Rethinking the Relationships Between Sport and Race in American Culture: Golden Ghettos and Contested Terrain

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This article proposes a new way of thinking about the relationships between sport and race in the U.S. It is critical of sport's racial form and function but does not overlook its unique and potentially progressive characteristics. This theoretical framework is generated through an extended review and critique of longstanding popular beliefs and post-1970s scholarly critiques thereof. It draws most heavily from the latter but also argues that academic critics have been too quick to dismiss the opportunities for racial resistance and change available through sport and, thus, failed to grasp the full extent to which sport is implicated in American racial formations. In contrast, sport is portrayed as a "contested racial terrain." This formulation, in combination with the "golden ghetto" metaphor, not only conveys the complexity of racial dynamics in sport but also reveals the broad public significance of sport in a racialized culture.

Cet article propose une nouvelle façon de penser aux relations entre le sport et la race aux États-Unis. Une telle pensée est critique face aux formes et fonctions raciales du sport mais elle ne fait pas fi des caractéristiques uniques et potentiellement progressistes de ce dernier. Ce cadre théorique émerge d'une recension, une critique et une reconstruction des croyances dominantes et des critiques académiques. Il emprunte énormément aux analyses empiriques des chercheurs en études du sport qui, depuis les années 1970, ont puissemment démontré que, contrairement à la croyance populaire, le sport n'est pas purement une force raciale positive et progressiste. Ce cadre suggère aussi que les critiques académiques ont trop rapidement mis de côté les occasions de résistance et de changement racial en sport et n'ont donc pu capter jusqu'à quel point le sport est impliqué dans les pratiques et significations raciales de la culture américaine. Le présent article suggère que ces relations sont mieux comprises lorsque le sport est considéré comme "terrain racial contesté." Lorsqu'elle est animée de la métaphore du "ghetto doré," cette formulation traduit la complexité de la dynamique raciale en sport et révèle la large signification publique du sport dans une culture racialisée. Cet article se termine avec quelques observations sur les implications de cette pensée pour la sociologie conventionnelle de la race et des relations raciales.

The French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu begins his well-known "Program for a Sociology of Sport" with a parable about African American athletes in prestigious American universities in the early 1970s. Despite their seeming public prominence and importance, Bourdieu recounts (1988a), these student-athletes found themselves in "golden ghettos" of isolation where conservatives were reluctant to talk with them because they were black, while liberals were hesitant to converse

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with them because they were athletes. This absurd situation and the vivid image Bourdieu uses to capture it both introduce and summarize the argument about race and sport developed in this paper. In many ways, the unparalleled athletic prominence and prowess of African American athletes is one of the most striking and seemingly progressive features of a society otherwise marked by persistent racial inequalities. Yet, at the same time, it is not clear if success in sport contributes to the advancement of racial justice. Even more problematic are the ways in which this sporting success actually seems to reinforce and reproduce images, ideas, and social practices that are thoroughly racialized, if not simply racist.

In the pages that follow, I explore this contradiction and others related to it in the context of a review and critique of the usual ways of thinking about the relationships between race and sport in American culture. I focus specifically on two very different views of the racial form and function of sport in the U.S.: (a) widespread popular beliefs about sport's positive, progressive role in struggles for racial justice and (b) the critiques of these beliefs that have been fashioned by scholarly critiques since the 1970s. My driving assumption is that the juxtaposition of these two rather radically opposed alternatives will allow me to construct a framework for rethinking the complicated and consequential relationships between race and sport in the U.S., one that is properly critical of the racial force of sport but does not overlook its more positive, progressive possibilities. This paper is, in a sense, an attempt to follow D. Stanley Eitzen's (1999) lead in developing theories of the social force of sport that move "beyond" the usual competing "myths and paradoxes," albeit by focusing on the specific case of race and with more of an emphasis on sport's symbolic role in American culture broadly conceived.

There are three keys to the analysis, argument, and synthesis eventually put forward. The first is the idea that the complexity of sport is best captured and conveyed when sport is understood as a "contested racial terrain," a social site where racial images, ideologies, and inequalities are constructed, transformed, and constantly struggled over rather than a place where they are reconciled or reproduced one way or the other. The second key is the idea that the complex and often contradictory racial dynamics of sport must be informed by an understanding of the power, prominence, and deep structuring significance of race in America. They must be situated, in other words, in the context of a racialized culture. This is part of what gives sport its paradoxical, golden ghetto-like quality: for all of its problems, sport offers opportunities and possibilities for racial resistance and change that stand out in comparison with other institutional realms. But the salience of the metaphor also has to do with the broader, more public symbolic significance of sport and the racial struggles that occur in, through, and around it. The point here, the third key, is that sport has a particularly privileged and prominent role in American culture, especially with respect to race, which dictates that its organizational structure, dynamics, and struggles carry with them broad cultural import and significance.

As this paper unfolds, my hope is that it will both elaborate the powerful if paradoxical racial force of popular cultural forms such as sport and illustrate the deep and abiding role of race and racism in American culture. In fact, when put this way, this paper is less about race in sport than about race in general. By way of conclusion, then, I will discuss the implications of the case of sport for conventional sociological theories of race and race relations.

The Challenges of Theorizing Sport and Race

Perhaps I should preface all of this by pointing out what makes this project so difficult and challenging in the first place. Much of the difficulty has to do with sport itself or, more precisely, the assumptions, stereotypes, and presuppositions surrounding sport in American and Western culture. Invariably and often immediately, sport taps into many of the dualisms and dichotomies—of mind and body, work and play, competition and cooperation, serious and trivial, and real and imagined—that so often stand in the way of nuanced, systematic social thinking and theorizing.[1] Bourdieu himself used the paradoxical predicament of African American student-athletes to call attention to the particular obstacles any sociological study of sport faces: those who know sport very well tend to be indifferent or even hostile to sociology, while those who know sociology have their own biases against sport. "Scorned by sociologists," as Bourdieu (1988a) put it in an observation that has informed and inspired the work of a generation of sport scholars, "[the sociology of sport] is also despised by sportspersons" (p. 153).

Extending from Bourdieu (who doesn't, to my knowledge, explore the connections between sport and race any further in this essay or any other work), I suggest that it is particularly difficult to understand sport insofar as race is concerned. All of the cultural presuppositions that make it difficult to think critically and comprehensively about sport get further complicated, even multiplied, when situated in relationship to our equally problematic and deeply contested conceptions of race and racism. I won't attempt to elaborate this claim any further except to reiterate my hope that this exercise of rethinking the relationships between race and sport will help to clarify not only our understanding of sport but of the deep and complex way in which race is implicated in American culture.[2]

Nevertheless, the starting point for all of this is the claim that echoes Bourdieu's insistence that sport be taken seriously *and* treated critically: that sport itself occupies an important and even privileged place in American culture insofar as racial identities, inequalities, and ideologies are concerned. Eitzen (1999) notes that African Americans, while representing only 12% of the population, comprise 80% of the players in professional basketball, 67% in football, and 18% in baseball. This extraordinary and highly visible success of African American athletes is just one of the reasons why it is necessary to begin from this assumption. Another has to do with sport's prominent place in the public culture and the mass media. Large numbers of Americans across racial lines interact with sport and are impacted by its remarkable racial dynamics. Making the sheer demographics of these sport-based interactions even more socially significant is the passion that practices of sport inculcate among those whose lives it touches.

In very different ways, but to a degree with few correlates in American life, sports fans (especially men[3]) tend to care deeply about sport and feel free to express strong opinions about sport and the issues they encounter in its social space. That so many sport discussions and debates are not consciously recognized as having broader societal causes, connections, and consequences only, in my view, accentuates sport's social power and importance. Finally, there is sport's own historical reputation as the "great equalizer," a leader in Civil Rights, and a "way out of the ghetto" for African Americans, an ideology that is an important social fact and force in its own right. I will have a good deal more to say about these points in

the pages that follow. For the moment, the purpose is simply to insist that the interesting and important question is not *if* sport is a significant racial force but *what kind of a racial force is sport?*

Before I take up this question, let me offer two additional qualifications. The first is that this paper will focus entirely on the African American athletic experience or, to be even more precise, on black-white racial dynamics in and around sport. Not only is this the case I know best, it is the one from which, for better or worse, most theories of sport and race interactions derive and depart. (In this respect, theories of race in the sociology of sport parallel theories of race in the wider discipline.) Secondly, I should note that I will *not* delve into the debates about how to explain African American athletic excellence, except to insist that it is (as is race itself) a social construction—which is to say, a product of environmental, historical, and cultural forces. The fact that so many people from such various backgrounds and political orientations are nevertheless obsessed with discovering underlying physiological causes for African American athletic excellence itself provides, in my view, a telling insight into the deeply problematic cultural assumptions implicated in the intersections of race and sport in the United States, not to mention elsewhere around the globe.[4]

Alternative Views of Sport as a Racial Force

There are two ways of thinking about the relationships between race and sport that any serious student of the subject must take into account: one is popular or even commonsensical, the other is scholarly and deeply critical of the first. Juxtaposing these two very different visions—which I call the "popular ideology" and the "scholarly critique"—and their respective insights and shortcomings against each other is the first step toward developing a full and satisfactory understanding of the complex relationships between sport and race in the United States.

The Popular Ideology

Dominant cultural conceptions of sport's racial impact can be stated easily enough. Sport is seen by most Americans as a positive and progressive racial force, an avenue of racial progress, and an arena of racial harmony. It is understood as a "way out of the ghetto," the great racial "equalizer," and a leader in Civil Rights, if not a literal "model" for race relations in the United States.

The notion that sport is a positive and progressive racial force has a long history in American culture. Leaders of the sporting establishment have trumpeted such claims at least since the spectacular athletic accomplishments of Joe Louis and Jesse Owens in the 1930s, and the basic empirical-intellectual foundations for the argument were laid in 1939 with the publication of Edwin Bancroft Henderson's (1949) seminal study, *The Negro in Sport*. But the ideology probably reached its high point in the late 1950s and early 1960s with the fall of the color-line in professional baseball, that self-proclaimed American pastime. It was in the wake of this success that one of the most prominent African American sportswriters of the day, a man named A.S. "Doc" Young (1963), proclaimed that Willie Mays was as important a figure for civil rights as Martin Luther King, Jr. and that Jackie Robinson ranked next to Jesus Christ among the most important and honorable men ever to have walked the earth.

Such bold claims were based upon a number of fairly compelling, if usually implicit, points. One of the most basic was that sport was believed (because of its own ideals but especially because of its relatively unrestricted and inexpensive access) to provide an unparalleled avenue of opportunity and mobility for African Americans individually and collectively conceived. These athletic successes were, in turn, thought to have many broader community impacts as well, such as providing role models and heroes for young African Americans as well as spokespersons and community leaders for African Americans as a whole. A third claim was that sport was thought to be a crucial space for social interaction and community building among African Americans as well as an important symbol of racial accomplishment and a source of pride and collective identification. A fourth had to do with broader cultural impacts. Specifically, African American athletic prowess was thought to discredit the usual racial hierarchies and stereotypes about racial inferiority. Fifth, sport was believed to have provided many white Americans with their first meaningful experiences with integration and the possibilities of harmonious interracial interaction. Sixthly, connected with the fifth, many advocates of sport's positive racial influence followed "Doc" Young in arguing that sport was an important public symbol of and institutional model for racial progress, with some even arguing, finally, that sport's own ideals of fairness and meritocracy were themselves the essence of social and racial justice in the United States.

Today, it is rare to hear bold and unqualified statements about sport's positive racial force, much less see the underlying composite elements sketched out in the manner I have attempted here. Part of the reason for this is that not nearly as much empirical support for these claims has been accumulated as one might expect. Most of what does get offered as evidence in support of these claims is either anecdotal or historical and, as such, of questionable generalizability or applicability under current structural constraints and contexts. The relative lack of clearly articulated and empirically supported claims, however, does not mean that the notion has fallen out of favor. Quite the contrary, I would argue that the absence of empirical investigation and systematic argumentation of this point is actually evidence of how deeply held and commonsensical it has come to be in American culture. The notion that sport is a positive, progressive force for African Americans is more than just an idea, it is an ideology, an idea that has taken on a life of its own. It doesn't need to be restated or defended. It is cultural common sense, an article of faith held by Americans black and white, liberal and conservative, even those who don't care about sport in any other way.

Such a claim is notoriously difficult to prove empirically. Public opinion polls provide some help. To take just one example, a 1996 poll conducted for *U.S. News and World Report* and Bozell Worldwide found that 91% of Americans think that "participation in sports" helps a "person's ability to . . . get along with different ethnic or racial groups" (42% said sport "stongly helps"; 49% said it helps "somewhat").[5] This, of course, is connected with the fact that Americans have very positive attitudes about sport as a social force in general, but even so, racial attitudes are particularly positive by comparison. In this same poll, for example, 78% of Americans thought that sport had either a very positive (25%) or somewhat positive (53%) impact on society taken as a whole. Conversely, even on questions where opinions about the racial force of sport are not so overwhelmingly positive, only a handful of Americans believe sport plays a harmful or negative racial role. In a 1997 ABC News/ESPN poll where just over half of those

surveyed felt that the interracial sports teams "helps integration and the reduction of racial tensions in other areas of life," for instance, only 8% thought the influence was negative (37% said sport had no effect).

Cultural texts, events, and performances provide additional support. The popular frenzy that surrounds superstar African American athletes such as Michael Jordan or Tiger Woods, the pronounced and prolonged public reverence that accompanied the fiftieth anniversary of Jackie Robinson's entry into major league baseball, or the fact that President Clinton chose to devote one of his three national "town-hall" meetings on race exclusively to sport are all examples of the prominent and essentially positive racial meanings expressed in and through sport in mainstream American culture. So powerful and widely taken-for-granted are these ideas that commentators who want to affirm sport's general societal contributions routinely invoke racial examples to make their case. Michael Novak's (1976) well-known celebration of sport as a privileged shrine of civil religion in America, *The Joy of Sports*, is a perfect example. Despite the fact that the book has little to say about race, Novak introduces his argument by recalling his life-long obsession with the Dodgers, the team that picked Jackie Robinson to integrate Major League Baseball. In a somewhat more recent and very different kind of book, A. Bartlett Giamatti (1989), the former Commissioner of Major League Baseball and President of Yale University, used the Robinson story (and the example of race more generally) to make a similar point about the positive social value of sport (see especially pp. 63–65).

One of the most powerful and prolonged illustrations of the power of sport as positive racial force ideology was embodied in the 1996 Centennial Olympic Games in Atlanta, GA. I am referring here not just to the top performances of African American athletes such as Carl Lewis, Michael Johnson, or Jackie Joyner Kersee but also to the fact that Atlanta won the right to host the Games because the International Olympic Committee believed it would display for the peoples of the world a model of racial harmony, progress, and prosperity. Organizers did their best to make these connections as clear as possible in the Opening Ceremonies by celebrating African American performers like Jessye Norman and musical legacies such as gospel, jazz, and dance and even enlisting one-time racial radical Muhammad Ali to light the Olympic torch. The connections between sport and racial progress were drawn most forcefully in the pre-Olympic stump speeches of Andrew Young, the former mayor of Atlanta and the co-chair of the Atlanta Organizing Committee. Around the world, Young—who first came to prominence working as the Executive Director of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Southern Christian Leadership Council—touted the Olympic Movement as the secular, global realization of his friend and mentor's dream for a truly color-blind society. In examples such as these, we see the powerful, if taken-for-granted, assumptions about the positive, progressive racial impacts of sport that circulate throughout American culture.

The Scholarly Critique

In stark contrast to this sport-as-positive-racial-force ideology stand a plethora of grounded scholarly criticisms of the racial form and function of sport. Inspired by the "revolt of the Black athlete" of the late 1960s,[6] the primary objective and accomplishment of these works taken as a whole has been to demonstrate that

racial inequalities and injustices are not so much challenged and overcome in and through sport as they are reproduced and reinforced there. The dominant motif is captured succinctly in the subtitle of one recent (and, as I will discuss below, highly controversial) contribution to the field: "How Sport Has Damaged Black America and Preserved the Myth of Race" (Hoberman, 1997).

In order to make sense of this large body of research and writing, I think it is useful to divide it into two categories. One includes those works that analyze the racial character and organization of the sports world itself; I think of this as an institutionalist approach. The other, which I call a culturalist orientation, encompasses those works that emphasize the symbolic role of sport in the formation of racial meanings and practices broadly conceived. Institutionalist scholars, to draw the contrast bluntly, focus on race and racism in sport, while more culturally oriented analysts tend to study the ways in which sport is implicated in larger racial structure of American culture. Since the institutionalist approach was the first to emerge fully formed and is almost certainly still the dominant approach in the field, I will start with it.

Institutional Approaches.   The main racial problem with sport, according to scholars who study sport's concrete policies, practices, and structures, is the persistence of racial inequality and injustice in and immediately around the world of sport itself. One of their first points is that although African Americans experience high rates of participation and phenomenal success in highly visible sports such basketball and football, there are many sports (hockey, tennis, bowling, skiing, etc.) where they are significantly underrepresented or virtually nonexistent. But the more important claim is that striking racial disparities exist even in the arenas where African American athletes do best. In their 1991 review of sport sociology, the leading disciplinary home of this work, James H. Frey and D. Stanley Eitzen (1991) summarize some of the main findings:

> American sport sociologists have devoted considerable attention to the examination of racial discrimination in sport. The major conclusion of this work . . . is that just as racial discrimination exists in society, [so also] it exists in sport. Blacks do not have equal opportunity; they do not receive similar rewards for equal performance when compared to whites; and their prospects for a lucrative career beyond sport participation are dismal. (p. 513)

In recent years, scholars have found racial disparities and very limited opportunities in ownership and management as well (cf. Brooks, Althouse, & Tucker, 1997; Lapchick, 1997). This applies also to recreational and fitness-oriented sport (see Kelley, 1997 for a partial discussion).[7] Even works of sport scholarship that are not specifically about race, such as Patricia and Peter Adler's (1991) study of role engulfment in college athletes or Michael Messner's (1992) analysis of masculinity in sport, find that African American athletes face different and more extreme versions of the problems experienced by their non-Black athletic counterparts. In any case, although there are important differences between some areas and evidence of some improvement in others, the overall pattern is strikingly consistent: At all levels of sport, across even the most "integrated" sporting agencies and organizations, racial differences and inequalities continue to be a defining feature of the American sporting landscape.

Such patterns of racial inequality make it easy to talk of the "racism" and "discrimination" built into the athletic establishment. Billy Hawkins (1995), for example, makes a powerful argument against the NCAA for systematically "exploiting" and "colonizing" African American bodies and labor. It has proven difficult, however, to isolate the racial policies, practices, and intentions that account for them. Explanations for disparities in areas such as wages, hiring, and spectator discrimination have been mixed; according to Kahn (1991), for example, scholars generally have been unable to isolate discriminatory practices based strictly on race. On the other hand, research on "stacking" has confirmed that black athletes, in a variety of sports at both the collegiate and professional levels, are consistently channeled, stockpiled, or relegated to positions that emphasize physical rather than mental prowess ever since Loy and McElvogue's (1970) seminal work in the area.[8] Whatever questions may remain about the mechanisms by which racial inequalities and disparities are produced, however, they do little to detract from the overall conclusion of institutionally based analyses of sport: that contrary to popular perception, sport is far from free of racial inequality.

Extending from this insight, institutionally oriented critics also strongly emphasize the miniscule odds of African Americans achieving social mobility through sport. Jay Coakley (1998), for example, estimates that only one of 47,600 African American males between the ages of 20 and 39 will make it into professional football, the sport in which the opportunities are the greatest. He further notes that the approximately 3,000 African Americans who make their living as professional athletes pale in comparison to the over 60,000 African Americans who work as either lawyers or doctors—and this is not to mention that these professionals have lifetime earnings far in excess of athletes whose careers usually last less that 5 years. Although the odds of attending a college or university on a sport scholarship are considerably better, scholarship athletes are still a very small percentage of the African American student population, and graduation rates are extremely low.

Eitzen (1999) points out that in 1996 not even half of African American athletes who entered Division I school had graduated. These numbers, in combination with polls showing that a majority of young African Americans (and their parents) perceive sport as a realistic career choice,[10] lead many to advocate an "over-investment" thesis: that by fostering utopian dreams, sport leads young African Americans away from more reliable and accessible avenues out of poverty and racism (cf. Edwards, 1984; Hoberman, 1997). Others suggest that African American males use sport as a means of self-expression—a "cool pose," as Richard Majors (1990) calls it—in the face of an otherwise racist society. But even here the implication is that sport does nothing to challenge established structures of racial inequality and may actually reinforce and perpetuate them (see Rudman, 1986 for an explicit statement).

While the lack of both a comparative perspective and a critical theoretical understanding of race and resistance against it haunts such institutionalist criticisms, they do, nevertheless, call our attention to much broader questions about the important symbolic role that sport plays in American culture with respect to race. This brings me to the second major line of scholarly criticism of sport's racial impacts. Before I get to work explicitly and self-consciously situated in this domain, however, I should point out that there is a broader cultural critique of American

race relations often implicit in institutionalist work. To recognize it (because it is rarely stated), we need first to recall the popular ideology that sees sport as a leading institutional model of and for appropriate race relations in the United States. Put in this context, the findings of racial inequality in and around sport come to be a critique of American race relations themselves: If even this model institution is not without racial problems, then surely the rest of society can be no different. Eitzen and Frey's line about discrimination existing in sport just as in society, therefore, is reversed. In a culture and a post-Civil Rights period where it is difficult to even talk about racial inequality much less do anything about it (cf. Omi & Winant, 1994), this is a more important point than is often realized.

Culturalist Orientations. In the last decade or so, scholars working out of a more interdisciplinary, cultural studies-type tradition have developed more explicit and, in my view, much more intricate analyses of the symbolic role that sport plays in American culture with respect to race. These scholars begin not from the racial limitations of the sports world but rather from its achievements, from the unparalleled success of African Americans in sport and its widespread public recognition. However, instead of seeing these social facts as a progressive racial force (as the popular ideology would have it), they hold that the prowess and prominence of African American athletes in American culture may actually perpetuate and reinforce the racial status quo.

There are actually several different variations on this theme. One of the most established focuses the inherent physicality of sporting practices. The claim here, articulated most recently and provocatively in John Hoberman's aforementioned *Darwin's Athletes* (1997), is that the athletic success of African Americans doesn't discredit racial assumptions about inherent African American inferiority. Rather, because of sport's *de facto* association with bodies and the mind/body dualisms at the core of Western culture, African American athletic excellence serves to reinforce racist stereotypes by grounding them in essentialized, biological terms where athletic prowess is believed to be inversely associated with intellectual and/or moral excellence.

Another version of this symbolic-culturalist critique, articulated most powerfully in the last decade or so by scholars such as Cheryl Cole and David Andrews, derives from a deep critical understanding of the role of mass-mediated, market-based cultural forms such as sport in generating contemporary racial images and ideologies. At the core of this work is the enormous gap between the class position and racial experiences of highly visible and often highly paid African American celebrities and entertainers as compared with the vast majority of African Americans and the fact that many mainstream, middle-class Americans are unable or unwilling to realize this disjuncture. In this context, African American athletes come to serve as what Andrews (1996), borrowing from the French theorist Jacques Derrida, calls "floating racial signifiers"—images that are dynamic and complex and, because they are thoroughly disconnected from social life, can be interpreted in virtually any way an audience wants. Given the persistence of race and racism in American culture (a structural condition whose importance cannot be overstated), sport images thus tend to serve an essentially conservative, reproductive role.

The effect can be achieved in several distinct ways. One is that attention to African American athletic success can deflect attention away from, minimize, or distort the more general persistent problems of racial inequality and racism in

contemporary American society. Secondly, and even worse, the cultural prominence of African American athletic success can be used to legitimate existing racial inequalities in other social arenas by making it seem as if there are no barriers standing in the way of African American mobility and assimilation. If African Americans can make it in sport, the thinking goes, why can't they make it in other social spheres?

A third point has to do with the claim that images of African American athletes are thoroughly racialized, indelibly linked with the racial stereotypes and controlling images that permeate the culture no matter what other symbolic functions they may serve. Bell hooks (1994), for example, talks about how a popular cultural domain such as sport involves a "commodification of blackness . . . and particularly . . . the black male body . . . of sports figures." Sport allows white audiences to interact as capitalist consumers in seemingly risk-free, value-neutral ways with some segment of the African American population. What is complicated here, of course, is that these images tend to be quite positive and even flattering, thus, the opposite of what most Americans would think of as racist. But the key point is that the fascination, celebration, and desire contained in mediated images of African American athletes are closely and indelibly connected to the negative racial stereotypes that also permeate the culture.

Cole and her associates (Cole & Andrews, 1996; Cole & Denny, 1994) develop this point by examining how media portrayals and the cultural presentation of African American athletes typically exaggerate their social differences and how quickly this celebration of difference can turn into a condemnation of social deviance. Indeed, they argue that there is a prevailing cultural logic that links, albeit by means of inversion, images of African Americans in sport with racially coded images of disorder, delinquency, and crime. In one of her most provocative papers on the matter, Cole (1996) shows how Nike's use of images of Michael Jordan, basketball, and the inner-city in its ongoing P.L.A.Y. (Participate in the Lives of American Youth) advertising campaign actually plays off of—or are "rendered intelligible" only in contrast to—racial stereotypes associating African Americans with crime, gangs, and drugs. Her point is that no matter how much less sinister and destructive sport's racial imagery may be in comparison with that of other cultural arenas, it is nonetheless inevitably part and parcel of a thoroughly racialized culture. The stereotypes may be positive, but they are nonetheless still stereotypes constructed around race. Sport's racial imagery thus constitutes and contributes to a rather insidious form of "enlightened racism" (McKay, 1995) in which racial stereotypes and hierarchies are reproduced even as mainstream audiences believe they are being subverted.[11]

And it is not just that these market-mediated (or market-dominated) interactions obscure and deny the social foundations of racial separation and economic inequality in the United States. What is worse, according to such scholars, is that due to their own objectification and submission to the monetary and moral demands of capitalism, black athletic figures such as Michael Jordan, Tiger Woods, or even Dennis Rodman are further stripped of any potential political agency or intention. They are, in hooks' (1994) deliberately arousing terms, "fetishized, eroticized and feminized" in ways that render impossible any meaningful racial resistance. Helan Page's (1997) detailed description of the obscure struggles of former Chicago Bulls basketball player Craig Hodges and how his experience contrasts

with that of his former teammate, Michael Jordan, is just one example.

Constraints upon racial resistance in and through sport has also been a central theme in my own work on the 1968 African American Olympic protest movement (Hartmann, 1996; forthcoming). But I have developed this argument in a somewhat different fashion, by focusing on the connections between the color-blind, individualist ideals of American political economy and the culture of sport itself. My argument, more specifically, is that the parallels between sport culture and liberal democratic American political ideology—their common emphasis on competition, meritocracy, and equality before the rules, in particular—limit and undermine the ability of African Americans to use sport to contribute to the struggle for racial justice because they actually stand in contrast to the structural and institutional factors at the root of racial inequalities. This has been especially true since the Civil Rights movement of the late 1950s and early 1960s effectively outlawed and de-legitimated overt prejudice, segregation, and discrimination against individuals in the U.S. simply because of their skin color. In any case, this emphasis is what I like to think is a third and final variation on race-based cultural critiques of sport, one which emphasizes sport's own instrinsic complicity in the deep ideological structures—often referred to specifically as "whiteness"[12]—that make race such a prominent and problematic part of contemporary, post-Civil Rights American society.

Criticism and Synthesis

As part of public discourse on race and sport in the U.S., these cultural and institutional critiques provide a much-needed criticism and deconstruction of the hegemony of the sport-as-positive-racial-force ideology. They expose the empirical limitations—with respect to both internal institutional order and broader symbolic function—of the conventional ideology that sport is an unambiguously progressive racial force. Perhaps more importantly, they suggest how unqualified acceptance of the popular ideology can actually serve to obscure and minimize, and thus reinforce and reproduce, established racial meanings and practices. An especially noteworthy contribution (and where racial critics of sport have been on the cutting edge of critical race theorizing, in my opinion) has been to show the ways in which images and accomplishments that would seem to be positive actually serve to reinforce racial difference as part of a broad, complex cultural system of racial meanings and practices.

However, to the extent that they are intended to be comprehensive social scientific theories of race and sport—which is to say, a conceptual framework that captures the full complexity, import, and potential of these relationships—these critiques leave a good deal to be desired. For one thing, there are tensions between the institutional and cultural approaches that have not been reconciled or even really recognized. At a very basic level, the cultural critique relies essentially on African American success in sport, while the institutional one emphasizes racial barriers and limitations. Connected with this, the former focuses on the construction of racial difference, while the latter is based in a claim to inequality. This is not to say these two perspectives cannot be synthesized, but rather that they haven't been yet; it also suggests that this synthesis may be a bit more complicated than we first realize.

A more fundamental problem with race-based scholarly critiques of sport, in my view, is that they have gone too far. They have made their points only by exchanging one totalization (that sport is a positive force for racial change) for the other (that it is a negative, impeding one). Deconstruction, to put it even stronger, is virtually all these critics have done.[13] And in failing to do more than deconstruct the popular ideology, these critiques have become (or at least threaten to become) a one-sided ideology of their own, an ideology that fails to appreciate the actual complexity of sport's place in the American racial order.

Stated somewhat differently, the problem with established sociological critiques is that, for all the truth they contain, they see the popular ideology that sport is a positive and progressive racial force strictly as a form of false consciousness, as *mere* ideology. This cynical, dismissive attitude makes it impossible for academic critics to grasp why popular perceptions appeal so widely, especially among African Americans, *even* in the absence of scholarly argument and empirical support of them. Even worse, in many ways, such an approach makes it difficult if not impossible to recognize the ways in which racial resistance and change have been fostered in and through sport in the past and the possibilities for such that are in place still today.

The most prominent and extreme version of this may be John Hoberman's (1997) argument about the supposed "sports fixation" of African American intellectuals and in the African American community in general. As many of Hoberman's critics suggest,[14] there are good, solid empirical reasons why numerous African American politicians, preachers, business leaders, and activists proudly and publicly attest to the racial significance of sport. In recent years, a handful of scholars have produced works that are beginning to coalesce into a serious, scholarly defense of this point. For example, as Jeffrey Sammons (1994) makes clear in his excellent review of the still-burgeoning historical literature, sport has been a crucial and leading institutional site in the struggle for racial justice over the course of the 20th century in the United States.

While it may not be perfect, sport is an unparalleled institutional site of accomplishment for African Americans and remains one of the most integrated institutions in American life. Moreover, as Nelson George (1992) describes memorably in the case of basketball, sport has become a crucial social space for the development of an African American identity and aesethetic (for a similar, if somewhat broader, commentary see Andrews, 1996a, 1996b; Sailes, 1996). This distinctive cultural style is obviously useful in terms of its market value, but it is more significant still, in theoretical terms, for its capacity to inspire productive, creative labor among African American young people living in otherwise alienating and disadvantaged circumstances (see Dyson, 1993; Kelley, 1997; Waquant, 1992). I will have more to say about these points, all of which revolve around issues of agency and resistance, shortly. But for the moment, suffice it to say that if African Americans tend to see sport positively, it is not because they are fixated on sport; indeed, some evidence (Siegelman, 1998) shows that African Americans are not any more fixated on sport than any other group of Americans. Rather, it is because sport offers African Americans opportunities and freedoms found rarely in other institutions in the society. The popular ideology, in this respect, is not simply a misguided set of ideas and beliefs.

None of this is to now conclude that the scholarly critique of sport is totally wrong and the popular ideology completely correct. Indeed, I am convinced that what the scholarly critique has to say about both the racial form and function of sport is basically on the mark. But that qualifying adverb is crucial. The way in which sport is implicated with racial formations may be deeply problematic, but it is not entirely so. Instead of choosing between these one-sided, totalizing perspectives of scholarly criticisms or popular beliefs, we would do better to blend the insights of these two perspectives. The relations between sport and race are, in short, more complicated and contradictory than sociological critics have usually realized. Given this, what we need is a theory that is deeply and (once again) properly critical of the popular belief that sport is a pure and perfect arena of racial progress but that is, at the same time, able to allow that sport may affect positive, progressive racial change under certain conditions, in certain social settings, and for certain kinds of racial concerns.

Sport as Contested Racial Terrain

At the core of the theoretical vision needed to produce such a synthesis is the notion that sport is a kind of "double-edged sword" (Kellner, 1996) or what I will call, extending from Stuart Hall (1981), a "contested racial terrain." That is to say, sport is not just a place (or variable) whereby racial interests and meanings are *either* inhibited *or* advanced but rather a site where racial formations are constantly—and very publicly—struggled on and over.[15]

Douglas Kellner's (1996) discussion of Michael Jordan begins to capture and convey this more bifocal, pluralist way of thinking about the racial dynamics of sport:

> On the one hand, Michael Jordan is a spectacle of color who elevates difference to sublimity and who raises Blackness to dignity and respect. An icon of the sports spectacle, Michael Jordan is the Black superstar and his prominence in sports has made him a figure that corporate America can use to sell its products and its values. Yet, such are the negative representations and connotations of Blacks in American culture and such is the power of the media to define and refine images that even the greatest Black icons and spectacles can be denigrated to embody negative connotations . . figures of choice to represent social transgression and tabooed behavior. (p. 465)

This holds not just for the broad symbolic functions of sport but also for its concrete, on-the-ground practices and policies. The racial dynamics of sport are both positive and negative, progressive and conservative, defined by both possibilities for agency and resistance as well as systems of constraint. Thus, one of the most basic tenets of an approach that treats sport as a site of contestation and struggle is the need to guard against the age-old sociological bugaboo of overgeneralization.

I have already suggested why it is so misleading with respect to sport's "positive" or "negative" racial impacts, but let me point out the danger with respect to sport itself. We must remember that the thing we call sport is a large and complex social institution with a wide variety of forms and racial functions. "Sport" is actually

a vast array of different sports, with different levels of competition (elite, high-performance sport versus more community-based, participatory forms) and different modes of participation (athlete, coach, spectator, etc.).[16] Each of these, moreover, has its own racial composition, consequence, and symbolic meaning, and these oftentimes may be in tension with or contradict one another. Indeed, one of the key insights of thinking about sport as a contested racial terrain is its recognition that the tensions and contradictions between different ways of thinking about the racial form and function of sport are, in fact, crucial to the power, particularity, and importance of sport's relationship to race. I am thinking here not only of the stark oppositions that divide popular beliefs and scholarly critiques but also of the underlying tensions between cultural and institutional critiques. The point is that the racial impacts of sport depend upon both the context and conditions within which it is exercised. They cannot be theorized abstractly but must be analyzed concretely.

However, thinking of sport as a contested racial terrain cannot be just an abstract balancing act of competing racial forms and forces, much less a simple calculation of positive and negative outcomes. More than this, it must be informed by—or, more precisely, be firmly grounded in—a broad, theoretical understanding of the place of sport in the larger history and structure of the American racial order as well as of the paradoxical ways in which racial resistance and change are made in the contemporary, post-Civil Rights moment. The first half of this statement harkens back to Bourdieu's claim that the social significance of sport cannot be apprehended in the absence of a much broader understanding of the structure of the society as a whole. It also recalls C.L.R. James's (1963/1993) famous rhetorical question, "what do they know of cricket who only cricket know?" If these scholars meant to suggest that sport couldn't be understood outside the context of the social world of which it is part and parcel, their admonition demands for us a much broader vision of American race relations and the place of sport therein than has typically been the case.

At a very basic level, this requires a more explicit comparative sensibility. Too often sport sociologists have focused exclusively on racial injustices inside and around the world of sport without comparing sport's racial composition with that of other organizations and institutions, much less situating them carefully in the context of the broader racial makeup of the society taken as a whole. The result is that many of their conclusions about the role of sport in constituting the broader racial order that these analysts draw are often trivial observations about sport reproducing or reflecting society's racial problems (recall once again Frey and Eitzen's [1991] conclusion that "just as racial discrimination exists in society, it exists in sport," p. 513). The root of the problem here, in my view, is an underlying functionalist theory that leaves little or no independent role for sport; it is left only to reproduce or "reflect" (cf. Lapchick, 1986) prevailing racial arrangements. A comparative perspective would help us better specify and more fully analyze and appreciate the unique racial characteristics and consequences of sport, particularly with respect to the ways in which sport presents positive, progressive opportunities for racial agency, resistance, and change. With this in mind, a recent edited volume by a noted sociologist of sport, Earl Smith, along with his colleague Joyce Tang, *Women and Minorities in American Institutions* (1996), might be useful despite the somewhat surprising fact that it lacks a chapter devoted specifically to the institution of sport.

Only the military compares with sport in terms of integration and accessibility for African Americans; in terms of its import to the Black community, sport compares favorably with the Church. This need for a comparative perspective applies not only to concrete, institutionalist studies of sport but also to cultural and symbolic ones. Indeed, it is probably in this respect that sport is most culturally unique and important. As a site for the presentation and representation of successful African Americans, sport is rivaled only by the entertainment industry. It is this insight that is at the core of Gerald Early's virutoso writings on boxing in American culture (Early, 1994, 1989). Early's (1998) more recent discussion of the 50th anniversary of Jackie Robinson's breaking of the color line in major league baseball takes the analysis even further. What was interesting and important about this event, according to Early, were the radically different ways it was viewed by racial liberals and racial conservatives. It was either as a symbol of the achievements of the Civil Rights movement or of its limitations and, depending upon one's political perspective, the result of either individual opportunity or of group-based initiatives. These multiple perspectives illustrate for Early the fact that sport presents an important and perhaps unparalleled public forum for the discussion and debate of otherwise difficult-to-raise issues of race and racism.

It is probably important to note that in this piece (which was the lead article in the *Nation's* first ever issue devoted solely to sport), Early uses the metaphor of reflection to characterize sport's racial impacts and role in American culture. That may sound a good deal like the functionalist theorizing that characterizes many institutional analysts of sport and allows them to generalize beyond their studies of sport to the larger social world. Early's usage of reflectionist language, however, differs from functionalist theories in at least two important respects. In the first place, he means to call attention to the unique and culturally privileged role that sport plays as a site for reflection on the state of American race relations. Sport, in short, plays an active role and occupies a privileged position. Secondly, what Early thinks is reflected in sport is not society's static racial *structure* but society's racial *struggles*, a point that brings us back to the all-important issues of agency, resistance, and struggle.

At a basic level, thinking of sport as a contested racial terrain requires a very particular understanding of the relationship between structure and agency. Here the point involves the general theoretical insight, at the core of Anthony Giddens's and Pierre Bourdieu's respective writings about structuration and practice, that structure and agency are not opposed or mutually exclusive but in fact deeply interconnected, even mutually constitutive. This is one of the key points of my own (1996) work on the 1968 African American Olympic protest movement: that as much as sport has functioned to structure and reinforce dominant racial formations in the post-Civil Rights era, the dynamics of racial domination have been intimately intertwined with and revealed by attempts at activism, resistance, and challenge. Resistance and domination, as well as opportunity and constraint, thus must be taken together. This is also how scholars who have begun to talk about the importance of sport as a site of racial resistance and identity formation understand things.

Loic Wacquant (1992), for example, explains the appeal of boxing to young African American men in Chicago by situating the sport in the socioecological context of African American life in impoverished, inner-city Chicago. Boxing is appealing, according to Wacquant (1992), not because it reflects the disorder and

disorganized of the surrounding communities but rather because boxers and boxing coaches define themselves "in opposition to the ghetto" as "islands of stability and order," "relatively self-enclosed site(s) for a protected sociability where one can find respite from the pressures of the street and ghetto," a "buffer against the attributes and dangers of ghetto life" (p. 229).[17] In his discussion of basketball and various other popular cultural forms in which African American young people from the inner-city invest, Robin Kelley (1997) takes these points even further to emphasize the particular possibilities for racial resistance, creativity, and enjoyment that are at the heart of popular practices and preferences such as sport. The point, for Kelley, is not just that agency is constituted in relationship to structures of racial domination in and around sport. In addition, a popular cultural form such as sport is a particularly important site for racial resistance because it is one of the few arenas open and encouraged for African Americans in an otherwise deeply racist society.

Of course, it is one thing to point out the possibilities for individual agency, creativity, mobility, and resistance available in and through sport; it is quite another to consider the larger political implications of all this. Indeed, many scholarly critiques of sport grant the former but deny the latter. Culturally oriented, media-focused critics of sport, for example, regularly acknowledge that there is some degree of agency and creativity present in African American athletic performances but insist that these are contained within an essentially racialized cultural structure. If resistance goes hand-in-hand with domination, in this view, it is always extremely limited, partial, and contained. However typical this outcome and impact may be, it is important to realize that precisely because it is so thoroughly racialized, sport presents much larger scale *opportunities* and *possibilities* for social mobilization and change. This is, I think, why many of its most prominent public critics—organizations such as Lapchick's Center for the Study of Sport in Society, the NAACP, or Jessie Jackson's Operation Push—target sport: because of its prominence and the prominence of African American athletes therein.

Sport is not just a site for the reproduction of racial stereotypes and formations but also a site of potential struggle and challenge against them. It is, as I have suggested before in reappropriating Bourdieu's famous phrase, a source (or at least potential source) of cultural capital that can be directed toward larger struggles for racial justice in the U.S. It may be that using sport to deliberate political effect is a difficult proposition in the contemporary, post-Civil Rights era (because of the different nature of the racial structures being struggled against), but sport's contribution to the movement against racism in the U.S. was never, in any case, automatic or easy. As the new generation of sports historians understand very well, from the beginning of the 20th century (Gems, 1995; Jable, 1994; Ruck, 1987) right up to the Civil Rights movement (Davis, 1992; Ross, 1999; Smith, 1987; Tygiel, 1983), racial progress in and through sport did not come easily or automatically but rather slowly and unevenly, typically the result of protracted, deliberate struggles and repressive counter-resistance.

Conclusions and Broader Implications

So, then, the relationships between sport and race (a) are more complicated and indeed often contradictory than we typically realize, (b) are constituted within the ideological structure of a culture that is thoroughly racialized, and (c) because

of sport's prominence in American culture and sport's own unique racial charac-
teristics, have meaning and consequence far beyond the usual boundaries of the
sporting world itself, meanings and consequences that can reproduce or—espe-
cially if invested with political intent—transform racial formations broadly con-
ceived. This is the essence of what it means to think about sport as a contested
racial terrain. It not only stands as an alternative to both popular ideologies and
scholarly critiques of sport's racial form and function but is actually a theoretical
synthesis of the two. It is also a deeper way to understand the paradoxical "golden
ghettos" metaphor from Bourdieu that I used to begin this paper, a sensibility that
was similarly reflected in the title "Glory Bound," which the sports historian David
K. Wiggens (1997) gives to a collection of his seminal essays on African American
sport involvement in the twentieth century.

Thinking of sport as a contested racial terrain—which is to say, again, ana-
lyzing sport in its full complexity and in the context of the racial meanings and
practices of the society taken as a whole—has implications both for how we now
go about studying race and sport intersections as well as how we think about the
relationships between race and culture more broadly conceived. The former should
be most obvious by now. Thinking about sport in this fashion calls for and, in fact,
requires a much different, much broader, and more comprehensive kind of sport
scholarship, an approach that attends to both the racial organization of sport and
the racial significance of sport. More than this, however, it would seem to necessi-
tate more intensive and concretely grounded case studies of the sort typically ex-
emplified in ethnographic (cf. MacAloon, 1992) or historical methods. But the
implications of this contested terrain approach have as much to do with how we
think about race as they do with how we think about (and study) sport. Indeed, I
believe that considering the implications of this reconstructive exercise for the
conventional sociology of race and race relations is the best way to capture what is
truly original and important about this perspective.

In recent years scholars from disciplines and departments across the acad-
emy have produced a large and very impressive body of work exploring the con-
nections between race and culture in contemporary American society. I am think-
ing here of the work of scholars such as Robin Kelley, David Roediger, and George
Lipsitz (in history); David Theo Goldberg and Cornell West (philosophy); Kimberle
Crenshaw, Patricia Williams, and Richard Delgado (law); and Lisa Lowe, Toni
Morrison, and Wahneema Lubiano (literature). Yet, despite the substantial analyti-
cal power, intellectual sophistication, and deep social significance of this work, it
has had surprisingly little impact on or even visibility in either of the relevant
sociological subfields of race and culture (not to mention the discipline itself). The
reasons for this are obviously complicated. Many of them have to do with the
usual problems of interdisciplinary scholarship. Most of this work is rooted in the
humanities and thus begins from a different set of questions and concerns, has a
different vocabulary and rhetorical style, and employs different analytical tools
and techniques. However, I believe that there is another, more fundamental reason
why this body of work has not received more attention in sociology. It has to do
with the materialist and utilitarian assumptions ingrained in sociological thought
and practice, assumptions that make it difficult for sociologists to grasp the cul-
tural construction of race and racism, why these phenomena are so deeply prob-
lematic, and the paradoxes of meaningful resistance against them.

Obviously, I cannot fully defend these broad and presumably controversial claims about the cultural shortcomings of the conventional sociology of race in the brief space of these final, concluding paragraphs. What I want to do instead is simply suggest that sport—an area still often ignored or dismissed by scholars, even those otherwise appreciative of popular cultural forms and practices—presents an interesting and exciting empirical site from which to appreciate, illustrate, and explore these points, especially when understood in the manner I have tried to sketch out in the preceding pages.

There are four main reasons why I think sport understood as a contested racial terrain is an empirical site pregnant with the possibility of a fuller understanding of the relationships between race and culture in contemporary American society. The first has to do with the power and import of popular cultural forms and practices in the constitution of racial images, identities, and ideologies. In a very basic way, and simply by force of its example, the unique racial composition of sport and social status of sport itself calls our attention to the indispensable role that mass-mediated, popular cultural sites play with respect to the formation of race in the contemporary United States.

A second point involves the ostensibly positive, progressive images of blackness presented in sport, and the ways in which they are actually implicated with dominant racial images, ideologies, and hierarchies. This point is important because it runs counter to many of our usual social and sociological assumptions about racism and prejudice as beliefs and behaviors that not only differentiate groups and individuals from each other but that stratify, exclude, and evaluate them on these terms. When seen in sport, racism is revealed as a more complicated cultural system than we often assume, one which often ironically finds expression and reinforcement in the celebration and consumption of racial difference itself. Following closely from this is a third point about the depth and pervasiveness of the problematic situation of race and racism in American culture. Color-blind, liberal democratic ideals and their connections with the culture of sport are the focal point here. On the one hand, they point out the deeply ideological and symbolic nature of racial formations, a point typically not fully grasped and appreciated by sociological analysts of American race relations. On the other hand, thinking about race in the context of an institution often thought to be the embodiment of liberal democratic ideals serves—either because these ideals have not been achieved or because these ideals themselves seem to be part of the problem—to highlight the radical challenge and difficulty of overcoming racial differences and inequalities within the structure of American political theory and practice.

The fourth and final point has to do with the paradoxical politics of struggles against racism and racial injustice. Popular cultural institutions such as sport are not only sites in and through which racial formations are constructed and reproduced but also sites where racialized structures can be acted on, utilized, or even struggled against. What is important about this formulation is that it focuses our attention on the social processes and struggles by which racial meanings and practices are reproduced and transformed, as well as on the social agents and actors who drive these dynamic processes. At a theoretical or analytical level, this helps avoid the overly deterministic, totalizing vision that can so easily result when the world is viewed through the lens of a racialized cultural system. At another more practical level, this way of thinking of sport also reminds us of two additional

points. First, that racism must be struggled against (it will not simply go away). Second, the most significant racial struggles are usually waged on, within, and against spheres of social life such as sport that are thoroughly racialized because this is where those marginalized, excluded, and disempowered by race have the most power and are closest to the sources of their oppression.

There is obviously much more that could be said here, but let me conclude simply by reiterating, first, that the previous points suggest that the sociology of race has a great deal to learn from taking sport seriously as a racially contested terrain. At the same time, thinking of sport in this way should also make clear that a full theory of sport and race interactions has as much (if not more) to do with how we think about and understand race, racism, and the struggles against them as with how we think about sport itself. If sport is golden for African Americans (which is to say, if it offers a way to rethink and resist dominant American racial structures), it is mainly because of its unique place in and relationship to the pre-vailing structures of the metaphorical racial ghetto itself. This is neither a criticism nor a celebration of sport; it is simply a statement on one of the ironies of race in contemporary, post-Civil Rights American culture.

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Notes

[1]It almost goes without saying, as John MacAloon (1988) emphasized in introducing him to sociologists of sport over a decade ago, that Bourdieu's entire theoretical project is predicated around "nothing less than the dissolution" of such "epistemological couples" (p. 150). For a brief summary statement, see Bourdieu (1988b); see also: Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992). MacAloon (1982) himself had previously explored the ways in which some of these dualisms and paradoxes get played out in American culture in the case of Olympic sport.

[2]For some of my own views on the state of racial theorizing in sociology, see Hartmann (1999); see also Cornell and Hartmann (1998, chapters 3 and 4).

[3]I might also point out that what I have to say about race and sport is oriented toward, if not centered upon, males and masculinity. There are many reasons for this, but the most important ones are practical and, unfortunately, may obscure many important and consequential intersections (and disruptions) between race and gender in sport and in American culture. Radio stations dedicated almost exclusively to sport talk are perhaps the more recent and most obvious example of the significance of discussions and debates that take place in and around sport. See Goldberg (1998) for a recent discussion and analysis.

[4]Historical treatments of these debates can be found in: Hoberman (1997), Wiggens (1997 [1989]), and Davis (1990).

[5]The poll, which surveyed 1,000 people by telephone in a random national sample, was conducted in May of 1996 by the Tarrance Group, Lake Research and KRC (TARR).

[6]For contemporaneous descriptions of this movement, see Edwards (1969) and Olsen (1968). For more recent and somewhat more critical discussion and analysis, see Hartmann (1996), Wiggens (1997b; 1988), and Spivey (1984). It is also worth recalling that Harry Edwards, widely known as the leader of the movement, was one of the leading practitioners of and spokespersons for the race-based critique of sport. Some of his ideas can be found in *Sociology of Sport* (1973), one of the first widely used sociology of sport textbooks in the country.

[7]Kelley argues that Shivers and Halper's (1981) prediction that the decline of publicly funded parks, youth programs, and extracurricular activities in schools would have disproportionate impacts upon poor, minority communities has been essentially borne out in the last 20 years. For discussions on the impacts of declining public commitment to youth sport and recreation in New York and Chicago see, respectively, Rosenzweig and Blackmar (1994) and Rauner (1994).

[8]Recent analyses of stacking include Margolis and Piliavin (1999), Smith and Leonard (1997), and Phillips (1997).

[9]This is actually up somewhat from the 1980s when, as Lapchick notes (1991), some collegiate programs failed to graduate even a single black athlete.

[10]One of the more recent of these polls found that 57% of African American males in middle school and high school chose "professional athlete" as their career of choice. What is more, 55% of these respondents (compared with 20% of white males) think they may be good enough to play professional basketball; 49% (27% for whites) believe they can play in the NFL (*Sports Illustrated*, December 9, 1997).

[11]See also: Wonsek (1992), Boyd (1997), Werner (1995), Wilson (1997). George Lipsitz's path-breaking *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness* (1998) provides a powerful general argument about the links between white fear and white desire (chapters 5 and 6, respectively) and is notable in this context because much of the argument is focused largely around O.J. Simpson's murder trial.

[12]See, again, Lipsitz (1998). For provocative illustrations of how critical whiteness studies can inform our understanding of race and sport dynamics in the contemporary U.S., see Johnson and Roediger (2000) and Yu (unpublished manuscript).

[13]Given that David L. Andrews' (forthcoming) book on popular culture and the politics of race in the U.S. is to be titled *Deconstructing Michael Jordan*, I should emphasize that I am not at all against deconstruction *per se*. Indeed, I am trying to suggest that it is crucial to a full theory of sport and race relations. But I am concerned about deconstructions that fail to appreciate the full force and foundation of the social formations they criticize, thus missing the opportunity to build more comprehensive and forward-looking critical theories.

[14]For discussions see Sammons (1997), Smith and Shropshire (1998), and the reviews collected in symposia in the *Social Science Quarterly* (December 1998), the *International Journal of the Sociology of Sport* (March 1998), and *Black Issues in Higher Education* (April 1998). I should also note that sports fixation thesis is not inherently liberal or conservative. Indeed, Harry Edwards has long advanced similar claims. The problem with both standard liberal and conservative formulations, in my view, is their failure to situate

the African American experience in sport within the larger context of living in and struggling against a deeply racialized culture.

[15]The term "contested racial terrain" is obviously closely related to the notion of "contested ideological terrain" used by feminist sport scholars such as Messner (1988) or Kane and Disch (1993). Without detailing its numerous similarities and connections with these works, I should emphasize that my conception was developed out of Stuart Hall's (1981) Gramscian work on popular culture. For more on Hall's reading of Gramsci, especially as it applies to the study of race and ethnicity, see Hall (1996).

[16]In a series of important (if underappreciated) studies of the complex and contradictory experiences and impacts of sport, Laurence Chalip and his colleagues (Chalip et al. 1984; McCormack and Chalip, 1988) found that, contrary to the hopes of sport defenders and fears of sport critics, sport did not have solely positive or solely negative social impacts but that these impacts varied, depending upon factors such as the level of sport, relations with the coaches, and so forth. Outcomes and experiences in sport, in other words, were not of a generalizable piece.

[17]Wacquant's (1992) study of boxing in Black Chicago stands in contrast to the other major focus of Hoberman's critique of sport as well—namely, his argument about the inherent negative racialization built into sport's physicality. In contrast, Wacquant treats boxing as a form of social practice that requires tremendous practice, creativity, and understanding, a "social art . . . whose mastery involves an intensive, ascetic and strictly regulated manipulation of the body" (p. 221). As a form of "embodied practical reason," therefore, sport constitutes a form of agency and potential source of resistance. See also Wacquant (1995).