Welcome to ESL904!

Sports Literature

During the summer, read the following chapters out of the book, *Major Problems in American Sport History*, edited by Steven A. Riess.

We will be using the articles and essays in the chapters to begin our discussion on race and sport the first week of school. Additionally, annotate your reading by following the enclosed instructions. **Moreover, you must answer the noted essay prompt and bring it with you on the first day of school.**

If you have any questions, please talk to either of us before you leave for the summer. Please make note of any question you have after summer break begins to address in class when you return in the fall.

We look forward to working with you during the upcoming school year!

Sincerely,

Ms. Caulfield, Mr. Ewing, and Mr. Joyce
Annotation Instructions
For Any Article Are As Follows:
Use the following guidelines to help you annotate each article.

- Use any white space available -- the margins of the essay, inside cover, random blank pages, between or within lines. Do not be afraid to mark up the text; in fact, you must.
- Star, question mark, underline, or use other appropriate methods (boxes, triangles, clouds, circles, etc.) to identify important elements of the prose piece analyzed and make connections with lines and arrows.
- Do not use a highlighter. Instead, use pen or pencil to annotate the piece.
- The text (your copy) should show strong evidence (proof) that you did indeed read the entire piece.
- Annotation will slow your reading to an appropriate pace for maximum comprehension.

Do The Following To Annotate Your Texts:

- Make note of the speaker, audience and the subject (purpose) of each article or essay.
- Write the definitions of words (in context) vital to an understanding of the piece. --Remember, every word is capable of containing meaning.
- Mark passages causing confusion or passages you think you may be misinterpreting.
- Mark the central claim of the author (thesis) of the piece (main idea/purpose).
- Find and mark specific ideas (passages) related to the claim made by the author.
- Find and mark passages meaningful to you (personal).
- Include an explanation of the significance for any marked passage.

"ESSAY RESPONSE (REQUIRED FOR THE FIRST DAY OF SCHOOL)"
When you have the annotations complete, answer the following prompt in essay format and bring the essay with you on the first day of school:

After looking back on your readings, detail the trials and tribulations of athletes in regard to race and ethnicity in sport during the early 20th century. Consider struggles athletes encountered, discrimination faced, how others tried to oppress during these times, and ultimately how the athletes persevered thus changing the landscape of American sports in the years to come. You must use evidence from the articles in your response and correct citations must be utilized.
Chapter 10

Race and Ethnicity in American Sport, 1890–1940

Ethnic and racial factors played an enormous role in the development of sport. The original immigrants who came from Western Europe between 1840 and 1880 brought a vital athletic tradition that they sought to maintain in the United States. How did their experience compare to that of the millions of new immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe who arrived in the period 1890–1914 from premodern cultures where sport was largely unknown?

Though these newcomers found American sports to be a waste of time, their American-bred children became very interested in sports. Were the athletic experiences of second-generation Jews, Italians, and Poles similar to those of second-generation Germans and Irish? Second-generation Americans idolized leading athletic heroes, followed their favorite teams in the penny newspapers, and played sports themselves. However, their options were limited by poverty and by parental disapproval. These young men looked to sport as a means to gain respect, prove they were not greenhorn; and even make money. They were most successful in those sports that fitted with their environment, like boxing and basketball. How did their sporting experiences compare to those of American-born people of color? Native Americans produced several prominent major-league ballplayers, and the Carlisle Indian School fielded powerful football teams that competed with distinction against the top collegiate elevens. African-Americans also participated in high-level sports, but they encountered more discrimination than any other group. In the late nineteenth century many leading jockeys were African-Americans, and there were excellent professional African-American baseball players and prize fighters. However, prejudice forced them out of organized baseball and most other sports by the turn of the century. African-Americans were only allowed to remain in the low-status sport of boxing, and following Jack Johnson’s tenure (1908–1915) as heavyweight champion, he received an opportunity to fight for that prestigious title until Joe Louis in 1937.

The Chicago Daily News Describes the Quadrennial National Turnier Festival, 1893

Milwaukee is the center of German-American life, and the 20,000 strangers who to-day crowding its streets and participating in its festivities represent the German-speaking population of every city in the country. The North American Turners' present company 250 societies with a membership of 30,000 men...

The reception this evening will be proceeded by a torchlight parade from the depot through the principal streets to the banquet hall. Dr. Henry Brann, president of the Turner Bund, will deliver an oration, after which Mayor Koch will welcome the visiting turners... After the inaugural festivities the men will proceed to the...
encampment at the athletic park and fair grounds, where they will be quartered during the four days of the tournament. The number of active turners who will participate in the gymnastic exercises will exceed 3,000, and the other turners and visitors who will come are expected to swell the crowd to about 50,000. The turners believed that physical exercise is as important for women as for men, and the reports show that more than 200 women are already entered in the gymnastic contests.

The representation of the various turn districts... will be as follows: New York, 132; Indiana, 150; St. Louis, 233; New England, 90; Wisconsin, 193; Chicago, 408; Philadelphia, 200; New Jersey, 140;....

The North American Turn Bund was founded in Washington, D.C., in 1849, on the day that Richmond fell... Before that time the turners... were separated into two distinct bodies... The first turnfest of the present national organization was held in Cincinnati from Sept. 2 to 6, 1865, when about 2,000 turners participated, of whom only 200 competed for prizes. Since that time, however, the membership of the bund shows a wonderful increase in numbers and each successive quadrennial fest has a greater attendance.

To-morrow evening there will also be competitive singing and declamatory exercises in the Exposition Building. On Sunday the turners will prepare for the performance to be given by them on the following Wednesday at the World's Fair. About 100 classes, formed into three groups, will go through a large number of movements with dumb-bells and wands. In the afternoon the exercises will be accompanied by songs by a chorus of 300 voices. On Monday the individual turners will compete for prizes. In the evening 150 of the best turners in the city will form pyramids on twelve ladders. The effect will be heightened by a flood for calcium lights. Prize-winning exercises will take place at Bohm's swimming school...

In the afternoon all the turners who will perform at the World's Fair... will give a grand gymnastic exhibition in Athletic park.... On Tuesday the pioneer turners will hold a reunion... On Wednesday morning, the visitor will leave for Chicago on early morning trains in order to arrive on time in Jackson park, where they will give evidence of their accomplishments in the arena reserved for that purpose on the World's Fair grounds.

Probably one of the strongest teams entered to compete... is the one from the New York Turnverein. They expect to eclipse the record of the famous Rochester team of 1887, which, with thirty-five men captured thirty-seven individual prizes, almost making a clean sweep.

The National Police Gazette Supports the Rise of Italian Boxing, 1905

The Irish race is not losing its fighting propensities if we were to judge by the familiar Celtic names which appear in present day ring statistics, but personal investigation bears out the assertion that there are but few men of Irish birth or descent in the games-to-day. Nearly all the pugilists in this country, Heenan, Morrisey, McCloskey, and the older Sullivan, were either Irishmen or the sons of Irishmen, and it has come to be accepted as a rule that prize fighters and boxers should bear Irish names. Of the pugilists of the present time, however, the great majority of them are young Italian-Americans, who, for convenience or other reasons, have taken Celtic names.

Immigrants from Italy coming into New York have lad the name of being inclined to use knives when they fought, instead of their fists. This was true of the Italian immigrants, but it does not apply to the second generation of Italians, born and reared in the city of New York.

Unlike the older Italians, they have developed here a strong partiality for American athletics, and the number of amateur boxers and professional fighters among the children of Italian parents residing here is very large. It is increasing, too, so much so that a special designation for them has become current.

In the same way that there has been a change in the fighting peculiarities of Italians, the stiletto of one generation being succeeded by the hard knock of the next, the Russian Jews who came to this country as immigrants and who are known as peaceable and inoffensive, have in some parts of town been succeeded by a generation of turbulent young men from whose ranks have been graduated a number of professional pugilists and boxers. Note the number who are making ring history and then ask yourself, where are the Irish?

Richard Henry Pratt Encourages Indian Sportsmanship. c. 1894

First, that you will never, under any circumstances, slug. That you will play fair straight through, and if the other fellows slug you will in no case return it. Can't you see that if you slug people who are looking on will say, "There, that's the Indian of it. Just see them. They are savages and you can't get it out of them." Our white fellows may do a lot of slugging and it causes little or no remark, but you have to make a record for your race. If the other fellows slug and you do not return it, very soon you will be the most famous football team in the country. If you can set an example of that kind for the white race, you will do work on the highest interests of your people.

The Outlook's Dismay with Indian Sportsman Jim Thorpe and the Forfeiture of His Olympic Medals, 1913

When an American Indian, who had won the championship as the best all-round athlete in America, established his right in the Olympic Games at Stockholm last

From Richard Henry Pratt, Soldier and Indian, 1926, pp. 174-175.
July to be regarded as the greatest amateur athlete in the world, and was so declared by the King of Sweden, there was widespread gratification in America. Now that that great Indian athlete, Jim Thorpe, has been stripped of his honors because, by his own confession, he had received money for playing baseball, and therefore was not an amateur but a professional, and had no right to enter into competition with amateur athletes, the humiliation is not confined to him. It extends to all who value their country’s reputation for fairness in sport as in all other matters.

Every such incident lends aid and comfort to those who are constantly looking for proof of their assertions that Americans are constitutionally devoted to the doctrine that nothing should stand in the way of winning. This incident in particular will afford an opportunity to those unfriendly to this country to declare again their opinion that the ideals of its gentlemen are beyond the comprehension of American athletes, and that American sport is thoroughly commercialized. The fact that these aspirations are unjust and ill founded only makes it the more humiliating for work so devoted as this to occur.

James Thorpe is a student at the Carlisle Indian School. He is of the Sac and Fox tribe, and, like many other Indians, has sufficient property to afford him support. The Carlisle School is well known for its athletes and its athletic teams. In particular, the Carlisle football team has established a reputation for a peculiar skill and brilliance. Thorpe has been the best-known football player at the School and one of the greatest football players in the country. He is almost as well known as a player of baseball. “In the summer of 1909 and 1910” (this is his own phrase) he played baseball in North Carolina, and for this he received money. In fact, in the fall of 1911 he was re-instituted to the Carlisle Indian School. He took part not only in the sports of the School but also in the athletic meets of the Amateur Athletic Union. Last summer he went with the rest of the American team to Stockholm and competed in the Olympic Games. His achievements there astonished the whole world of athletes. In particular, he took part in the great series of athletic events. One, known as the Pentathlon, is a series of five athletic events; the other, the Decathlon, is a series of ten athletic events. In the first series, out of a possible five firsts he won four; in the Decathlon he registered 8,412 points as against the 7,724 of his nearest competitor, a Swede.

American public opinion should cordially support the officials of the Amateur Athletic Union, whose action was so prompt and sure in this matter that no reparation of the wrong to Thorpe as an amateur was officially made. The news of the discovery of his offenses was a chance for the representatives of organized amateur sport in America to make clear to the world that their standards of amateur sport were inexorable. In the first series, out of a possible five firsts he won four; in the Decathlon he registered 8,412 points as against the 7,724 of his nearest competitor, a Swede.

Prejudice Against African-American Ballplayers in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, 1911

There is no doubt that baseball, after all, is the great American game. We play it to be sure, but the colored people play it so much better that the time is apparently coming when it shall be known as the great African game. The St. Louis Giants, a black baseball team, have easily beaten everything in town but the Browns and the Cardinals, and neither of these latter will play them. The Chicago Giants, alligator bail, have done the same thing in that city, and there are no end of people up there willing to wager that they can beat either the White Sox or the Cubs.

Your Negro is not a bad athlete. Peter Jackson only missed being heavyweight champion of the world because the holders of that title through the years of his prime would not fight him, and Jack Johnson, more fortunate, besides the

As quoted in New York Age, September 28, 1911, p. 6, col. 5.
James “Cool Papa” Bell Remembers Negro League Baseball

In the 1920s and 1930s

Of course, most of the time nobody kept any records, so I don’t know what my lifetime batting average is. Nobody knows. If I had to guess, I’d say around .340 or .350. I batted .437 one year, in the Mexican League. I batted .407 in 1944, .411 in 1946. I played twenty-nine years of baseball, and the lowest I ever batted was .308, in 1945. Other than that it was .340 or up to .400. That’s twenty-nine seasons, 1922 through 1950, Plus twenty-one winter seasons. That makes a total of fifty seasons. That’s the way you have to count it, by seasons.

I was born in Starkville, Mississippi, in 1903; . . . . I had five brothers, all good athletes. When I got to St. Louis, four of them were playing with a semipro team, the Compton Hill Cubs. I joined up with them, as a left-hand pitcher. . . .

I was with the Cubs about a year and a half, playing Sundays and holidays and during the week working in the poolhall.

Then one day I pitched a good game against the St. Louis Stars, a professional team with a lot of first-rate ballplayers. A few nights later my brother, who owned a restaurant, said to me, “The manager of the St. Louis Stars was over here. Wants you to play ball.” . . .

So I went with the Stars and pitched for them for two years, making $90 a month. Then they switched me to the outfield. . . . We played five days a week in what they called the Western League, and we played against Chicago, Indianapolis, Detroit, Kansas City, Cleveland, Dayton, and Toledo. . . . In 1928 or ’29 we installed lights, years before the major leagues did. We drew crowds of 3,000 to 5,000, and more than that once we got the lights.

From James “Cool Papa” Bell interview, in DavidHonka, Baseball When the Great War Was Real (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1972), 194-5.
team. We'd play about 130 league games, and another 130 exhibition games, where from 250 to 300 games a season.

Later on there were those famous games where Satchel pitched against Dizzy Dean. I was in center field most of all those games. Dean was a good pitcher, no mistake about that. The feature for those games was always Paige and Dean. Nobody else got any publicity.

Dean beat us a game in New York broke our heart. We had beaten them four in a row, and we went to New York, and everybody said we couldn't do it again. Dean shut us out, 3-0, at Yankee Stadium.

There was a play that day I still remember. I was on second, and Josh Gibson was up. He hit one on a line way back in deep center field. Jimmy Ripple caught it, and I tagged up and rounded third and came all the way home. The ball came in to the catcher... the same time I did, but high, and I slid in under it before he came down with the tag. And the umpire said, "Out!" I said I was safe, but the umpire laughed, and said, "I'm not going to let you do that on major leagues. Maybe you can do that in your leagues, but not against major leagues."

Heck, I often scored from second on a long outfield fly....

It was rough businessman. We traveled by bus, you see. You'd be surprised at the conditions we played under. We would frequently play two and three games a day. We'd play a doubleheader in one town and a single game in another. Or three single games in three different towns. One game would start about one o'clock, a second about four, and a third at about eight. Three different towns, mind you. Same uniform all day, too. We'd change socks and sweat shirts, but that's about all. When you got to the town, they'd be waiting for you, and all you'd have time to do would be to warm your pitcher up. Many a time I put on my uniform at eight o'clock in the morning and wouldn't take it off till three or four the next morning.

Every night they'd have to find us places to stay if we weren't in a big city up North. Some of the towns had hotels where they'd take us. Colored hotels. Never a mixed hotel. In New York we'd stay at the Thressa, in Harlem, or the Woodside. In the larger cities in the South we'd stay at colored hotels. In smaller towns we'd stay at rooming houses or with private families, some of us in each house.

You could stay better in small towns in the South than you could in the North, because in a small town in the North you ate most of the times don't find many colored people living there. And those that are there have no extra rooms. But in a small town in the South there are enough colored people living there so you can find rooms in their homes....

We went into a lot of small towns where they'd never seen a colored person. In some of those places we couldn't find anyplace to sleep, so we slept on the bus. If we had to, we could convert the seats into beds. We'd just pull over to the side of the road, in a cornfield or someplace, and sleep until the break of day, and then we'd go on into the next town, hoping we'd find a restaurant that would be willing to serve colored people.

All those things we experienced, today people wouldn't believe it.

The Chicago Commission on Race Relations Examines Racial Contacts in Recreation in the Late 1910s

Representatives of each park commission said that they had no rules or regulations of any kind discriminating against Negroes, and that all races were treated in exactly the same way. The only case in which this rule appeared to be violated was in connection with Negro golf players at Jackson Park. Two Negroes participated in the Amateur Golf Tournament at Jackson Park in the summer of 1918 and made good records. The only requirement for entrance into the tournament at that time was residence in the city for one year. In 1915 the requirements were increased, entries being limited to the lowest sixty-four scores, and membership in a "regularly organized golf club" being required. Since Negroes are not accepted in established golf clubs, the Negro golf players met this qualification by organizing a new club, "The Windy City Golf Association." In 1920 the restriction was added that contestants must belong to a regularly organized golf club affiliated with the Western Golf Association. As it was impossible for Negro clubs to secure such affiliation, it is impossible for Negroes to compete in the tournament.

Unofficial discrimination, however, frequently creeps in. According to the representative of the Municipal Bureau, "the person in charge of the park is largely influenced by the attitude of the people outside the park. We had trouble at Beutler Playground because of the tendency on the part of the director, who was a white man, to be influenced by the attitude of the white people in the neighborhood, and either consciously or unconsciously shewed by his actions to the colored people that they were not fully accepted." Beutler Playground later became an example of unofficial discrimination in favor of the Negroes, for the Municipal Bureau decided to "turn over the playground particularly to Negroes" and instructed the director to "give them more use of the facilities than the whites." But this was found to be impossible as long as a white director was employed, because he was influenced by the feeling of the whites in the neighborhood who did not want the playground turned over to the Negroes. The desired result was finally obtained by employing a Negro director. "Then the switch suddenly came," said the park representative, "and the playground was turned over to the Negroes almost exclusively."

A similar method was employed with reference to the Twenty-sixth Street Beach, according to the head of the Municipal Bureau, who said, "As the colored population gradually got heavier and more demand came for the use of that beach it gradually developed into a beach that was used almost exclussively by Negroes. And we did as we did in the Beutler case: we employed a Negro director when the preponderance was Negro."...

Clashes—Clashes between Negroes and whites at various places of recreation are reported as far back as 1913. These clashes in the main have been initiated by
gangs of white boys. In 1913, for example, the secretary of boys’ work at the Wabash Avenue Y.M.C.A. (for Negroes) conducted a party of nineteen Negro boys from the Douglas Center Boys’ Club to Armour Square. They had no difficulty in entering the park and carrying out their program of athletics. The party then took shower baths in the field house. The Y.M.C.A. secretary had noticed the increasing crowds of white boys near-by but had no misgivings until the party left the park. Then they were assailed with sandbags, tripped, walked over, and some of them badly bruised. They were obliged to take refuge in neighboring saloons and houses in Thirty-third Street west of Shields Avenue. For fully half an hour their way home was blocked, until a detachment of city police, called by the park police, scattered the white gang.

That same year the Y.M.C.A. secretary had found it impossible to proceed east through Thirty-first Street to the lake with groups of Negro boys. When this was tried they inevitably met gangs of white boys, and fights ensued with no missiles permissible. Attempts to overcome this situation by continuing to demonstrate that the Negro boys had a right to use these streets were unsatisfactory for the next two years.

In 1915 similar conflicts occurred. That winter Father Bishop, of St. Thomas Episcopal Church, took a group of the Negro Y.M.C.A. boys to Armour Square to play basket-ball. The party, including Father Bishop, was beaten up by white boys, their sweaters were taken from them, and they were otherwise ill-treated. The Y.M.C.A. staff then decided not to attempt to use the park or field house during the evenings...

An altercation between white and Negro boys in Washington Park is on record as early as the summer of 1915. These boys were sixteen or seventeen years of age. During the spring and summer of 1919, numerous outbreaks occurred because of the use of the baseball diamonds in Washington Park by Negro players. White gangs from the neighborhood of Fifty-ninth Street and Wentworth Avenue, not far from the park, also came there to play baseball, among them some of “Zagar’s Cols.” Gang fights frequently followed the games. Park policemen usually succeeded in scattering the combatants. The same season gangs of white boys from sixteen to twenty years of age frequently annoyed Negro couples on the benches in the park. When the Negroes showed fight, minor clashes often resulted.

In Ogden Park, as early as 1914, there were similar instances of race antipathy, expressed by hoodlums who were more or less organized. A Negro playground director said that if Negro boys attended ball games in that park, white gangs would wait for them outside the park, and the Negroes were plugged. The white gangs also tried to keep Negro boys from using the shower baths at the park....

* * * *

Though the Negro areas are as well supplied with ordinary playgrounds as the rest of the city, they are noticeably lacking in more complete recreation centers with indoor facilities for the use of older children and adults. Several of these recreation centers... border on Negro areas but are not used to any great extent by Negroes because of the whites’ object to their presence. Though

there are three publicly maintained beaches within the main Negro area the Negroes feel free to use only the Twenty-sixth Street Beach, though many of them live as far south as Sixty-sixth Street. Where Negroes do not use nearby facilities to any great extent they have usually either been given to understand, through unofficial discrimination, that they are not desired, or they have been terrorized by gangs of white boys. Few attempts to encourage Negro attendance have been made...

Voluntary racial groupings and serious clashes are found mainly at the places of recreation patronized by older children and adults—the large parks, beaches, and recreation centers. Trouble is usually started by gangs of white boys, organized and unorganized. The members of so-called “athletic clubs,” whose rooms usually border on the park, are the worst offenders in this respect. If they do not reflect the community feeling they are at least tolerated by it, as nothing is done to suppress them. Some park authorities that have made sincere efforts to have these hoodlums punished are discouraged because they get no co-operation from the courts, and the policemen who take the boys to court get a reprimand, while the boy is dismissed....

The most important remedies suggested to the Commission for the betterment of relations between Negroes and whites at the various places of recreation were:

1. Additional facilities in Negro areas, particularly recreation centers which can be used by adults;

2. An awakened public opinion which will refuse longer to tolerate the hoodlums and will insist that the courts properly punish such offenders;

3. A selection of directors for parks in neighborhoods where there is a critical situation who will have a sympathetic understanding of the problem and who will not tolerate actions by park police officers and other subordinate officials tending to discourage Negro attendance;

4. Efforts by such directors to repress and remove any racial antagonism that may arise in the neighborhood about the park.

ESSAYS

The essays in this section examine two of the most important ways in which race and ethnicity influenced American sport. In the first, biographer Randy Roberts of Purdue University examines one of the most important prize fights of the twentieth century, the heavyweight championship bout of July 4, 1910, between titleholder Jack Johnson, and the "Great White Hope," Jim Jeffries, a former champion. The fight represented the efforts of the white race to protect its predominance over other races by demonstrating superiority inside the ring. Roberts also examines the riotous impact of the Johnson victory upon the public. The other essay, written by historian Peter Levine of Michigan State University, offers a microcosmic view of how sport influenced the behavior of second-generation Eastern European Jews, an ethnic group characterized as undersized, physically unfit, and unarmed. Levine offers an in-depth examination of the basketball experiences of Jewish youths during the 1920s and 1930s at a time when these young men had little money for alternative activities. In an account based heavily on oral testimony, Levine recreates the Jewish world of Brooklyn during the inter-war era and shows how sport promoted community and individual self-esteem."
The 1910 Jeffries-Johnson Fight and Its Impact
RANDY ROBERTS

Few if any fights in history generated as much interest as the 1910 Johnson-Jeffries match. ... From the very first, it was advertised as a match of civilization and virtue against savagery and baseness. As early as April 1909 the Chicago Tribune realized what was at stake. It printed a picture of a cute young blond girl pointing a finger at the reader, underscathing the caption: "Please, Mr. Jeffries, are you going to fight Mr. Johnson?" ... Humanity needed Jeffries. He had inherited the White Man's Burden and he could not plead retirement to cloak his weakness.

The money, the success, the fame, the smile, the body—women now more than ever were attracted to Johnson. In New York he met Bita Terry Duryea, whom he would eventually marry. She was a sporting lady, though technically not a prostitute. Born in Hempstead, Long Island, and brought up in a fashionable section of Brooklyn, Bita had married Charles C. Duryea, an Eastern horse-racing patron. The marriage did not last long, but even after the two separated Bita continued to attend the races. One afternoon at the Canoe Island track she met Johnson, and shortly thereafter the two began living together, Bita taking the unofficial title "Mrs. Jack Johnson." About her there was a certain sense of sadness. Her beauty was of a haunting sort—cold, distant, aloof. Her hair and eyes were dark, her chin pointed and dimpled. She had a beautifully shaped mouth, but one that appeared unused to smiling. In pictures her lips are always locked in a perpetual pout. But it was her eyes that registered the real sadness. They seemed to stare without seeing, as if they knew all too well that sight was not worth the effort of focus. It is difficult to look at pictures of Bita and still be surprised that she committed suicide.

When Johnson left New York for Philadelphia, Bita went along. So too did Belle and Hattie. The two prostitutes were used to the arrangement, but Bita was not. There were several scenes, but nothing Johnson could not handle. The three lived in separate hotels and waited for Johnson. That was his normal procedure when traveling with more than one woman. At any time in the day or night he might make a brief appearance for the purpose of intercourse, but he usually left after a short stay. Belle and Hattie, as prostitutes, were accustomed to such behavior. He treated Bita differently. She stayed at the hotel where he stayed. She was, it soon became clear, the number one Mrs. Jack Johnson...

... The Kenesaw Case had dramatically enhanced his reputation and he was sought after by several vaudeville agents. In December 1909, while in New York, he signed for a tour with Barney Germain's "Atlantic Carnival" show. For the tour, which was due to start in early 1910, Johnson was guaranteed $1,250 per week. It was a star's salary, and initially Johnson seemed satisfied. As he left to begin the tour, a reporter for the Chicago Tribune noted that Johnson was "his usual happy self." He was expected only to be himself, or what whites perceived was his true nature. He was told to dance about the stage, sing a bit, and tell a few amusing stories.

He was also supposed to accept the indignities that came with being a black performer. Even the top black vaudeville were treated shabbily. Bert Williams, one of vaudeville's greatest stars, ... was never supposed to mix socially with the white members of the tour, and a clause in his contract specified "that at no time would he be on the stage with any of the female members of the company."...

Johnson was also expected to live with the inconveniences. Frank Calder, a stage manager, recalled working with Johnson at the Cleveland Star Theatre and the Indianapolis Empire Theater. Even though it was bitter cold, Johnson was not allowed in the heated dressing room that the other performers used. Rather he was forced to change clothes in the cellar. Unlike Williams, Johnson rebelled against such treatment. At the Fairland Theatre in Terre Haute, he refused to perform. It was too cold, he said, to go on stage in just boxing trunks and gloves. An argument with the management followed, and Johnson angrily left town...

Money was no longer an immediate problem. Ahead of Johnson was a rainbow, and beyond it the pot of gold. The rainbow was Jeffries, the pot of gold their proposed match. Toward the end of 1909 Jeffries succumbed to the pressures of race and dollars. Hundreds of letters were sent to Jeffries with a single theme: it was incumbent upon him as a white man to shut Johnson's smirking mouth once and for all. White Americans doubted not that Jeffries was up to the task. They believed the Jeffries mythology—that he cured himself of pneumonia by drinking a case of whisky in two days, that with a broken leg he was still able to knock out a leading heavyweight contender, that upon inspection a physician told him that he was simply not human. Across America white bartenders told customers that if Jeffries fought Johnson, he would "probably kill the Negro." After more than a year of such stories Americans—and, more important, Jeffries—believed that he probably would kill Johnson.

It was left to the business managers to work out the details. Sam Berger negotiated for Jeffries, George Little and Sig Hart for Johnson. They told reporters that the fight was open to bids and that the purse was offered to the highest bidder. The leading promoters in America heard of the bids, which were supposed to be opened in public at the Hotel Albany in New York City. However, both boxing and the promotion of boxing matches were illegal in New York, and at the last minute the scene for the opening of the bids was shifted across the Hudson River to Meyer's Hotel in Hoboken, New Jersey...

The bids were opened. They were all attractive, but George L. "Tex" Richard's was the best. He guaranteed the fighters $101,000 and two-thirds of the movie rights. In addition, he promised a cash bonus of $16,000 for each fighter upon signing. It was money unheard of in the boxing world, but it was not just talk. Richard was backed by Thomas R. Cole, a Minnesota millionaire who owned silver and gold mines across the United States and Alaska.

In an age when a laborer still might earn only a dollar a day, the amount Jeffries and Johnson stood to make struck some observers as disgraceful. Not only would the winner get 75 percent of the $101,000 guarantee, and the loser, 25

percent, but additional revenues would be gained through their percentages of the film rights and vaudeville contracts. Howard R. Moss, sports editor for the New York Evening Sun, estimated that if Jeffries won, the white fighter would make $567,750 and Johnson would earn $358,250. If Johnson was victorious, the film rights would be worth less and he would make only $360,750 to Jeffries's $158,000.

Behind the new era and manipulating the million-dollar match were Tex Rickard and Jack Gleason, who were brought in on the promotion to please Jeffries. Rickard was a new sort of promoter. He did not know much about boxing, and in 1910 he had few connections in the pugilistic world. As a teenager he moved to Texas and worked as a house wrangler and later a frontier marksman. In 1893 his wife and baby died and he left Texas, drifting north to Alaska. It was a time for making money and getting rich, and Rickard poured gold, staked gold, and gambled. He managed the Northern Saloon in Nome but lost everything he earned at the poker and roulette tables. Tired of Alaska, he drifted south, this time ending up in the gold fields of South Africa. Back in the United States, he opened the famous Northern Saloon in Goldfield, Nevada, where another gold rush was under way. There in the hot, dusty-rich town of Goldfield Rickard tried his hand at promoting boxing matches. He did it not for the love of boxing or even the love of money, but to draw the nation's attention to Goldfield. He matched Joe Gans, the magnificent black lightweight champion from Baltimore, against the rugged Battling Nelson, and for forty-two rounds the two men battled and kicked, sweated and bled, and occasionally punched until Nelson sank a left hook in Gans's groin and lost on a foul. But the scheme worked. Overnight Goldfield became famous and Richard became a success as both a promoter and an advertiser.

In Johnson and prizefighting [rural-based] reformers saw the incarnation of everything they opposed, feared, and hated. They embraced traditional, rural, parochial values, the values that at last in popular theory had accounted for everything pure and great about America. The world of prizefighting, they argued, was as alien to those values as an illiterate Jewish immigrant from Russia. Professional boxing was viewed as an incarnate sport that attracted Irish and Polish Catholics, Russian Jews, and other undesirable sorts. It was also quite correctly seen as having close ties with saloon keepers and Democratic urban machine politics. And the epitome of the evil of the prizefighting world was Jack Johnson. He drank, supported prostitutes, and threatened the very social and racial order of America. He was not the type of men rural Anglo-Saxon Protestants felt comfortable with. Instead he was a constant reminder of the powerful thrust to the traditional American order.

When the site of the Johnson-Jeffries fight was announced as San Francisco, reformers slapped on their svaccos. It was an affront to civilization, they said. In Cincinnati a million post cards were distributed among the faithful for signing and posting. They were addressed to the governor of California and contained the simple message: "STOP THE FIGHT, THIS IS THE 20TH CENTURY." Other protests were staged in California. Fifty ministers formed a prayer session on the capitol steps in Sacramento. They prayed for Governor J. N. Gillett to see the light of civilization and reason.

Up until then Gillett had steadfastly supported the match, claiming that it in no way conflicted with the laws of California. The potential obstruction of the Panama-Pacific Exposition, however, made him reread the statutes. After some soul-searching he concluded that the Johnson-Jeffries contest would not be a boxing exhibition, which California law permitted, but a prizefight, which state statutes forbade. In an open letter to the attorney general of California Gillett claimed, "The whole business is demoralizing to the youth of our state, corrupts public morals, is offensive to the senses of the great majority of our citizens, and should be abated, as a public nuisance, and the offenders punished."

Moral outrage and economic pressure had won for the reformers. Although Mayor Pat McCarthy opposed the governor's decision, the fight was pushed out of San Francisco.

To Rickard fell the task of finding another city to stage the fight. He had already sold $133,000 worth of tickets and had invested between $30,000 and $50,000 in the stadium, licenses, and various political payoffs. Now he had only two weeks to find another city, build a stadium, and complete the many other arrangements. He received offers from Reno, Goldfield, and Salt Lake City. He chose Reno because of its superior railroad facilities and because the mayor of the town assured him that a 20,000-seat stadium could be constructed there within the two-week deadline. Further incentives were offered by Governor Dayton S. Dickerson. He told the promoter that no reform movement had any power in Nevada and no amount of protest could force him to cancel the fight. Thus guaranteed, Rickard, Jeffries, Johnson, and everyone else involved in the match boarded a train for Reno.

For American reformers, however, the site was important. They wanted to prevent the match from being staged anywhere in the United States, across the nation protest was intense, and in the end useless. Dickerson refused to budge. For many gospel-hung Americans, Reno became a national disgrace.

This strident tone of the reformers' protests revealed their true objectives. To be sure, they opposed boxing matches in the past and would do so again. But their opposition had never been so angry and forceful. The difference between the Johnson-Jeffries match and the other prizefights they opposed was the problem of race. The Reno fight was not simply another brutal and demoralizing prizefight; it was a battle that was widely perceived as a struggle for racial supremacy.

Just to allow the fight to take place was to admit a sort of equality. It implied that blacks had an equal chance to excel in at least one arena of American life.

White reformers, therefore, considered the fight a no-via proposition. Win or lose, if the fight took place Johnson would achieve a symbolic victory for his race.

And in that victory whites saw disturbing possibilities. They were sure that if Johnson won, the result would be race war. "If the black man wins," a New York Times editorialist noted, "thousands and thousands of his ignorant brothers will misinterpret his victory as justifying claims to much more than mere physical equality with their white neighbors." This prediction was echoed throughout the United States, especially in the South. Southern congressmen "talked freely of the danger of the negroes having their heads turned" by a Johnson victory.

Southerners believed a Johnson victory would increase the possibility of physical contact between young, proud blacks and white women. This haunting specter led naturally to thoughts of racial warfare.
Race and Racial Identity in American Sport, 1890-1940

Whites were not slow in predicting that the fight would beggar violence. Conservative blacks feared the same possibility. Black admirers of Booker T. Washington had never felt comfortable about the implications of Jack Johnson. They feared that Johnson challenged an order they wished to placate and that his emancipated lifestyle eventually would cause a violent white reaction.

For many Americans Reno was a word as well as a physical desert. They assumed that most of the town's population of 15,000 was to some degree associated with vice and sin. There was the gambling—not normal secretive gambling, conducted behind locked doors and pulled blindly, but illuminated, unabashed gambling. In Reno gambling was legal. ... And there was the drinking. In a four- or five-block area there were more than fifty saloons. ... Most notoriously of all, there were the divorcees. Reno even then was the divorce capital of America.

According to most observers the more than 20,000 people who traveled to Reno for the fight did nothing to upgrade the town's reputation. It was a sporting crowd—boxers, ex-boxers, promoters, armor owners, gamblers, pickpockets, hobos, profiteers, and high rollers of every kind. They came to drink, spin the roulette wheel, and talk about the upcoming fight. They talked and dressed loud. Bright plaid vests, thick black ties, and large diamond rings were the order of the day. These were sporting men from England, France, Germany, Italy, Australia, and all over the United States. There were black sports as well as white sports. It was an atmosphere filled with tall tales, hard luck stories, big dreams, and grandiose plans.

Perhaps at no time before had so many reporters descended upon so small a town. Upwards of 500 correspondents were present to report the town's celebrations. Every day for the week before the fight between 100,000 and 150,000 words about the fight—enough for two popular novels—were sent out from Reno. Some of the correspondents were leading writers. Jack London, Rex Beach, and Alfred Hickey Lewis, three of the leading writers for Sport, detailed the activities. But far more famous were the boxers and wrestling correspondents. Covering the fights for various newspapers were John L. Sullivan, James J. Corbett, Robert Fitzsimmons, Abe Attell, Battling Nelson, Tommy Burns, Frank Gotch, Willie Mullaney, and a host of others.

Another faction well represented in Reno was the criminal class. Thieves of all types roamed about town's streets, and "if a hand was not dipped into your pocket sooner or later it was almost a sign of disrespect. ... Nor were all the criminals there to work. Some of the more famous and prosperous had come just to watch the fight and wage a few thousand dollars. ... Even the notorious Sundance Kid was reported to be on his way to Reno.

By the Fourth of July the entire nation was a bit nervous. Henry Wales of the Chicago Tribune, reviewing his long career as a reporter and an editor, said that no event so captured the public mind until the Lindberg flight seventeen years later. It was fitting that the fight was scheduled for the national holiday, for the celebration and the excitement were intense. Never had so illustrious a group of sports gathered in one spot.

And everyone had an opinion about who would win. The betting was ten to six or seven on Jeffries, but as Arthur Rubel wrote, the talk was 1,000 to 1 in favor of the white fighter. "You couldn't hurt him—Fitzsimmons had landed enough times to kill an ordinary man in the first few rounds, and Jeffries had only shown his head like a bull and bored in. The negro might be a clever boxer, but he has never been up against a real fighter before. He has a yellow streak, there was nothing to it, and anyway, 'let's hope he wins the close.'"

Most boxers and intellectuals also predicted a Jeffries victory. John L. Sullivan, James J. Corbett, Robert Fitzsimmons, Tommy Burns, Abe Attell, Battling Nelson—the list is extensive. They all favored Jeffries. Even black boxers like Sam Leavenworth and Joe Jeanette picked the white. Perhaps Jeanette, who had fought Johnson more than any other man, spoke for them all: "Why, Jeffries can lose half of his strength, have his endurance cut in two, carry a ton of extra weight and still whip Johnson. He has the 'heart' and the 'head' to do it." The head and the heart it was a common theme among intellectuals too. A psychologist writing for the London Lancet remarked that Jeffries's brain should be the deciding factor.

Even America's churches were not immune to the excitement. In Hutchinson, Kansas, the colored Holiness Church announced that it would hold special services during the fight to pray for Johnson. To counterbalance this plea for divine help a Midwestern white minister said he would pray for Jeffries. Although some ministers disagreed with such statements, most did agree that there was something much greater at stake in Reno than a championship belt.

On the Fourth of July the nation was ready. Every section of the country was connected electrically with Reno. ... Outside newspaper buildings in every major city crowds gathered to follow the progress of the fight. At Tuskegee Institute Booker T. Washington, who declined to cover the bout as a reporter, sat aside a special assembly room to receive telegraphic reports from Reno. If the fight was a racial Armageddon as everywhere it was advertised, then the results would be known to everyone as soon as it concluded.

"The day dawned spectacularly clear, one of those still crystalline mornings which come in the thin dry air of the mountain desert country." Because of the shibboleth of the event that was to follow, reporters in Reno remembered the beauty of the morning. They recalled the order with which the drunken mob, 15,000 to 20,000 strong, moved toward the stadium on the outskirts of Reno and checked their firearms at the gate; how they poured in through the four tunnel-like entrances into the huge sighted arena; how their voices rose strong and clear into the hot afternoon air; how a brass band climbed into the ring and played "All Coons Look Alike to Me" and other "pleasing" selections...

Johnson was the first into the ring, wearing a gray silk robe and blue trunks with an American flag for his belt. A tinsy of racial slurs greeted him, but as always he seemed not to notice. Beach watched for some sign of fear, but Johnson merely grinned and clapped his hands like a boy." Jeffries was greeted like an emperor. He looked nervous, chewing gum rapidly and glaring across the ring at Johnson.

Johnson looked big but also old and tired. A few days before Jeffries had told reporters, "I realize full well, just what depends on me, and I am not going to disappoint the public. That portion of the white race that has been looking to me to defend its athletic superiority may feel assured that I am fit to do my very best.

Tex Rickard, who had named himself as referee, also felt the "vast concentration of thought," and he feared it might erupt into violence. In order to cool the
heated racial feeling, Richard called on William Muldoon to give a speech. Muldoon, the once great wrestler, was a pompous, humorless man who genuinely believed in such notions as honor and fair play. In a forceful voice he told the spectators so. It was necessary, he said, not to judge Johnson too harshly just because he was black, and regardless who won, the verdict must be accepted in a sense of fair play. Muldoon's speech and the lemonade, which was the only beverage served in the arena, seemed to sober the crowd.

During the preliminary activities not all of the tradition of the prize ring was observed. Certainly all the ex-champions were introduced. However, by prearranged agreement Johnson and Jeffries did not shake hands before the fight. No detail more clearly illustrated the symbolic importance of the match. The refusal to observe such a fundamental ritual, the very expression of sportmanship and fair play, indicated that this was not simply another championship fight.

No fight could do justice to such an extended buildup. This one did not even come close. "It was not a great battle after all, save in its setting and significance," wrote Jack London. Johnson established the tempo of the fight in the first round—slow and painful. He waited for Jeffries to lead, then threw straight right and left counter. For all the talk of Jeffries' grizzly strength, Johnson was by far the stronger of the two men. He tossed Jeffries around with alarming ease.

In the second round Johnson started talking to Jeffries. "Don't rush, Jim," he said as he pushed Jeffries across the ring. "I can go on like this all afternoon." he exclaimed as he hit the challenger with a solid right hand lead. Jeffries' famous crouching, rushing, wild-swinging style was useless against the grace and economy of Johnson's defense.... During the intervals Johnson would talk to Jeffries or to the challenger's corner.

Most of the reporters believed that Johnson could have ended the fight in an early round. They said he did not because he was a good businessman and a yeoman's son. Financially a quick fight would have been disastrous. It would have destroyed the potential of the fight as a revenue source, but beyond the money question, the money question, Johnson enjoyed watching Jeffries suffer. By round twelve Jeffries' mouth was cut twice and his nose was broken and bleeding. His face and eyes were bruised and smeared with blood. Even Johnson's chest and back were covered with Jeffries' blood. There was no reason for the fight to go on. But it did.

In the fifteenth Jeffries' face was bleeding and swollen, and his movements were languid. But he continued to move toward Johnson. The round-by-round report accurately, if emotionally, reflects the horror of the scene: "He staggered after the clashing negro, sometimes choking low... and sometimes standing erect. Stopping and starting, he was a mask for Johnson's accurately driven blows. Johnson simply waited for the big white man to come in and chopped his face to pieces." Finally a combination of rights and lefts forced Jeffries onto the ropes. There Johnson landed fifteen or twenty punches to Jeffries' head and face. Jeffries fell to the canvas for the first time in his career. He was dazed, and Johnson stood over him until Richard made the champion move back. At the count of nine Jeffries struggled to his feet. Johnson charged and landed another combination of punches. Again Jeffries fell to his knees. At the count of nine he once more arose. At this stage ringfighters aloud, "Stop it, stop it. Don't let him be knocked out."

But the fight continued. Jeffries was helpless. A left-right-left combination knocked Jeffries into the ropes. He sprawled over the lower rope, hanging half outside the ring. Richard picked up the timekeeper's count. At seven one of Jeffries' handlers rushed into the ring, and Richard stopped the fight. The "fight of the century" was over.

Silence, insults and cheers were few. The spectators accepted the end as they might the conclusion of a horse race where the favorite broke a leg and had to be destroyed. Johnson was clearly superior, so there was nothing to argue about. Jeffries was old and tired and should have attempted a comeback. More than taking gas or yelling, the real boxing fan wanted to leave the arena as quickly as possible and find a bar that served something stronger than lemonade. Across the nation thousands of other men who crowded around newspaper offices for news of the fight experienced similar reactions. And so they went to the saloons, and on the streets and in the parks, and when they finished drinking and brooding about the fight they expressed their displeasure in spontaneous outbreaks of violence. The emotions sparked by the Johnson-Jeffries fight were quite incandescent, once uncovered, were deadly.

In Greenwood, South Carolina, close to the border of Georgia, Benjamin F. Mayo was almost 2,500 miles from Reno. Only fourteen in 1910, the future educator remembered clearly how white men in his town reacted to the news of Johnson's victory. They could not accept the outcome. Because a black boxer defeated a white boxer in faraway Nevada, whites in Greenwood beat up several blacks. Fear swept through the black population, and in the presence of whites they dared not discuss the fight. The match, which prompted random violence and brutal deaths, touched every section of the country. Compared with many cities, Mayo's Greenwood was tame. . . .

The rioting claimed other casualties. In Houston, Charles Williams openly celebrated Johnson's triumph, and a white man "shouted his throat from ear to ear"; in Little Rock, two blacks were killed by a group of whites after an argument about the fight on a streetcar; in Roanoke, Virginia, six blacks were critically beaten by a mob; other murders or injuries were reported in New Orleans, Baltimore, and many other smaller cities and towns. The number of reports of violence and inquiries is unknown.

Many of the riots followed a similar pattern. They were started by blacks who, inspired by Johnson's example, refused to submit and briefly lifted their heads and raised their voices in pride. In New York City, Nelson Turner, a black, was almost lynched for yelling to a crowd of whites, "We blacks put one over on you whites, and we're going to do more."

Participants in the riots also displayed similar traits. Most striking was the class element. The rioting largely saw lower-class whites attacking lower-class blacks, although occasionally a middle-class black might also be assaulted. Often white sailors or soldiers were to blame. . . . As usual, the reason was attacks by the mobs on blacks. In New York City "loving hands of white hoodlums" like the Pearl Button Gang and the Hands of Hell roamed through the city beating every black they could catch. In the districts known as the Black and Tan Belt and San Juan Hill, tenement houses inhabited by blacks were set ablaze and
trust that public sentiment will be so aroused, and will make itself felt effectively, as to guarantee that this is the last prize fight to take place in the United States.

Basketball and the Jewish-American Community, 1920s–1930s

PETER LIVISH

While hardly all Jews embraced basketball as a valid enterprise, by the late 1930s, certainly sportswriters identified it as the “Jewish” game. Paul Gallico, longtime sports editor for the New York Daily News, explained the intimate connection between Jews and basketball. "Curiously... above all others," Gallico wrote, "the game appealed to the temperament of the Jew." While "a good Jewish football player is a rarity... Jews flock to basketball by the thousands," he insisted, because it placed "a premium on an alert, shrewd mind... flashy trickiness, artful dodging and general smart aloofness." traits naturally appealing to "the Hebrew with his Oriental background." One year earlier, in 1936, Stanley Frank, former varsity trackman and campus sports editor at the City College of New York (CCNY), offered his own version of Jewish attachment. Rejecting the implied anti-Semitism of Gallico’s remarks, nevertheless Frank insisted that no other sport so required "the characteristics inherent in the Jew... mental agility, perception, imagination and subtlety... If the Jew had set out deliberately to invent a game which incorporated those traits indigenous in him... he could not have had a happier inspiration than basketball." Describing Jewish domination, Frank concluded, "ever since Dr. James A. Naismith came up with a soccer ball, two peach baskets and a bright idea... basketball players have been chasing Jewish athletes and never quite catching up with them."

Providing slightly different spins on the same biological deterministic ball, Frank and Gallico offer no more satisfactory explanations of Jewish involvement in basketball half a century ago than similar arguments sometimes offered to explain black domination of the game today. But they were right in one respect. Although you didn’t have to be Jewish to play basketball, especially in large eastern and midwestern cities containing substantial numbers of first-generation East European immigrant Jews, Jewish children flocked to the sport, making it a significant part of everyday community life and ultimately earning some of them local and national reputations for their exploits in the cage and on the court.

Not surprisingly, in urban, ethnic working-class neighborhoods, a game open to improvisation and requiring little space or equipment proved attractive to children. As early as the turn of the century, in the streets and on the school yards, at
settlement houses and YMHAs, their imagination and control of their own turf along with more structured opportunities for sport shaped their introduction to the game.

Certainly that's how Nat Holisky and Harry "Jammy" Moskowitz, my high-school gym teachers, remember it. Harry was born in 1904 and Nat in 1901 in Brownsville to Russian immigrant parents. They went to local high schools and attended respectively the Savag School for Physical Education and CCNY. Later, they became good friends and neighbors as well as colleagues at Brooklyn's James Magee High School, where for some forty years "Jammy" coached basketball and Nat track and field. They were also competitors, teammates, and stars of amateur, college, and professional basketball teams in the New York City area.

"Jammy" -- first played basketball on Bristol Street where he was nine years old. As both he and Nat recall, sandbars placed on brownstone stoops served as baskets, roughly simulating the more formal game with backboards that did not exist in any form and baskets were nonexistent. A bunch of rolled-up rags, an old stocking stuffed with them, or a wooden stocking cap sufficed as ball. Neither running nor dribbling were allowed; instead playmates tapped the ball to each other.

Three years apart in age, Krinsky and Moskowitz moved their street skills to the gym and school yard of P.S. 84 where they played on class teams and also on clubs like the Mercury, the Bears, and the Invincibles -- teams defined by age and weight that represented the local evening recreation center. Enthusiastically recalling his boyhood at the age of 83, Nat remembers waking up at the Brooklyn YMHA where basketball was the most popular sport, Nat Krinsky, writing in 1923, made the connections quite clearly. Writing for the Y's newspaper, he emphasized that "the gymnasium and the athletic field are ideal places to develop the qualities of courage, respect for authority, co-operation, unselfishness, and a desire to play cleanly and in a sportsmanlike manner." Such rhetoric served as code words for organized play advocates, settlement house workers, and YMHA enthusiasts who hoped that the ability to inoculate these traits into the children of immigrants would ease their entrance into the American mainstream.

Whether or not Krinsky's remarks reflect his own childhood experiences at settlement houses and in evening recreation programs, other men who first became involved in basketball in similar ways certainly remember their power and persuasion. Red Sarnacki was born in the Bronx in 1912, and raised in the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn. Workmen's Circle coach and also mentor in the American Basketball League as well as coach and athletic director at Yeshiva University for 39 years, he clearly recalls efforts to use sports as a means of acculturating the children of immigrants. As he put it, "they expected it to grow on them and it did grow on them. After all, they gave them a home, a place... the incentive to do something would carry over."

More impressive for the many who joined the Y's, settlement houses, the Educational Alliance, and evening recreation programs was their own part in determining their participation. Joining because of their enthusiasm for sport, or to get free milk and cookies, even within these organized programs they often maintained control of their own activities. On their own but within the framework of Jewish family and community, they learned more about "American" values and survival skills than they absorbed from the actions and words of social workers and physical education teachers. Though not without conflict between themselves and their parents, their early basketball experiences illuminate the role of sport as middle ground in all its many versions.
Certainly that’s how Sammy Kaplan remembers the Dux. The Dux took in the summer of 1925 when a bunch of high-school freshmen and sophomores in Sammy’s Brownsville neighborhood got together and won a basketball tournament at a summer recreations program in the school yard of P.S. 184. Veterans of punchball, stickball, hide and seek, kick the can, and Johnson’s pony, they decided to form a club in order to play basketball at their school’s evening recreation center. As Kaplan recalls, they chose the name “Dux” because it meant leader in Latin and for the more practical reason that it only contained three letters, making it cheaper to sew the name on uniform shirts and jackets.

Recreation center rules required the club to hold weekly meetings, collect dues, and keep minutes, all in the spirit of a philosophy well articulated by youth organizations at the time which insisted that such practices would teach good citizenship and respect for authority. The club dutifully followed procedures, independently turning in the children’s own wristbands. Establishing ten-cent weekly dues, they used the money to promote their basketball. One member acted as a booking agent, arranging games with other clubs around the city. Visiting teams received as much as $2 for participating. Occasionally, the Dux even rented out the main school gym for $5 to host their opponents, money recouped by charging five-cent admissions to the games and by betting club dues on the outcome.

Sammy joined the club in 1925 at the age of fourteen, on the recommendation of his lifelong friend Duddy Linn that he was a good punchball player. A growth spurt during the summer of 1927 which made Kaplan the tallest member of the club, moved him into the Dux starting lineup. The team relied on Sammy to win the center jumps each time someone scored.

In 1928 the Dux represented P.S. 184 in a city-wide evening recreational basketball league and won the city championship, defeating P.S. 171 of Manhattan by a score of 33–15. To celebrate their success, the club put out a single issue of its own newspaper: Appropriately called The Leader, it proclaimed the Dux as city champions and detailed the exploits of the team, giving due credit not only to its young Jewish stars but also to Arthur Brown, who ran the center and coached the team. Edited by Kaplan and Linn, the paper also included accounts of other center activities, taking great care to mention as many participants as possible by name. The inclusion of so many names assured that neighborhood children and their parents would buy the paper at its five-cent price and turn a profit for the club.

Much as David Naar describes the street and work life of turn-of-the-century immigrant children in cities throughout the United States, the Dux’s control over their own fortunes, both literally and figuratively, gave them a sense of independence, optimism, and a taste of success that many of their peers may have never experienced. In love with a city that offered all kinds of possibilities for fun and adventure, Kaplan remembers the freedom and opportunity involvement in basketball gave him and his friends. As he put it, “the street, the school yard and the candy store was [sic] our second home.

Collecting dimes, booking games, betting on the outcome, and selling their own celebratory munches gave them a sense of independence and taught them first hand about American capitalism and the pleasures of success within it.

Building on their growing reputation, after 1928 the Dux left the evening recreation league and moved over to Hopkinson Avenue to represent the Hebrew Educational Society (HES), primarily because it had a bigger gym. Although Meyer Landesman, its head, tried to get the boys interested in the society’s religious educational, and social activities, basketball remained their focus. After two years the club broke its affiliation and freelanced throughout the city, playing college and professional teams as well as five in established leagues. As Kaplan remembers, the “city was teeming with YMHA’s, YMCA’s, settlement houses, temples, Educational Alliances, Boys clubs, Harlem Hebrew Institute. . . . All the institutions were trying to get the immigrant children and their parents into the American mainstream and off the streets. They had all kinds of athletic programs, arts and crafts, drama, night classes which taught English and trades. And the immigrants seeking only a chance, grasped these opportunities with both hands. . . . We played them all. We played three or four times a week and demanded more expense money. . . .”

By 1930 the Dux played throughout New York’s five boroughs and also in upstate New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania. Successful on the court and at the gate, they “were even able to shower more than once a week,” a mark for Kaplan, of their separation from their immigrant parents. Occasionally, when they traveled outside the city limits, the boys would hire a car and charge their friends $1.50 for the permission to accompany them. Charged by their love of the game and “their own incentive to do well,” Kaplan asserts the Dux took responsibility for their own lives and never wanted “somebody to give us a handout or do something” for them.

Basketball provided the Dux and other clubs like them opportunities for learning American ways. Whether playing in their own neighborhood or representing other Jewish communities, their games also became an integral part of the social life of Jewish neighborhoods, especially for second-generation friends and neighbors. Cheering their own to victory, they were drawn up in a web of associating experiences, both by deciding as American consumers how and where to spend their leisure time and by vicariously identifying with modern values of competition and masculinity that victory on the court demanded. So intense were basketball rivalries and fan loyalties among New York’s Jewish communities that, during the 1933–34 season, the Staten Island Jewish Community Center hired the Brooklyn Dux to represent them in the YMHA league. Led by Sammy Kaplan, the Dux by this time were already established as one of the best independent clubs in the New York area. As the ICC Dux, they played a schedule that included other Young Jewish clubs, local college teams such as NYU and CCNY, and a host of professional clubs including the New York Jewels, Jersey City Reds, and the Chicago Studebakers. The schedule also included games with independent barnstorming teams that took on Jewish names to heighten crowd appeal. The Hebrew Cyclones, the House of David, and the Jersey City Hebrews, a team of former college and professional ballplayers that included Hank Greenberg, . . . all did battle with the Dux.

The Dux were unabashedly billed as the Brooklyn club. Nevertheless, the Staten Island Advance praised the boys as their own. In graphic prose the paper described a March 1934 victory over a previously undefeated Holman-coached City College club, noting how “the Dux went on an all-out drive and in the final two periods as
passing attack... suddenly began to click on all cylinders—a quickening tempo that hypertrophied the jam-packed crowd of over 600 "into a wild, exultant mob as shots repeatedly went in." Despite the fact that the Dux were clearly earning expenses and appearance money, the paper billed them as the "city's best amateur team" and emphasized the "tremendous local interest" they generated. In part this was due to a 17-game unbeaten win streak which ended when the JCC Dux lost to eventual national collegiate champions NYU by a 23-24 score before 500 fans. The same issue of the Advance that reported this disaster brought news to the Staten Island faithful also offered a column headlined "Jewish Centers Click on Court" which noted the Dux among the top of the current crop of New York Y teams. Commenting that the teams were generally composed of ex-college stars and younger players of "college timber," the Advance suggested that "never before in the history of Jewish center basketball has the interest been widespread and attendance so good."

People who watched the 92nd Street Y variety and the Dux came to enjoy good basketball, other than friends and neighbors, and to see each other, catch up on local gossip, and socialize. Inevitably, the price of admission also included refreshments and dancing to live music after the game. Fans attending a basketball carnival at the Fort Richmond Community Center on Staten Island in December 1933 to raise money to supply Christmas food baskets to Staten Island's needy could see two games, one featuring the Dux, and danced afterward to midnight to Charles Bishop's Brownies eight-piece orchestra, all for 50 cents. Over in Paterson, New Jersey, anyone attending a 1934 game between the Dux and the local Y team could also count on dancing to the music of Natie Fatt's orchestra, regardless of whether their local heroes triumphed on the court.

Although not all stories are well documented as that of the Dux or the 92nd Street Y, in Jewish communities large and small, scattered throughout the United States, the children of East European Jewish immigrants, as players and spectators, took up this American game and made it their own. Twenty years before the Dux began, Joseph Weiner and a handful of New Haven Jewish boys, after learning the sport at the local boys club, formed their own organization, the Jewish Club. Holding weekly meetings, collecting dues, even publishing a club newspaper, over the next three quarters-century this Jewish social athletic club participated in a wide variety of sports but excelled most prominently in basketball. In the early 1920s, its team was not only won city, state, and regional amateur championships but also played for pay against professional teams scattered throughout Connecticut and nearby states. During the 1919-20 season, in fact, the team, often referred to as the "Jewish boys" by the New Haven press, went undefeated over a 24-game schedule that included games with YMHA teams from Bridgeport and Waterbury as well as contests with the New York Collegiate and the Jewish Debutantes of Boston, New York.

Even though many of its members came from orthodox Jewish homes, basketball games were often scheduled for Friday nights. As one member recalls, that evening turned out to be the most profitable, attracting large numbers of youthful Jewish supporters interested both in basketball and the dance at the Mitzi Hall that followed. Violation of Sabbath observance, however much (as it might have upset their parents, did not diminish the club's own sense of Jewish purpose. Playing in cities which had never seen a Jewish athlete, Joseph Weiner recalls that club members "looked upon ourselves not simply as another team of players but as a group of goodwill representatives on behalf of the Jewish community. We were shattering the stereotype of the neurotic Jew."

No doubt their athletic success also made other Jews both proud and hopeful of their own chances for success in America. Certainly the club's victory over the Yale varsity basketball team in a 1922 exhibition game which raised $2100 for the Jewish Relief Fund encouraged such sentiments. Playing before 2800 spectators at the Meadow Street Armory, the largest crowd ever to see a basketball game in New Haven until that time, the Atlas, led by "Bucky" Brovnik and George Greenberg, crushed the Elks by 42-22. So too did the fact that many of the boys who played for the Atlas Club over the years went on to Yale or other colleges and then to careers in business and the professions.

Basketball, then, all within the setting of a Jewish community, provided second-generation participants and spectators opportunity to experience dominance and success in an American enterprise. In community centers and gymnasiums, neighborhood people also participated as American consumers by purchasing a ticket and choosing to root for whomever they pleased. They became fans of an American invention and more "American" in turn, by watching their own kind transform it into a Jewish majority sport. These Americanizing experiences unfolded in ways that encouraged ethnic pride and identification. Although this dynamic was to receive far greater publicity with the success of Jewish boxers and major league baseball players, the achievements of local boys in local settings carried a more immediate, palpable sense of American possibility for all Jews.

Wrestling interests evolved in American sport while socializing in settings distinctly Jewish even provided opportunities for maintaining Jewish tradition. Whether raising money to buy Passover matzah for poor Brownsville residents or for the Jewish Relief Fund in New Haven, or using basketball revenues, as the 92nd Street Y did, to send children to summer camps or to supplement its Keren Ami Fund which raised money for a host of Jewish charities, those who participated in basketball both as players and as spectators also expressed collective concern for community welfare consistent with the long-standing Jewish tradition of tzedakah—God's directive to help others less fortunate than yourself. Engaging sport as a middle ground, participants in this world of basketball and Jewish community acquired American ways while absorbing Jewish sensibilities, even as they moved inexorably away from the Jewish world of their immigrant parents.

II

Not everyone was happy about this transformation. Harry Glaize, who glowingly reported on the success of Los Angeles Jewish community basketball teams for his B'nai B'rith Messenger readers, chastised the local B'nai B'rith lodge for sponsoring league games on Friday nights. Players certainly have the chance to be home for the "Shabbat feast." But as soon as the meal is over, he lamented, "they bundle their athletic uniforms and shoes into their grips and they're away as fast as they can—to uphold the fair name of a Jewish club on a basketball court," in violation of the true meaning of "our most important holy day."
Fathers and mothers also voiced disapproval. Even those eager to see their children make as much of a mark as successful Americans were often appalled by their children’s passion for basketball and other sports. Thinking about his boyhood Brownsville street life, William Foster, poet and writer, remembers parents who “were soングreased as we came streaming in from a x-mas ball game covered with sweat and gin” before rushing off to one of a hundred several annual activities that we were all boys, girls, and children — the Southside. The poem of Milton Klonsky, who also grew up in the late 1920s and early 1930s a little further south in the Jewish neighborhood surrounding Brooklyn’s Brighton Beach, recalls similar moments. Proudly he remembers his loyalty to his club, the Orphans, and their incidentful use of streets and sidewalks in all-consuming love and interest in sport. “We played hard with a will to win so strong it killed itself,” he remembers. “Sometimes we became so engrossed by a pinball or a stickball game that sight would fail without anyone knowing it.” Their passion, however, was not shared by mothers who complained because they had to complain and even more by the older boys, those with the embittered yearnings and their white beards worn like orders upon their heads. They wondered whether we were Jews or a new kind of skimbei. . . . They painted a picture of our decline and fall stage by stage until someday we would be eating pig and pulling beards on the streets of New York.”

Parents, they remember, caught up in their own struggle between new American ideals and traditional East European ethnic ways, often expressed displeasure with their sons’ love of sport. More important, however, they were too preoccupied with making ends meet to devote time and energy to the daily direction of their children’s lives. When they did raise objections, it had little to do with fears that children were abandoning any sense of traditional Jewish life but rather that they were squandering opportunities for education and economic opportunity offered by a new American world. For some parents, over time, their children’s accomplishments in this American game softened their disappointment, even serving as a common ground between generations both caught up in learning how to be American.

When asked if his parents objected to his playing basketball, Harry Litwack recalls that they were too busy trying to survive to worry about how he spent his time. Although not orthodox, his Polish parents kept religious holidays, observed the high holidays, and spoke only Yiddish in the home. Noting that the hardships they experienced in coming to terms with America, he mentions that his mother never learned English and that her father struggled with it. Harry’s father repaired shoes, putting in hours from 6 a.m. until his day’s work was done. Only on Sunday afternoons did he take time off from his labors, when after a full meal he went out to buy his supplies for the following week. In such a setting, there was no time for outside interests or for worrying about his son’s participation in athletics. Not until, through his playing days at Philadelphia’s South High School, Temple University, or even with the renowned Philadelphia SPHAs, did his parents come to see him. “All the parents in the ghetto,” Harry remembers, “had no interest in sport. All they understood were books, books, books, knowledge, knowledge.” His parents’ only concern, as Harry recalls it, was that “I came home at night.”

Leif to his own devices, basketball provided Litwack with a ticket to college, a sense of empowerment and independence as an adolescent, and ultimately a highly successful career in basketball, all unfolding in the Jewish world South Philadelphia. Several thousand miles away and almost a generation later, Harry Glickman offers a somewhat different version of family and community. Born in Portland, Oregon, to immigrant parents from Russia and Poland in 1924, he grew up in Portland’s small East European Jewish neighborhood that he remembers distinctly “Jewish.” His parents divorced when he was five and Harry was raised in an orthodox kasher home by his mother, who worked as a finisher in the garment trade to make ends meet. Although not an outstanding basketball player, his childhood memories remain dominated by his days spent at the local Jewish Community Center where he played basketball with his Jewish friends—friends he still sees regularly today. His mother, he recalls, encouraged his interest, worrying only that he might be injured.

Clearly it would be unfair to suggest that these stories about basketball and Jewish life, offered by exceptionally talented athletes, were typical of the experience of all other men of their generation. Well-marked Jewish enclaves like Brooklyn’s Brownsville, Chicago’s Maxwell Street, or Philadelphia’s South Side, where everyone and everything seemed “Jewish,” did not describe the situations of Jews growing up in places like El Paso, Texas, or Montgomery, Alabama. Moreover, neither in Brownsville nor on Maxwell Street did all young boys find basketball and sport the all-consuming passions.

Still, in neighborhoods located in eastern and midwestern cities where most Jews lived, for those who played the game and for friends who offered their support, basketball provided a large segment of second-generation Jewish youth from urban East European working-class backgrounds opportunities to relish what was most exciting about being an American. Social reformers and religious leaders certainly tried to impose their own definitions of propriety and citizenship on them, even using sport as one means of cutting their own versions of Americanism out of immigrant cloth. But through basketball, these children of immigrants became active participants in the process of deciding what it was to be an American and what it was to be Jewish. For them, it was never a choice between remaining part of some idealized version of European immigrant culture or blending into an American Gentile world. Rather, in the context of their own ethnic world, they shaped their own sense of Americanism, one that ultimately fused what they considered to be ethnic and mainstream values. In short, these people recognized an incredible feature of American life totally alien to their parents’ European beginnings. Here, public definitions of community, of American citizenship, of Jewishness, and of the place of sport in it all were not dictated by secular or religious authorities. Even in the face of opposing views from within and without their own communities, they were free to determine what assimilation meant for themselves.

**FURTHER READING**


Sports Heroes and American Culture, 1890–1940

Why was sport such an important source of heroes in the early twentieth century? Although there were a few earlier sports idols like pugilist John L. Sullivan, by the 1920s it seemed that every major sport had its own hero or heroine: baseball had Babe Ruth; boxing had Jack Dempsey; football had Red Grange; swimming had Gertrude Ederle; tennis had Bill Tilden; and golf had Bobby Jones. There were not only heroes for the broader society but also certain ideals for ethnic sub-communities like boxer Benny Leonard for Jews and baseball star Tony Lazzeri for Italians.

What made certain athletes heroes? Why was there such a great need for heroes at this time? Sociologist Janet Harris in Athletes and the American Hero Dilemma (1984) states that heroes "provide much-needed displays of prominent human characteristics and social relationships. . . . They are thought to help define individual and collective identity, compensate for qualities perceived to be missing in individuals or society, display ideal behaviors that people strive to emulate, and provide avenues for temporary escape from the rigors of daily life." How did sportsmen and women become identified as heroes? A sports hero was recognized for athletic accomplishments that were readily measurable, usually gained over a long period, earned, according to historian David Voigt, through "hard work, clean living, and battlling obstacles." A hero was more than a celebrity, who was famous simply for his/her athletic accomplishments. Society expected heroes to be morally and socially responsible and to serve as role models. Heroes were thought to be very important for youngsters to emulate (particularly when American society was undergoing many major changes because of industrialization, urbanization, bureaucratization, and immigration). They exemplified stability and direction, certified that traditional values like rugged individualism, self-reliance, and courage still counted, and occasionally also epitomized the relevance of newer traits like teamwork and cooperation.
CHAPTER

13

Sport and Race in America
Since 1945

Race was an important factor in American sport prior to World War II, and, if anything, it has become an even more prominent variable since then. Before the war, Americans had begun to recognize the abilities of African-American athletes, most notably Jesse Owens and Joe Louis. Then during the war when African-American soldiers were serving in their country, there were growing demands by civil rights leaders and liberal politicians for racial equality, which included integration of the playing fields.

Jackie Robinson broke color lines in 1946 when he played with the Montreal Royals, the top farm club of the Brooklyn Dodgers, and the professional football league followed suit when they hired their first African-American players in twelve years. One year later Robinson joined the Dodgers. Why is Jackie Robinson one of the most important men of the twentieth century? Why have historians considered his becoming a Dodger a pivotal event in modern American history?

Integration actually took place at a slow pace—it was twelve years before the last major league team, the Boston Red Sox, became integrated. Furthermore, blacks were “stacked” into certain less central positions like outfielder or corner-back rather than catcher or quarterback, and informal quotas limited the number of African-Americans that a team might keep on its roster or play at the same time. On the collegiate level, certain southern schools would not play football or basketball teams having African-Americans as late as the early 1960s, and some southern schools fielded white-only teams until the late 1950s. It was then that the Black Student Revolt emerged to fight racism, mainly on college campuses, but wherever it existed, most notably the apartheid in South Africa. The movement raised the consciousness of college athletes and their supporters; between 1967 and 1971 there were protests against racism at thirty-seven schools. What emboldened African-American student-athletes to fight prejudices in sport?

Historians point to factors such as the civil rights movement, the Black Power movement, and role models—most notably lightweight champion Muhammad Ali. All defied conventional norms by his outspokenness, his conversion to the Muslim religion, and his refusal, on religious grounds, to serve in the military. He paid for that decision by having his life taken from him. By the 1960s, when 90 percent of the NBA was black, and most NFL players were black, the most glaring remnants of what had been eliminated, particularly in sports and society. However, African-American sportsmen were still limited when they sought to gain substantial long-term benefits from sport. They disproportionately failed out of college, and these young people remained very underrepresented in athletic leadership positions, both on and off the field.

DOCUMENTS

The first document is a private report to the American League by Yankees president Larry McPhail in 1946 on the issue of integrated baseball. It had been strongly pushed by Bill Veeck, a minority league owner who had tried to buy the Philadelphia Phillies in 1943 and stocked them with Negro League stars. However, Baseball Commissioner Kenesaw Mountain Landis had blocked Veeck's bid. McPhail, like most of the leaders in organized baseball, opposed integration, and in this presentation he argues that integration would be bad for African-Americans. However, the integration of baseball went on despite his criticisms, and Dodgers president Branch Rickey signed Jackie Robinson to a minor league contract.

Robinson was not a star in the Negro Leagues, but he had been an all-around superstar athlete at UCLA and an All-American in football. He had grown up in an integrated world in Los Angeles, was a former army officer, and was married to a sophisticated African-American woman. The second document examines his first spring training in 1946. What problems did he encounter in his initial experience with white baseball?

The third document consists of various statements made by Muhammad Ali during the late 1960s when he was barred from fighting for refusing induction into the Army.

In the fourth document, sociologist Harry Edwards of the University of California, Berkeley, reviews the origins of the Black Student Revolt he began in 1967 by organizing students at San Jose State to fight racism both at the college and in its athletic program.

The final document examines the attitude of the late Arthur Ashe toward the issue of Proposition 48. The NCAA adopted this act in 1982 to promote higher educational achievement by prospective student-athletes. It required them to achieve a 700 on the SAT tests and commensurate grades before they could get an athletic scholarship. Many African-Americans objected to this as racist because most of the athletes affected were African-Americans. Ashe, along with certain authorities like Dr. Edwards, courageously spoke out against the majority because he recognized the ephemeral value of sport as a means of social mobility, especially when compared with educational achievement.

Yankees President Larry McPhail’s Plan to Discourage Integration of Baseball, 1946

The appeal of baseball is not limited to any racial group. The Negro takes great interest in baseball and is, and always has been, among the most loyal supporters of professional baseball.

The American people are primarily concerned with the excellence and performance in sport rather than the color, race, or creed of the performer....

Baseball will recognize leadership in professional sport if it fails to give full appreciation to the fact that the Negro fan and the Negro player are part and parcel of the game. Certain groups in the country, including political and social-minded drumbeats, are conducting pressure campaigns in an attempt to force major league clubs to sign Negro players. Many of these groups are not primarily interested in professional baseball. They are not attempting to bring greater opportunity for thousands of Negro boys who want to play baseball. They are not even particularly interested in improving the lot of Negro players who are already employed. They know little about baseball—and nothing about the business end of its operation. They see out professional baseball for attack because it offers a good publicity medium.

These people who charge that baseball is a Jim Crow flag at its masthead—or that racial discrimination is the basic reason for failure of the major leagues to give employment to Negroes—are simply talking through their hats or collective hairs. Professional baseball is a private business enterprise. It has to depend on profits for its existence, just like any other business. It is a business in which Negroes, as well as whites, have substantial investments in parks, franchises, and player contracts. Professional baseball, therefore, has grown and prospered over a period of many years on the basis of separate leagues. The employment of Negroes in one AAA League club in 1946 resulted in a tremendous increase in Negro attendance at all games in which the player appeared. The percentage of Negro attendance at some games at Newark and Baltimore was in excess of 50 percent. The situation might be reversed, if Negroes participate in major-league games, in which the preponderance of Negro attendance in parks such as the Yankee Stadium, the Polo Grounds, and Comiskey Park could conceivably threaten the value of the major league franchises owned by these clubs.

The thousands of Negro boys of ability who aspire to careers in professional baseball should have a better opportunity.... Signing a few Negro players for the major leagues would be a gesture—but it would contribute little or nothing toward a solution of the real problem. Let's look at the facts:

(1) A major-league baseball player must have something besides great natural ability. He must possess the technique, the coordination, the competitive attitude, and the discipline which is usually acquired only after years of training in the minor leagues. The minor-league experience of players on the major-league rosters, for instance, averages 7 years. The young Negro player never has had a good chance in baseball. Comparatively few good young Negro players are being developed. This is the reason that there are not more Negroes who play major-league standards in the big Negro leagues. Sam Lacey, sports editor of the Afro-American newspapers, says, "I am reluctant to say that we haven't a single man in the ranks of colored baseball who could step into the major league uniform and impress himself with the fashion of a big league.... Mr. Lacey's opinions are shared by almost everyone, Negro or white, competent to appraise the qualifications of Negro players.

(2) About 400 Negro professionals are under contract to the 24 clubs in four Negro leagues. Negro leagues have made substantial progress in recent years. Negro baseball is now a $2,000,000 business. One club, the Kansas City Monarchs, drew over 300,000 people to its home and road games in 1944 and 1945. Over 50,000 people paid $22,000 to witness the east-west game at the White Sox Stadium in Chicago. A Negro-league game established the all-time attendance record for Griffith Stadium in Washington. The average attendance at Negro games in the Yankee Stadium is over 10,000 per game.

These Negro leagues cannot exist without good players. If they cannot field good teams, they will not continue to attract the fans who click the turnstiles... If the major leagues and the big money of professional baseball raid these leagues and take their best players—the Negro leagues will eventually fold up... a lot of professional Negro players will lose their jobs. The Negroes who own and operate these clubs do not want to part with their outstanding players... no one accuses them of racial discrimination.

(3) The Negro leagues rent their parks in many cities from clubs in organized baseball. Many major and minor league clubs derive substantial revenue from these rentals. The Yankee organization, for instance, nets nearly $100,000 a year from rentals and concessions... Club owners in the major leagues are reluctant to give up revenues amounting to hundreds of thousands of dollars every year. They naturally want the Negro leagues to continue. They do not sign and cannot properly sign, players under contract to Negro clubs. This is not racial discrimination. It's simply respecting the contractual relationship between the Negro leagues and their players.

There are many factors in this problem and many difficulties which will have to be solved before any generally satisfactory solution can be worked out. The individual action of any club may exert tremendous pressure upon the whole structure of professional baseball and could conceivably result in loosening the value of several major league franchises.

Jackie Robinson on the Struggles of His First Spring Training, 1946

We had a rough time getting to Daytona Beach. At one point we had to give up our seats because the Army still had priority on places. So we took a train to Jacksonville, and when we got there we found we'd have to go the rest of the way by bus. We didn't like the bus, and we particularly didn't like the back seat when there were empty seats near the center. Required only where Negroes are to ride in public conveyances. The law says: "Back seat." We rode there.

When we arrived in Daytona Beach we were met at the bus station by Wendell Smith, sports editor of The Pittsburgh Courier; and Billy Rowe, a photographer for the same paper. They had been there about four days and had arranged housing accommodations and other necessities. With them was Johnny Wright, a good friend of mine and a pitcher for the Homestead Grays of the Negro National League. Mr. Rickey had signed Johnny to a Montreal contract not long after he had signed me.

Johnny had come up with a good record in the Negro National League and had been a star pitcher for a Navy team in 1945.

They took us to the home of a prominent Negro family. The rest of the team usually stayed at a big hotel on the ocean front, but this particular time they were quartered at Sanford, Florida, where the Dodger organization was looking over at least two hundred players.

As a result of our transportation difficulties, I was two days late. I learned from Smith and Rowe that Mr. Mickey was a bit upset about my late arrival, so we decided to get up early next morning and drive to Sanford, which is some twenty miles south of Daytona Beach.

We arrived in Sanford the next morning about ten o'clock, but instead of going to the ball park, we decided to go to the home of Mr. Brock, a well-to-do Negro citizen of the town and call Mr. Mickey. We had to feel this way in this entire matter. We didn't want to cause a commotion or upset anything by walking into the park and surprising everyone. It was so secret that Johnny and I were going to be there, but we felt it best to remain as inconspicuous as possible.

Smith called Mr. Mickey at his hotel and told us he would get over to the park as soon as possible. We took our shoes and gloves and hurried over, Clyde Stuker was met us. We shook hands. "Go right into the dressing room and get your uniform," he said. '"Babe' Hamberger, our clubhouse man, is in there. He'll see that you get fixed up."

I glanced at the players on the field. They had come from every section of the country—two hundred men out there, all hoping some day to become members of the Brooklyn Dodgers. Some were tossing balls to each other; others were hitting fungoes to the outfielders; still others were running around the field conditioning their legs. Suddenly I felt uncomfortably conspicuous standing there. Every single man on the field seemed to be staring at Johnny Wright and me.

We walked into the clubhouse. It was empty save for one man, a big, fat fellow. I felt a bit tense and I'm sure Johnny did, too. We were ill at ease and didn't know exactly what to do next. The man saw us then and came right over and introduced himself. "Hey, fellow," he said with a big, broad smile on his face. "I'm Babe Hamberger. Robinson and Wright, oh? Well, that's swell. Which one is Robinson?"

I put out my hand and he gave it a hearty shake. "This is Johnny Wright," I said. "Johnny shook Babe's big, soft hand. "Well, fellow," he said, "I'm not exactly what you'd call a part of this great experiment, but it's up to you to give us advice anyway. Just go out there and do your best. Don't get tense. Just be yourselves."

Be yourselves? Here in the heart of the race-conscious South? ... Johnny and I both realized that this was hostile territory—that anything could happen any time to a Negro who thought he could play ball with white men on an equal basis. It was going to be difficult to relax and behave naturally. But we assured Babe we'd try. ...

We finally got dressed and headed for the field. Waiting for us was a group of reporters from New York, Pittsburgh, Baltimore, Montreal, and Brooklyn. They surrounded us and started firing questions:

"What are you going to do if the pitchers start throwing at you?" one of them asked.

"The same thing everyone else does," answered, smiling. "Duck!"

The next morning we were up bright and early. We went out to the park in a taxi and this time dressed with the rest of the players. Practice that day was a bit long, but not at all strenuous.

When we got back to Brock's, Johnny and I found Wendell Smith and Billy Rowe, our newspaper friends from Pittsburgh, waiting for us. Usually, they joked and kidded with us a lot; but that night they were both exceptionally quiet and sober. We all ate together. The conversation dragged until I began to feel uncomfortable.

Rowe got up from the table suddenly and said to Smith, "I'm going to fill up with gas." He had a red Pontiac that he used to cover his assignments.

"We should be able to get out of here in fifteen or twenty minutes," Smith said.

"Daytona isn't far, either."

"You guys leaving us?" I asked curiously.

"No," Smith said. "We're all going to Daytona."

"What about practice in the morning?" I asked. "After all, we came here to make the Montreal Club."

I was angry. What was this all about, anyway? No one had told us to move on to Daytona. ... After all, things had been going beautifully. The first two days of practice had passed without a single incident. Surely we weren't being rejected after only a two-day trial! We were just beginning to loosen up a bit. The tension was going away. I was beginning to feel free and good inside.

As I sat there getting ever so the minute, I heard Smith talking on the telephone: "Yes, Mr. Mickey," he said, "I'm with them now. We're pulling out for Daytona in about twenty minutes. Just as soon as they get their bags packed." I heard Rowe's car pull up in the driveway.

We plied into the car and started for Daytona. Rowe was driving and Smith was sitting beside him. Johnny was in the back with me. None of us said a word. We stopped at the main intersection of the town for a traffic light. A group of men were standing on the street corner in their shirt sleeves. It looked like a typical small-town ball season.

I suddenly decided that Daytona wasn't a bad town at all. The people had been friendly to us. Apparently they liked ball players. The men on the corner turned to look at us easily-going guys, courteous over where we were going—certainly not hostile, I thought. I smiled at them. Actually felt like waving.

Rowe broke the silence for the first time as the light changed and we picked up speed. "How can people like that call themselves Americans?" he said bitterly. "Now just a minute," I said. "They haven't done anything to us. They're nice people as far as I'm concerned."

"Yeah," Smith said, swinging around and looking us in the face. His eyes were blaring with anger. "Sure, they liked you. They were in love with you. That's why we're leaving."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"I don't get it," chimed in Johnny.

"You will," Rowe said. "You will."

"Look," Smith said, "we didn't want to tell you guys because we didn't want to upset you. We want you to make this ball club. But ... we're leaving this town..."
The thoughts of Muhammad Ali in exile, c. 1967

"I never thought of myself as great when I refused to go into the Army. All I did was stand up for what I believed. There were people who thought the war in Viet-

nam was right. And those people, if they went to war, acted just as brave as I did. There were people who tried to put me in jail. Some of them were hypocrites, but others did what they thought was proper and I can't condemn them for following their conscience either. People say I made a sacrifice, risking jail and my whole career. But God told Abraham to kill his son and Abraham was willing to do it, so why shouldn't I follow what I believed? Standing up for my religion made me happy; it wasn't a sacrifice. When people got drafted and sent to Vietnam and didn't understand what the killing was about and came home with one leg and couldn't get jobs, that was a sacrifice. But I believed in what I was doing, so no matter what the government did to me, it wasn't a loss.

"Some people thought I was a hero. Some people said that what I did was wrong. But everything I did was according to my conscience. I wasn't trying to be a leader. I just wanted to be free. And I made a stand all people, not just black people, should have thought about making, because it wasn't just black people being drafted. The government had a system where the rich man's son went to college, and the poor man's son went to war. Then, after the rich man's son got out of college, he did other things to keep him out of the Army until he was too old to be drafted. So what I did was for me, but it was the kind of decision everyone has to make. Freedom means being able to follow your religion, but it also means carrying the responsibility to choose between right and wrong. So when the time came for me to make up my mind about going in the Army, I knew people were dying in Vietnam for nothing and I should live by what I thought was right. I wanted America to be America. And now the whole world knows that, so far as my own beliefs are concerned, I did what was right for me."

"Time and again on college campuses, all those things that are important to us: On the war in Vietnam: "I'm expected to go overseas to help free people in South Vietnam, and at the same time my people here are being brutalized and mistreated, and this is really the same thing that's happening over in Vietnam. So I'm going to fight it legally, and if I lose, I'm just going to jail. Whatever the punishment, whatever the persecution is for standing up for my beliefs, even if it means facing machine-gun fire that day, I'll face it before denouncing Elijah Muhammad and the religion of Islam."

On being stripped of his title and denied the right to fight: "The power structure seems to want to silence me. The punishment, five years in jail, ten-thousand-dollar fine, isn't enough. They want to stop me from working, not only in this country but out of it. Not even a license to fight an exhibition for charity, and that's in this twentieth century. You read about these things in the dictatorship countries, where a man don't go along with this or that and he is completely not allowed to work or earn a decent living."

On the financial hardship he was enduring: "What do I need money for? I don't spend no money. Don't drink, don't smoke, don't go nowhere, don't go running with women. I take my wife out and we eat ice cream."

On lack of black pride: "We've been brainwashed, everything good is supposed to be white. We look at Jesus, and we see a white with blond hair and blue eyes. We look at all the angels, we see white with blond hair and blue eyes. Now, I'm sure there's a heaven in the sky and colored folks die and go to heaven. Where are the colored angels? They must be in the kitchen preparing milk and honey. We
look at Miss America, we see white. We look at Miss World, we see white. We look at Miss Universe, we see white. Even Tarzan, the king of the jungle in black Africa, he's white. White Owl Cigars, White Swan soap, White Cloud tissue paper, White Rain hair rinse, White Tomato flour wax. All the good cowboys ride the white horses and wear white hats. Angel food cake is the white cake, but the devil's food cake is chocolate. When we are going to wake up as a people and understand that life is better than black.

On hate: "I don't hate nobody and I ain't lynched nobody. We Muslims don't hate the white man. It's like we don't hate a tiger; but we know that a tiger's nature is not compatible with people's nature since tigers love to eat people. So we don't want to live with tigers. It's the same with the white man. The white race attacks black people. They don't ask what's our religion, what's our belief? They just start whipping heads. They don't ask you, are you Catholic, are you a Baptist, are you a Black Muslim, are you a Martin Luther King follower, are you with Whitney Young? They just go whoop, whoop, whoop! So we don't want to live with the white man; that's all.

Harry Edwards Reviews the Making of the Black Athletic Revolt, 1967

Early rumblings of revolt evolved around the issues of segregation and social discrimination. For instance, in the late fifties and middle sixties, there were numerous cases where black athletes refused to participate due to discrimination in spectator seating at athletic events or because of discriminatory practices encountered by the athletes themselves. A firm indication that a revolt was brewing appeared in 1965 when the black athletes chosen to play in the American Football League's East-West All-Star game banished together and refused to play in New Orleans, Louisiana, because several of the Afro-American stars had been refused entrance to some of the city's social clubs. As a result of the athletes' threat to boycott the event, Joe Popp, commissioner of the league, had the game moved to another city.

This incident marked the first time in modern athletic history that a sporting event had actually been changed to another site because of discrimination against Afro-American participants. And the threat succeeded largely because of the unity among the black athletes involved, a unity forged from their firm conviction that they were men and that they in fact were going to be treated as such. . . .

After the 1964 games, black athletes got together and talked about the possibility of a black boycott of the 1968 Olympics to be held in Mexico. They discussed the justifications for the move and also the possible ramifications. Then in the fall of 1967, two events occurred that brought all the talk and discussion to a head. First, Tommie Smith, in Tokyo for the University Games, casually commented that some black athletes would perhaps boycott the 1968 Olympics. . .

A Japanese sports reporter had asked, "Do you understand correctly that there is talk in America about the possibility that black American athletes may boycott the 1968 Olympic games at Mexico?" Smith answered, "Yes, this is true. Some black athletes have been discussing the possibility of boycotting the games to protest racial injustice in America." . . . The major American newspapers and most of the country's sports pages carried the story, proclaiming that Tommie Smith and stated that there was considerable sentiment among black athletes favoring a boycott of the Olympic games in order to protest racial injustice.

The second event was a revolt of black students and athletes at San Jose State College in California. . . . the institution at which Tommie Smith and a number of other "world-class" athletes were matriculating. The significance of this event was that sixty of the seventy-two Afro-American students on campus (out of a college enrollment of 24,000) had banded together and for the first time in history utilized collegiate athletics as a lever to bring about social, academic, and political changes at an educational institution. The whole plan for the revolt originated from a discussion between me and Kenneth Noel, then a master's degree candidate. . . . He, like most of the black males on the campus, was a former athlete. Most of the Afro-American males on San Jose State College's campus were former athletes who no longer had any college athletic eligibility left but who had not yet graduated. . . . It suddenly dawned on us that the same social and racial injustices and discrimination that had dogged our footsteps as freshmen at San Jose State were still rampant on campus—racism in the fraternities and sororities, racism in housing, racism and out-and-out mistreatment in athletics, and a general lack of understanding of the problems of Afro-Americans by the college administration.

Our first move was to approach the administration. We were promptly referred to the Dean of Students, Stanley Benz. It did not take him long to make it crystal clear that, where the interest and desires of the majority whites were concerned, the necessities of black students were inconsequential. At this point, we felt that we had no alternative but to move into the public arena. So we called a rally to commence at noon of the opening day of classes for the fall, 1967, to demand . . . [for] the elimination of racism at San Jose State College. We invited all faculty members and administration officials.

We outlined a list of demands and stated publicly what our strategy would be if our demands were not met. We, in effect, declared that we would prevent the opening football game of the season from being played by any means necessary. Most observers felt that this was an inconsistent and self-defeating strategy. Why stop the football game? Why attack the only area that had gained black people full equality?

Our strategy was basically a simple one. First of all, we realized something that perhaps the casual observer did not—that athletics was, in fact, as racist as any of the other arenas of college life. Second, we felt that we had to utilize a power lever that would bring the community and student body as well as the administration of the college into the pressure situation. We had seen, all too often, the spectacle of black people demonstrating and picketing groups, organizations, and institutions of limited concern to people in positions of power. We therefore decided to use something more central to the concerns of the entire
local community structure—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? The faculty also was deeply involved in the affair, particularly the faculty of the Department of Men's Physical Education and Intercollegiate Athletics. For some of the black athletes had threatened to boycott the game if the black students were forced to try to stop it.

The rally was a success and immediately afterward an organization was formed, the United Black Students for Action. It was composed chiefly of Afro-American students. . . . Our demands were as follows:

U.B.S.A. Demands

We the affiliates of United Black Students for Action, hereby put forth the following DEMANDS:

Public deliberation of all problems and proposed solutions relevant to the situation of minority groups in SJS.

Publicly announced pledges from the SJS Administration that housing—approved, unapproved, fraternities, and sororities not open to ALL SJS students will not be open to any student . . .

That the highest authority . . . of any and all social and political organizations be required to stipulate in writing before November 1, 1957, that its particular organizational branch on the SJS campus is open to all students . . .

That the Dept. of Intercollegiate Athletics organize and put into operation immediately an effective program that provides the same treatment and handling for all athletes including visiting prospective athletes.

That the Dept. of Intercollegiate Athletics make a public statement denouncing the racist principles upon which the present system exists and secondly, that they publicly dissociate themselves and their dept. from this system.

That the college administration either work to expand the 2% rule to bring underprivileged minority group members to SJS as students at least in proportion to their representation in the general population of California.

That a permanent commission be set up to administer and operate a "tutorial" type program aimed at the recruitment of minority group members . . .

The end result of the confrontation was that the college administration moved to meet our demands, but not before it had reached such a pitch that the game had to be called off . . .

So we had carried the confrontation. But more than this, we had learned the use of power—the power to be gained from exploiting the white man’s economic and almost religious involvement in athletics.

Arthur Ashe on Propositions 42 and 48, c. 1980s

"Prop 42" sought to raise the high-school academic requirements for students entering college who wished to compete in intercollegiate athletics. Incoming freshmen who did not meet these academic requirements could be given scholarships but could not play for their schools during their first year. "Prop 42," passed later, sought to deny athletic scholarships to such students. Behind the proposals were not only a spate of recent scandals in which former college athletes with degrees proved to be semi-literate but also a deepening sense that many athletic departments had subverted the true mission of their colleges and universities in the name of athletic success. The issue became charged with racial lines because a disproportionately high percentage of college athletes in the major American sports—football, basketball, baseball—and track—are black.

The black presence in many colleges and universities is close to a sham. In 1983, an article by sociologist E. D tasty Edwards in the Atlantic Monthly documented the sorry situation. Although entrance requirements were often pathetically low, 25 to 35 percent of young black high-school athletes could not meet them. In college, as many as 65 to 75 percent of black students with athletic scholarships never graduated. Of those who graduated, perhaps 75 percent did so with degrees in physical education or some other major or concentration designed to reflect their athletic prowess but with limited use after school. (In 1983, two years after Edwards’s article, a report revealed that only one school, North Carolina State University, long famous as a power in collegiate basketball, had not graduated a single basketball player since 1983.)

Prop 48 allowed a freshman to play for one of the 277 Division I or II athletic schools; only if the student had made a 2.0 grade point average (a C average) in high school and only if his or her courses included English, mathematics, the social sciences, and the physical sciences. It also required the athlete to have a combined score of 700 (out of a possible 1600) on the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) or 15 (out of a possible 30) on the rival American College Test (ACT). The SAT and ACT tests are mandatory steps at most American colleges. Previously, students required only a C average, without regard to the courses taken, and many of the courses were scandalously devoid of intellectual content.

These new requirements should present no challenge whatsoever even to the average student. In recent years, however, fewer than 50 percent of black students taking the SAT had scored as high as 700; on the ACT, only 28 percent reached 15. Meanwhile, more than 75 percent of whites achieved 700 or 15 on the tests...

Although these proposals would affect athletes of all races, some black college presidents, charging racism, led the opposition to them and threatened to withdraw their schools from the NCAA. Among white institutions, presidents were generally for the changes, while athletic directors generally were not. In black schools, however, opposition was often led by presidents. The president of

To Thompson’s first objection, that black athletes would be barred by the new standards, I asserted my belief that any loss in numbers would be short-term. In response to the new standards, black students would simply rise to meet the challenge. To the objection of cultural bias, I responded that Thompson could hardly come up with a credible alternative set of requirements that would yield a higher number of qualified entering black students. Did he really want an essay test, instead of the multiple-choice format of the SAT and ACT tests? Then, I told him—only half in jest—no black kid would get in, since the quality of writing among black students in general had become notoriously poor. As for John Clancy’s mantra that black kids “deserve a chance”—of course they do, I responded. Everyone deserves a chance. What Thompson’s plaintive cry reflects, however, is the obsession with entitlement that is rampant among young blacks. The idea that society owes them special favors for average efforts has taken root with a vengeance.

In my essay “Coddling Black Athletes,” I wrote:

We need to address the deep-seated cynicism of entitled, black public-school athletes, many of whom are carried through school with inflated grades and peer group status that is more a reflection of their athletic prowess than academic preparation of their would-be Michael Jordans. The critics of Proposition 42 seriously underestimate the psychic value that black athletes place on their athletic success and how that could be used to motivate them academically. The growing process for superior athletes starts earlier—when they are 11 or 12—and is more efficacious than for any other group of Americans. Social status is conferred at once. And they learn early that they don’t get the idolatry, adulation, and, ultimately, Division I scholarships for their intellectual prowess.

Proposition 42—or something like it—would motivate high school coaches and their best players to take education seriously. Most important, that dedication to academic success among athletes would set a tone in the schools that would likely inspire nonathletes to study harder.

**ESSAYS**

The first essay by Jules Tygiel of San Francisco State University examines the demanding rookie year of Jackie Robinson, the first African-American to join the major leagues since the long-forgotten Moses Fleetwood Walker who played for Toledo (American Association) in 1884. Robinson had a banner year in Montreal in 1946, winning the MVP and, in two more years in Detroit, 1947 and 1948, what kinds of problems did he encounter on and off the field? How did he view his teammates, his opponents, and the fans?

The second essay by Michael Ozahl, a literary scholar at Oregon State University, examines the public images of Muhammad Ali, the most famous athlete in the world over the past thirty years, and the power those images had in the 1960s and 1970s. All played a major role in determining those perceptions, which radically changed the traditional athlete’s self-presentation. He first came to national attention when, as Cassius Clay, he won a gold medal at the 1960 Olympics. An unusually self-assured, swaggering boxer, Clay brazenly predicted the outcome of his fights. After defeating the five-inspiring Sonny Liston in a stunning upset in 1964, he announced his conversion to
the Muslim faith and changed his name to Muhammad Ali. Mainstream Americans were shocked by such unconventional behavior, and they were further taken aback when Ali refused to step forward for the draft in 1966 on religious grounds. Yet, instead of becoming a pariah, Ali became a hero for standing up for his beliefs and against the Vietnam War. In 1971 the Supreme Court overturned his conviction for draft evasion and Ali resumed his boxing career, going on to regain the heavyweight championship.

A Lone Negro in the Game: Jackie Robinson's Rookie Season

JULES TYZER

For Jackie Robinson, relative tranquillity characterized the initial week of the 1947 season. In the first two contests, facing the Boston Braves, the rookie first baseman coked out one bunt single, "He seemed frantic with eagerness, reckless as a can of weed," observed a Boston correspondent. On April 18 the Dodgers crossed the East River to play the New York Giants. Over 37,000 people flocked to the Polo Grounds to witness Robinson's first appearance outside of Brooklyn. Robinson responded with his first major-league home run. The following day the largest Saturday afternoon crowd in National League history, more than 22,000 spectators, jammed into the Giants' back park. Robinson stroked three hits in four at-bats in a losing cause. Rain postponed a two-game set in Boston, and on April 22 Robinson and the Dodgers returned to Brooklyn, where a swirl of events abruptly shattered the brief honeymoon. The next three weeks thrust Robinson, his family, his teammates, and baseball into a period of uneasing crises and tension.

The Dodgers' first opponents on the homestand were the Philadelphia Phillies, managed by Abner Doublehead Chapman. While playing for the Yankees in the 1930s Chapman had gained a measure of notoriety for his anti-Semitic shouting jousts with spectators. Now he ordered his players to challenge Robinson with a stream of verbal racial taunts "to see if he can take it." From the moment the two clubs took the field for their first contest, the Phillies, led by Chapman, unleashed a torrent of insults at the black athlete. "At no time in my life have I heard racial venom and dugout abuse to match the abuse that Ben sprayed on Robinson that night," writes Harold Parrott. "Chapman mentioned everything from thick lips to the supposedly extra-thick Negro skull... [and] the repetitive scenes and diseases he said Robinson's teammates would become infected with if they touched the towels or the comb he used." The onslaught continued throughout the series.

The Phillies' verbal assault on Robinson in 1947 exceeded even baseball's broadly defined sense of propriety. Fans seated near the Phillies dugout wrote letters of protest to Commissioner Heyman, and a white fan sent Chapman a letter that accused him of being a "nigger," and that the papers should not cover his game.

Philadelphia owner Robert Carpenter that the harassment of Robinson must cease or he would be forced to invoke punitive measures.

Chapman, while accepting Chandler's edict, defended his actions. "We will treat Robinson the same as we would Hank Greenberg of the Pirates, Clint Hartung of the Giants, Joe Girardola of the Cardinals, Connie Ryan of the Braves, or any other man who is likely to step to the plate and box us," said Chapman, listing some regular targets of ethnic insults. "There is not a man who has come to the big leagues since baseball has been played who has not been elided..."

The general consensus, however, judged the Phillies' behavior unacceptable. Robinson's Dodger teammates led the protest. By the second day of the series they fanned back at Chapman demanding that he cease baiting Robinson. Chapman's fellow Alabamians marched in the forefront of Robinson's defenders. Eddie Stanky called him a "coward" and challenged him to "pick on somebody who can fight back." Even Dixie Walker represented Chapman, a close personal friend. Rickey later claimed that this incident, more than any other, cemented Dodger support for Robinson. "When [Chapman] poured out that string of unexceptionable abuse he solidified and unified thirty men, not one of whom was willing to sit by and see someone kick around a man who had his hands tied behind his back," asserted Rickey.

Robinson publicly downplayed the incident. In his "Jackie Robinson Says" column which appeared in the Pittsburgh Courier, the Dodger first baseman wrote, "Some of the Phillies' bench jockeys tried to get me upset last week, but it didn't really bother me..." In later years he revealed his true emotions as he withstood the barrage of insults. "I have to admit that this incident on my life brought me nearer to cracking up than I have ever been," he wrote in 1972. "For one wild and rage crazed minute I thought, 'To hell with Mr. Rickey's noble experiment.' " The ordeal tempted Robinson to "slide over to that Phillies dugout, grab one of those white souser's of bitches and smash his teeth with my despised black fist."

The daily flood of mail included not only congratulatory messages, but threats of violence. In early May, the Dodgers turned several of these notes over to the police. The letters, according to Robinson, advised "that somebody was going to get hurt if I didn't get out of baseball," and "promised to kill any n——s who interfered with me." In the aftermath of the threats and in light of the burden that averting the mail placed on the Robinsons, Rickey requested that they allow the Dodgers to open and answer all correspondences. In addition, Robinson agreed to refuse all invitations to speak or be honored as well as opportunities for commercial endorsements.

The Dodgers released details of the threatening letters to the press on May 9. On that same day Robinson faced other unpublishable challenges in Philadelphia, the initial stop on the club's first extended road trip. Rickey had been forewarned that Robinson would not get a warm reception in Philadelphia. Herb Pennock, the former major league pitcher who served as the Phillies' general manager, had called Rickey demanding that Robinson remain in Brooklyn. "You just can't bring that nigger here with the rest of your team, Branch. We're just not ready for that sort of thing yet," exhorted Pennock, according to Parrott who listened on the line. Pennock threatened that the Phillies would boycott the game...
When the Dodgers arrived in Philadelphia on May 9, the Benjamin Franklin Hotel, where the club had lodged for several years, refused to accept Robinson. Team officials had anticipated problems in St. Louis and Cincinnati, but not in the City of Brotherly Love. Rather than force a confrontation, Robinson arranged for alternative quarters. On subsequent trips, the Dodgers transferred their Philadelphia headquarters to the more expensive Warwick hotel.

A third, more ominous development, which also surfaced on May 9, overshadowed these incidents. New York Herald Tribune sports editor Stanley Woodward unveiled an alleged plot by National League players, led by St. Louis Cardinals, to strike against Robinson. Woodward charged that the Cardinals, at the urging of a Dodger player, had planned a strike during the first Dodger-Cardinal confrontation three days earlier.

Rumors of the impending mutiny reached Breaden in St. Louis and on May 1 he flew to New York where the Cardinals were playing the Giants. Breaden informed National League president Zack Wheat of the strike rumors. Wheat, in less eloquent terms than attributed to him by Woodward, advised Breaden to warn the Cardinals that the National League would defend Robinson's right to play and that a refusal to take the field would lead to his suspension. Breaden conferred with player representatives Moore and Madsen, both of whom denied the rumors. According to Breaden, Woodward reported back, "It was just a tempest in a teapot. A few of the players were upset and popping off a bit. They didn't really mean it." If an uprising indeed had been brewing, it ended with these discussions. On May 6 the Cardinals appeared as scheduled at Ebbets Field and lost to Robinson and the Dodgers.

Woodward's allegations, exaggerated or not, marked a significant turning point. The account of Woodward's steadfast renunciation of all efforts to disrupt the black athlete, following so closely after Chandler's warning to Chapman, placed the baseball hierarchy openly in support of Robinson. In addition, the uproar created by the Woodward story dashed any lingering hopes among discriminating players that public opinion, at least as reflected in the press, endorsed their opinions.

May 9, 1947, marked perhaps the worst day of Jackie Robinson's baseball career. Threats on his life, torrent from opposing players, discrimination at the team hotel, and rumors of a player strike simultaneously engendered the black athlete. The following day, Jimmy Cannon, describing Robinson's relations with his teammates, reported, "He is the loneliest man I have ever seen in sports."

Amidst the swirl of controversy that followed the Dodgers on their first major road trip, the national interest in Jackie Robinson grew apparent. On Sunday, May 11, the Dodgers faced the Phillies in a doubleheader before the largest crowd in Philadelphia baseball history. Scalpers sold 32 tickets for $6, "just like the World Series." Two days later in Cincinnati 27,164 fans turned out despite an all-day rain to "size up Jackie Robinson." Bad weather dissipated the crowds for the two games in Pittsburgh, but when the skies cleared, 34,814 fans appeared at Forbes Field for the May 16 series finale. The following day the Dodgers met the Cubs in Chicago. Two hours before game time Wrigley Field had already filled. A total of 46,572 fans crammed into the ball park, the largest attendance in stadium history. The tour concluded in St. Louis where the Dodgers and Cardinals played before the biggest weekday crowd of the National League season.

"Jackie's nimble. Jackie's quick. Jackie's making the turnstiles click," crowed Wendell Smith. Jimmy Cannon hailed him as "the most lucrative draw since Babe Ruth." By May 23 when the Dodgers returned to Brooklyn, Robinson had emerged as an American phenomenon.

Robinson had also erased all doubts about his playing abilities. By June, Robinson had convinced even the most hardened opponents of integration of his exceptional talents. Starting on June 14, Robinson hit safely in twenty-one consecutive games. At the end of June, he was batting .315, leading the league in stolen bases, and ranked second in runs scored.

Robinson's impressive statistics revealed only a portion of the tale. "Never have records meant so little in assessing a player's value as they do in the case of Jackie Robinson," wrote Tom Meany. "His presence alone was enough to light a fire under his own team and unsettle his opponents." Sportswriter祠 Crosby各式 sorts, "He was the greatest opportunist on any kind of playing field, seeing openings before they opened, pulling off plays lesser players can't even imagine." Robinson's intense competitiveness provided the crucial ingredient. As a seasoned athlete, even in his rookie year, Robinson seemed to thrive on challenges and flourished before large audiences. Robinson's drive not only inspired his own dynamic performances but intimidated and demoralized enemy players.

At the plate and in the field, Robinson radiated dynamic intensity, but his true genius materialized on the base paths.

"He brought a new dimension into baseball," says Al Campanis. "He brought stealing back to the days of the twenties whereas up until that time baseball had become a long-ball hitting game." But the phenomenon went beyond bare statistics. Robinson's twenty-nine steals in 1947 were actually less than the league leader of the day. The style and play of the baserunning that had before mere measure the magnitude of Robinson's achievement. He revolutionized major league baseball by injecting an element of "tricky baseball," so common in the Negro Leagues, in an age in which managers honed the art of bunting. Robinson, in forty-six burst attempts, registered fourteen hits and twenty-eight sacrifices, a phenomenal .513 success rate. His tactics often went against the time-worn conventional wisdom of baseball.

Nur did Robinson's effectiveness require the stolen base. "He drains and prances off base keeping the enemy infield piped up and off balance, and worrying the pitcher," reported Time.

In spring training Rickey had advised Robinson, "I want you to win the friendship of people everywhere. You must be approachable, you must smile, and even if they are worrying you to death, make the public think you don't mind being bothered." Robinson created precisely this image. He publicly thanked opposing players, like Hank Greenberg and Frank Gustine, who welcomed him into the league.

Among northern teammates, playing alongside Robinson posed few problems. For southerners, on the other hand, it often required a significant adjustment. Several players feared repercussions at home for their involuntary role in baseball integration. "I didn't know if they would spit on me or not," recalled Dixie Walker of his Alabama neighbors. "It was no secret that I was worried about my business. I had a hardware and sporting goods store back home." Pee Wee Reese later said that
Robinson's correspondence reflected the changes in racial attitudes that he inspired. His dynamic presence instilled a sense of pride in black Americans and led many whites to reassess their own feelings. The affection for Robinson grew so widespread that at the year's end voters in an annual public opinion poll named him the second most popular man in America. Only Bing Crosby registered more votes.

... Despite his growing acceptance, Robinson remained an oddity in organized baseball. Throughout the season, even after he had established himself as a bona fide major league player, Robinson confronted difficulties and challenges unknown to other athletes. The burdens of racial pioneering and the restrictions imposed on his behavior still rested heavily on his shoulders.

On the road, hotel accommodations remained problematic. Throughout the season, Robinson's roommates supposed he had become a major objective to integration. Even in many northern cities, the better hotels did not allow blacks. In border cities like St. Louis and Cincinnati, segregation remained the rule. Yet he and his advisers had determined that the Dodgers would not challenge local customs.

In Boston, Pittsburgh, and Chicago, Robinson had no problems. In Philadelphia and St. Louis, Robinson usually roomed with Wendell Smith, who traveled with the team as both a reporter and a Dodger employee.

Robinson also received numerous money-making propositions for the winter and fall. He signed up for a theatrical tour of New York, Washington, and Chicago, traveling with three vaudeville acts. For each of his appearances Robinson would receive a minimum of $2,500. The articulate athlete became a popular radio guest and signed contracts to co-author an autobiography. To star in a Hollywood movie that despite his low salary, Robinson's income for 1947 exceeded that of all major leaguers with the exception of Bob Feller and Hank Greenberg.

Throughout most of the season, Robinson maintained his batting average over .300, but a late season slump hurt the Dodgers, and the pennant dropped him to .257. He finished second in the league in run scoring and first in stolen bases. Robinson also led the Dodgers in home runs with 12. Despite his reputation for being injury prone, Robinson appeared in 151 of the 154 contests, more games than anyone else on the club.

Robinson's performance also benefited other National League teams. Throughout the season fans continued to watch in record numbers. By season's end Robinson had established new attendance marks in every city except Cincinnati. Thanks to Robinson, National League attendance in 1947 increased by more than two-thirds of a million people above the all-time record set in 1946. Five teams set new season records, including the Dodgers, who attracted over 1.8 million fans for the first, and last, time in the club's Brooklyn history.

The saga of Robinson's first season has become a part of American mythology—sacrosanct in its memory, magnificently in its retelling. It remains a drama.
American culture, I’m interested in the public images of Ali and in the power they had in the 1960s and 1970s. Those of us who came of age during the Ali era share certain memories of Ali, however we might have differed, or differ now, in our responses to him. We can all hear Ali’s voice, declaiming, “I am the greatest!” We can still hear him predicting the round in which an opponent would fall; we can hear him chant, “Float like a butterfly, sting like a bee!” If we don’t remember the precise words, we nonetheless retain impressions of his poetry and his turns of weight and even in the ring, and his seemingly hysterical bluster before and after fights. For all their familiarity, however, we should not forget how we first encountered these outpourings from the Louisville Lip, as he was called early on (a less charming later nickname termed him The Mouth). We need to remember that in his first down on public awareness, Ali radically changed the self-presentation of the American athlete.

The hero beast has a long ancestry: from Achilles before the walls of Troy through the latter-day “flyting” of ring-tailed courtesans on the American frontier, nearly into the age of modern sport with John L. Sullivan and his fellow bare-knuckle brawlers. But the lineage of our sporting etiquette looks more to the tradition of Castiglione’s courtier and his spiritual offspring on public-school playing fields in Britain. America’s sportsman through the first half of the twentieth century were not uniformly “sportsmen” in this honorific sense, but officially they subscribed to the aw-shucks code of Frank Merriwell.

Those born after 1960 or so might accept as commonplace something that perhaps thrilled, perhaps offended, but in all cases startled as well. We first heard the immortal, exuberant young Cassius Clay declare, “I am the greatest!” in a shower of confidently worded pronouncements of the sportsman. The Merriwell code still hovered over American sport before Ali’s emergence. During televised games, players sardonically looked away when they sensed a television camera pointed in their direction. They kept their game faces on and their mouths shut; they left the voting on #1 to pollsters and waited until after the game to say “Hi” to their mothers.

After Ali, we heard Joe Namath outrageously predict that his Jets would beat the Colts in the 1969 Super Bowl. Not quite two years later, the Kansas City Chiefs’ Elmo Wright, a rookie wide receiver, introduced the first end-zone dance to the NFL—a simple two-step considerably less artistic than the Ali Shuffle.

Those details of sporting manners reflect a major cultural transformation in post-1950s America. Surely Muhammad Ali is one of the emblems of self-assertion and self-regard in an era whose cultural mainstream has become coefficients—obsessed—with the self. This is not to say that Muhammad Ali represented the values now associated with “me decade” narcissism and Reagan-era greed, with Yuppie self-indulgence and Donald Trump. When Cassius Clay first declared, “I am the greatest!” this was an original and radical act. It defied the spirit of gray flannel suits and social accommodation; it shattered the mask of humble silence and nonassertion demanded of blacks in America, particularly of blacks in the South. It was also full of risk: proclaiming himself the greatest, Clay/I challenged opponents to beat him into a lie. Moreover, at least initially, he risked the Merriwellian modesty was the guile that athletes were expected to adopt if they were to be accepted as popular heroes. In this matter of self-presentation Clay/Ali represented something genuinely radical.

Muhammad Ali: The Hero in the Age of Mass Media
MICHAEL O’RIAR

I’m not concerned here with Muhammad Ali the man, but with Ali as cultural representation. To find the “real” Ali is a quest for biographies; as a student of
All was not only the greatest, he was also, as he constantly reminded us, the prettiest; in a sport, and in a division, associated with strength and violence, Muhammad Ali made us think about beauty. Ali’s sculpted body and "pretty" face, together with his gentleness with children, undoubtedly accounted for much of his appeal to women of all ages, who were not typically drawn to prizefighters. This was not consciously the "feminine" aspect of Ali, the physical incarnation of those elements of his boxing style (his dance, his speed and quickness) as opposed to his power and his poetry that American culture defines as feminine. I can think of no one in our time who so successfully embodied cross-gender whole-ness. As a professor of American literature, I am more accustomed to looking at this matter from the other direction: at the dilemma of the American male artist who feels driven to assert his masculinity because art and literature have been culturally defined as feminine. Probably only the heavyweight champion of the world could declare "I am the prettiest!" and not diminish his aura of physical prowess. Certainly it hasn’t worked the other way: writers such as Hemingway or Mailer, for instance, invoking their own most ambitious work, have been considerably less convincing.

All was the prettiest and the greatest; he was fighter and dancer, loudmouth and poet, exuberant child and heavyweight champion of the world. In describing All as a sum of many parts, I have been circling around one of the principal claims I want to make in this essay: *Our* Muhammad All is the one we know through television, radio, newspapers, magazines such as *Sports Illustrated*, and closed-circuit screenings of his fights—the collection of images transmitted through those media. The crucial fact about these images is their extraordinary range. Various images of Muhammad Ali might be assigned to different stages in his career and might reasonably identify an early trashy, youthful, and exuberant Cassius Clay, who changed with the changing of his name after winning the title from Sonny Liston in 1964. This new Muhammad All grew increasingly militant as a spokesman for black separatism; then another new Ali, the political martyr, emerged with his defiance of the draft board and his three-year-a-half-year exile from boxing; then another Ali appeared with his return to boxing in 1970, an older, more mature figure of physical and mental courage in the Norton, Frazier, Foreman fights. Finally, Ali became the aging champion who fought too long, who not only lost bouts to Leon Spinks, Larry Holmes, and Trevor Berbick, but who also lost his physical health and very agility to the sport he had transformed.

Certainly there is much truth in this account of the changes over the course of Ali’s career, but it is also essential to recognize that at every stage of his career there was not a single Ali but many Alis in the public consciousness. The brash Cassius Clay could seem either braggart or free spirit; the dancing All could seem an artist or an coward; the Muslim All could seem a religious or a political man; the conscientious objector could seem a con man, a pacifist, a traitor, or a martyr. To the late 1960s white counterculture, All surely was identified more with the civil rights movement than with black separatism; to blacks during this same period he surely represented chiefly racial pride.

All of us—young and old, black and white, poor and privileged—knew these various Alis through the media. The media did not construct a single Ali but the multiple Alis we have been considering. The anthropologist Clifford Geertz has taught scholars to approach cultural expressions as "texts" in which we can read the larger culture that produces them. In reading the texts of a complex modern culture it is essential to acknowledge that no single interpretation is likely to be possible. Students of American culture who attempt to interpret the texts of our past confront an overwhelming challenge to discover how ordinary people interpreted them. Students of sport have this advantage; the sports journalists, not direct access to the minds and hearts of its readers, but at least closer sensitivity to the events they describe; at the same time, they mediate between these events and the readers who read their accounts. What one finds in the reporting of Ali over the years is, first, an awareness among sportswriters that Ali was a "text" that could be read in competing ways and, second, a record of the ways he was read.

To approach Ali as a "cultural text" I read through the coverage of his career in *Sports Illustrated*, and I discovered, among other things, that journalists understood Muhammad Ali in just this way, without recourse to Clifford Geertz or any other theorist. I fascinated some of our most respected journalists—Norman Mailer, George Plimpton, and Wilfrid Sheed came more quickly to mind—but I was particularly struck by the writing of YI’s Mark Kram, a much less famous sportswriter. All’s own activity in and out of the ring clearly challenged sportswriters to create a commensurate art of their own. Kram clearly covered All’s second career, beginning with his return from exile to fight Jerry Quarry in 1970. In welcoming Ali back to boxing, Kram described him as a "clever drama-tist" who was creating a new genre for his fight with Quarry. Kram identified All’s scripts for his early bouts: "brashness versus meekness" for Sonny Liston; "holy wars" with Frazier and Floyd Patterson; and "the black prince on the moon" for his European fights with Karl Mildenberger, Henry Cooper, and Brian London. Now, with Quarry, Ali had cast himself as "Korschunov back from exile."

The specific scripts are less important here than Kram’s explicit recognition that boxing matches can function as cultural dramas or texts. The following spring roles that Ali and Frazier would be playing in the ring, Kram stood back to look at the history of boxing from this perspective:

Americans are the most curious in their reaction to a heavyweight title bout, especially one of this scope. To some, the styles and personalities of the fighters seem to provide the parameters of a forum; the issue becomes a show through which they feel themselves to pour all of their fears and prejudices. Still others find it a convenient opportunity to dispense instant good and evil, right and wrong. The process is as old as boxing: the original bluff and bluster of John L. against the awed and decorous of Gentleman Jim; the building malice of Johnson vs. the silence of Jeffries; the evil incarnate Liston against the vulnerable Patterson. It is a fluid script, crossed over religion, war, politics, race and much of what is so terribly human is all of us.

Heavyweight championship fights have always been culturally scripted; equally important, as Kram noted, is the fact that these scripts are read differently by
different observers, Kram went on to describe some of the most prominent "runnings" of the upcoming fight:

The disposition of the New Left comes at Frazier with its spongy thinking and push-button politics and seeks to color him white, to denounce him as a capitalistic dupe and a Fifth Columnist to the black cause. Those on the other fringe, just as blindly racists, see in Ali all that is unhealthy in this country, which in essence means all they will not accept from a black man. For still others, marked by the shock of a sharply evolving society, he means confusion; he was one of the first to start pushing their immature world down the drain.

Among the blacks there is only a whisper of feeling for Frazier, who is deeply cut by their racism. He is placed under the most powerful influence on black thought in the country. The militancy and bluntness of his opponent, and the way he handles it, are new for the black intellectual who has circumscribed what he believes to be an international white conspiracy. To the young he is idealistic, an incomparable hero of mythological dimension.

And so on. Black and white, conservative and liberal, young and old read the cultural text of Muhammad Ali in different ways... It's important to keep in mind both Ali's uniqueness and his typicity. Among the champions of our time Ali was uniquely Aragonia—a puzzle, a maze of paradoxes; this is how sportswriters repeatedly described him, as they obsessively attempted to unravel his mystery. Their own varied, conflicting interpretations were thus to some degree a consequence of Ali's resistance to simple explanation. In this range of interpretations, of course, Ali can also be considered typical: because of our diversity we Americans do not read any of our important cultural texts in identical ways.

The matter is an obvious point, but its implications are important: no simple "dominant" ideology is imposed upon an unrelenting public by the mass media. Sport in general, and perhaps Muhammad Ali in particular, can teach us how the media reach their diverse audience through multiple narratives.

The coverage of Ali's career in Sports Illustrated reveals an Ali who never fit a single role. Through the earliest years he was repeatedly termed a child: braggadocio, careless or casual about training, absurdly confident; a willful child with a short attention span, unpredictable to his own managers as he was to the public. But against this sense of Clay as child stood the "remarkably calm and composed" Clay who entered the ring with the monster Sonny Liston in 1964, whose strategy had been "carefully rehearsed and meticulously perfected," who was driven by a deep sense of purpose, whose performance was remarkable for the "completeness of his ring wisdom." Tex Maule, the SI reporter whose words I've just quoted, commented that "the boasting and calculated gibes...had seemed the overwhelming confidence of a child" (any emphasis). Was Cassius Clay some kind of wondrous child of the gods or a cunning ring technician whose childhood antics were meant to build interest in his fights and doubts in opponents' minds? Boxing fans answered that question in different ways and at stake were beliefs about races, about what it takes to succeed in America, even about the relative importance of biology and self-determination in human lives.

By the morning after the Liston fight, Cassius Clay was Muhammad Ali, a Black Muslim, forever altering the terms by which he would be considered, but not altering the conflicts among terms. Ali as vain self-promoter now competed with Ali as spokesman for black America; Ali as "that marvelous, whimsical, overwhelming jung and—when he turns the volume down—charming young man," with Ali as "black racist." Ali's Muslim connection was initially interpreted in terms of race, the fighter—whether a genius in his chosen craft or simply a natural who did not dream of winning, but was like his sense of having been chosen for a purpose, about "divine things." The physicians and the metaphysical, the natural and the supernatural, contended for reporters and the public's attention. Following Ali's fight with Floyd Patterson in November 1965—by which the pugilistic child had seemed conclusively consummated of his opponent, and of the audience as well—SI's Gilbert Rogin asked: "What strange times we live in. What a strange, uncommon man is Clay. How can we fathom him? We can only watch in wonder as he performs and ponder whether, despite his truly affecting ways, he doesn't scorn us and the world he is champion of? Playful or merely vacuous, pug or prophet, an already puzzling Ali was becoming a more profound riddle.

In a two-round series in spring 1966, following Ali's challenge to his draft board, Sports Illustrated and Jack Olsen confronted the "enigma" of Muhammad Ali head-on: the incongruous mix of "ambitious and doggrel," "hardheaded bigotry," and "the conscience of a genius—objector." The most accessible champion in memory, to whom children flock as constantly as did also the most hated figure in sport. His buoyancy too often crossed the bounds into naivety. His life is a symphony of paradoxes," Olsen wrote in the first installment of the series. In the third, an inquiry into the seeming hysteresis of Ali's fight and postfight rantings—"temporarily lunacy? an act? a psychological ploy? simple fraud?" Olsen compiled a long list of the images that had become attached to Ali.

Figuring out what or what is the real Cassius Clay is a peculiar game that has not proved rewarding by experts. Clay's personality is like a jigsaw puzzle whose pieces were cut by a drunken carpenter, a jumbled collection of moods and attitudes that do not seem to interlock, but whose wavelike sounds like a religious lunatic, his voice ringing and chanting, and all at once he will come into a calm, reasoning, if sometimes confused, student of the Scriptures. He is a loudmouthed windbag and at the same time a remarkable philosopher and dedicated athlete. He can be a kindly benefactor of the neighborhood children and a vicious bully in the ring, a pious Puritan, totally intolerant of drinkers and smokers, and a fast-mouthed teller of dirty jokes.

Notice here—in 1966, two years after Ali changed his name—that Olsen still called him "Clay." The two names, Cassius Clay or Muhammad Ali, themselves stumbled up conflicting interpretations of the heavyweight champion. Following his May 1966 quoted Ali's physician, Dr. Ferdie Pacheco, who had said it said that there's a 15 days to Clay but had decided that the fighter was "just a thoroughly confused person." Pacheco did not solve the riddle, of course, but only the mortal possibility.

The hero and villain of the late sixties became more thoroughly heroic in the seventies, yet without being reduced to a single dominant image. Following his would revises and campus lectures in the United States during his exile from boxing, Ali returned to the ring in 1970 as a spokesperson for "black million black people," as "a symbol of black nationalism and antiracist sentiment," as a man fighting "out
Moreover, the victory assuaged the guilt feelings of those who remembered the theft of Ali’s career. The final phase of Ali’s career—the precipitous decline from Holmes, and Trevor Berbick in 1978, 1986, and 1981—was played out as fate, all the more so for having squandered his career. This is, indeed, a man who suffers wonderfully from ‘habits,’ as Plimpton put it in 1974, now paying heavily for his pride and courage.

...if [Michael] Jordan is like Ali in this status as cultural text, Ali differed—and was perhaps unique—in two important ways. First, against the crush of media attention, Ali managed to maintain an amazing degree of control over the ways he was interpreted. He remained the principal author of his own cultural text. When Sports Illustrated’s Mark Kram reprinted Ali’s “one act play of infinite variations” (the occasion was his second fight with Floy Patterson, in 1972), he described Ali as the producer of his own show; in the ring Ali seemed like a “drum coach” feeding Patterson his lines. And it wasn’t just the general public for whom Ali wrote his own scripts and enacted the drama of his own creation. He also dictated to reporters, a group considerably less susceptible to illusions and delusions. He played for reporters the various roles that he wanted them to consider: he presented himself as an enigma that reporters became obsessed with figuring out, while never allowing them access to his essential mystery. Collectively, the reporters came to understand, as George Plimpton put it, that “so much of what Ali does is a game, a put-on,” but both collectively and individually they never were exactly sure which part was put-on, which part serious. In one of Howard Cosell’s many interviews with Ali—one act in the vaudeville show they staged over most of Ali’s career—Cosell and Ali revealed over who had created whom. The answer seems obvious: Ali was not a media creation but a self-created who used the media brilliantly. In our world of sound bites and soundbytes, sports itself is resistant to mere manipulation. At the heart of sport, unlike most kinds of entertainment, lies something real; what the athletes themselves bring to the field or ring. As Mark Kram wrote, in anticipation of Ali’s third fight with Joe Frazier, “There is nothing contrived here. This is not an electronic toy conscripted in network boardrooms and then sent out and made to look like a dramatic sporting event.” Within the world of sport, Muhammad Ali more successfully than anyone within memory resisted manipulation by others. ...Ali was the author of his own narratives, and, moreover, he transcended all attempts to explain him.

The second way I think Ali is different from other sports heroes lies in the kind of hero he was, and is. Having circled around it, I’ve arrived at the issue announced in the title of this essay: the question of Ali as a “hero” in an age in which the electronic media are capable of reaching billions of people everywhere in the world, but whose images are so overwhelmingly numerous and so dependent on novelty that the lifespan of even the most powerful images seems that of the firefly. I think that David Halberstam is correct in recognizing a new kind of fame: fame potentially of unprecedented reach, due to the transmission of images via satellite into every corner of the globe, but also fame of unprecedented brevity. That this fame will emanate from the United States, chiefly through commercials and images on consumer goods, also seems clear...
success. There is the white middle class, that huge engine of society that once rejected him but now flock to his position with miniature cameras and ballpark pens...”. Muhammad Ali came to be a true “multicultural text,” in which for over a decade we Americans, in all our diversity, were able to find important values. For most of Ali’s boxing career his public image was intrinsically tied to his race, and for part of that time they were bound to his racisit rhetoric. But at some point in the mid-seventies, this changed. Ali remained subtly racial yet simultaneously beyond race.

The world of sport regularly raises up a host of heroes, who for a short time represent the fastest, the strongest, the most graceful, the most courageous, but who then yield their pedestals to the next set of heroes. The culture as a whole benefits, while the discarded heroes often become victims of their own fame, players in our modern version of an ancient tragedy. But in addition, on rare occasions, from the world of sport arises a Muhammad Ali, who not only is the prettiest, the loudest, and the greatest, but who reminds us of the deeper and broader possibilities of commitment and achievement, while still entertaining us and letting us dream.

1 FURTHER READING


Michael Eric Dyson, *Be Like Mike: Michael Jordan and the Pedagogy of Desire* (1993), 64-74


Nelson George, *Elevating the Game* (1992)


Jeffrey Simmons, *Beyond the Ring: The Role of Boxing in American Society* (1988)


Julie Tygiel, *Baseball’s Great Experiment: Jackie Robinson and His Legacy* (1983)