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STAND UP AND BE COUNTED: THE BLACK ATHLETE, BLACK POWER AND THE 1968
OLYMPIC PROJECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

by

DEXTER L. BLACKMAN

Under the Direction of Jacqueline A. Rouse

ABSTRACT

The dissertation examines the Olympic Project for Human Rights (OPHR), a Black Power initiative to build a black boycott of the 1968 US Olympic team that ultimately culminated in the infamous Black Power fists protest at the 1968 Olympics. The work challenges the historiography, which concludes that the OPHR was a failure because most black Olympic-caliber athletes participated in the 1968 games, by demonstrating that the foremost purpose of the OPHR was to raise public awareness of “institutionalized racism,” the accumulation of poverty and structural and cultural racism that continued to denigrate black life following landmark 1960s civil rights legislation. Additionally, the dissertation demonstrates that activist black athletes of the era were also protesting the lack of agency and discrimination traditionally forced upon blacks in integrated, yet white-controlled sports institutions. The dissertation argues that such movements for “dignity and humanity,” as progressive black activists of the 1960s termed it, were a significant component of the Black Power movement. The dissertation also examines the proliferation of the social belief that the accomplishments of blacks in white-controlled sports fostered black advancement and argues that the belief has origins in post-Reconstruction traditional black uplift ideology, which suggested that blacks who demonstrated “character” and “manliness”

improved whites' images of blacks, thus advancing the race. OPHR activists argued that the belief, axiomatic by 1968, was the foremost obstacle to attracting support for a black Olympic boycott. The manuscript concludes with a discussion of the competing meaning and representations of Smith and Carlos's protest at the Olympics.

INDEX WORDS: Olympic Project for Human Rights, Black Power, Black Students' movement, Institutionalized racism, Black athletes, 1968

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DEXTER L. BLACKMAN

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2009

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2009

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OLYMPIC PROJECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

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This dissertation is dedicated to my grandparents: Quincy Roy, Sr. and Janie Hooper Kea, William Henry, Sr. and Lois Raynor Blackman and Oscar Peter, Sr. and Addie Rust Hooper and the Hooper, Kea and Blackman families.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|---------|--|
| ACOA | American Committee on Africa |
| AAU | Amateur Athletic Union |
| CIAA | Colored Intercollegiate Athletic Association |
| IOC | International Olympic Committee |
| MLB | Major League Baseball |
| MOOC | Mexican Olympic Organizing Committee |
| NBA | National Basketball Association |
| NCAA | National Collegiate Athletic Association |
| NFL | National Football League |
| NL | Negro Leagues |
| NOI | Nation of Islam |
| OAU | Organization of African Unity |
| OAAU | Organization of African American Unity |
| OPHR | Olympic Project for Human Rights |
| SASA | South African Sports Association |
| SAOC | South Africa Olympic Committee |
| SAN-ROC | South Africa Non-Racial Olympic Committee |
| SCSA | Supreme Council for Sport in Africa |
| SJS | San Jose (CA) State College |
| SCSA | Supreme Council of Sport in Africa |
| UCLA | University of California-Los Angeles |
| USOC | United States Olympic Association |
| UTEP | University of Texas-El Paso |
| UN | United Nations |

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation examines the Olympic Project for Human Rights (OPHR), a Black Power attempt to raise awareness of “institutionalized racism” in the post-Jim Crow United States by building a black boycott of the 1968 US Olympic team. The movement is more popularly identified with the Black Power fists protest of two black US Olympians, Tommie Smith and John Carlos, at the 1968 Mexico City Olympics. As much as that image has come to represent the Sixties in popular and textbook discussions, in many academic and popular discussions, it also represents the failure of the proposed boycott. Observers note that although several blacks protested at the Olympics, they participated first; hence the boycott was a failure. As this dissertation will detail, however, the primary purpose of the OPHR was not the boycott itself, although its supporters did work ardently to produce one and failed; the foremost purpose of the proposed boycott was to raise awareness of the continued denigrating effects of “institutionalized racism” on black life in the immediate post-Jim Crow US. The dissertation will further illustrate that the OPHR shared this agenda with the encompassing Black Power and Black Students’ movements.¹ As such, this dissertation contextualizes the OPHR within these movements rather than focusing exclusively on the failure of a boycott to materialize.

The failure of the OPHR was predetermined by its opponents, especially those in the mainstream media, whom asserted that a black boycott of the US Olympic team would be unpatriotic and destructive to racial advancement. In the aftermath of the Olympics, these same opponents asserted that its failure to occur indicated its undesirability and infeasibility, even among blacks, and attached similar unpatriotic and destructive connotations to the Black Power protest at the games. These assertions derived their legitimacy from the established societal belief that blacks’ presence and accomplishments in sports advanced race relations in the US by improving whites’ image of blacks. Although referenced by other accounts of the boycott movement and in African American sports history, this belief, prolific as it

¹ For a discussion of “institutionalized racism” and Black Power, see Stokely Carmichael, “Toward Black Liberation” in *Black Fire: An Anthology of Afro-American Writers* ed. by Leroi Jones and Larry Neal, (New York: Morrow, Inc., 1968) 123-5.

continues to be, has not received much treatment by scholars. OPHR supporters and activist-athletes, however, suggested that their opponents' assertion of the belief in the public discourse was the proposed boycott's foremost obstacle.² Therefore, in addition to examining the OPHR, this dissertation also examines the evolution of the belief that blacks' presence and accomplishments in sports improved whites' images of blacks, thus improved race relations. By the Sixties, the belief had been articulated and widely-accepted in US society for approximately four decades. The dissertation illustrates that the belief has origins in traditional black advancement ideologies that suggested demonstrating "character" and "manliness," both hallmarks of advanced civilization, improved whites' image of blacks and thus, wrought their race advancement. The hegemony of the belief was established in the traditional black establishment in the mid-1930s, following the ascendance of heavyweight boxing champion Joe Louis and Olympian Jesse Owens. Despite its lack of tangible results, over several decades, the belief trumped criticisms concerning sports' role in building character, attempts to deemphasize sports and hid the discrimination that blacks endured and in the Sixties formed, as boycott sympathizers noted, a significant obstacle to a black Olympic boycott. Additionally, the examination of the belief lends to recent discussions concerning the influence of gender and class in the development of post-Reconstruction black advancement ideology.³

By contrasting the boycott proposal against the traditional belief that black participation in white-controlled sports contributed to improved race relations, opponents of the OPHR were able to label the boycott as militant, which in the Sixties implied that it was wantonly destructive and/or Communist, an aim it supposedly shared with Black Power. Contrary to these assertions, this dissertation illustrates that

² Harry Edwards, "The Olympic Project for Human Rights: An Assessment Ten Years Later," *Black Scholar*, 10 (6-7) 1979: 2.

³ Recent influential scholarship concerning the influence of gender and class in the development of post-Reconstruction black advancement ideology include Kevin K. Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Glenda E. Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, 1996); Martin A. Summers, *Manliness and Its Discontents: The Black Middle Class and Transformation of Masculinity, 1900-1930* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, 2004); Steve Estes, *I am A Man: Race, Manhood and the Civil Rights Movement* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

early incarnations of Black Power, like the OPHR, focused on combating “institutionalized racism,” the legacy of structural and cultural racism and poverty that continued to denigrate the quality of black life in the US. As several scholars have noted, Black Power as a social movement expanded the black struggle for equality from an emphasis on obtaining complete citizenship and integration to include socioeconomic equality and recognition of blacks’ agency in American society and institutions. Even prior to Stokely Carmichael’s announcement of Black Power in the summer of 1966, this agenda had been the focus of a significant number of black radical and progressive activists of the era. By 1968, black activists across the ideological spectrum supported movements such as the Memphis sanitation workers’ strike, which attempted to improve the wages and working conditions of a predominately black workforce, the Poor People’s Campaign, an attempt to establish a quality standard of living for all Americans, Black Students’ movements, which challenged the discrimination that blacks continued to encounter on predominately white campuses, and endorsed and/or attended national Black Power conferences, that focused on combating the socioeconomic depravity and cultural racism that continue to denigrate black communities. Because few comprehensive analysis of Black Power have been published, however, many academic and popular discussions of Black Power and its attendant movements such as the OPHR continued to be shaped by the establishment’s characterization of such movements as wantonly destructive and separatist.⁴ This dissertation challenges those establishment and historiography’s assertions by illustrating the impetuses and goals of the OPHR and those student-athletes and activists who participated in black sports protest in the Sixties were motivated “institutionalized racism,” an impetus that also served as impetuses to the Black Power and Black Students’ movements.

The most influential analyses of black athletic activism in the Sixties are a series of articles by historian David K. Wiggins, since compiled in his book *Glory Bound: Black Athletes in White America*. According to Wiggins, the activism of black athletes, especially at the 1968 Olympics, “shocked the

⁴ The most comprehensive analysis of Black Power remains Robert L. Allen, *Black Awakening in Capitalist America* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1992): originally published in 1969.

world” and “made the problems of racial discrimination in sport and the larger society more visible to the American public and international community. Even those with any passing interest in sport were made aware of racial discrimination by virtue of increased outspokenness of black athletes.” Nevertheless, Wiggins concludes that because the proposed boycott of the games was compromised into a demonstration, the movement was unsuccessful.⁵ Much of the historiography has echoed this analysis.

Black protest in sports failed, according to Wiggins, because black athletes were “athletes first and civil rights activists second.” Taught “early on to be humble and accommodating to authority,” Wiggins asserts that black militants pressured them to “lash out at racial discrimination.” They were “constantly being told by black activists that the problems of blacks were common to them as a group rather than individuals and the best way to combat those problems was through collective action.”⁶ Militant peer pressure, Wiggins argues, forced black athletes, including Olympians, to participate in the OPHR and black students’ movements. Black student-athletes, according to Wiggins, risked being “scorned, if not ostracized by their black peer group, if they did not show at least tacit support of the BSU [a Sixties black student organization]...and stand up to the schools’ sporting establishment.”⁷ According to Wiggins, this “placed enormous pressure on them because they were unable to seek out new social contacts when their roles as athletes conflicted with the political views of the majority of blacks on campus. By alleging discrimination, black athletes could simultaneously express empathy with the black protest movement- or become actively involved in it- and convince themselves that they had not violated their proper roles as athletes.”⁸ In response to the militants, Wiggins suggests that many black athletes, including Olympians, settled on a “middle ground” of protests- “donning dashikis, sporting large Afros, and exhibiting other outward trappings of racial militancy” such as the Black Power demonstrations at the Olympics- but “stopped just short of quitting.” Wiggins further explains their reluctance to boycott or quit intercollegiate sports by interjecting that it was a “frightening proposition for even the most

⁵ David K. Wiggins, *Glory Bound: Black Athletes in White America* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1997), 105-6.

⁶ Wiggins, 120.

⁷ Wiggins, 139.

⁸ Wiggins, 149.

courageous black athletes” to sacrifice years of training.⁹ Peer pressure and personal ambitions, as Wiggins notes, were issues that confronted activist black athletes. However, his analysis also reads as if the identity of “athlete” negated black athletes’ experiences in both sport and society.

As ascertained from above, Wiggins argues that the protest associated with the Sixties was improper or antithetical to black athletes. In his historization of the black athletes’ roles in the struggle for black equality, Wiggins ultimately illuminates what he believes was the condemning dilemma of the Olympic boycott initiative. He notes that prior to the Sixties, for black athletes to be successful (inferred in the text as integration into a white-controlled sports institution), it was necessary that they, even more than white athletes, submit to the dictates of sports institutions and establish a moral, accommodating persona, often at the expense of “a black identity.” By adhering to “traditional athletic expectations of being highly disciplined, obedient, and respectful to authority,” they achieved success (entrance into white-controlled sports institutions), which “caused them, like other black Americans, to think less about blackness as a cultural identity and more about their loyalty to this country and its ideals.”¹⁰ Because their abilities (and accommodation) gained them entrance into white-controlled sports, black athletes became prominent examples of the traditional black advancement belief that demonstrating character and capability were a better means of black advancement than protest.¹¹

A foremost concern with Wiggins’ scholarship is his assertion that militant peer pressure was the prime motivating factor of black athletes’ activism in the Sixties and how he arrives at the conclusion through an inadequate historization. Wiggins constructs a singular accommodating “black athlete” from what I argue is the unrecognized dissemblance of black athletes in post-Reconstruction early twentieth century white-controlled US institutions. Several scholars have observed that to enter and protect

⁹ Wiggins, 120; his arguments are influenced by a discussion in Harry Edwards’s *The Sociology of Sport*, (Homewood, IL: Dorsey Press, 1973), 141-52.

¹⁰ Wiggins, 200-2, 209-13; Wiggins constructs a successful black athlete as one who participated in integrated competition and not, for instance, those whom participated in sporting institutions in black America, such as the Negro Leagues or black colleges. This assertion, intentional or callous, is linked to the belief that integration was the prime preoccupation of black advancement in the Twentieth Century, another tacit assumption present in Wiggins’ work.

¹¹ Wiggins, 216.

themselves in white-controlled institutions in the early twentieth century, blacks often had to dissemble; feign ignorance of racial slights and subvert their agency and true thoughts concerning racism and discrimination. Historian Kevin K. Gaines notes that one result of dissemblance is that it sometimes has sundered individuals from blacks' common oppression and struggles or what Wiggins has referred to as a "black identity."¹² Wiggins does not acknowledge the possibility that the accommodation of black athletes was at least partially a product of the dissemblance required for blacks to enter, and indeed survive, in white-controlled institutions. Nor does his analysis explore episodes in the life of blacks in white-controlled early Twentieth Century sports, such as Jack Johnson, Paul Robeson, Louis and Jackie Robinson to name a few, which illustrate a less accommodating acceptance of discrimination in sport and society. His work also does not, as Historian Amy Bass's does, consider how the media may have construed black athletes as accommodating, and thus non-threatening to white supremacy, and how this perception of accommodation may have disassociated them from what Wiggins believes is their "blackness" or other more ardent forms of black protest.¹³ As critical, he also does not explore the activism of a generation of black athletes prior to the Sixties, which indicate they were increasingly less tolerant of discrimination than their predecessors Owens and Louis. In the absence of such explorations and in comparison to the Louis-Owens model, Sixties black activist-athletes appear as dissidents to the monolith and Wiggins' assertion that pressure from militant outside agitators forced black athletes to participate in protest seems valid.

Wiggins further supports his claims by asserting that protesting black athletes' charges of racism against white-controlled athletic departments in the Sixties were a method of scapegoating to appease militant pressure. This seems fathomable as well, because Wiggins references the "various forms of [racial] insensitivity and discrimination" that blacks encountered in white-controlled sports institutions, but dismisses the possibility that such discrimination served as the catalysts for their protests. As this dissertation will illustrate, his conclusion is eerily reminiscent of the arguments advanced by a defensive

¹² Gaines, 5; Estes, 1-4.

¹³ Amy Bass, *The Struggle, Not the Triumph: The 1968 Olympics and the Making of the Black Athlete* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 6-10.

white-controlled sports establishment and mainstream press during the Sixties.¹⁴ Black athletes, as the literature that emerged from the Sixties movement illustrates, endured a litany of athletic, academic, socioeconomic and cultural abuses in predominately white institutions.¹⁵ Like many other Black Power era movements, activist black athletes argued that entry into white-controlled institutions without recognition of their agency and humanity was not equality, and as this dissertation will demonstrate, served as a prime impetus of black athletes' activism in the Sixties. This element of Black Power and the Black Students' movements and black social protest, however, continues to be obscured by the prevailing assumption that integration was the dominant concern of twentieth century black advancement integration into white-controlled institutions. Several scholars have argued that one result of such an assumption is that anti-black discrimination within integrated institutions has been difficult for liberals and others to fathom.¹⁶ However, as this dissertation will demonstrate, the recognition of blacks "humanity and dignity," as a number of the periods' black activists termed it, within mainstream institutions was a significant concern of Black Power and Black Students' activists.¹⁷ Indeed, credit must be given to Maureen M. Smith's dissertation for acknowledging that black protest in sports was a specific attempt by black athletes to have their equality recognized in "a white sporting culture that had previously defined them in very subservient and exploitive terms."¹⁸ This dissertation advances that argument by demonstrating that the discrimination that black athletes endured in white-controlled institutions and society served as the catalysts of their protests.

Additionally, the historiography slights the black cultural politics of the Sixties such as natural hairstyles, 'Malcolm X' beards, dashikis and spiritual conversions. Indeed, in several instances black

¹⁴ Wiggins, 148-50.

¹⁵ Robert L. Green et al, "Black Athletes: Educational, Economic and Political Considerations," *Journal of Non-White Concerns in Personal and Guidance*, 3, no. 1 October 1974: 6-27; Jack Olsen, *The Black Athlete: A Shameful Story; The Myth of Integration in American Sport* (New York: Time-Life Books, 1968), 154-67; Jack Scott, *The Athletic Revolution* (New York: The Free Press, 1971), 82.

¹⁶ Joy James, *Shadowboxing: Representations of Black Feminist Politics* (New York: Palgrave, 1999), 94-6; Michael Eric Dyson, "The Liberal Theory of Race" in *The Michael Eric Dyson Reader* (New York: Basic Civitas, 2004), 41.

¹⁷ Edwards, *Revolt of the Black Athlete*, 65; *New York Amsterdam News*, 23 March 1968, p. 49; 3 August 1968, p. 21.

¹⁸ Maureen M. Smith, *Identity and Citizenship: African American Athletes, Sport and Freedom Struggles of the 1960s* Ph D. dissertation, 1999, ii.

student and professional athletes refused to compromise and chose their “blackness” over their scholarships and favor with the establishment. However, without an adequate exploration of activist black athletes’ relationship to the cultural component to Black Power, the historiography yields a truncated unsatisfactory understanding of their cultural activism. This dissertation suggests that many black athletes, like other Sixties’ activists, used the culture of “soul” and black liberation of the period to attack the cultural and moral hegemony of white supremacy.¹⁹

Perhaps, the most egregious problem in Wiggins’ work, which also lends itself to the previously discussed concerns, is the lack of voice by participating black athletes. In his discussion on the dynamics of black athletes’ activism on three predominately white campuses, for instance, only two black athletes and one supporter are quoted, and all from mainstream media sources.²⁰ The most significant source in the article are a series of articles by *Sports Illustrated* reporter John Underwood entitled “The Desperate Coach,” which quote very few activist athletes and undertook as its mission to illustrate how altruistic (white) coaches were attempting to counter the misguided suasion of hippies and militants on athletes.²¹ Wiggins’ conclusion, that black athletes were coerced into protest by militants, reverberates with those of white coaches and many mainstream journalists of the period such as Underwood, whom illustrated very little understanding of the racial, socioeconomic, academic and cultural concerns of activist student-athletes. Historian Jeffery T. Sammons has expressed similar criticisms of Wiggins’ work, noting that without the voice of participating activist-athletes, “only part of the story can emerge, a distorted one at that.”²² Although Wiggins’ analysis draws significantly from activist Harry Edwards’s *The Sociology of Sport*, it does not contend with Edwards’s assertion that while black athletes were pressure by militants, they were also pressured by their coaches and other athletic officials, who were all-white at predominately

¹⁹ For a discussion of soul and the Sixties, see Scott, 197-8; and Robin D. G. Kelley, *YO’ mama’s disFUNKtional!: fighting the cultural wars in urban America* (Boston: Beacon, 1997), 25-6.

²⁰ The article has been included in Wiggins, *Glory Bound*, 123-51.

²¹ It is my contention that the series of articles were a defense of the racial and cultural insensitivity of the white coaching establishment. For a similar discussion, see Scott, *The Athletic Revolution*, 201n; The articles are as follows; John Underwood, “The Desperate Coach,” *Sports Illustrated*, 25 August 1969; John Underwood, “Shave Off that Thing,” *Sports Illustrated*, 1 September 1969; John Underwood, “Concessions and Lies,” *Sports Illustrated*, 8 September 1969.

²² Jeffery T. Sammons, “Race’ and Sport: A Critical Historical Examination,” *Journal of Sport History*, 21(3), fall 1994: 259-60.

white universities in the Sixties, not to be involved in protest movements. Edwards, in fact, notes that “one could argue with [white coaches’] assessment” that militants were the sole catalyst of the black student-athletes’ protest.²³ Wiggins and the historiography do not explore if the assertions of the oppositional establishment of the Sixties influence contemporary discussions of the OPHR and black sports protest of the era.

In addition to being distorted by the establishment “powers-that-be” in the Sixties, Black Power and its attendant movements remain obscured by the current scholarship’s understanding of the Sixties and so-called identity movements. Max Elbaum notes that the focus of much of the scholarly discussions on the Sixties is “almost exclusively on the ebb and flow of activism among white radicals in and around the SDS.” In situating so-called identity politics of women, minorities and homosexuals, such works usually ignore that working-class concerns were the common denominator of these movements and conclude that a disparate emphasis on color, gender and/or sexuality obstructed the New Left’s effort to reform institutional America by fracturing class solidarity. Elbaum explains that such arguments ignore that minority activists, in addition to Third World Marxists anti-imperialist struggles, usually provided significant ideological currency for “white” anti-establishment struggles of the period. Even among the student dissidents that the historiography concentrates on, the strong presence of minorities and the working-class are discounted, despite evidence that they were well represented by a vast increase of first generation and minority college students. For instance, Elbaum contends that because the Vietnam War claimed a disproportionate number of lives from minority and working class communities, those communities strengthened the era’s anti-war movement. In addition to student-activism, minorities as workers, parents, soldiers, prisoners, domestics and other proletariat groups, including student-athletes, engaged in protests, which continue to remain veiled by the establishment’s distortion of Black Power as

²³ Edwards, *Sociology of Sport*, 145.

“rock-throwing” militancy and scholarship’s continued privileging of white student-activism as the correct leftist discourse.²⁴

Like Elbaum’s analysis, this dissertation is concerned with the establishment’s determination of who was a legitimate activist and what were legitimate social movements, and the historiography’s failure to recognize the establishment’s influence on these perceptions. More specifically, it is concerned with how the historiography’s acceptance of the mainstream media’s assertions about the OPHR continue to limit our understanding of the Olympic boycott movement, black protest in sports in the Sixties and Black Power.²⁵ The continued acceptance of Black Power as militant destructiveness prevents the historiography from exploring the OPHR as organic, or in other words, that the boycott proposal emanated from blacks’ racial, cultural and socioeconomic concerns in the Sixties. To illustrate those concerns, this dissertation makes extensive use of the autobiographical and primary sources of participating activist-athletes. In addition to illustrating their impetuses and goals, these works inform a much needed discussion of the discriminations they encountered in sport and on campus and a critique of the establishment repression enacted against their activism. Ultimately, these primary sources challenge the establishment and historiography’s notions that Sixties’ black protest in sports was a product of the destructive aimless militancy that was supposedly Black Power.

Sociologist Douglas Hartmann builds on many of Wiggins’ claims in his dissertation, including the notion that the proposed boycott was a product of militant coercion. Hartmann notes that activist black athletes agreed with Sixties’ black progressives on the need to protest continued racial discrimination in society, but discrimination in sports was either non-existent or a non-factor in black Olympians’ participation in the boycott movement.²⁶ The absence of such a critique is important, according to Wiggins, because it allowed most Americans to continue to believe that sports provided

²⁴ Max Elbaum, *Revolution in the Air: Sixties Radicals turn to Lenin, Mao and Che* (New York: Verso, 2002): 27-38; also see Kelley, 104-15; William Van DeBurg, *New Day in Babylon: The Black Power Movement and American Culture* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago, 1992), 12-5.

²⁵ Edwards, *Sociology of Sport*, 151; Scott, 80.

²⁶ Douglas Hartmann, “Golden Ghettos: The Cultural Politics of Race, Sports and the Civil Rights Movement, 1968 and Beyond,” (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1997), 77-9.

blacks with significant opportunities for advancement, which prevented the OPHR from obtaining significant support in the public discourse, contributing to its failure. Indeed, Hartmann suggests that it is not surprising that most Americans condemned the boycott as militancy, but that it received any support at all. He suggest that beyond militants, the few people whom supported black protest in sport, including Martin Luther King, Jr., were attempting to use the boycott as a means of keeping the issue of discrimination newsworthy in the public discourse.²⁷ Hartmann's discussion, like Wiggins', concludes that the boycott was a black militant idea, which ultimately went against black athletes' beliefs and self-interest. Indeed, he also concludes that militant pressure could not compel the Olympians to boycott and sacrifice rewards that might ultimately allow them escape from a black "ghetto."²⁸

Hartmann's analysis is based on what he terms an "exhaustive study" of the US mainstream press, including influential periodicals such as *The New York Times*, *The Chicago Tribune* and *Track and Field News*. The examination allows Hartmann to illustrate that most mainstream periodicals and sports reporters opposed the boycott and attempted to consolidate such a consensus among an American public weary of social movements in the Sixties. Hartmann notes that the mainstream media subordinated the issue of discrimination prompted by the boycott proposal and instead asserted that sports were apolitical and therefore, an inappropriate realm for protest. Secondly, he notes that the media declared that militant outside agitators such as Edwards forced the proposed boycott on black athletes. He further notes that the primary reason the media was able to rally substantial opposition to the boycott was because it reinforced the prevailing belief that sports provided blacks with substantial individual and group opportunities for advancement.²⁹

Hartmann's quality research suggests that the media played a significant role in shaping the public perception of the boycott. However, like Wiggins' analyses, it reproduces an uncritical acceptance of the mainstream press' condemnation of the boycott and activist-athletes. Hartmann constructs sports

²⁷ Hartmann, 117-20, 134.

²⁸ Hartmann, 77-9, 176-83; implicit in Hartmann's discussion is a notion of all of black America as a pejorative "ghetto," which entrance into white institutions, including sport, provides escape from.

²⁹ Hartmann, 20-1, 108-28.

writers in the same liberal sense that Wiggins constructs white coaches, noting that “it was not the boycott weapon in general that seemed to offend these editorialist, most of whom at least believed that civil rights had not yet gone far enough,” but rather its use in sport, which they articulated was a proven, valuable tool to improve race relations.³⁰ Although Hartmann notes the mainstream media’s opposition of the boycott was easily discernible, he does not explore what effect the media’s oppositional arguments may have had on public opinion. However, he does confidently conclude that there was no “unholy” collusion between the mainstream press and sports establishment against the boycott, despite documenting that several vested entities, including sports industry officials, the mainstream media and white coaches, concomitantly articulated similar oppositional critiques of the boycott movement. For Hartmann, such a conspiracy would be hard to “accept (much less prove) that so many could have so deliberately and so skillfully mystified, manipulated or obscured their view on race as would be necessary to account for these peculiarities.”³¹ Similar Amy Bass’ work recognizes the mainstream media’s opposition to the boycott, noting that the media argued athletes had a Cold War responsibility to country and constructed the proposed boycott as unpatriotic, disloyal and the coercion of militants, but does not explore how these assertions may have affected the public’s understanding and support of boycott and may have influenced the development of the boycott. Instead, Bass, like the previous historiography, suggests that Edwards’s racialized politics could not compel the athletes to withdraw from the Olympics.³²

By contrast, this dissertation investigates boycott supporters’ claims that the mainstream press was part of an oppositional establishment that included the white-controlled sports establishment and the traditional black press and attempted to combat the proposed boycott by distorting it as unpatriotic and militantly destructive.³³ Smith has issued a similar conclusion. Her work illustrates that liberal, moderate and conservative and black and white communities and their presses held diverse opinions concerning the boycott proposal. Smith found that black periodicals and writers were significantly more likely to be

³⁰ Hartmann, 116.

³¹ Hartmann, 120.

³² Bass, 90, 98.

³³ Edwards, *Revolt of the Black Athlete*, 30-1; Bill Russell with Taylor Branch, *Second Wind: The Memoirs of an Opinionated Man* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979), 175-7.

sympathetic of the proposed boycott as an attempt to expose and combat discrimination in sport and society, whereas white periodicals and reporters were significantly more likely to condemn such protests. Smith also found that mainstream coverage of black protest in sport was often veiled with subtle racism, such as the absence of activist-athletes' explanations or added irrelevant details in attempts to distort their activism, and/or defended entities that black athletes charged with discrimination.³⁴ This dissertation also examines several mainstream periodicals and found they reasserted the belief that sports provided blacks with significant opportunities for group and individual advancement as a means to combat the legitimacy of the OPHR in the public discourse. The dissertation also examines several traditional black newspapers and periodicals, leftist, student and Black Nationalist organs as a way of determining the boycott's appeal in those communities. Through such examinations, we gain understanding of the oppositions' actions against the boycott and insight on the meaning of the boycott and its relation to other protest movements in the Sixties.

Most of the historiography also fails to explore or even reference the transnational and pan-African aspects of the boycott proposal. In his article, "Black Consciousness and the Olympic Protest Movement," historian Donald Spivey suggest that in addition to black progressives and radicals' domestic concerns, the boycott issue also has origins in the period's Third World protest of European imperialism, including the Organization of African Unity's opposition of apartheid South Africa's entry into the 1968 Olympics. While the article suggests that the boycott was relative to the era's anti-apartheid movements, it does not examine how the issue influenced discussion and support of the OPHR in the public discourse?³⁵ Similarly, Bass explores the "conjectural" ties between the OPHR, opposition to apartheid and the Mexican Students' movement of the period, all of which, she notes, threatened to disrupt the first non-Western-hosted Olympics, "indirectly nurtured one another" and illustrates the OPHR's

³⁴ Smith, as does Harry Edwards, Smith notes that there were exceptions in the black/ white dichotomy of supporting/ condemning the actions of Smith, Carlos and other activist-athletes; Smith, *Identity and Citizenship*, 237-58; Edwards, *Revolt of the Black Athlete*, 30-7.

³⁵ Donald Spivey, "Black Consciousness and the Olympic Protest Movement," in *Sport in America: New Historical Perspectives*, ed. by Donald Spivey (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1984), 239-43.

commiseration with the international New Left's global discourse of advancing human rights.³⁶ As important, Bass's suggests that the apartheid issue had a "serendipitous" influence on support for the OPHR.³⁷ However, like the historiography, Bass does not contextualize the OPHR within the burgeoning discourses of pan-African and Third World liberation that influenced Black Power and thus, does not explore the lasting support and significance the apartheid issue brought to the OPHR.³⁸ This dissertation illustrated that by supporting the Third World and African Nationalist campaign to expel South Africa from the 1968 Olympics, the OPHR attracted support from respected liberals and radicals that increased its legitimacy in the public discourse and raised awareness of the continued detrimental impact of black life in the US.

The first chapter illustrates that the belief that blacks' presence and accomplishments in white-controlled sport institutions has its origins in the post-Reconstruction black advancement ideology that demonstrating character and manliness proved that blacks were worthy of access to complete citizenship. Following the emergence of championship black sprinters in the 1920s, the belief began to be articulated in the black press and civil rights periodicals. It achieved near-hegemony in the traditional black establishment following the ascendance of Jesse Owens and Louis, both of whom illustrated American superior manliness by defeating athletes from Nazi Germany, a US ideological and military foe in the 1930s and 1940s. Although the accompanying advocacy that blacks escalate their use of athletics as a means of advancement engendered scrutiny from some intellectuals in the black community, ultimately the debates concerning the developing belief illustrate the increased validity that it obtained in the traditional black establishment in the period. The second section of the chapter illustrates that contrary to the developing belief that white America respected the manliness inherent in the champion black athletes' accomplishments, black athletes including well-known champions like Louis and Owens, routinely experienced the daily humiliations and discrimination that circumscribed black life in Jim Crow America.

³⁶ Bass, 5, 113-9, 131-3.

³⁷ Bass, 180-1.

³⁸ Bass, 190.

Chapter two illustrates that the mass integration of sports in the years between WWII and the Sixties strengthened the belief that blacks' athletic accomplishments improved whites' image of blacks, and thus perpetrated racial advancement. The traditional black establishment consistently articulated that blacks' manly accomplishments in the highly visible arena of sports and the Cold War service of black athletes to the nation illustrated that blacks were sufficiently manly to be recognized as first-class American citizens. Contrary to the strengthening of that belief, however, blacks' experiences in white-controlled institutions not only continued to be shaped by racial discrimination, but they also routinely contested that racism. The second section suggests that anti-black discrimination continued in sports because economic motives, rather than the altruistic notions supposedly inherent in fair play and democracy in American sports, served as the main impetus for the mass integration of sports in the period. The third section demonstrates that as a result, black athletes, individually and collectively, protested the racism they encountered in sports throughout the era. Contrary to the historiography's contentions that black athletes' participation in Sixties' protest movements was spurious, the section concludes that they inherited a legacy of struggle against racism in white-controlled sports institutions from Jackie Robinson and their other predecessors. Nevertheless, the ever-increasing omnipotence of the social belief would remain the foremost obstacle to the use of protest in sport for black advancement.

The third chapter demonstrates that contrary to the establishment and historiography's assertions that the Olympic boycott proposal was the product of a deviant black militancy aimed at destroying America, its foremost aim was to combat "institutionalized racism," the accumulation of structural and cultural racism and poverty that continued to demean the quality of black life in the post-Jim Crow US. By situating the proposal within the Black Power and Black Students' movements, the discussion challenges the historiography's conclusion that black militant coercion was the prime impetus of black athletes participating in black protests in the period and concludes that activist black athletes, like other Black Student and Black Power activists had substantive grievances that motivated their activism and thus, were genuine activists or in their gendered language of the period, "men first and athletes second." The second section illustrates that in opposition to the proposed boycott, the establishment reasserted the

social belief that blacks' presence and accomplishments in sports contributed significantly to improved race relations and that a boycott was radically unpatriotic. The dominance of these assertions, as well as the establishments' attempted repression, not only significantly shaped public discussion, but as importantly influenced black athletes' opinions and decisions concerning the boycott. Thus, the chapter concludes that the establishment's repression was, if not more influential than militant peer pressure, which both the historiography and establishment suggests drove black activist-athletes to initially support the Olympic boycott proposal.

Chapter four illustrates that in response to the repression and media distortion, the OPHR launched a public campaign drive in hopes of attracting public support and remaining relevant in an increasingly turbulent society. By ideologically linking the proposed boycott to other movements and causes, the OPHR attracted support from several entities that were either previously indifferent or opposed to the movement. Much of that new support, however, was conditional; most liberals, for instance, would support only OPHR initiatives that coincided with their agenda of integration. By contrast, other demands expanded support among leftists and radicals that would endure the campaign. In particular, the OPHR's support of the international campaign to end apartheid and prevent South Africa's participation in the 1968 Olympics attracted support from international Leftists, Third World independence movements, liberals and blacks that raised the visibility of the OPHR and increased its legitimacy in the public discourse. From February through May 1968, the height of the campaign against South Africa's participation in the games, a black boycott of the Olympics seemed extremely feasible. Resultantly, worried opponents of the boycott, including the mainstream press, began to examine activist-athletes and their movements more objectively.

The final chapter illustrates that following the resolution of the South Africa issue, the mainstream press and establishment, despite increased activism by black student-athletes on campuses across the country, successfully reasserted the belief that the accomplishments of black athletes improved race relations as a means to condemn the boycott proposal in the public discourse. As a result, most Americans never comprehended black and Sixties' protest in sports, especially an Olympic boycott, as a

means to force the redress blacks' grievances, but only as an ill-conceived tactic that would only regress race relations. The mainstream press' dominant notion of the boycott as militantly degenerative further concealed the impact of the establishment's repression on the OPHR and activist-athletes. Contrary to the historiography's assertion that the Olympic boycott did not manifest because black athletes were not authentic activists, the second section of the chapter illustrates that establishment repression was a key obstacle to a successful Olympic boycott, even shaping the now-infamous Black Power protest that did occur at the 1968 games. Decades later, the activist-athletes and their supporters continue to compete with the establishment and mainstream perceptions they opposed in 1968 to define the meaning of their activism.

Chapter I

“The Negro Athlete and Victory”: The Traditional Black Establishment, Manliness and the Meaning of
Black Athletes in the Age of Jim Crow

On 23 June 1937, the day after Joe Louis defeated reigning champion James J. Braddock, a white American, for the world’s heavyweight boxing title, an editorial in *The Honolulu (Hawaii) Star-Bulletin* declared that he “knocked out more than a heavyweight champion in yesterday’s epic encounter,” he “exploded [the] myth” that blacks “lacked an essential Anglo-Saxon quality- that quality of never knowing when you are licked.” Louis, the editorial insinuated, was evidence that blacks possessed the same superior manliness that allowed whites to wrest control of the continent from Native Americans and succeed in imperial conflicts, and thus improved whites’ images of blacks. Indeed, the editor noted that “In the ring, on the track, and elsewhere, too, it is gradually coming about that a mans’ a man for a’ that” and that a black man demonstrating such ability “must have gone a long way, too, toward giving the ultimate quietus to both an obsequious inferiority complex among his own people and a supercilious superiority complex” among whites. The editor further predicted that “Out of this second Negro heavyweight championship, along with the astonishing Olympic records of Negro athletes, there should develop an increased mutual respect of the two races that fate has joined together in the making of an America with justice for all.” *The Star-Bulletin* was an obscure periodical for most, however, the belief that the athletic accomplishments of Louis and the 1936 black Olympians improved the manly image of blacks and advanced blacks toward equality achieved near-hegemonic certainty in the traditional black establishment in the mid-1930s. The *Star-Bulletin’s* editorial, for example, was reprinted in the next August edition of *The Crisis*, the news organ of the NAACP, the nation’s foremost civil rights organization, and similar commentary could be found in black and liberal periodicals across the nation.¹

¹ “Kayoed More than Braddock,” *The Crisis*, August 1937, 243; originally published in *The Honolulu (Hawaii) Star-Bulletin*; For a discussion of superior manliness, see Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A*

This chapter chronicles the origins and proliferation of the traditional black establishment's promotion of the societal belief that athletic accomplishments advanced black equality in the US by improving whites' images of blacks. Rather than attempting to ascertain the legitimacy of that belief or in other words, if blacks' athletic accomplishments actually improved race relations, the chapter explores the development and prominence of the belief because in the context of this dissertation, those activists and athletes organizing the Olympic Project for Human Rights (OPHR), a black boycott the 1968 US Olympic team, claim that black America's near-hegemonic faith in the belief was the foremost impediment to the success of the movement.² The dominance of the belief, one historian suggests, challenged the legitimacy of the OPHR in the public discourse.³

The chapter illustrates that the belief that black athletes' presence and accomplishments in white-controlled sports improved whites' images of blacks has its origins in the post-Reconstruction traditional black advancement beliefs that blacks who possessed "character" and "manliness" demonstrated that they and their race were worthy of complete citizenship. The belief first began to be articulated in the black press and civil rights periodicals following the emergence of championship black sprinters in the 1920s. It achieved near-hegemony in the traditional black establishment in the mid-1930s following Louis and black Olympians' triumphs against athletic representatives from Nazi Germany, a US ideological and imperialistic opponent. Although the belief engendered scrutiny from some intellectuals in the black community, ultimately the debates concerning the developing belief illustrate the increased validity that it obtained in the traditional black establishment in the period. The second section of the chapter demonstrates that contrary to the developing hegemony of the belief, black athletes, including well-known champions like Louis and Jesse Owens, routinely experienced the daily humiliations and

Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 10-20, 178-84.

² Harry Edwards, "The Olympic Project for Human Rights: An Assessment Ten Years Later," *Black Scholar* 10, 6-7, (1979): 2; Also see Tommie Smith, "Why Negroes Should Boycott," in *The Unlevel Playing Field: A Documentary History of African American Experience in Sport* ed. David K. Wiggins and Patrick B. Miller (Chicago: University of Illinois, 2003), 291; originally published in *Sport*, March 1968, 40-1, 68.

³ Adolph H. Grundman, "The Image of Intercollegiate Sports and the Civil Rights Movement: An Historian's View," *ARENA-Review* 3, 3 (October 1979): 17.

discrimination that demeaned the quality of black life in the Jim Crow US. As a result, some black athletes questioned the validity of the belief, even as it was being disseminated in the nation's presses.

Demonstrating manliness as a means of black advancement has its origins in post-Reconstruction and early twentieth century black advancement ideologies. Following the failure of the federal government's post-Civil War efforts to enforce the recognition of blacks' complete citizenship rights, post-Reconstruction and early twentieth century black elites developed an additional, alternative means of pressing for equality by claiming status as part of the nation's normative bourgeois middle-class. However, because economic and social access to the middle-class were generally circumscribed by white supremacy law and terror and de facto anti-black discrimination, black elites often argued that their middle-class status was evident through their adherence to the era's Victorian bourgeois morality or "character," which included temperance, thrift, industry, patriarchy and other moral characteristics that contradicted widely-accepted anti-black stereotypes. More conservative blacks, most notably preeminent spokesperson Booker T. Washington, suggested that blacks eschew political and constitutional agitation, which often produced further anti-black sentiment, because complete citizenship and political rights would likely accrue to blacks who exhibited a moral character, accumulated wealth or made themselves valuable to their community and nation through service. However, as Washington and other black moderates were intermittently forced to admit, the virulent seek-and-destroy nature of white supremacy tended to ignore blacks' claims to respectability and judge all blacks by negrophobic stereotypes. Therefore, most blacks concomitantly argued the inalienability of their citizenship and humanity. Many educated and elite blacks, however, also supported programs of educating the masses in tenets of Victorian bourgeois morality. Traditional black elites believed that by improving the morality of the black masses, they were eradicating the dominant white rationale for anti-black prejudice, which as Kevin Gaines suggests also allowed black elites to distinguish themselves from the black majority and the

immoral behavior that was supposedly responsible for their denigrated condition and thus, establish their own claims to a bourgeois middle-class status.⁴

Manliness as a measure of men and a requirement for citizenship privileges has origins in nineteenth century western imperialism and the white supremacy reasoning of “civilization.” Accordingly, turn of the century white American nationalists and European imperialists noted that civilization, the moral perfection of man and society, advanced through conflict between the “races” and those more civilized races triumphed and “spread civilization” to the more primitive. Just as the American frontier experience fused various European peoples into a virile “white” race that triumphed over the savage “Indian,” imperial tensions at the turn of twentieth century allowed Americans (whites) to supplant a decaying Spanish empire and expand civilization to the childlike nonwhites of Cuba and the Philippines. According to its many advocates, including President Theodore Roosevelt, white civilization triumphed because of Anglos’ legacy of superior morality and masculinity, or “manliness.” Anglo-Saxon men, evident by the culture of pronounced gender differences in the Anglo-America and western European middle-classes, were sufficiently moral and had mastered the manly traits of industry, diligence, self-restraint, thrift and sobriety, which allowed them to develop economic independence and justified their moral, economic and political authority over women, children and nonwhites. In application, turn-of-the-century manliness, as several scholars have noted, was ambiguous; socioeconomically successful men were often ascribed moral and masculine traits that supposedly explained their success. Ideally, men worked and economically provided for their families, which buttressed their authority over women, whom devoted themselves to childrearing and homemaking. By comparison, slavery, Jim Crow and racialized socioeconomic discrimination forced significant numbers of black and immigrant women to work outside their homes, and as a result, outside of the cult of domesticity, which cloaked white women in pure

⁴ Kevin K. Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1996), 1-5, 37-41; Glenda E. Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1996), 62-4, 76-7; also see Martin Summers, *Manliness and Its Discontents: The Black Middle-Class and the Transformation of Masculinity, 1900-1930* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 1-9; and Cornel West, “Black Strivings in a Twilight Civilization,” in *The Cornel West Reader* (New York: Basic Civitas, 1999), 93-5.

sexuality, piety, delicacy and the protection of the law. The lack of supposedly normative patriarchal authority in the black community, the inability of black men to materially provide for their families and the supposed sexual licentiousness of African peoples were all often cited as evidence that blacks did not possess the civility or moral capacity, or in the case of males, the manliness, necessary to participate in white-controlled institutions, politics, jurisprudence and other bourgeois privileges of citizenship. For most white advocates of civilization, “race” indicated intractable evolutionary and biological differences amongst humans and denoted their superiority and the inferiority of peoples of color.⁵

Post-Reconstruction black intellectuals, however, appropriated “civilization” to oppose white supremacy by arguing that the inefficiency of the black masses resulted from the incivility of slavery, Jim Crow and the general anti-black orientation of the West. Although the discourse unintentionally reaffirmed that blacks were inferior, Gaines notes that by positing the denigrated black condition as environmental and/or cultural, *traditional* black elites were then able to suggest that it was possible for the black masses to acculturate the bourgeois morality and education, both considered traits of advanced manliness, necessary to be productive, valuable citizens. As such, cultivating morality, or “uplifting the race” as it was often paraphrased, informed the mission of post-Reconstruction traditional black advancement ideology.⁶

The Progressive era education at black schools, especially preparatory institutions and colleges advanced this agenda by preparing its students to be cultural missionaries of sorts to the black masses. The classical-influenced curriculum, copied from British and New England institutions, emphasized that ancient Greece and Rome were the pinnacles of civilization and that the modern republics of Western Europe and the US were their progeny. Additionally, the classical curriculum asserted that the

⁵ Bederman, 11-31, 170-90; Summers, 1-15; Glenda E. Gilmore, 61-5.

⁶ Bederman, 23; Gaines, xv-xvi, 34-7, 72-80.

The term *traditional* is derived from Antonio Gramsci’s assertion that all intellectuals, consciously or unconsciously, intentionally or unintentionally, reinforce the hegemony of the status quo, by using it as the basis for their information and conclusions. In this particular instance, the terms applies to those black and liberals intellectuals whose race work of cultural and moral education tacitly agreed with prevailing anti-black stereotypes that blacks were inferior; Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (New York: International Publishers, 1999), 3-5; for an application of Gramsci’s theory of hegemony to culture race, see Manning Marable, *Black Leadership* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 97-107.

advancement of society and man were the duty of its educated and culturally literate citizens. Generally, those intellectuals guiding black educational institutions, whether they emphasized the liberal arts or industrial education, agreed that the African and slave past and the current coffles of Jim Crow prevented the masses from obtaining the moral and cultural values necessary to be productive citizens. Although these intellectuals universally rejected the premise that blacks were biologically or ineradicably inferior, they tacitly agreed that a cultural pathology of “race,” like class, rather than the capitalist Jim Crow state and pervasive white supremacy, was the central cause of the denigrated condition of the unwashed black masses. Therefore, in addition to instruction in rudimentary literacy skills, the traditional black establishment reasoned that educating the masses in civility, those values that would signal sufficient morality, would best convince whites of the humanity of blacks and dissipate anti-black prejudice.⁷

Athletics and recreation as a means of uplifting the manliness and morality among black Americans emerged in the last decade of the nineteenth century. In 1897, W. E. B. DuBois lectured members of Philadelphia’s black church that young people’s “thirst for amusement,” which along with economic opportunities were drawing them from the farm to urban areas, could be used to attract them to schools and churches, where “responsible” leadership could instruct them in fitness, sexual purity, race pride and “the development of Negro character to its highest and holiest capabilities.”⁸ Earlier that decade, black schools integrated “physical culture” into the ethos of moral and cultural education they imparted in those they prepared to guide the masses. In addition to expanding physical education curriculums and facilities, several black colleges, mirroring the growth of intercollegiate sports at southern white colleges, initiated football, baseball and track teams for male students. Black educators, like other Progressive reformers, believed that exercise and the proper maintenance of the body increased one’s mental stamina, which allowed an individual to devote more time to the pressing moral, social and

⁷ Gaines, 4-5, 34-6, 157-8; for a discussion of black education during the late 19th and early 20th century, see James D. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1988), 240-4.

⁸ W. E. B. Du Bois, “The Problem with Amusement,” in *W. E. B. Du Bois: On Sociology and the Black Community* ed. by Dan S. Green and Edwin B. Driver (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 226-37; originally published in the *Southern Workmen*, 27 (September 1897), 18-24.

cultural concerns of the race. In addition to serving as a means to uplift the race, athletics as a means of cultivating character also had origins in Progressive era beliefs that programs of responsible play could be used to inculcate individuals with the proper citizenship values, as well as stem the effeminate transformation of men that accompanied the permanence of a consumer society. For that reason, with the aid of the military during the Great War, physical education departments at black colleges like Howard and Fisk enthusiastically established training facilities for blacks on their campuses and instituted mandatory military drills for males.⁹ By using athletics as a means to inculcate morality, improve health or prepare blacks for service to the nation, the traditional black establishment hoped to demonstrate that blacks understood the importance of and possessed manliness, which, as Gaines notes, black elites believed “would topple racial barriers and bolster their claims to humanity, citizenship and respectability.”¹⁰

By the emergence of Louis and Owens in the mid-1930s, Dr. Edwin Bancroft Henderson, an educator and activist, emerged as black America’s most influential articulator of athletics as a means of black advancement.¹¹ Educated in Progressive era black institutions, including Washington DC’s illustrious M Street high and Miners Teachers College, Henderson taught physical education in Washington DC’s black public schools from 1904 into the 1950s and helped found several organizations that shaped athletic curriculums and intercollegiate sports at black colleges and high schools in the mid-Atlantic and South. Henderson also served in several local and national liberal civil rights organizations and routinely published articles on black participation in sports in important civil rights journals such as *Opportunity* and *The Negro History Bulletin*. His writings articulated the black Progressive beliefs that cultivating the manly character of the black masses and educating whites to blacks’ capacity for such character annulled racial discrimination. His biographer, historian David K. Wiggins, notes that in addition to attempting to “foster pride among blacks,” his writings also attempted to “alter white racial

⁹ Summers, 247-53; For a discussion of athletics and Progressive era beliefs, see Bederman, 186; and Amy Bass, *Not the Triumph, But the Struggle: The 1968 Olympics and the Making of the Black Athlete* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 39-46.

¹⁰ Gaines, 74-5.

¹¹ *Chicago Defender*, 8 February 1947, p. 21.

beliefs” by “proving that African Americans were just as capable as whites on the playing field and, by extension, in other areas of American life.” Henderson believed that the presence and accomplishments of blacks in white-controlled sports institutions exposed whites to blacks’ manly ability. Wiggins notes that Henderson possessed a “boundless optimism in the power of sport to break down racial prejudice and contribute to a more integrated society.” He believed that “sport transmitted shared values and norms and contributed to communal feelings between whites and African Americans.”¹²

This black Progressive impulse is also present in Henderson’s seminal essay, “The Negro Athlete and Race Prejudice,” published in *Opportunity*, the national Urban League’s progressive journal, in March 1936. As the nation anticipated Louis’s June bout with Max Schmeling, a German and former world’s heavyweight boxing champion, and “the Nazi Olympics” in August, the article was a response to the pernicious “racial prejudice” in the mainstream media that made questionable “the extent that...the Negro athlete is affecting race relations.” In the mainstream press, characterizations of Louis vacillated between that of animalistic savage to Sambo. Henderson reported a current press fable that Louis inherited his physical prowess from a grandparent whom overcame a baboon. The mainstream press also attributed the recent succession of champion black sprinters to a primitive anatomical structure specific to Africans. These assertions were typical of the scientific racism and negrophobic minstrelsy that circulated in the mainstream press for a century after Reconstruction and mocked black efforts to have their humanity and citizenship recognized by the white-control state by bolstering everyday social notions of black inferiority. In particular, the stereotype of the Negro as beast contradicted notions of bourgeois manliness by suggesting anti-black notions that black males lacked the moral constitution to control a savage urge to rape white women. The pseudoscientific assertion that champion black sprinters resulted from a race-specific anatomical structure reinforced widely accepted anti-black beliefs that there were ineradicable biological differences between races. The conviction that nonwhites were a less developed human species aided in purging the collective white consciousness of guilt concerning the virulent seek-

¹² David K. Wiggins, *Glory Bound: Black Athletes in White America* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1997), 221-32; Edwin B. Henderson, “Physical Education and Athletics among Negroes,” in *The History of Physical Education and Sport* ed. Bruce L. Bennett (Chicago: The Athletic Institute, 1972), 67.

and-destroy nature of white supremacy that contradicted the democratic and humane ideals of the republic. Indeed, Henderson declared that the “Prejudice thinking as to race and athletic success” was only another means of justifying “present-day ‘Negro-phobiacs.’”¹³

Henderson concluded that despite the minstrelsy and scientific racism that characterized black athletes in the mainstream press, they were “making a considerable contribution to the spread of tolerance and improved race relations” because their performances solicited the “feelings and emotions” of the nation’s masses. Typically, it was in the arts and academia that the races formed “social relationships” based on mutual respect. The masses, however, Henderson contended, “still respond readily to the call of the chase, the fight, the race or the hunt and live over something of our early ancestral experiences when we thrill or despair with the runner, boxer or other athlete. The world still loves a fighter, whether he be the winner or the loser.” The article never used the term, but it implied that the championship exploits of black athletes improved the image of all blacks because their accomplishments demonstrated that black males possessed a *virile masculinity*, the same element of manliness that allowed “whites” to advance civilization by supplanting Natives.¹⁴

Henderson’s essay is indicative of early twentieth century traditional black intellectuals’ aspirations to construe the adulation of black athletes in the mainstream press as recognition of blacks’ manly ability to contribute to and advance the nation and civilization. The manliness inherent in the efforts of black athletes, he suggested, explained how members of an otherwise subjugated race like “Joe Louis has thus captured the fancy of millions” and black sprinters like “Jesse Owens, [Ralph] Metcalf, [Eddie] Tolan, and a host of others have likewise provided a feeling of pride and joyful relationship for many.” In international athletic contests such as the Olympics and professional boxing, which were often

¹³ Edwin B. Henderson, “The Negro Athlete and Race Prejudice,” *Opportunity*, 14, 3 March 1936, 77-8; for a discussion of the characterizations of Louis in the mainstream press, see Chris Mead, *Joe Louis: Black Hero in White America* (New York: Scribner, 1985), 50-1, 62-4; and William H. Wiggins, Jr., “Boxing’s Sambo Twins: Racial Stereotypes in Jack Johnson and Joe Louis Newspaper Cartoons, 1908 to 1938,” *Journal of Sport History*, 15, no. 3, (Spring 1988), 242-54; for discussions of the myth of the black rapist and the black man as beast, see Gaines, 67-70; and Glenda E. Gilmore, 82-3.

¹⁴ Henderson, “The Negro Athlete and Race Prejudice,” 79; for a discussion of virile masculinity, see Bederman, 178-84; *emphasis mine*.

transposed in the mainstream and black press as competitions of the virtual manliness and virility of the nations involved, white Americans cheered these black men as representatives of the nation's manliness. Such adulation provoked Henderson to proclaim, "These athletes are American athletes," products of American civilization, rather than solely members of a degenerative race.¹⁵

Although similar assertions pervaded the black press, Henderson's 1936 essay provided the most comprehensive attempt to posit the emergence of champion black athletes as evidence of a superior manliness among blacks. As a trained academic, Henderson employed the discourse of civilization, the moral and manly evolution of society, to scientifically validate his argument. His article cited the black radical research of physical anthropologist Dr. William Montague Cobb, a professor of anatomy, who also employed the discourse of civilization to explain the success of black athletes in interracial athletic competition. In the mid-1930s, Cobb, a former track standout, observed many of the nation's best track and field athletes and concluded that while "in a few specialized events a particularly body structure may confer advantages" to a competitor, there was no evidence to suggest that champion athletes, black, white or otherwise, in any particular field possessed an archetypical anatomical build. His research contested the idea of biological racial differences or that champion black athletes were aided by unique anatomical features by illustrating that racially identified groups did not possess an anatomical homogeneity that distinguished them from other groups. The lower limb measurements of Owens, for example, were categorically typical of those assigned to Caucasians. He further noted that several past black champions, like Howard Drew, lacked "distinctly Negro features" and were routinely identified as white or foreign. As such, there was little evidence to support the claim that a specific anatomical structure accounted for the success of black sprinters or athletes of any racial grouping. (Ultimately, Cobb argued that blacks were not a distinct race, but instead a categorical creation of US racism and laws.) Although he noted the need for further research before a conclusive assessment could be declared, Cobb supported Owens's

¹⁵ Henderson, "The Negro Athlete and Racial Prejudice," 77-9; for a discussion of masculinity as an important component of manliness, see Bederman, 16-20; for a discussion of international athletics and nationalism, see Benjamin G. Rader, *American Sports: From the Age of Folk Games to the Age of Televised Sports*, 4th ed. (Prentice Hall: Upper Saddle River, NJ, 1999): 201-6; and Randy Roberts and James Olsen, *Winning is the Only Thing: Sports in America since 1945* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 5-6.

conclusion that black athletes' success were a product of their intellect, desire and years of training—"industry, training, incentive and courage," all of which were considered traits of a superior manliness, rather than simply an innate racialized brawn.¹⁶

Noting that the research of "Dr. Cobb has scientifically disproved the one and twenty theories that Negro athletes have peculiar anatomical structures," Dr. Henderson issued his own educated "guess" to explain the championship athletic exploits of blacks.

When one recalls that it is estimated that only one Negro slave in five was able to live through the rigors of the "Middle Passage," and that the horrible conditions of slavery took toll of many slaves who could not make biological adjustments in a hostile environment, one finds the Darwinian theory of survival of the fit operating among Negroes as rigorously as any selective process ever operated among human beings. There is just a likelihood that some very vital elements persist in the historical tissues of the glands or muscles of Negro athletes.¹⁷

Henderson's hypothesis paralleled that of black moderates such as Washington, who argued that slavery, it's brutal and chattel nature notwithstanding, produced an advanced progeny that differed from other African peoples by its graphed capability to contribute to and spread civilization.¹⁸ As notable, he surmised that slavery acted as a Darwinian process that evolved the masculinity of blacks as a group, just as the frontier had improved the manly stock of whites, and that if blacks were further morally cultivated by elite-guided programs of physical education, the athletic service of black men, much like their military service, would provide evidence of blacks' manliness to participate in the advance of the US, thus accruing blacks recognition as valuable citizens. The present mainstream recognition of black athletes, he concluded, "behooves educators and racial agencies for uplift to make greater social use of athletics." In addition to developing the character or "the qualities known collectively as good sportsmanship" of the

¹⁶ W. Montague Cobb, "Race and Runners," *Journal of Health and Physical Education* 7, 1 (Jan. 1936): 3-7, 52-6; for Owens's discussion of his ability, see Donald McRae, *Heroes without a Country: America's Betrayal of Joe Louis and Jesse Owens* (New York: Ecco, 2002), 93.

¹⁷ Henderson, "The Negro Athlete and Race Prejudice," 78-9.

¹⁸ Gaines, 37-9; Also see Robin D. G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002), 22; and Rod Bush, *We Are Not What We Seem: Black Nationalism and Class Struggle in the American Century* (New York University Press, 1999), 145-7.

masses through athletics, “we will be developing future good-will ambassadors,” blacks whose athletic accomplishments would improve the image of the race.¹⁹

It was precisely for this reason that Henderson’s 1936 essay and much of the traditional black establishment celebrated black Olympians and Louis, both of whom they suggested were poised to garner recognition for blacks by illustrating that American men possessed a superior and more virile manliness than males of other nations. Escalating European tensions that threatened to involve the US in another global conflict bolstered the black press’ enthusiastic pronouncements. In early 1933, Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party commandeered the German government, and in addition to aggravating tensions with other European imperialists, Nazi anti-Semitic pronouncements provoked Jewish and much of European and American civil society to demand that their nations’ boycott the games or the 1936 Olympics be moved from Berlin. The International Olympic Committee (IOC) and Avery Brundage, the influential head of the American Olympic movement, however, argued that Germany’s political and ethnic policies were inconsequential to its ability to host the games and after securing paper promises that Jewish athletes would be included on the German team, the US and international protests stalled. In September 1935, however, Nazi enactment of the Nuremberg laws, which effectively stripped German Jews of citizenship, reinvigorated the movements.²⁰ The following March (1936), Germany violated the Treaty of Versailles and further escalated imperial tensions by sending troops to occupy the mineral-rich Rhineland region, a demilitarized zone that had been a source of conflict with France. Concomitantly the Nazis and Italy’s fascist government backed a fascist coup attempt of Spain’s democratic government. German territorial aggression and the resulting Spanish Civil War threatened to precipitate the first large-scale fighting in Europe since WWI. Despite the official US course of neutrality and mediation, President Franklin

¹⁹ Henderson, “The Negro Athlete and Racial Prejudice,” 79; *emphasis mine*.

²⁰ McRae, 113; Wiggins, *Glory Bound*, 61-71; Richard Lapchick, *The Politics of Race and International Sport: The Case of South Africa* (Westport, CN: Greenwood Press, 1975), 4-19, 103-4.

Roosevelt's administration bemoaned that Nazi foreign policy, rearmament and trade policies made US involvement in Europe's imperial conflicts inevitable.²¹

Several black entities, such as the NAACP and *The New York Amsterdam News*, supported the international campaign to boycott the German games. However, the majority of the black press, according to historian David K. Wiggins, argued that it was disingenuous to participate in a boycott authored by white Americans demanding Jewish equality, because many whites did not actively support domestic anti-lynching or civil rights legislation. As important, Wiggins further reveals that the black press surreptitiously suggested that the ideal means of combating Aryan and white supremacy were to allow Owens and the eighteen other black Olympians to best German and white athletes in Berlin.²² Many black periodicals did not openly participate in the boycott debate, but during the spring-summer months that it ensued, they enthusiastically supported US participation in the Berlin Olympics as a means of black advancement. *Opportunity*, for instance, noted that the "brown Americans" who "will march under the eyes of Hitler as representatives of American Democracy...will be the living refutation of the sinister doctrine of racial superiority."²³ *The New York Age*, a black weekly, suggested that the sterling performance of several blacks at the US Olympic trials meant that "the Olympic situation seems to get worse and worse, i.e., as far as Nordic supremacy is concerned."²⁴ Henderson added that "Joe Louis and Jesse Owens are but symbols of a modern return to the golden age of Greece when education was begun in play, and the years that passed were measured in Olympiads."²⁵ For the traditional black establishment, Owens's place on the Olympic team and Louis's scheduled June bout against Schmeling placed both in the invaluable position to reduce Aryan and white supremacy to physiological rubble. As such, much of the traditional black press not only supported US participation, but several entities contributed much-needed travel funds to the US team, which was being boycotted by many of its usual

²¹ C. A. MacDonald, *The United States, Britain and Appeasement, 1936-9* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981), 1-10.

²² Wiggins, *Glory Bound*, 63-7.

²³ "Democracy in Athletics," *Opportunity*, August 1936, 228.

²⁴ *New York Age*, 4 July 1936, p. 9.

²⁵ Henderson, "The Negro Athlete and Racial Prejudice," 79.

wealthy Jewish patrons.²⁶ Widespread black support for US participation in the Berlin games suggested that by 1936, much of the traditional black establishment believed that black athletic accomplishments, whether as a means of demonstrating a superior manliness among blacks and/or service to the nation, presented a better opportunity to secure recognition of their citizenship than protest. Three decades later, the traditional black establishment would articulate a similar sentiment in response to black radicals' call to boycott the 1968 US Olympic team in protest of continued discrimination against blacks.

By 1968, the black establishment's belief that participation in white-controlled athletic institutions advanced blacks had been bolstered by decades of athletic accomplishments, seminal of which were the performance of blacks at the 1936 Olympics and Louis's initial reign as the world's heavyweight boxing champion from 1937 to 1949. In August 1936, the black Olympians foiled the Nazi's intent to use the Berlin Olympics as a showcase for Aryan supremacy. Although the host German team garnered the most medals, nine of the eleven black track and field athletes medaled and overall, the eighteen blacks contributed eighty-three of the US's team high 167 points, to help the US team to a second-place total and as importantly, foil assertions of Nazi dominance. In addition to refuting Aryan supremacy, the traditional black press suggested that their overall performance was evidence of blacks' superior manly American ability. Indeed, the *Pittsburgh Courier* suggested that blacks so dominated the oval that "if any of the vast throngs who filled the huge stadium left the individual track and field championships believing that Uncle Sam was a mulatto instead of a Nordic blonde, on the face of the performances they would have been justified." As notable, Owens emerged as the games' star, winning three individual gold medals, a fourth as a member of the 4X400 meters relay squad and established a world's record in the broad jump.²⁷ His unprecedented performance, as well as a reported (but false) snub by Hitler, wrought Owens international celebrity. Pictures of Owens, with USA emblazoned across his jersey, accompanied stories of the black Olympians' feats in periodicals throughout the world, including the *Jim Crow South*.

²⁶ *Pittsburg Courier*, 18 July 1936, sec.1, p. 1.

²⁷ *Pittsburgh Courier*, 15 August 1936, p. 4.

The New York Times reported that even the German press, which was typically derisive of non-Aryans, praised the blacks and “hailed” Owens as “the super-athlete.”²⁸

In addition to explaining how the athletic victories of blacks discredited Aryan supremacy, the proud American press attributed Owens’s success to his manly character. *Newsweek*, for instance, depicted Owens as a self-made man with a strenuous work ethic; “One of eight children of a cotton picker who now works in a Cleveland garage,” who was working his way through college and “neither smokes nor drinks.” The article further testified to his character by noting that “The Democrats now want him to run for office” and that in addition to wanting to “cash in” on his Olympic fame, he held ambitions to teach and work with black youth. His hometown newspaper, *The Cleveland Plain Dealer*, further heralded him as a model of the Horatio Alger work ethic that made American men successful and also noted his humility and piety.²⁹ Perhaps the grandest honor paid the black Olympians was acknowledgement that they were “American,” men who possessed the superior manliness that made the nation geopolitically superior, by several mainstream entities. A most notable instance occurred on 3 September 1936 in New York City. In the city’s ticker tape parade honoring the returning Olympians, Owens rode in the lead car and the procession deviated through Harlem in honor of the contribution of blacks before ending in a commemorative service on Randall’s Island. Amongst fellow and former Olympians and iconic athletes such as Babe Ruth, Mayor Fiorello La Guardia singled-out Owens as the “leading member of the 1936 American Olympic team.” In response to the Nazi assertion that blacks were exploited “black auxiliaries,” only added to the US team to ensure that the US defeated the Nazis, La Guardia proclaimed “Jesse, on behalf of New York City, I hail you as an American boy. We are all Americans here; we have no auxiliaries in this country.”³⁰

²⁸ *New York Times*, 7 August 1936, p. L13; Charles H. Williams, “Negro Athletes in the Eleventh Olympiad,” *The Southern Workman*, February 1937, 58-9.

²⁹ “XI Olympics: James Cleveland Owens’s Name Led All the Rest,” *Newsweek*, 13 August 1936, 23, 26; “Saga of Jesse Owens” *The Crisis*, September 1936, 367; originally published in the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*.

³⁰ *New York Times*, 4 September 1936, p. 21; Mark Dyreson, “From Civil Rights to Scientific Racism: The Variety of Responses to the Berlin Olympics, the Legend Jesse Owens and the ‘Race Question,’” in *Critical Reflections on Olympic Ideology* eds. Robert K. Barney and Klaus Meier (London, Canada: International Centre for Olympic Studies, 1994), 49-50.

Initially, Louis did not fare as well as Owens against the Nazis. Boxing experts favored the black fighter over Schmeling in their first bout in June 1936. However, the mainstream press championed the German, despite increasing American condemnation of Nazi anti-Semitism. When Schmeling earned a technical knockout of the previously unbeaten Louis, much of the American mainstream and Nazi press proclaimed his victory the logical outcome of white supremacy. Schmeling was then scheduled to be the next challenger for the champion Braddock. However, American fear of an Aryan holding the world's most virile title, in addition to an unsuitable financial purse, prevented a Braddock-Schmeling fight from materializing. The racially amicable Braddock, convinced by a substantial payday, then granted Louis a title shot. On 22 June 1937, before a racially partisan crowd of 45,000 in Chicago's Cosmiskey Park, Louis knocked out Braddock in the 8th round to become only the second African American to earn the heavyweight championship.³¹ Black America was rapturous; as would occur throughout his reign as champion, blacks took to the streets across the nation, including a few cities in the Jim Crow south, to celebrate, as Maya Angelou remembered, the "night when Joe Louis proved that we were the strongest people in the world."³²

Louis quickly announced his desire for a rematch with Schmeling, which, because of financial wrangling and anti-Nazi sentiment, was delayed a year, until June 1938. In the interim, imperial politics heightened the meaning of the rematch. In early 1938, Germany militarily annexed Austria and began preparations to invade Czechoslovakia. Additionally, the international press began detailing the Nazi's mass genocide of Jews. Although the US supported European diplomatic negotiations to halt Germany's territorial aggression, Roosevelt and his advisors privately lamented the imminence of military conflict. These tensions were replicated in the mainstream commentary surrounding the second Schmeling-Louis fight. In his examination of the domestic press, author Donald McRae concluded that the event "engendered a fierce nationalism in the nation" and "united a country fractured by race. Rather than

³¹ McRae, 108-30, 185-90; Arthur Ashe, Jr., *A Hard Road to Glory, vol. 2: A History of the African-American Athlete, 1919-1945*, (New York: Amistad, 1988), 15.

³² Maya Angelou, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (New York: Random House, 1969), 132; *Pittsburgh Courier*, 2 July 1938; p. 2; *Atlanta Daily World*, 25 September 1935, p. 1; *Washington Post*, 23 June 1968, p. X1.

describing the fight as a contest between a Negro and white man, as many had done only two years before, newspapers now depicted it as a struggle between an American and a German. The American symbolized freedom; the German represented fascism.” In addition to being hailed as the overwhelming favorite by the mainstream media, Louis was summoned to the White House, where FDR was photographed feeling the black man’s bicep and quoted telling, “Joe, we need muscles like yours to beat Germany.” The favorable treatment even motivated Louis, who as one of the conditions of a black man reigning in a white-controlled institution generally reframed from gloating over opponents and discussing politics, to expound on the meaning of the match. On the day of the fight, he told reporters, “I not only fight the battle of my life to revenge the lone blot on my record, but I fight for America against the challenge of a foreign invader, Max Schmeling. This isn’t just one man against another, or Joe Louis boxing Max Schmeling; it is the good old USA versus Germany.” On the night of 22 June 1938, a record radio audience of more than seventy millions Americans tuned in to hear Louis knockout the German in two minutes and forty-eight seconds in the first round. His victory was celebrated as a defense of the nation’s virility and, like the Olympic performance of Owens two years earlier, garnered a black man rare patriotic praise. In the mainstream press, the once-menace to white male superiority was now praised as an “American.”³³

The traditional black establishment believed that the adulation of black athletes that proliferated through the mainstream press and abroad educated whites to blacks’ ability to possess character and manliness and thus, improved race relations. Shortly after the Olympics, Charles H. Williams, a coach and administrator at Hampton Institute, wrote that the mainstream praise of the athletes “disclosed a world...more willing to pay homage where homage is due. The press in every section of our own country was generous in carrying in its front and sports pages glowing accounts of the exploits of the Negro athletes...The American people were proud to have been represented by young men who so ably defended the Stars and Stripes of foreign soil.” Williams declared that through their demonstration and

³³ Mead, 132-45; McRae, 110, 195-201; Gerald Astor, “...And a Credit to His Race”: *The Hard Life and Times of Joseph Louis Barrow a.k.a. Joe Louis* (New York: Saturday Review Press, 1974), 164-70.

character, they “won new friends for the race they represented.”³⁴ *The Pittsburgh Courier* also suggested that the athletes’ display of superior ability improved their race’s image. During the games, it pointed out that “colored American athletes now doing their bit for the United States at the Olympic games in Berlin, have achieved a status abroad, that it is [*sic*] scarcely suspected is theirs when in their native land. Radio broadcasts have pictured them, not as Negroes, but as Americans.” Hoping that whites at home would accept this meaning of their accomplishments, the *Courier* concluded “That is what they are, Americans, without hyphens, with roots deep in the American soil. It is indeed good for America as a whole to learn there are Americans...in Germany today, upholding the good old Stars and Stripes.”³⁵ Indeed, although the black press was certain that athletic accomplishments indicated that blacks possessed a superior manliness, many were skeptical that whites would admit it. On the eve of Louis’s championship bout with Schmeling in 1937, Marcus Garvey, a black radical with little faith that whites would ever recognize blacks’ equality and humanity, hoped black athletes’ accomplishments would inspire and inform blacks throughout the Diaspora of their ability to contribute to civilization, most notably those in Africa.³⁶ Garvey’s analysis is exceptional in that most black intellectuals suggested that athletic accomplishments indicated that blacks possessed a manliness worthy of being considered complete Americans. Nevertheless, his commentary is evidence of the proliferating belief that athletic accomplishments demonstrated the blacks possessed a superior manliness capable of contributing to the advancement of civilization.

The manliness associated with athletes in the 1930s’ black press was generally a cross of the Victorian notions of bourgeois morality that evolved in the nineteenth century and the more modern ethos of masculinity that emerged with the advent of a full blown consumer economy surrounding the-turn-of the twentieth century. In Victorian America, manliness connoted those moral traits that were believed to aid a man’s socioeconomic success in a competitive society and rationalized his access to politics.

³⁴ Williams, “Negro Athletes in the Eleventh Olympiad,” 58-9.

³⁵ *Pittsburgh Courier*, 8 August 1936, sec. 2, p. 5.

³⁶ Marcus Garvey, “The American Negro in Sport,” *Black Man*, March-April 1937, 17.

Victorian manliness, or a man's "character" as it was usually termed, generally included such moral qualities as honesty, piety, sobriety and practical restraint and a commitment to work ethic, which included industry, thrift and punctuality. Industrialization and the transformation of the American economy from producer-based to consumer-based in the decades surrounding the turn of the twentieth century and the growth of corporate business, which made it increasingly difficult for individuals to obtain the economic independence and stability that had substantiated their forefathers political and social rank, precipitated challenges to established Victorian notions of middle-class manliness. As industrialization forced more men to work for others, market forces made economic stability tenuous and the working-classes, women and racial minorities organized to challenge the established privilege of the well-to-do, younger generations of aspiring middle-class men with less opportunity for wealth and sociopolitical significance cast for new means to substantiate a meaningful manly elitism. Although adherence to Victorian bourgeois morality continued to retain importance, by the first decade of the century, manliness also included a virile "masculinity," which was often associated with a muscular body, expressive sexuality and an increasing material consumption. The shift in manliness occurred gradually and generationally, as several scholars have acknowledged, and the two variants, although at times contradicting, were not mutually exclusive. Nevertheless, older men wedded to Victorian-minded notions of manliness often initiated generational debates concerning the utility of a virile manliness to social mobility and economic success, particularly in comparison to a respectable character and bourgeois morality.³⁷ Although few intellectuals in the black community would question that blacks' athletic accomplishments denoted a manly ability, there were those who questioned the contribution of athletic accomplishments to the black struggle for equality. Ultimately those debates, as this section will detail, illustrate the certainty the belief attained in the traditional black establishment following the ascendance of Louis and Owens.

The traditional black establishment celebration of black athletes emphasized Victorian notions of manliness, often insinuating that character was often essential to their athletic success. As an example, a

³⁷ Summers, 1-9; Bederman, 10-20.

May 1936 editorial in *The Crisis* termed Louis “our ambassador of good will” because he “rose from obscurity to a place of eminence in the world of sports through his active portrayal of the concepts and ideals of Americanism.” The editorial suggested that Louis had obtained the opportunity to defend the nation against Schmeling, a Nazi foe, because in addition to his virility, he was sufficiently moral; he “stands as an idol of fight fans, not only because he is the best in his field, but because he conducts himself as a MAN.” The article pointed out to other blacks, as the traditional black establishment so often did, that such demonstrations of character annulled racism: Louis’s “code of living and doing can be accepted so easily by all the rest of Aframerica” and “When our men and women in every walk of life talk natural, and act natural, the vexing problems of our lives,” racial discrimination, “will solve themselves.” The article articulated the traditional black uplift belief that the cultivation of character earned blacks respectability.³⁸

Only occasionally did the traditional black establishment correlate their athletes with a powerful virile masculinity. Louis remembered that his pastor preached that the fighter “was supposed to show that Negroes were tired of being muddled around in the ground.”³⁹ Such assertions, however, were not to be taken literally. Black elites, for instance, routinely condemned the mass impromptu street celebrations that erupted in cities across the nation followed the victories of Louis and other black fighters. They suggested that such “riotous cavortings,” which often included accosting whites, annulled the accomplishments of champion black athletes and would provoke the white establishment to end blacks’ opportunities in sports.⁴⁰ Although unstated in the black press, there was also worry that this open celebration of black triumphs over whites would provoke further violence against black communities.⁴¹ As such, although it was the essence of black folk accounts of black boxers in the period, the notion that

³⁸ “Ambassador of Good Will,” *The Crisis*, May 1936, 147; originally published in *The Pittsburgh Courier*.

³⁹ Joe Louis with Edna and Art Rust, Jr., *Joe Louis: My Life* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), 63.

⁴⁰ “A Real Champion,” *Opportunity*, October 1939, 290-1; also see “Hurting Our Champions,” *The Crisis*, August 1938, 317.

⁴¹ Charles S. Johnson, *Growing up in the Black Belt: Negro Youth in the Rural South* (New York: Schocken Books, 1970), 242-6; originally published in 1940; Walter L. Weare, *Black Business in the New South: A Social History of North Carolina* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois, 1973), 250-1.

champion athletes represented blacks' ability to physically defeat white supremacy was absent from the traditional black establishment's accounts of superlative black athletes.⁴² At most, the traditional black establishment issued adroit statements like *The Crisis's* suggestion that "the beautiful breasting of a tape by Jesse Owens and the thud of a glove on the hand of Joe Louis carry more 'interracial education' than all the erudite philosophy ever written on race."⁴³

The black press' assertions that the success of black athletes resulted from work ethic, piety and other traits of Victorian manliness supposedly engrained in American men also allowed the black and liberal press to assert the immorality of discriminating against such accomplished men as Olympians, regardless of their skin color. The black press, as several scholars have demonstrated, was the first to seize upon the rhetoric of comparing Nazi anti-Semitism and anti-black discrimination to undermine the later and legitimize their struggle for advancement. The employment of such rhetoric began as early as 1936, as a prescience of what would become known as the "Nazi Olympics."⁴⁴ *The New York Age* correctly predicted that after "politicians finished singing the praises of the Black Auxiliary and...presenting them with the keys of their respective cities," the black Olympians would again be Jim Crowed like the nation's other twelve million blacks. By comparison, he noted that white team members would capitalize on the endorsement and job opportunities typically offered to Olympians. But, he concluded, "That is how they do things in the land of the free, but in Nazi-land, where that bad man, Hitler reigns, promotions and better paying jobs have already been given to victorious sons of the Olympiad."⁴⁵ The view was articulated in the liberal press as well. Oswald Garrison Villard, a cofounder of the NAACP, editor of *The Nation* and grandson of the radical white abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison, found the performance of the black Olympians "highly amusing" because it occurred in the

⁴² For examples of black folk accounts, see Angelou, 129-32; Richard Wright, "High Tide in Harlem: Joe Louis as a Symbol of Freedom," *New Masses*, 5 July 1938, 18-20; Malcolm X with Alex Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (New York: Ballentine, 1999), 24-5.

⁴³ "Joe Louis and Jesse Owens" *The Crisis*, August 1935, 241.

⁴⁴ Penny M. Von Eshen, *Race against Empire: Black Americanism and Anticolonialism, 1937-1956* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell, 1997), 153; Jacqueline Dowd Hall, "The Long Civil Rights Movement and Political Uses of the Past," *Journal of American History*, 91, no. 4 (2005): 1247.

⁴⁵ *New York Age*, 15 August 1936, p. 9.

presence of “the spurious leader of Aryanism.” However, he hoped that it would have greater effect domestically by exposing whites to black men of character. He noted that during the games, the mainstream press portrayed the black athletes as patriotic, educated, diligent, sober, mannerly and masculine. Villard further insinuated blacks’ civility by what he hoped was their response to Hitler’s reported refusal to personally congratulate them; “I should think they would be rather relieved not to have to take the blood-stained paw of the monster.” He suggested that if they had been forced to meet the fuhrer, they would be “beyond being hurt” because

We Americans have trained them too well for that with our own discrimination, our own slights, our own insults, which do not even spare their women, which often poison their childhood and youth, precisely as the Jewish children in Germany are tortured to their very souls by being told in their schools that they are inferior beasts, mere contact with whom is leprous.⁴⁶

In the estimation of Villard and many others who opposed the virulence of anti-black discrimination in American society, American racists were as uncivilized as Nazis.

Accompanying the increasing certainty of athletic accomplishments as an indicator that blacks possessed manliness in the black press was also an ardent suggestion that black colleges increase their financial and moral support of significant Olympic sports such as track, in hopes that cultivating more Olympians would further demonstrate blacks’ worthiness for complete citizenship. As important, their advocacy animated an existing debate concerning the proper emphasis of athletics at black schools and the impact of athletic accomplishments on the black struggle. Within the debate, advocates for an increased emphasis of sports at black schools articulated an argument that continues to give meaning to black athletes in black America.

The May 1936 of *The Crisis* published an article by James D. Parks, a former track coach at Lincoln (PA) University, which surveyed the promising Olympic prospects of Owens and several blacks. As notable to Parks, however, was the fact that black schools had failed to ever produce a single Olympian. He acknowledged the financial restraints of the poorly-funded segregated institutions: few had “first-class” cinder tracks, access to the necessary indoor-track facilities for year round training, employed

⁴⁶ Oswald Garrison Villard, “Issues and Men,” *The Nation*, 15 August 1936, 185.

a full-time track coach or funded track or other Olympic sports in proportion to popular sports such as football. Parks, however, cited misguided administrators as the primary reason for the inferior state of track and field at black schools. They “do not seem to realize that the development of even a single Owens or Metcalfe would bring more national and international renown to their institutions than a thousand of their so-called football ‘Classics,’ which black schools “play among themselves” and therefore, “gain no national recognition.” By comparison, track meets, save those in the South, typically invited blacks. Parks suggested that by training Olympians, black schools would earn a patriotic reputation for the cultivation of the manliness necessary to sustain that US’s geopolitical dominance. The failure of black schools to do so suggested that the race assigned a low priority or was unable to cultivate manliness. *The New York Age* implied as much by warning that if black schools failed to improve their support of track, potential black Olympians “may desert these schools and matriculate at mixed schools where they can receive the training and other things which go along to make a great athlete.”⁴⁷ Other advocates simply suggested that developing Olympians would increase the prestige and finances of black schools.⁴⁸ These arguments were stimulated by the ascendance of black Olympians, of course, but as importantly, signaled the growing importance that some blacks attached to athletic accomplishments.

The advocacy, however, also challenged the established Progressive belief of many educators that the primary use of athletics should be to cultivate the character or bourgeois morality of their charges. Resultantly, a number of black college administrators, faculty and intellectuals rejected the call for an increased emphasis on athletics because “athletes” were not indicative of the Victorian notions of manliness that garnered men respectability. In December 1937, at the annual conference of the Colored Intercollegiate Athletic Association (CIAA), an athletic association of mid-Atlantic black colleges, Arthur Howe, the president of Hampton Institute, told an audience of faculty, administrators and coaches from various black schools that “Training students for participation in professional sports is not a matter of education.” He suggested that their contributions and earning potential would be temporary, lasting only

⁴⁷ James D. Parks, “Negro Athletes in the 1936 Olympiad,” *Opportunity*, May 1936, 146; *The New York Age*, 1 August 1936, p. 9; Also see Henderson, “The Negro Athlete and Racial Prejudice,” 79.

⁴⁸ William M. Bell, “Next, The Olympics!” *Opportunity*, September 1938, 268-9.

as long as their athletic careers. “Any education of worth must be a preparation for life and not the first half of it.” Even those who would become coaches and athletic directors, he argued, “should have the broadest physical education possible” because they would be responsible for cultivating others. As such, he recommended that athletics be administered by “men who appreciate the main purpose of educational institutions and who knew how to conduct athletics without harmful over-emphasis” on winning, producing revenue and generating fame and publicity at the cost of cultivating the character of their charges. Howe, who five years earlier suggested that the accomplishments of blacks at the 1932 Olympics symbolized the cultural, material and moral progress of blacks since emancipation, did not reject the idea that athletic accomplishments indicated blacks possessed a superior manliness, but rather suggested that virility was not necessarily a trait that signaled that blacks possessed a manliness worthy of complete recognition of their rights; for instance, he further concluded that “on the question of character-developing qualities of athletics, experience through the years indicates that college athletes are no better and no worse morally than any other group of undergraduates.”⁴⁹ At the following conference in 1938, Frank T. Wilson, a dean at Lincoln (PA) University, concurred by noting that such “fallacy...have been demonstrated time and again when the hero of ‘the chalk-ribboned field of fame’ was confronted with practical barriers to his personal progress in the world of affairs beyond college walls.”⁵⁰ Their opinions

⁴⁹ Arthur Howe, “Athletics- Amateur or Professional,” *The Southern Workman*, LVXII, 11 (November 1938), 329; originally published in *The C.I.A.A. Bulletin*, 1937; Arthur Howe, “Two Racers and What They Symbolize,” *The Southern Workman*, (October 1932), 387-9.

⁵⁰ Frank T. Wilson, “A College Dean Looks at Intercollegiate Athletics,” in *The 1938 Bulletin of The Colored Intercollegiate Athletic Association with Proceedings of the Nineteen Thirty-Seven Meeting* compiled by J. L. Whitehead (Hampton, VA: Hampton Institute Press, 1938), 19-21.

In one exceptional instance, Wilson and Howe may have been more accurate than they knew. In the months following the games, Owens had been dismissed from OSU and for the next decade supported his family on a variety of odd jobs and supplemented his income by racing against thoroughbreds, greyhounds, Negro League baseball players, clowns and even his good friend, Joe Louis. A decade after his magnificent Olympic achievements, one veteran black journalist and advocate of integrated sports as means to demonstrate the manliness of blacks, noted that Owens participation in such demeaning publicity stunts shamed him as a “black eye” to black athletes and people; McRae, 159-61, 213; Frank A. Young, “June 9, 1945,” in *Black Writers/ Black Baseball: An Anthology of Articles from Black Sportswriters who Covered the Negro Leagues* by Jim Reisler (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1994), 68.

were typical of men who did not consider athletics a career and virility a trait that earned men, especially the Negro, a middle-class bourgeois status and resultant citizenship privileges.⁵¹

The Victorian concerns that spurred the rejection of an increased emphasis of athletics were likely motivated by the desire of some administrators and educators to distance their institutions from the scandals and growing unsavory reputation associated with intercollegiate sports in the era. Beginning in the early 1920s, the mainstream press began reporting widespread academic and financial corruption in college athletics. As the number of scandals increased, educators' concern prompted a massive five-year investigation of intercollegiate sports. The resulting Carnegie Report of 1929 concluded that the illegal subsidies and special academic considerations afforded some athletes and the excessive influence of athletic-supporting boosters diminished the quality of education at several universities.⁵² Although the Carnegie Foundation did not investigate black institutions, similar eligibility, academic and smaller-scale financial scandals pervaded black intercollegiate sports and caused administrations at several black colleges including Fisk and Howard to de-emphasize athletics.⁵³ The 1929 report renewed concerns that the immoral practices associated with intercollegiate athletics might further tarnish the already precarious mainstream reputation of black educational institutions. DuBois and his protégée, George Streater, for instance, wrote a series of articles that suggested that the pervasive ethical violations in black intercollegiate athletics validated negrophobic stereotypes concerning a moral and cultural laxity among blacks. (This was despite the fact that similar violations occurred as routinely, if not in greater proportion at predominately white schools.) Streater stressed the "need for a national code of ethics for Negro college athletics" because black schools "are not observing the accepted amateur standards of 'white'

⁵¹ Summers, 162.

⁵² John R. Thelin, *Games College Play: Scandals and Reform in Intercollegiate Athletics* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1994), 21-32; Rader, *American Sports*, 75-87; Murray Sperber, *Onward to Victory: The Crisis that Shaped College Sports* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1989), 30.

⁵³ Patrick B. Miller, "To Bring the Race along Rapidly": Sport, Student Culture and Educational Mission at Historically Black Colleges during the Interwar Years," *History of Education Quarterly*, 35, 2, (Summer 1995), 125-8.

colleges...If the situation requires a different standard, this standard ought to be agreed upon” and therefore, black college sports would at least have the appearance of propriety.⁵⁴

Streator and DuBois’s concerns suggested that Victorian notions of respectability were of greater importance for black schools than demonstrating their ability to cultivate virile men. They were among a number of prominent intellectuals who supported the efforts of administrators to exercise greater institutional control of intercollegiate athletics because ultimately, the failure of athletic departments to adhere to established ethics reflected negatively on all black schools and blacks. Half a decade later, following the success of the 1936 black Olympics, educators continued to be guided by this sentiment. Howe, for instance, decried the influence of those who would tarnish the reputation of black schools and sacrifice their educational mission for the lure of publicity and financial gains. Wilson also argued that those who sought to make athletics the main objective of universities needed to be checked. The commentary of these intellectuals iterated the familiar traditional black advancement belief that if African Americans expected their institutions and accomplishments to be recognized as respectable and contribute to the goal of integration, blacks must adhere to the peculiar logic of bourgeois morality, despite its often racist inclinations. Experience taught them that depraved department in sports, despite its rampancy in white institutions, simply provided racists with a rational veneer.⁵⁵

In response to educators’ concerns, advocates of an increased emphasis on athletics enhanced their arguments. They acknowledged the necessity of cultivating character among blacks as a prerequisite for their race’s advancement, but also used the recent examples of the 1936 black Olympians and Louis to demonstrate that illustrating a virile manliness was as an effective means of improving the image of blacks. At the 1938 CIAA conference, a year following Howe’s speech, the Honorable Joseph T. Rainey, a former sports administrator and track coach at Lincoln (PA) University, made such an argument. He lectured those administrators, coaches and athletes who chose “to gather together from time to time for

⁵⁴ George W. Streater, “Negro Football Standards,” *The Crisis* March 1931, 85-6; Also see W.E.B. DuBois, “Athletics in Negro Colleges,” *The Crisis*, June 1930, 209-10; George W. Streater, “Football in Negro Colleges,” *The Crisis* April 1932, 129-30;

⁵⁵ Wiggins, *Glory Bound*, 223-5; Wilson, 20; Howe, “Athletics- Amateur or Professional,” 330.

the purpose of considering how we may better serve our racial group and our country through the matter of development of lofty pitched sports competition” on the “practicality and absolute necessity of more emphasis placed on the Negro Athlete as good will ambassador.” It was paramount that black institutions observe the “high” principals of amateurism, but simultaneously “put more and more into [athletics as a] program of easing the burden of the Negro in America through the medium of better understanding between the racial groups.” He attempted to demonstrate through his experiences as an athlete, coach and administrator, that blacks who demonstrated virility through athletics earned a measure of respect from whites unusual for black men. He remembered that after the performance of black world-class sprinter Eulace Peacock, an Owens’s rival, at the Penn Relays several years earlier, those southern whites competing against him, “to a man, expressed a sincere regret that Peacock, presumably their intellectual equal and certainly their athletic superior” could not compete in the South “without the possibility of embarrassment.” Furthermore, Rainey explained, sport had provided the only opportunity for those southern whites to make “social contact” with blacks on “common ground.” After several like examples, Rainey felt compelled to “plead” with the CIAA delegates “for more effort in the direction of interracial competition on a lofty plane.” He suggested that continued and even greater black advancement through sport required not only improved facilities, but also the continuation of athletic scholarships. Before concluding, he extolled the names of Paul Robeson, Fritz Pollard and Drew, (ironically, all men whom had participated in sports at predominately white universities) and asked the delegates to consider “what their contributions to a better understanding between racial groups must have been...In more recent years, contemporary with our times, think of what tremendous effect Jesse Owens must have had on white youth- and oldsters.” Rainey’s speech acknowledged that respectability and propriety were important for racial advancement, but he was ardent in his conviction that demonstrating a virile masculinity had proven as beneficial. Indeed, he noted that one of his “greatest regrets” in leaving his post at Lincoln several years earlier was his failure to complete plans for a track meet with a nearby predominately white college. Rainey had deprived his race of an opportunity to advance and he urged the respective men who

controlled athletics at black schools not to make the same mistake.⁵⁶ A similar ardency was present in other appeals for increased support for athletics. At the following CIAA conference, Bluefield (WV) State College's Harry J. Capehart, a former US District Attorney, told delegates that "The Negro Athlete and Victory" were tantamount in importance to the Biblical Esther's beauty, which allowed her to influence the Persian king and save her Jewish people from a pogrom.⁵⁷

At the least, those who advocated a greater emphasis on sports at black institutions believed that the virile masculinity demonstrated by black athletes benefited black advancement as much as demonstrations of blacks possessing character. In the decades following the ascendance of Owens and Louis, this advocacy, though sometimes subtle or implied, became the dominant articulation of the utility and meaning of athletics and athletes in black America.⁵⁸ The notion, however, was initially solidified in black America by Henderson's acclaimed *The Negro in Sports*. Published in 1939, two years after Louis captured the heavyweight title and three years after blacks' remarkable performances at the Nazi Olympians, the work was the first book-length treatise on the contribution of athletes to the black struggle. Henderson attempted to validate the respectability of black athletes, by promoting the Progressive belief that American men's superior manliness was essential to the nation's geopolitical dominance and that blacks' history of athletic accomplishments demonstrated their race's possession of that superior manliness. In the opening chapter, he noted that like ancient Greece and Rome, athletics "became a part of our national life" early in US history and that highlighting the "part American Negroes have taken in the play and games of America is the burden of this effort." His history further insinuated that previous black athletes, because of their demonstrated virility, had garnered opportunities otherwise denied blacks in an endemically hostile anti-black society. For instance, after his All-American gridiron

⁵⁶ Joseph H. Rainey, "The Negro Athlete as Goodwill Ambassador," in *The 1938 Bulletin of The Colored Intercollegiate Athletic Association with Proceedings of the Nineteen Thirty-Seven Meeting* compiled by J. L. Whitehead (Hampton, VA: Hampton Institute Press, 1938), 24-6.

⁵⁷ Harry J. Capehart, "The Negro Athlete and Victory" in *The 1939 Bulletin of The Colored Intercollegiate Athletic Association with Proceedings of the Twenty-Sixth Annual Meeting* compiled by J. L. Whitehead (Hampton, VA: Hampton Institute Press, 1939), 18-20.

⁵⁸ For examples see, *The Negro History Bulletin*, (December 1951); Rufus E. Clement, "Racial Integration in the Field of Sports," *The Journal of Negro Education* 23, no.3 (Summer 1954), 223; "Negro Athletes and Civil Rights," *Sepia*, June 1964, 35-39.

days at Amherst, William H. Lewis founded a successful law practice in Boston, authored a leading football manual and with Booker T. Washington's assistance, was eventually appointed an assistant Attorney-General of the US by President Howard Taft. His teammate, William Tecumseh Sherman Jackson, became principal of M Street High School, where he served as Henderson's mentor. In addition to also working with the Taft administration, Jackson spent "many pleasant informal evenings" with President Calvin Coolidge discussing memories of Harvard.⁵⁹ Similar to the traditional black advancement belief that the US military (though segregated) presented blacks with unprecedented opportunities to demonstrate manliness, *The Negro in Sports* suggested that participation in white-controlled athletic institutions held similar promise.⁶⁰

In the book's final and most significant chapter, "The Meaning of Athletics," Henderson directly engaged the debate concerning athletics in black America. He argued that "recorded history" illustrated that great civilizations past used athletics as a means to improve the physiological health of individuals and society, and that sacrificing that altruistic purpose and using athletics exclusively for entertainment, prestige and military training signified the decline of those societies. Therefore, he opposed the use of athletics as a means for schools to generate publicity or raise funds because the "prostitution of athletes" eventually led to ruined bodies, minds and failed societies. However, "Supervised athletics," as history illustrated, could spur "the solution of problems of great import bearing on the progress or decline of our civilization" such as racism. He noted that if both black and white participants were

made to realize that in striving to win he must also keep the good will of his fellows, and exhibit the traits that the masses of society admire. Every effort must be made to discourage dishonesty, poor sportsmanship and the feeling of depression in losing. He must be taught to do his best, to avoid excuses for losing and to congratulate his opponents. If the social group in which the athletes perform is properly led to show appreciation of victorious striving and good sportsmanship, good athletics and character-building inevitably result (p. 358).⁶¹

⁵⁹ Edwin B. Henderson, *The Negro in Sports*, 2nd ed. (Washington, DC: Associated Publishers, 1949), vii, 1-10; for a discussion of the Progressive era and masculinity, see Bederman, 183.

⁶⁰ Gaines, 26-8; Steve Estes, *I Am a Man: Race, Manhood and the Civil Rights Movement* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2005), 12-23; emphasis mine.

⁶¹ Henderson, *Negro in Sports*, 349-58.

Henderson suggested that the use of athletics to cultivate character in both blacks and whites contributed to improved race relations. Indeed, using athletics as a means to cultivate the civility of blacks was of specific concern to Henderson, because like many black elites, he believed that by improving the moral fiber of the black masses, they would be less likely to confirm anti-black stereotypes that were used to rationalize white supremacy and segregation. Henderson, like much of the traditional black establishment, suggested that the mass black street celebrations that typically followed Louis's victories demeaned the fighter's contributions to the black struggle and would be cited as further evidence of black depravity. By using athletics to educate the black masses in "spectatorship," Henderson believed it was possible to curb certain public behavior that whites often highlighted to justify black inferiority. As such, *The Negro in Sports* suggested that respectability and character remained essential in the black struggle for citizenship and therefore, Henderson supported athletics administered by "real educators" who understood the importance of cultivating morality among blacks.⁶²

Before concluding the chapter, Henderson added that "One other aspect of the social implications of athletics is the large opportunity an athlete or an athletic setting has to develop a real Christian brotherhood among men of difference races." He argued that in a period shaped by fascism's challenge to republicanism and imperial, labor and racial strife, athletics, such as the Olympics, brought men together to compete against each other and "in many instances contribute much to the friendliness, good-will and helpful contacts for Christian brotherhood" that was absent in other institutions. Echoing Rainey's assertion that the virility displayed by black athletes often dissipated the bigotry of those whites they competing against and that interracial sport provided a substantial model of interracial cooperation, Henderson declared that "When athletes are allowed to compete with each other, representing different racial or social groups, and when they observe rules of sportsmanlike play in contests, the reaction upon them and those who witness the competitions almost invariably results in more toleration, greater respect

⁶² Henderson, *Negro in Sports*, 358-9; for a discussion of early twentieth century black elites and the public behavior of the masses, see Glenda E. Gilmore, 75-7.

and appreciation of the oneness of the human race.” The ultimate examples of this, he noted, were Louis and the 1936 black Olympians.

Can anyone doubt that the appearance of Jesse Owens in Berlin did not reduce adherence to some of Hitler’s super-man Aryan philosophy to a mere figment in the minds of thousands of Germans? Is it not possible that the oppressed races in Germany and elsewhere revived hope of a coming promised land of racial brotherhood and opportunity since their rulers have passed on, when they witnessed the long string of victories of Ben and Cornelius Johnson, Ellerbe, Owens, Williams, Luvall, Metcalfe, Woodruff, Watson, Albritton, Walker, Robinson, and Borican? The rise and fall of human emotions spurred by the conquering fists of Joe Louis, Armstrong, and John Henry Lewis brought to men everywhere something of the feelings of respect and reverence that were felt by the masses when David slew Goliath, and Sampson the Philistines. Likewise this feeling exists on the occasions of athletic contests all along the pathway of man from the cave days down to the destruction of the idealism of Aryan superiority by Joe Louis, when he lay down the Schmeling myth.” (p. 360)

In his historization of the accomplishments of black Olympians and Louis, Henderson insinuated that perhaps blacks were the manliest of all races. Historian Gail Bederman has demonstrated that Progressives believed that advancing the moral compass of society was the ultimate function and marker of bourgeois manliness and Henderson suggested that the virile athletic accomplishments of Louis and Owens did as much by invalidating the rationale of white anti-black racism, which in addition to reducing the inferiority complex in minorities, liberated whites from the immorality of practicing racial discrimination. By annulling racism, champion black athletes made a significant contribution to American society and the world, which, in addition to their athletic accomplishments, further suggested the evidence of a superior manliness among blacks.⁶³

Approved and published by pioneering black intellectual Dr. Carter G. Woodson’s Associated Press, *The Negro in Sports* legitimized the belief that the manliness blacks demonstrated through athletics advanced the race. Reviewers, for instance, generally agreed with the book’s premise. James Browning of Howard University concluded that the book could not only be used “for the inspiration of youth,” but also to increase “the appreciation of the hundreds of Negro athletes who are doing more to break the color

⁶³ Bederman, 27-9; Henderson, *The Negro in Sports*, 364-5.

line barriers than hundreds of books have done.” James Nabrit, Jr., a noted civil rights attorney and law professor, praised the work as “inspiring as well as informative” of black athletes’ contributions.⁶⁴ Over the next six decades, the work would become the most referenced (and plagiarized) source on the meaning and accomplishments of black athletes.⁶⁵ Many referenced *The Negro in Sports* to legitimize their thesis that the accomplishments of blacks in athletics contributed to black advancement by improving whites’ images of blacks. Few of the works, however, made overtures to athletics as a means to cultivate character.

More immediately, beginning in the early to mid-1930s, the belief was articulated over the next decade in the traditional black press’ sustained campaign to integrate professional baseball. In addition to arguing that the presence of blacks in the nation’s pastime would demonstrate the realization of a practiced democracy to the Nazis and the nation’s other detractors, the traditional black establishment further argued that the prominent demonstration of blacks’ manliness would educate whites to blacks’ capabilities and thus, ameliorate racism. During WWII, for instance, a *Pittsburgh Courier* columnist suggested that MLB “take a tip from the US Navy,” which had recently lifted restrictions that limited blacks to service as mess attendants. According to *The Courier*, the Navy’s decision was validated by the heroism of Dorie Miller, a black mess attendant, who during the Japanese surprise attack on Pearl Harbor scurried a wounded officer to safety and shot down at least two enemy aircraft with a deck-mounted machine gun that the Navy had refused to train blacks to use. The letter concluded that “if Jolting Josh Gibson,” the Negro Leagues’ perennial homerun champion, “were only given an opportunity, he could be one of the big guns of major league baseball.” *The Courier* suggested that the integration of baseball would be validated by the capably manly ability that Gibson and other blacks would demonstrate.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ James M. Nabrit, Jr., review of *The Negro in Sports*, by Edwin B. Henderson, *The Journal of Negro Education* 10, 1 (January 1941): 86; James B. Browning, review of *The Negro in Sports*, by Edwin B. Henderson, *The Journal of Negro History* 25, 1 (January 1940): 125.

⁶⁵ Wiggins, *Glory Bound*, 222-3, 230; for the influence of *The Negro in Sports*, also see Jeffery T. Sammons, “Race” and Sport: A Critical Examination,” *Journal of Sport History* 21, 3 (Fall 1994): 221-3.

⁶⁶ Chester Washington, “An Open Letter to Judge Landis,” in *Black Writers/Black Baseball: An Anthology of Articles from Black Sportswriters who Covered the Negro Leagues* ed. by Jim Reisler (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1992), 109-11; originally published in *The Chicago Defender*, 30 May 1942.

Indeed, just before the war, a *Chicago Defender* columnist suggested that the performance and amicable crowd reception of black players at recent integrated all-star football games in the city “ought to make the United States Army and Navy wake up” to the realization that whites would accept capable blacks.⁶⁷ Of course, the traditional black establishment celebrated the mass integration of team sports that would occur following the war as a prominent example of blacks demonstrating manliness and character that would eventually improve race relations. An article in the *Philadelphia Tribune*, a black weekly, published after Jackie Robinson and three other blacks entered the white-controlled professional baseball establishment in the 1947 season, noted that “Their achievements have marked for them and their race the possessions of sportsmanship, courage and ability,” all considered traits of manliness, “second to those of no other people.” As a result, the columnist asserted, they “have wrested the goodwill of millions of persons who formerly were at least indifferent to the race” and “garnered for Negroes a healthier and more favorable environment by reason of the appeal they have made to the fair-minded sports-loving citizens of America.”⁶⁸ In the second edition of *The Negro in Sports*, published in 1949, Henderson doubted that another revision of the work would be unnecessary because the recent “coming of Robinson” and other black athletic achievements were a powerful demonstration of blacks’ manly character that signaled “the beginning of a brighter day has truly started for minorities of color.”⁶⁹

II

By the late-1930s, the success of Louis and the 1936 black Olympians solidified the traditional black establishment’s articulation that the manliness inherent in the athletic accomplishments of blacks improved the image of their race, and thus furthered the black struggle for the recognition of their humanity and equality. However, the tenuousness of such claims, that blacks were respectable and deserved equality on the basis of the virility and/or character they exhibited, often caused a reticence or

⁶⁷ Frank Young, “September 6, 1941” in *Black Writers/Black Baseball: An Anthology of Articles from Black Sportswriters who Covered the Negro Leagues* ed. by Jim Reisler (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1992), 63-4; originally published by *Chicago Defender*, 6 September 1941.

⁶⁸ *Philadelphia Tribune*, 31 January 1948, p. 7.

⁶⁹ Edwin B. Henderson, *The Negro in Sports*, 2nd ed. (Washington, DC: Associated Press, 1949), ix.

silence among black elites concerning the racial slights and injuries they experienced, because such instances of discrimination contradicted the liberal belief that whites were predisposed to recognize the respectability and rights of accomplished and/or cultured blacks. A number of scholars, including Gaines and Steve Estes, have demonstrated that for blacks to enter and participate in many white-controlled institutions in the early twentieth century, they had to dissemble, feign ignorance of racial slights and humiliations, and/or wear a mask of deference to white supremacy in an attempt to avoid provoking additional white anti-black prejudice which would also denote their social and racial inferiority. Estes notes that even in integrated institutions, including civil rights organizations, blacks were expected to “hide their true thoughts and identities,” “adopt a submissive posture” and subordinate their agency and ideals concerning black advancement to those of whites. In the early Twentieth Century, advancement, and in many instances, survival, necessitated that blacks, particularly men, “cloak their sexuality and mask their manhood” when in the presence of whites or risk provoking further white anti-black violence and economic and sociopolitical repression.⁷⁰

This section will illustrate that black athletes, despite the manliness associated with their accomplishments, were required to dissemble and defer to whites in order to participate in white-controlled institutional sports. Their experiences contradicted the traditional black establishment and liberal mainstream America’s increasingly disseminated notion that blacks whom demonstrated themselves manly, particularly through athletics, earned a manly respect from whites. Additionally, the section argues that the traditional black establishment tacitly encouraged black athletes to dissemble and defer to white supremacy by rationalizing that their presence in white-controlled athletics improved whites’ images of blacks. Consequently, the traditional black establishment produced little significant discussion of the institutionalized anti-black discrimination in white-controlled sports. Such a discussion, as this sections while demonstrate, would have contradicted the emerging social belief that the mainstream respected champion black athletes as manly and that their accomplishments made a significant contribution to black advancement.

⁷⁰ Estes, 1-6; Also see Gaines, 5-8.

Deference to white supremacy, as the studies cited above demonstrate, significantly influenced the everyday lives of most early Twentieth Century blacks, and this section demonstrates, blacks within white-controlled sports were not exceptions. For instance, noted black activist Paul Robeson, born in 1898, remembered that “From an early age,” he learned dissemblance as “a certain protective tactic of Negro life in America.” He remembered that “Even while demonstrating that he is really an equal (and, strangely, the proof must be *superior* performance!) the Negro must never appear to be challenging white superiority. Climb up if you can- but don’t be “uppity.” As a youth, Robeson did his “best to “act right,” but soon realized that his accomplishments, as well as “courtesy and restraint, did not shield” blacks from white anti-black “hostility.”⁷¹ Perhaps, Robeson thoughts on black advancement were influenced by his experiences at predominately white Rutgers University, where he lettered in several sports between 1915 and 1918. The lone African American on the football team, Robeson was routinely brutalized by opponents and in the initial practice that integrated the team, his teammates, all of whom were white, “piled on,” breaking his nose and spraining his shoulder, both of which hospitalized him for ten days. Only after he began to retaliate did his white coach issue an edict that any teammate attempting to rough Robeson up would be dismissed from the squad. Brutality and retribution repeated themselves throughout his four years on the gridiron and often fueled performances that led to him twice being honored as an All-American in 1917 and 1918. After games, however, Robeson was known to quickly return to his characteristic “humble” persona and shake hands with his bigoted opponents. Robeson handled other anti-black slights at Rutgers, such as negrophobic minstrel descriptions in local papers, exclusion from social organizations and activities and being forced to sit-out contests against southern schools, in a similar manner.⁷² As a black person in a white-controlled institution, Robeson understood that deference to whites meant that despite racial injury, you must “Always show that you are *grateful*. (Even if what you have gained has been wrested from unwilling powers, be sure to be grateful lest “they” take it all away.) Above all, *do nothing to give them cause to fear you*, for then the opposing hand, which

⁷¹ Paul Robeson, *Here I Stand* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1988), 20; *emphasis in text*.

⁷² Martin B. Duberman, *Paul Robeson* (New York: Knopf, 1988), 19-22.

at times might ease up a little will surely become a fist to knock you down again!” It was a learned habit, Robeson noted, that he would “not fully break with until many years later.”⁷³

Like blacks in the military, Robeson’s experiences at Rutgers demonstrate that blacks could possibly enter white-controlled athletic institutions in the early twentieth century, but could not expect to be treated equally. Their protest of black inequality, as Robeson noted, risked provoking for themselves and other blacks further anti-black repression and therefore to enter and participate in white-controlled athletics, blacks, as they did in society and other white-controlled institutions, often dissembled and/or deferred to white supremacy. Robeson’s experiences would typify those of black athletes in white-controlled sports throughout the twentieth century. In 1972, Jackie Robinson, who integrated the white-controlled major leagues in 1946, noted that blacks in white-institutions were still only “partially accepted.” It had become fairly easy for blacks to enter white-controlled sports institutions, but they were still often denied authority, autonomous agency and the right to protest.⁷⁴

Historian Glenda E. Gilmore echoes Robeson and Robinson’s assertions that protest of racism in white-controlled environs could have dire consequences for blacks. Gilmore argues that many early Twentieth Century blacks were reticent to protest white anti-black discrimination because such criticisms often provoked whites to charge blacks with promoting “social equality,” which white supremacists and politicians skillfully manipulated into a black campaign of miscegenation or access to white women. By positing lust for white women as a universal trait of black men, recalcitrant white racists suggested that all black political, educational and economic ambitions were discursive attempts to gain sexual access to white women. Concomitantly, when a black man stood accused of rape, recalcitrant whites typically claimed that black political or socioeconomic advancement, locally and elsewhere, stimulated his innate desire for white women and called for the further repression of black communities. The myth of the black male’s insatiable lust for white women justified, if not convinced a number of whites to support lynching,

⁷³ Robeson, 20; *emphasis in text*.

⁷⁴ Jackie Robinson, *The Autobiography of Jackie Robinson: I Never Had it Made* (New York: The Ecco Press, 1995), 76-8.

white riots of black communities and legal and customary segregation and therefore, circumscribed black agency in white-controlled institutions.⁷⁵

For many whites, as well as blacks, Jack Johnson, the first African American to reign as the world's heavyweight champion, embodied the truism. More than perhaps any other example, his transgressions of white male supremacy illustrate Estes' thesis that entrance and participation in white-controlled institutions, sports and otherwise, in the early twentieth century necessitated black deference and/or accommodation anti-black discrimination. During his reign from 1908 to 1915, in addition to angering many whites by allowing blacks to vicariously retaliate against whites and stake a claim to a superior masculinity, Johnson disparaged his white male opponents in the ring and publicly paraded a succession of white wives and mistresses. After his 4th of July 1910 defeat of Jim Jefferies, a retired champion summoned from his Australian alfalfa farm to vindicate Anglo-Saxon manhood, ensuing race riots across the nation claimed the lives of at least eighteen blacks and left more than 500 people injured. Several southern white congressmen lamented the further possible effects of allowing the public to witness a black man defeat whites and convinced Congress to ban the interstate commerce of prize-fighting films. In 1913, after a string of "white hopes" failed to dethrone the increasingly popular "Negroes' Deliver," the national Bureau of Investigations convicted Johnson on trumped-up charges of kidnapping and transporting (white) women across state lines for illicit purposes. To avoid incarceration, Johnson fled the US, but continued to defend his title until 1915, when, according to speculation, he purposely lost to Jess Willard, a white American, in return for a lenient prison sentence upon return to the US.⁷⁶

Predictably, the black press protested Johnson's prosecution, arguing that the legal action against the champion was solely motivated by white anti-black racism. However, "more moral minded" members of the black press, historian Al-Tony Gilmore reports, condemned Johnson not for his penchant for white women, but for adultery. The position was a middle ground for black moderates, who could not

⁷⁵ Gaines, 57-60; Glenda E. Gilmore, 71, 82-3.

⁷⁶ Bederman, 2-10; Astor, 54; Lawrence Levine, *Black Consciousness and Black Thought: Afro-American Folk Thought From Slavery to Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 429-33.

consent to the blatant anti-black repression of the state, but who also did not consider Johnson a respectable representative of blacks. Similar to acts committed by numerous “bad niggers” during slavery and Jim Crow and contrary to the traditional black establishment’s beliefs that the better means of claiming manliness was to perform Victorian bourgeois notions of character in public, Johnson claimed an independent and “resistant masculinity” by fraternizing with white women, defying Jim Crow customs and civic authority, appearing in public enervated, carousing with the lumpenproletariat and stuffing his boxing trunks to appear overly-endowed. However, rather than openly criticize his refusal to defer to whites or/and his ambivalence toward demonstrating a respectable character, a number of black spokesmen criticized Johnson’s lax morality.⁷⁷

For many black intellectuals, Johnson’s behavior unfortunately actualized “the Negro problem,” the belief that the black male’s insatiable lust for white women threatened the survival of whites and American civilization, thus confirming whites’ rationale of segregation and anti-black repression. In 1912, shortly after charges against Johnson were announced, Booker T. Washington summed up black moderates’ bewilderment with Johnson (and rather discursively with white supremacy). “Until the court has spoken,” Washington stated, “I do not care to defend or condemn him,” but “only say” that Johnson “is another illustration of the almost irreparable injury that a wrong action on the part of one individual may do a whole race.” Therefore, Johnson should serve as a reminder to other blacks that they were routinely judged by the “evil” that one member committed. Washington acknowledged that this was “unjust, but” the virulent seek-and-destroy history of white supremacy illustrated that “no one can deny that it is true.” With those implications in mind, Washington concluded that Johnson’s offense was “a little worse” than the typical dereliction of deference to white supremacy because of “the fact that it was the white man” who “had given Jack Johnson the kind of prominence he has enjoyed.” He misused it “to bring humiliation upon the whole race of which he is a member” and as a result, blacks as a group would suffer. Therefore, from Washington’s perspective, Johnson’s more serious offense was not the possible

⁷⁷ Al-Tony Gilmore, *Bad Nigger!: the National Impact of Jack Johnson* (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1975), 121, passim; for a discussion of “resistant masculinity,” see Estes, 5-6.

violations of the Mann Act- that “is a question for the court to decide”- but the champion’s failure to demonstrate the civility (bourgeois morality and deference to whites) required of those in position to be black representatives. As such, Washington assured the United Press Association, a white press organization, that he, as a spokesmen for the “honest, sober element of the Negro people in the United States, is as severe in condemnation” of Johnson than “any other portion of the community.”⁷⁸

Although a few black intellectuals, most notably DuBois, criticized the black establishment for what he interpreted as their capitulation to white supremacy, the moderate perspective of Johnson as a scourge on the blacks’ effort to obtain recognition of their rights, as articulated by Washington, dominated in black America primarily because for more than two decades after Johnson’s defeat in 1915, the mainstream establishment and white boxing authorities colluded to prevent blacks from fighting for the heavyweight boxing title.⁷⁹ Despite the public knowledge of the anti-black covenant, many black intellectuals sermonized that Johnson’s lack of character, rather than the white establishment’s anti-black racism, prevented black fighters from obtaining title opportunities for the next twenty-one years. The notion so permeated black America, that in 1946, shortly after Johnson died and more three decades after he lost the title, C. L. R. James, a black socialist educator, took exception with “the ignorance and impertinence” of blacks whom continued to opine that “Johnson’s conduct had cast a stain on Negro character which [current champion Joe] Louis’s conduct was wiping away.” James asserted that “What made the authorities mad was that Johnson refused to act differently [from white heavyweight champions of his era] simply because he was a Negro. He insisted on his right to live his own way. He was persecuted but remained irrepressible to the end.” James concluded that it was “smug and hypocritical” to suggest that “If only all Negroes conducted themselves like Joe Louis, the Negro problem would be

⁷⁸ Booker T. Washington, “A Statement on Jack Johnson for the United Press Association” in *The Unlevel Playing Field: A Documentary History of the African American Experience in Sport* ed. by Patrick B. Miller and David K. Wiggins (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois, 2003), 79; for a discussion of “the Negro problem,” see Gaines, 58.

⁷⁹ W. E. B. DuBois, “The Prizefighter,” *The Crisis*, 8 August 1914, 181; for a discussion of this collusion, see Astor, 57.

solved,” because it implied that some blacks deserved to be repressed.⁸⁰ The black establishment’s reaction to Johnson stemmed from their experience that for black men to advance in white-controlled institutions, they were expected to defer to white manliness. Johnson’s refusal to do so resulted in dire consequences for all blacks, but also shaped the image and career of Louis, the next African American to acquire the heavyweight title.

Upon turning professional in 1934, Louis was told by Jack Blackburn, a retired black fighter and a Johnson contemporary, that the “heavyweight division for a Negro is hardly likely. The white man ain’t too keen on it.” From Blackburn’s experience, “black fighters were permitted in the ring just to make white fighters look good. They let you put up a good fight, but you dare not look better than some of the worst white boxers you were supposed to be fighting.” He also told Louis, “to go for the knock out” because white boxing judges could not be trusted to award black fighters winning decisions over whites. Blackburn, who became Louis’s trainer, as did Louis’s two black managers, John Roxborough and Julian Black, blamed Jack Johnson, as much as white anti-black prejudice, for the white boxing establishments’ collusion to prevent another black man from obtaining the prized virile title of world’s heavyweight boxing champion. Blackburn noted that the “White man hasn’t forgotten that fool nigger with his white women acting like he owned the world.” As a result, his handlers made distancing Louis from Johnson’s dereliction priority and at the onset of Louis’s national acclaim in 1935, Roxborough and Black stressed that the fighter would live and fight “clean” and publicized several rules that would guide his career. Among others, Louis would never “gloat” over a fallen (white) opponent or have his picture taken with white women. As hoped, the mainstream establishment interpreted these rules to suggest that Louis would never have sexual relationships with white women or disparage fallen whites in the ring as Johnson had done. Additionally, although Louis admired Johnson and it was tradition for neophytes to seek the counsel of experienced fighters, Louis’s management kept Johnson at a distance. Louis recalled that when the former champion visited his training camp in 1935, Roxborough “cursed Johnson out, told him

⁸⁰ C. L. R. James, *C. L. R. James on the Negro Question* (Oxford, MS: University of Mississippi, 1996), 61; essay originally published in 1946.

how he had held up the progress of Negro people for years with his attitude, how he was a low down no good nigger, and told him he was not welcome in my camp anymore.” Louis’s management correctly reasoned that the mainstream’s consent of Louis rested on the assurance, that unlike Johnson, he would defer to whites.⁸¹

Even after, Louis captured the heavyweight title in 1937, deference to whites remained the basis of his character throughout his public career in mainstream America. For instance, Louis biographer Chris Mead notes that many of the mainstream articles that introduced Louis in the 1930s explicitly linked his good behavior and character to assertions that he would not conduct himself as Johnson had. That characteristic, Mead notes, remained central to Louis’s image and popularity in the mainstream press throughout his reign as champion from 1937-1949.⁸² An article by John Kieran, a sportswriter for *The New York Times*, confirms Mead’s assessment. In 1942, shortly after the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, Louis voluntarily enlisted in the Army. Kieran wrote that the black fighter was “always doing the right thing” such as never drawing the color line in the ring (as previous white champions had done) and never gloating over fallen opponents, (the vast majority of which had been white). Kieran’s article suggested Louis’s consent to not challenge white supremacy as an example of the character that made the fighter “grand.” Indeed, his superficial compliment that Louis “has done more for the Negro race than any man since Booker T. Washington” asserted the black fighter as an accommodationist. He concluded that Louis had succeeded by capitalizing on his “opportunities for doing the right thing” and now that he was joining the military, “This, above all, would be no time to stop.” It was a characteristic essential to him being “A great fighter, a thorough sportsman, a modest gentleman, a good citizen, and now proudest title of all, a soldier of the U.S.A.”⁸³

Kieran’s article suggested that Louis’s service to the nation included being a prominent example of a black soldier who would accommodate segregation and defer to whites during the war. Mead

⁸¹ Mead, 52; Louis, 35-9, 69; McRae, 57-9; Astor, 42-3.

⁸² Mead, 52.

⁸³ Joe Kieran, “A Champion all the Way,” *Opportunity*, February 1942, 48-9; originally printed in *The New York Times*, 13 January 1942.

suggests that the War Department used his image for precisely that purpose by highlighting the enlistment and enthusiastic patriotism of Louis, the nation's most well-known black man, to superimpose a symbolic racial unity on the US's war effort. His appearance, as well as Owens's, in dozens of films, posters and pamphlets specifically designed to recruit blacks and rally blacks to the war effort, prominently countered reports of black discontent with segregation in the military and war industries and Nazi and Japanese attempts to highlight pervasive anti-black discrimination in American society. Prior to the war, Mead notes, the establishment press praised Louis for not being Johnson. Beginning with the second Schmeling fight in 1938 and escalating dramatically with his military service, however, many of the same white columnists "called him an good American" for dutifully prioritizing the advancement of the nation before that of blacks' equality.⁸⁴ Perhaps, this sentiment fueled the popularity of a term coined near the end of the war by Jimmy Cannon, a popular sportswriter for the *New York Post*, which has since become an enduring tribute to the boxer: "Joe Louis is a credit to the human race." Louis may have prominently represented blacks' capability to attribute to the advancement of the US, but he also served as a prominent example of black deference to the whites on the progress of racial advancement. However, as Louis biographer Gerald Astor asserts, the fact that the white establishment would even use a black man as a national symbol during the war was "enlightened for the time."⁸⁵

The significant of a black man winning the heavyweight championship, the bouts against Schmeling and his participation in the US war effort made Louis the most recognizable African American, if not US citizen across the globe. However, his experiences as champion and soldier contradicted the traditional black establishment's articulation that those blacks, well-known athletes or otherwise, demonstrating manliness and character were exempt from the routine discrimination, humiliation and terror that blacks endured in the early Twentieth Century. For instance, after winning the heavyweight title in June 1937, a member of Louis's entourage remembered that the black fighter fought

⁸⁴ Mead, 207-36.

⁸⁵ Astor, 6; Despite being infinitely paraphrased in popular and academic literature, no citation of the original quote has been found. In the period the term originated, Cannon wrote for *The New York Post*. However, a survey of the paper, as well as numerous other sources on Louis, proved fruitless.

a number of publicity exhibitions in the South. In Alabama, they encountered an admiring white gentleman who kept addressing the champion as “Boy this, Boy that,” to which Louis replied, “If you don’t stop talking like that, “this boy” is going to kick your ass.” Rather than engage in confrontations regularly, however, Louis usually dissembled or evaded discrimination by learning when and under what circumstances he could frequent certain establishments.⁸⁶ However, even dissemblance and accommodation did not prevent blacks for encountering white hostility. In 1940, for instance, after Louis and Owens were honored at a sports banquet in Chicago, a crowd followed the two to a bar where the champions willingly signed autographs and shook hands with fans. Louis was known to allow pleading admirers, usually white, to throw their best punch, which, to their amazement, he always blocked at the last moment. On this particularly night, however, after Louis blocked the initial punch of a white stranger and dropped his guard, the fellow countered with a surprise shot to the champ’s head. Owens rushed in to prevent Louis from retaliating and demanded of the fellow, “What did you do that for, mister?” The liquored-up gentlemen retorted that he usually got “one of you nigger’s a week,” “And there’s no bigger nigger than Joe fucking Louis.” An exasperated Owens, who also preferred accommodation to confrontation, then broke a glass mug on a table and wielded it as he stepped toward the offender. Louis, who by then had sufficiently regained his composure, pulled Owens out of the bar.⁸⁷

Private Joe Louis Barrow also endured racism in the armed services. In January 1942, a month after the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, the heavyweight champion joined the Army and traveled across the globe fighting exhibitions to raise the morale of Allied soldiers. However, he constantly bristled at the fact that the military condoned white supremacy and was a thoroughly segregated institution. From his induction, he found himself and other blacks regulated to “the colored section” in the charge of resentful white officers. The situation moved Louis to note, “Wasn’t a black man there who didn’t understand what the Jews were going through. Somehow they could place their own lives into what was over there, and a lot of them, for real, wanted to get Hitler.” But those same men “can’t sleep in the same

⁸⁶ Astor, 222-5.

⁸⁷ McRae, 220-2; Jesse Owens with Paul G. Neimark, *Blackthink: My Life as Black Man and White Man* (New York: Morrow, 1970), 16-19.

barracks with the white guys or go to the same movies or hardly get in officer's training." Louis never publicly challenged racism in the military, however, he privately used his "influence" to successfully challenge segregation and improve social conditions and increase opportunities for blacks soldiers. Although his celebrity often ameliorated discrimination, Louis was routinely reminded of the common plight of blacks in white-controlled institutions such as the Army. In 1944, Louis and Sugar Ray Robinson, the light heavyweight boxing champion and fellow black G.I., were stationed at Camp Seibert in Jim Crow Alabama. While on leave in a nearby town, the two entered a bus station to call a cab and were confronted by a white MP who ordered them out of the whites-only facility. A scuffle ensued and only ended after a white soldier recognized Louis. When it appeared that they would be reprimanded, Louis threatened to call "Washington" and thereafter, the charges were dropped. Louis, however, knew that "if I was just an average black G.I., I would have wound up in the stockades."⁸⁸ Although Louis believed that his accomplishments, including his military service, aided the "lightening up" of race relations, early in his public career he also realized the tenuousness of the liberal belief that illustrating manliness dissipated racism: "You know, when you're a black man, you constantly have to prove yourself."⁸⁹

Other black athletes, despite their popularity and utility, had similar racial experiences. Owens and his college and Olympic teammate, David Albritton were Jim Crowed in housing, dining and socially at Ohio State University. They and the other black team members typically trailed their white teammates to away track meets in a dilapidated car and lodged at YMCAs while their teammates checked into whites-only hotels.⁹⁰ Even as *The Crisis* saluted "Owens, America's greatest athlete" and other black Olympians aboard the *S.S. Manhattan* that set sail for Germany in August 1936, they crossed the Atlantic in Jim Crow fashion.⁹¹ Once in Germany, *The New York Times* reported black Olympians only evaded

⁸⁸ McRae, 237-8; Louis, 173-85; Astor, 230-4.

⁸⁹ Louis, 79, 144.

⁹⁰ Owens, 13-7; McRae, 33-6.

⁹¹ "Salute," *The Crisis*, August 1936, 43. Archie Williams, a black sprinter, remembered that on the *S. S. Manhattan* "all the brothers" had to room together. Although all Olympians dined together, Williams remembered

discrimination because “they were careful to avoid places they were not welcome.” The article did not specify if they were avoiding white Americans abroad, Aryans or athletes from European nations with colonies, who, the *Times* reported, “are somewhat cool and inclined to depreciate their presence” or white Afrikaner athletes, who “openly depreciate it.”⁹² Other black Olympians had similar experiences. Despite having run better times at the US team trails, Tidy Pickett and Louise Stokes, the first two black women Olympians, were inexplicably replaced by whites on the 400-meter relay team at the 1932 Los Angeles Olympics.⁹³

According to Henderson’s 1936 essay, racial prejudice was routine in white-controlled sports. Indeed, he surmised that as “interesting [a] question” as the influence of black athletic achievement on race relations was “how have Negro boys made progress against the tide of racial prejudice to reach the goals they have attained?” For an African American “To make a success in team athletics,” he needed to be a “definitely superior” athlete, “make adjustments” to the prejudices of white teammates and coaches, “survive the humiliation” of being forced to sit out contests against southern schools and the military academies and accommodate segregated travel and lodging. He would have to also endure these degradations alone because most predominately white colleges self-imposed a quota of “one good colored athlete per team” and even in professional athletics, where “promoters are openly in the game for money,” blacks were routinely excluded regardless of their skill. The few blacks who had managed to enter white-controlled professional sports, he noted, were usually “light enough in color to be signed as an Indian, Cuban or Far-southerner.” Additionally, Henderson noted that black athletes had to learn to “take plenty” from opponents” because racism in sport often manifested into brutality, injuries and even death.⁹⁴ In 1915, Robeson was hospitalized for injuries suffered at the hands of recalcitrant white teammates in

the “feeling that there was something there” as it concerned segregation and that several whites on board were prejudice. Archie F. Williams, interview by George A. Hodak, *An Olympian’s Oral History* (June 1988): 12-3.

⁹² *New York Times*, 7 August 1936, p. L13.

⁹³ Michael D. Davis, *Black American Women in Olympic Track and Field* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland Press, 1992), 130-1.

⁹⁴ Henderson, “The Negro Athlete and Race Prejudice,” 77-8.

practice and in 1923, Jake Trice of Iowa State University died of injuries sustained in a football game against an all-white squad from Minnesota.⁹⁵

Henderson's detailed discussion of institutionalized racism in the early Twentieth Century white-controlled sports establishment is notable because it is rare; for instance, he would author two seminal books and continue to chronicle the accomplishments of black athletes over the next four decades. However, as the belief escalated, similar in-depth discussions of institutional racism were absent from those writings, as well as other prominent works on black athletes. As argued earlier in the section, many early Twentieth Century black commentators, "particularly those concerned with projecting an image of respectability," were often silent on racial slights and personal injuries because such incidents contradicted the liberal black advancement belief that whites were predisposed to recognize the humanity and citizenship of accomplished blacks and because the virulence of white anti-black racism often cast the black victim as a perpetrator of an offense, such as advocating social equality, which provoked further white anti-black oppression.⁹⁶ Although the traditional black establishment did not discuss the issue, the pervasive anti-black discrimination in the white-controlled sports establishment suggested that despite the adulation of black athletes in the mainstream press, many whites, including coaches, teammates and opponents, in close proximity with black athletes were not convinced of their manliness.⁹⁷

Although silent concerning the institutionalized nature of racism in the white-controlled sports establishment, in their criticism of those institutions that continued segregation, a few black commentators insinuated that blacks would willingly endure discrimination for the opportunity to demonstrate that blacks were sufficiently manly. In 1942, William A. Brower suggested that the integration of baseball could be eased by "arrangements for separate accommodations for Negro players" when integrated clubs traveled the south. "For the convenience of Dixie, we suppose that the Negro

⁹⁵ Ashe, *A Hard Road to Glory*, vol. 2, 92-9; Duberman, 19-22.

⁹⁶ Gaines, 8-9, 57-60; Glenda E. Gilmore, 71, 82-3.

⁹⁷ Jack Olsen, *The Black Athlete: A Shameful Story, The Myth of Integration in American Sport* (New York: Time-Life Books, 1968), 158-9.

players will survive. After all, such social dispensations wouldn't be strange to them."⁹⁸ Occasionally, other black commentators often suggested that because black athletes often achieved in spite of anti-black discrimination, they were perhaps more manly than whites.⁹⁹ In 1936, the NAACP's Roy Wilkins insinuated as much when he wrote that "in spite of the prejudice which undoubtedly exists on middle western campuses," a number of black football players continued to excel on teams at white Midwestern colleges. For instance, Oze Simmons, despite his encounters "of prejudice, of non-support, of jealousy" at the University of Iowa, was "perhaps the most elusive broken runner in the country for the past three years." In Wilkins' article, Simmons was par exemplar that "Where given the chance, the Negro student has proved he can be a credit to his college in the classroom and in athletics." The article, like much of the commentary in the black press, was an attempt to refute black inferiority and contest segregation. However, Wilkins' conclusion reflected traditional black elites' belief that illustrating manliness and respectable civility, even if blacks had to endure racial slights to do so, was the most effective means of campaigning for their equality and citizenship.¹⁰⁰ As such, much of the black press lauded black athletes for their advancement contributions, but only referenced the pervasiveness of institutional racism in sport only to applaud those blacks who "suffered in silence the 'behind-the-scenes' insults and frustrations because they wanted to make the more important public impression" of manliness for blacks.¹⁰¹

The silence and/or tacit compromise of the traditional black establishment concerning the institutional anti-black racism in white-controlled sports institutions contributed significantly to the development of "the myth of the black athlete," as one journalist investigating racism in sports in the Sixties would term it.¹⁰² By the mid-1950s, the mainstream and traditional black press presented a near-consensus that the significant presence of blacks in integrated sport suggested that the institution was progressively racially democratic, especially when compared to society in general and other institutions

⁹⁸ William A. Brower, "Time for Baseball to Erase the Blackball," *Opportunity*, June 1942, 167.

⁹⁹ Glenda E. Gilmore, 62-3.

¹⁰⁰ Roy Wilkins, "Negro Stars on Big Grid Teams," *The Crisis*, December 1936, 362, 380.

¹⁰¹ "Black Athletes and Civil Rights," 38.

¹⁰² Olsen, *The Black Athlete*, 7-9.

such as military and colleges.¹⁰³ According to Harry Edwards, an activist and scholar, “of all the problems confronted” by the black movement against racism in sports, “by far the most difficult was black America’s highly illusionary perspective on sport.” Much of society, and many blacks in particular, were convinced “so completely about sports supposed uniquely beneficent role in their lives that the very idea of either using sport as a protest vehicle or protesting the character and circumstances of Afro-American involvement in sport...seemed to most as quite mystifying, to some ludicrous, and to yet others criminal, or worse, treasonous.” Many blacks, Edwards suggested, could not conceive that black athletes endured discrimination in an institution littered with their presence and accomplishments.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ Grundman, 17-23.

¹⁰⁴ Edwards, “The Olympic Project for Human Rights,” 2.

Chapter II

“I Never Had It Made”: The Mass Integration of Blacks into White-Controlled Institutional Sports, World War II to the Sixties

In his 1972 autobiography, Jackie Robinson, the first African American to enter modern major league baseball (MLB), concluded that his experiences in white-controlled institutions in the mid-twentieth century had taught him that “A Black Man, even after he has proven himself on and off the field, will still be denied his rights.” Robinson was one of many blacks who appeared successfully integrated in the era, but he noted, at best many were only “partially accepted” because blacks were often denied their equality and agency in white-controlled institutions.¹ Robinson accommodated racism at the hands of white opponents, fans and even teammates during his ten year MLB sojourn, because he believed that the his presence and accomplishments in MLB would advance other blacks. However, he remembered that as he attempted to ignore the racial epithets hurled at him during games, he often “felt torture...I was, after all, a human being. What was I doing turning the other cheek as though I weren’t a man? In college days I had a reputation as a black man who never tolerated affronts to his dignity. I had defied prejudice in the service.” Indeed, Robinson had an inherited history of contesting personal racial discrimination that extended from his childhood to his years as a student at UCLA and service in the Army during WWII.² So in his third season, 1949, after helping the Brooklyn Dodgers win the World Series, thus proving his race’s ability, Robinson began to contest racism on and off–the-field. He quickly “learned,” however, that as a black man in a white-controlled institution, he was not allowed the same privileges as whites. He recalled that “as long as I appeared to ignore the insult and injury, I was a

¹ Jackie Robinson, *I Never Had It Made*, (New York: Putnam, 1972), 76-8; for a discussion of blacks in early twentieth century white-controlled institutions, see Steve Estes, *I Am a Man: Race, Manhood and the Civil Rights Movement* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2005), 1-9.

² Robinson, *I Never Had It Made*, 59-60; for a discussions of Robinson’s protest of discrimination in the military and college, also see Jules Tygiel, “The Court Martial of Jackie Robinson” in *The Jackie Robinson Reader: Perspectives on an American Hero*, 39-51; and Woody Strode and Sam Young, “The Goal Dust Gang,” in *The Jackie Robinson Reader* ed. by Jules Tygiel (New York: Dutton, 1997), 25-38.

martyred hero” in the mainstream. “But the minute, I began to answer, to argue, to protest- the minute I began to sound off- I became a swell-head, a wise guy, an ‘uppity’ nigger. When a white player did it, he had sprit. When a black player did it, he was ‘ungrateful,’ an upstart, a sorehead.” Robinson endured such “humiliations” during his MLB career because he believed the burgeoning social belief that blacks' presence and accomplishments in white-controlled sports would serve as inspiration to blacks and contribute to improved race relations. However, sixteen years after retiring from baseball, he suggested that his difficult sojourn had benefited blacks little, if any. Therefore, rather than accommodate, as he had done, he “warn[ed] the white world that young blacks today are not willing- nor should they be-” to be denied their rights, humanity and agency in white-controlled institutions. Although the direct action protest that characterized the Civil Rights and Black Power movements of the moment was often condemned, Robinson argued that integration without complete recognition of blacks' equality and agency within white-controlled institutions was not “progress,” but rather “a severe form of punishment.” He noted that for every black person he knew “who made it,” including the likes of Ralph Bunch and Lena Horne, he could also “give you a sordid piece of factual information on how they were mistreated, humiliated” in a white-controlled institution. Therefore, he supported many of the radical black movements of the Sixties that fought for blacks' agency and dignity within white-controlled institutions and socioeconomic equality. Robinson concluded that although he was celebrated for erasing the color line, as a black man in a white institution “I never had it made” and that he would never consider himself to “have it made, until the humblest black kid in the most remote backwoods of America had it made.”³

Robinson's assessment of the meaning of the integration of sports and his career contrast measurably with most accounts of those events. The chapter demonstrates that as the mass integration of sports in the United States occurred in the decades following WWII, the belief that black athletes' presence and accomplishments in white-controlled sports institutions advanced the black struggle and race relations by improving whites' images of blacks also escalated in certainty in the public discourse. In the Sixties, two decades after Robinson entered MLB, black activist-athletes and their supporters

³ Ibid, 76-80.

declared that the hegemony of the “myth” was the foremost obstacle to attracting support for their drive to build a black boycott of the US Olympic team to raise awareness of institutionalized racism.⁴ The chapter demonstrates that in the two decades between WWII and the Sixties, the traditional black establishment articulated that the capability blacks displayed in white-controlled sports and the important contribution blacks made to US teams in international sports during the Cold War demonstrated that blacks possessed a superior manliness that allowed them to participate in the advancement of the US against their foes, and thus validated black claim’s to complete citizenship. The black press’ and the state’s Cold War disseminated celebration of the integration of sports hid the important impetus of economics in the mass integration of sports. The second session asserts that like other corporate and technological advances, the entrance of blacks into intercollegiate and professional team sports was simply another means to enhance the product and capitalize on increasing sports revenue in the period. Consequently and contrary to the proliferating belief of black advancement in sport, ardent anti-black discrimination continued to shape blacks’ experiences in white-controlled sports institutions. As a result, in the decades between WWII and media dubbed “Revolt of the Black Athlete” in the Sixties, blacks in white-controlled sports individually and collectively challenged the discrimination they encountered in both sports and society, often reiterating Robinson’s assessment that despite the headlines they often garnered in the press, as blacks in white-controlled institutions in the mid-twentieth century US, they never had it made.

The traditional black press interpreted Robinson’s entry into MLB as a prominent opportunity to demonstrate that blacks possessed a manliness and character as productive and worthy as white Americans. During Robinson’s initial seasons in MLB, dozens of articles in the black press explained that Robinson was “on trial,” attempting to convince whites “through his baseball ability and personal characteristics” that blacks were as equally capable as whites and thus, deserved recognition of their

⁴ Harry Edwards, “The Olympic Project for Human Rights,” *Black Scholar*, 10, 6-7, 1979: 2; also see Harry Edwards, *The Struggle that Must Be* (New York: Macmillan, 1980), 218; and Tommie Smith, “Why Negroes should Boycott?,” *Sport*, March 1968, 40-1, 68.

equality and humanity.⁵ Shortly after Robinson signed with the Dodgers, NAACP executive Roy Wilkins suggested that Robinson's presence in MLB would have significant positive consequences for blacks beyond "the sports world." It would educate the masses, those who did not attend "lectures on race relations," to the capability and character of blacks. "He will be saying to them that his people should have their rights, should have jobs, decent homes and education, freedom from insult, and equality of opportunity to achieve."⁶

By 1945, the year that Rickey invited Robinson to join the Dodgers and integrate MLB, the belief that blacks' presence and accomplishments in white-controlled sports contributed to black advancement was accepted as conventional wisdom in the traditional black establishment. The ideal began to be expressed in the black press with the emergence of blacks in northern intercollegiate sports intuitions and champion black sprinters in the 1920s and became hegemonic following the performances of Jesse Owens and other black members of the 1936 US Olympic team and the ascendancy of Joe Louis to the world heavyweight boxing championship in the mid-1930s.⁷ Accordingly, the black and liberal press argued that the significant contribution of blacks to the US victory at the "Nazi Olympics" in Berlin and Louis's capture of the heavyweight title, as well as his defeat of the German and a former champion Max Schmeling in 1938, refuted Aryan and white supremacy theories and were prominent demonstrations that blacks possessed the sufficient manliness to participate in the nation's advancement against its foes and thus, deserved recognition of their complete citizenship.⁸

The black press suggested the integration of baseball, one of the nation's most venerated cultural institutions, would also suggest that blacks possessed the superior manliness and character of other (white) Americans. Disseminated throughout the country by soldiers during the Civil War, historian

⁵ *Michigan Chronicle*, 19 April 1947, p. 7; also see *Chicago Defender*, 26 April 1947, p. 5; 17 May 1947, p. 21.

⁶ *Michigan Chronicle*, 3 November 1945, p. 7.

⁷ For a discussion of the evolution of the belief that blacks' presence and accomplishments in white-controlled sports contributed to black advancement, see Chapter 1.

⁸ For discussions of the contribution of Louis and the black Olympians to the contribution of black advancement in the black press, see "Kayoed More than Braddock," *The Crisis*, August 1937, 243; and Edwin B. Henderson, "The Negro Athlete and Race Prejudice," *Opportunity*, 14, 3 (March 1936), 79; for a discussion of superior manliness, see Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 10-20, 178-84.

Benjamin Rader notes that by the 1890s, baseball was the lone amusement played by and across every class in the US. The following decade, entrepreneurs “organized” professional baseball into the National and American League circuits and influenced by the nationalism of the Progressive Era, championed the myth that the game had American origins and advertised it as “the nation’s pastime.” Coining the championship series “the World Series” further insinuated the superior manliness of Americans. By 1910, baseball dominated the recently invented sports page and the popularity of such players as Ty Cobb and Honus Wagner rivaled that of presidents and war heroes. The advent of radio in the 1920s furthered baseball’s popularity and men vacationing from jobs to and gather and listen to the World Series became an annual rite of male passage. Rader suggests that in the first half of the twentieth century, “baseball achieved an institutional prominence and permanence in American life, in some respects equivalent to that of the state, the church and the family. Boys everywhere grew up...dreaming of one day becoming diamond heroes themselves.”⁹ That dream, however, was deferred for blacks, whom were barred from the white baseball establishment in the 1880s. Various attempts followed to organize the game in black America; however, it was not until after the Great War that the Negro Leagues established permanence. In addition to being shaped by segregation, on the diamond, black baseball was characterized by speed and daring absent from the more strategic and methodical white leagues. In black communities, the exploits of players such as Judy Johnson, James “Cool Papa” Bell and Oscar Charleston were epic and by WWII, the economic prosperity of black baseball was equitable with many white minor leagues. Although the Negro Leagues developed into a source of race pride, from the 1930s forward, the black press steadfastly argued for the integration of MLB. Gerald Early surmises that the “Negro leagues were never meant to be an end to themselves,” but to demonstrate “black independence” and “show...whites that blacks were able, competitive, and desired very much to play baseball with them.”¹⁰ Like other Americans, blacks revered baseball. In addition to attending Negro League and MLB games, the

⁹ Benjamin Rader, *Baseball: A History of America’s Game* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 92-109.

¹⁰ Ibid, 156-60; Gerald Early, “American Integration, Black Heroism and the Meaning of Jackie Robinson,” in *The Unlevel Playing Field: A Documentary History of African American Experience in Sport* ed. by David K. Wiggins and Patrick B. Miller (Chicago: University of Illinois, 2003), 218.

traditional black establishment also expounded on the game's nationalist implications. In 1939, for instance, Dr. Edwin B. Henderson's acclaimed *The Negro in Sports* noted that "our great American game" was evidence of Americans' superior manliness. His work attempted to demonstrate that the Negro Leagues and other black athletic achievements were evidence that blacks possessed the same superior manliness as other Americans.¹¹

Henderson, as did other members of the traditional black establishment, argued that the integration of baseball would provide blacks with a monumental opportunity to demonstrate that their race possessed the same superior manliness as white Americans. During WWII, for instance, a *Pittsburgh Courier* columnist suggested that MLB "take a tip from the US Navy," which had recently lifted restrictions that limited blacks to service as mess attendants. According to *The Courier*, the Navy's decision was validated by the heroism of Dorie Miller, a black mess attendant, who during the Japanese surprise attack on Pearl Harbor scurried a wounded officer to safety and shot down at least two enemy aircraft with a deck-mounted machine gun that the Navy had refused to train blacks to use. The letter concluded that "if Jolting Josh Gibson," the Negro Leagues' perennial homerun champion, "were only given an opportunity, he could be one of the big guns of major league baseball." *The Courier* suggested that integration of baseball would be validated by the capably manly ability that Gibson and other blacks would demonstrate.¹² Indeed, just before the war, a *Chicago Defender* columnist suggested that the performance and amicable crowd reception of black players at recent integrated football games in the city "ought to make the United States Army and Navy wake up" to the realization that whites would accept capable blacks.¹³

¹¹ Edwin B. Henderson, *Negro in Sports*, (Washington, DC: Associated Publishers 1939), 2; for a discussion of *The Negro in Sports* and manliness among blacks, see chapter 1.

¹² Chester Washington, "An Open Letter to Judge Landis," in *Black Writers/Black Baseball: An Anthology of Articles from Black Sportswriters who Covered the Negro Leagues* ed. by Jim Reisler (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1992), 109-11; originally published in *The Chicago Defender*, 30 May 1942.

¹³ Frank Young, "September 6, 1941" in *Black Writers/Black Baseball: An Anthology of Articles from Black Sportswriters who Covered the Negro Leagues* ed. by Jim Reisler (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1992), 63-4; originally published by *Chicago Defender*, 6 September 1941.

Robinson entered the white-controlled baseball establishment in 1946, playing for Montreal Royals, the Dodgers' top minor league club. That year, he led the International League in batting average and runs batted in (RBIs) and won the league's most valuable player award. That next season, 1947, he was called up to the Dodgers in the major leagues. Nervousness and vicious opposition caused him to start slowly, but his solid fielding and clutch hitting helped the Dodgers to the World Series and he played consistently well enough to win MLB's first Rookie-of-the-Year award. Accordingly, the black press celebrated Robinson's success in MLB, like blacks' service in the segregated military, as a prominent demonstration that blacks' possessed a similar capability and character to succeed as whites. An article in the *Philadelphia Tribune*, a black weekly, published after Robinson's first season with the Dodgers, bluntly articulated that the recent accomplishments of blacks in white-controlled sports, especially Robinson's, "are not only a tribute to athletic ability but to lack of inferiority feeling and to the possession of other worthwhile traits of character" among blacks. Indeed, "Their achievements have marked for them and their race the possessions of sportsmanship, courage and ability," all considered traits of manliness, "second to those of no other people." As a result, the article concluded, they "have wrested the goodwill of millions of persons who formerly were at least indifferent to the race" and "garnered for Negroes a healthier and more favorable environment by reason of the appeal they have made to the fair-minded sports-loving citizens of America."¹⁴ Most black periodicals were less verbose, but as definitive. Writing for the (Detroit) *Michigan Chronicle*, Wilkins declared that Robinson's effort was proof that "If you give our folks a fair chance some of them will always make it," meaning that some blacks were as capable as some whites.¹⁵

As notable, the traditional black establishment also suggested that Robinson's successful entrance into MLB had as much to do with his character as his baseball ability. Accordingly, the black press attempted to valorize Robinson's accommodation of racism as a respectable trait of character. Wilkins, for instance, insinuated that despite the segregation and ostracism Robinson encountered in white-

¹⁴ *Philadelphia Tribune*, 31 January 1948, p.7.

¹⁵ *Michigan Chronicle*, 26 April 1947, p. 7.

controlled baseball, he did not challenge racism, but instead “took that in his stride and made a good record” on the field. Admittedly, he “made it the hard way,” but “here he is, a Dodger, the first publicly acknowledged member of his race to play major league baseball.”¹⁶ *The Crisis* also suggested that accommodation was essential to Robinson’s success in MLB. Robinson, the article noted, “is accustomed to playing with and against white boys and men. He is acquainted with what may be called ‘locker room’ problems and knows how to get along with hostile individuals.” Robinson had served his country in the Army during WWII under similar conditions.¹⁷ *Ebony*, the leading black popular magazine of the period, also disseminated the notion. Near the end of Robinson’s first year with the Dodgers, *Ebony* noted that it was the ex-Sunday school teacher’s “quiet, modest, yet self-assured manner” that allowed him to succeed and contradict “all the stereotypes about ball players and about Negroes.” Like Louis, who distanced himself from anti-black stereotypes through a program of “clean-living” a decade earlier, *Ebony* noted that Robinson did not “drink or smoke,” but instead preferred an “unpretentious life” at home with his wife. The article made no reference to his on-the-field performance that was earning him significant notoriety among baseball fans, but concluded that Robinson hoped to found a boy’s club where he would “stress[es] the value of good character, dignified behavior and sportsmanship as virtues for all Negro youngsters.”¹⁸ By suggesting that Robinson overcame prejudice because of his character and that his character included accommodation, the traditional black establishment forwarded its belief that accommodation was a more effective means of advancement than protest. Indeed, few if any articles in the black press during Robinson’s initial years in MLB mentioned Robinson’s history of challenging discrimination in college and in the Army, despite its familiarity with the latter.¹⁹

The mass integration of white-controlled athletics that followed Robinson’s entrance into MLB further strengthened the black community’s belief that the presence and accomplishments of black

¹⁶ *Michigan Chronicle*, 26 April 1947, p. 7.

¹⁷ *The Crisis*, May 1947, 13.

¹⁸ “Family Man Jackie Robinson,” *Ebony*, September 1947, 15-6; for a discussion of stereotypes concerning black male lust for white women, see Glenda E. Gilmore, 82-9.

¹⁹ Fellow black soldiers attracted attention to Robinson’s court-martial in 1944 by writing letters to the black press; Tygiel, “The Court-Martial of Jackie Robinson,” 45-6.

athletes in white-controlled athletics advanced blacks' struggles for equality. In March 1946, several months after Robinson signed with the Dodgers, professional football integrated.²⁰ Additionally, near the end of Robinson's first season in the majors, 1947, three other blacks entered MLB. The next season, 1948, approximately a dozen blacks played in either the white-controlled major or minor leagues.²¹ By 1954, seven seasons after Robinson's entrance, twenty-two blacks were in the major leagues and approximately eighty others were in the minors.²² Although integration in sports did not succeed as sensationally as some headlines suggested, during the decade following Robinson's signing, eventually seventy-one blacks played in the major leagues and white-controlled professional football and basketball were thoroughly integrated as well.²³ In the black press, the substantial presence of blacks in the white-controlled professional sport bolstered the belief that black athletes' demonstration of manly capability created opportunities for other blacks. In September 1947, near the end of Robinson's first season with the Dodgers, a veteran black sports commentator, noting the entrance of three blacks in MLB, declared Robinson's entrance in baseball "perhaps the most significant happening in sports" because it spurred further integration in sports and likely in society.²⁴ The next month, a *Chicago Defender* columnist agreed, noting that sports provided "a better interracial sermon than a hundred orators" and "has truly contributed its worth in battling race prejudice."²⁵

As the presence of blacks in sports increased in the decade, the certainty with which the traditional black establishment articulated the belief also increased. By the 1950s, for instance, black academicians exclaimed the belief with certainty. In 1951, Howard University literature professor

²⁰ "Negroes come back to Pro Football," *Ebony*, October 1946, 12-7.

²¹ "The Future of Negroes in Big League Baseball," *Ebony*, May 1949, 34-5.

²² Dan W. Dobson, "The Integration of Negroes in Baseball," *Journal of Educational Sociology*, 28, no. 2, (October 1954), 73.

²³ Arthur Ashe suggests that the seasons between 1947, Robinson's debut, and 1953, can best be described as a period of token integration. During those seven seasons, blacks were admitted to the National League on an average of three every two seasons and to the American League, one every two seasons. Additionally, it would be fourteen seasons before each of the sixteen major league clubs had fielded at least one black player. In 1950, *Sport* magazine's Dan Parker, a veteran baseball writer, suggested that many white-controlled baseball teams had only signed blacks to avoid bad publicity; Arthur Ashe, Jr., *A Hard Road to Glory: A History of the African American Athlete since 1946*, vol. 3, (New York: Amistad, 1993), 5; also see Dan Parker, "How Democratic is US Sports?," *Negro Digest*, January 1950, 52-3.

²⁴ Dan Burley, "Victory over Baseball's Color Bar," *Interracial Review*, September 1947, 138, 140.

²⁵ *Chicago Defender*, 4 October 1947, p. 1.

Sterling A. Brown gave a speech arguing that the significant presence of blacks on white-controlled sports teams and in entertainment indicated that blacks had achieved “complete acceptance” and “first-class citizenship” in those fields, which further offered proof that an integrated society was obtainable.²⁶ In 1955, an article in the *Journal of Negro Education* written by Atlanta University president Rufus E. Clement declared that the presence of blacks in the white-controlled sports was a prominent repudiation of black inferiority and illustrated the traditional uplift belief that blacks demonstrating capability and character advanced their race’s struggle for whites’ “acceptance.”²⁷

The meaning of the integration of sports and the accompanying proliferating belief that the presence of blacks in white-controlled sports institutions advanced blacks’ struggle for equality, however, was best articulated by A. S. “Doc” Young, the era’s most accomplished black sports columnist. Young authored a sports column for the *Chicago Defender*, the largest circulating black newspaper of the period and also served as sports editor of *Ebony* and *Jet*, two prominent black magazines, in the 1950s and 1960s. In 1955, nine years after Robinson entered MLB, Young named the interim of years “The Jackie Robinson Era” because as a result of Robinson’s display of ability and character, “Negro players have become absolute necessities to the game.” He referenced the traditional black uplift belief that by proving “that the Negro could do the job, if given the chance,” Robinson created opportunities for other blacks to enter white-controlled sports. Ultimately, Robinson’s “impact was tremendous. In baseball, in other sports, in non-sports fields, in the minds of men, things changed and got better because of what Jackie Robinson did on the ball diamond.”²⁸ Young reiterated this belief in most of his writings, including his 1963 work, *Negro Firsts in Sports*, which echoed the assertion that blacks’ athletic achievements educated whites to blacks’ capabilities and the mainstream’s adulation of black athletes indicated whites’ dissolution of prejudices, which resulted in better race relations.²⁹

²⁶ Sterling A. Brown, “Athletics and the Arts” in *A Documentary History of the Negro People in the United States, 1951-1959* ed. by Herbert Aptheker (New York: Carol Press, 1993), 17-22.

²⁷ Rufus E. Clement, “Racial Integration in the Field of Sports,” *Journal of Negro Education*, 23, 3, (Summer 1954), 222-3.

²⁸ A. S. “Doc” Young, “The Jackie Robinson Era,” *Ebony*, November 1955, 152-5.

²⁹ Young, *Negro Firsts in Sports*, 2-5.

Young and other members of the black press also suggested that the Cold War increased the importance of black athletes' presence and accomplishments, just as opposition to Nazi Germany increased the significance of the Owens and Louis's accomplishments in nation's consciousness in the 1930s. In 1952, the Soviet Union entered the Olympics and immediately, the geopolitical conflict between Communism and American capitalism that shaped the post-war world pervaded international sports. The press from both countries framed the athletic competitions between the two nations as a contest to demonstrate which was superior and suggested that the other would use a dominant Olympic performance as propaganda.³⁰ *The New York Times*, for instance, reported that Russian newspapers urged their Olympians "to win world championships and demonstrate the superiority of Soviet sport over that of bourgeois countries." Several weeks later, the *Times* urged its readers to support the fiscally challenged US Olympic team because of the "added significance" of competing against the Soviets, whom "with typical Communist diffidence, already have forecast victory for their athletes, presenting a challenge that should not be ignored by the United States."³¹ Athletes also understood the games as contests to determine the superiority of their nation. Rafer Johnson, a black decathlete on the 1956 US Olympic team, recalled that the Russians would use Olympic success as "a propaganda tool, a way of showcasing the Soviet system. At the Helsinki games in 1952, the Soviet Bloc countries had surprised the world with excellent performances" and at the 1956 games "they sought to topple America's Olympic supremacy." Johnson finished second to another black teammate Milt Campbell, but the Soviets garnered more medals than the US at the 1956 games. Although disappointed in the US team's performance, he counted watching his teammates "whipping the Soviet track and field machine" among his cherished Olympic memories.³²

Johnson was also a participant in one of the celebrated athletic battles between the Soviets and US in the era. Through the late 1950s and early 1960s, he sparred with Russian decathlete Vasily

³⁰ Joseph M. Turrini, "It was Communism versus the Free World": The USA-USSR Dual Track Meet Series and the Development of Track and Field in the United States, 1958-1985" *Journal of Sport History*, 28, 3 (Fall 2003), 427-32.

³¹ *New York Times*, 13 June 1952, p.22; 21 July 1952, p. 22.

³² Rafer Johnson, *The Best I That I Can Be: An Autobiography*, (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 94, 102.

Kuznetsov for championships and world records. He recalled the rivalry as “not just man-on-man for the unofficial title of the World’s Greatest Athlete, it was Communism vs. the Free World.” Other notable Americans held similar opinions of international athletic contests. After Johnson, defeated Kuznetsov and reestablished a world record in the decathlon in 1958, he received a congratulatory telegram from Vice-President Richard Nixon and was read into *The Congressional Record* as a product of superior American democracy. At the Rome Olympics in 1960, Johnson again defeated Kuznetsov and finally earned a gold-medal in the decathlon.³³ However, the Soviets decisive advantage in medals for the second consecutive games caused national concern. President John F. Kennedy, for instance, used his office to encourage high-school gym teachers to emphasize competitiveness among the nation’s would-be future Olympians.³⁴ As the 1964 Olympics approached, a worried American social scientist noted the swift ascendance of Russian Olympic success and concluded that “the statistics...show that Communist Russia is severely challenging US supremacy and is fast becoming the greatest nation of athletes in history.” He agreed with other concerned Americans that the Soviets promoted athletics because they believe it demonstrates “proof of the superiority of Soviet Socialist culture.”³⁵

In an attempt to prevent geopolitical concerns from characterizing the Olympics, the International Olympic Committee (IOC), the governing body of the Olympics, steadfastly refused to tally scores by nations, but instead issued medals to individual athletes or teams. However, according to various media and scientific tabulations of the four Cold War Olympics between 1952 and 1964, the US triumphed at the 1952 games and thereafter, the Russians scored the most points in 1956, 1960 and 1964.³⁶ Although the Soviets dominated, blacks were critical to the US’s competitiveness in the era. They consistently won medals in men and women’s track and field, boxing, weightlifting and were essential to US dominance in

³³ Rafer Johnson, 114-5; Edwin B. Henderson, *The Black Athlete* (Cornwells Heights, PA: Publishers Agency and The Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, 1976), 244-5.

³⁴ Benjamin G. Rader, *American Sports: From the Age of Folk Games to the Age of Televised Sports*, 4th edition (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1999), 280; *New York Times*, 21 December 1960, p. 21.

³⁵ Joseph A. Marchiony, “The Rise of Soviet Athletics” *Comparative Education Review*, 7, 1, (June 1963): 17, 25.

³⁶ *Ibid*, 18-25; Allen Guttmann, “The Cold War and the Olympics” *International Journal*, XLIII, 4, (Autumn 1988), 1988; *New York Times*, 1 August 1952, p. 16.

basketball.³⁷ That essentiality, the black press suggested, demonstrated that blacks were as equally manly as other Americans. In October 1952, following the first Cold War Olympics, *The Negro History Bulletin* reported that “In the unofficial contest between the “Free World of the West” and the Soviet Russia, the “burden” pulled the “superior race” to victory. Without the points contributed by Negroes, Soviet Russia would have been an easy winner in terms of the unofficial system of scoring.” Their accomplishments demonstrated that blacks were manly; “true Americans,” as the magazine suggested, who always “made their contributions to meet our country’s needs.” Noting their success, the blurb concluded that by continuing to oppress blacks, the nation impaired its “greatness.”³⁸ Avery Brundage, president of the IOC and an American, issued a similar analysis. In 1959, he suggested that the decline of American Olympic superiority indicated that the US was becoming a decadent nation characterized by “soft” effeminate citizens. He concluded that “Before the war we had won as many Olympic medals as all the rest of the world combined. Since then, if it wasn’t for our Negro athletes we would be out of the picture.”³⁹ Throughout the Cold War, the black and liberal press routinely highlighted the essentialness of blacks to US competitiveness in international sports and bitterly contrasted the praise they garnered in the mainstream press with the discrimination blacks endured in society.⁴⁰

The black press’ commentary concerning black women athletes, particularly in the important international sport of track and field, also denoted the traditional black establishments’ belief that athletic accomplishments were an significantly effective means of demonstrating blacks’ capabilities and thus, affirmed blacks’ claims to first-class citizenship. In 1958, the Soviet Union and the US inaugurated an annual dual men’s and women’s track and field meet, which immediately rivaled the Olympics in attention and importance in both countries. Johnson remembered that in the American press, “It was

³⁷ Edwin B. Henderson, “The Black American in Sports,” in *The Black American Reference Book* ed. by Mabel Smythe (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1976), 929, 948-53.

³⁸ “The White Man’s Burden’ in the Olympic Games,” *Negro History Bulletin*, October 1952, 2.

³⁹ Tex Maule, “Is America a Second-Class Track Power?” *Sports Illustrated*, 2 February 1959, 34.

⁴⁰ “How Negroes Helped the US in Tokyo Olympics,” *Jet*, 5 November 1964, 52-7; Clayton Riley, “If They Had Stayed Home,” *Liberator*, December 1964, 23-4; “20 Negro Stars qualify for “strongest” US Olympic team” *Jet*, 19 July 1956, 52-5; *Pittsburgh Courier*, 8 October 1960, p. 11; *Norfolk (VA) Journal and Guide*, 6 October 1960, p. 16; *New York Times*, 29 July 1958, p. 1.

treated with almost as much gravity as the missile race” between the two nations.⁴¹ Indeed, prior to the first meet, the governing track bodies of both nations debated each other concerning the scoring system to be used, with each attempting to legislate a system that would accentuate its strength and thus, enhance their nation’s chances for victory.⁴² Although competitive, the US men won the initial six meets and seven of the eight held between 1958 and 1969. In contrast, the Soviet women dominated the US women’s team, winning the first seven meets by large margins. Although as a whole, the US women’s teams were uncompetitive, track and field observers, as well as the black press, routinely noted that blacks were typically the only members of the US women’s teams to routinely beat Soviet women. African Americans were also the stalwarts of the Olympic and other women’s teams that the US sent abroad. Between 1948 and 1968, they composed two-thirds of all US women’s international track and field teams and won 25 of the 40 Olympic medals garnered by US women. At the 1948 London games, the first post-war Olympics, nine black women were among the eleven member US women’s track team and at both the 1948 and 1956 games, black women were the only members of those teams to medal.⁴³ At the 1960 Rome Olympics, seven black women, *Ebony* reported, were among the eight runners from historically black college Tennessee State University (TSU) that won seven gold medals, besting seventy-eight of the eighty-four other national teams participating.⁴⁴ Black women excelled in track and field in the period because in addition to the outstanding coaching at the black colleges they attended, concerns that strenuous athletics damaged women’s reproductive systems and made their bodies acquire a masculinity, or appear “mannish” as one observer suggested, caused many middle-class white American institutions to withdraw support for the sport in the 1920s. Susan Cahn suggest that women’s track continued to prosper in black America in the ensuing decades, despite declining in mainstream institutions, because the black community and black women were less beholden to mainstream and

⁴¹ Turrini, 427-8; Rafer Johnson, 114.

⁴² Marchiony, 23.

⁴³ Turrini, 432-5; Michael D. Davis, *Black American Women in Olympic Track and Field* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1992), xvi.

⁴⁴ “Winningest’ School in the Olympics: Tenn. State takes 7 Medals,” *Ebony*, November 1960, 70.

Victorian ideals of womanhood that were often employed to rationalize their racial and gender oppression.⁴⁵

Additionally, however, black women excelled in the sport because of the racial advancement significance associated with track in the period. By the 1930s, liberal and black periodicals routinely expounded on the accomplishments of black male sprinters such as Howard Drew, Ralph Metcalfe and Owens and the attention that their national and Olympic accomplishments garnered in the mainstream press.⁴⁶ That same decade, black colleges added women's track and field to their athletic programs and by the end of the decade, despite being regulated to segregated competition in the South, began to dominate national integrated track and field competitions. From 1937 to 1951, Tuskegee Institute's women's teams captured fourteen Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) titles. The annual AAU meet was essentially track and field's national championship. The TSU Tigerbelles won eleven AAU titles between 1955 and 1967. In addition, black women from northern and Midwestern athletic clubs also routinely won individual events in AAU competition and along with the Tigerbelles supplied the majority of black participants on the US women's teams in the 1950s through the 1980s.⁴⁷ In 1951, three years after Alice Coachman of Tuskegee won the high jump at the 1948 games, thus being the first black woman to earn an Olympic medal and the only US woman to medal at those games, Henderson alluded to the black advancement significance of "Negro Women in Sports." Although he, as well as the black colleges they attended, was attuned to concerns that athletics caused women to "lose some of their charm and...health," Henderson concluded that if women of other nations continued to "engage in these sports with no proven evidence of detriment, our girls have reason and right to compete. Victory in physical contests, as with high rating in mental or spiritual measurements, helped to kill off the Nazi-inspired doctrine of inferiority

⁴⁵ Susan Cahn, *Coming on Strong: Gender and Sexuality in Twentieth Century Sports* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 111-26.

⁴⁶ For examples see, Henderson, "The Negro Athlete and Race Prejudice," 77-9; Arthur Howe, "Two Racers and What They Symbolize" *The Southern Workman*, (October 1932), 387-9; Oswald Garrison Villard, "Issues and Men," *The Nation* 15 August 1936, 185; Joseph H. Rainey, "The Negro Athlete as Goodwill Ambassador," in *The 1938 Bulletin of The Colored Intercollegiate Athletic Association with Proceedings of the Nineteen Thirty-Seven Meeting* compiled by J. L. Whitehead (Hampton, VA: Hampton Institute Press, 1938), 24-6.

⁴⁷ Turrini, 432-5; Cahn, 111-26; Michael D. Davis, 80.

or superiority of groups of people classified as races.”⁴⁸ In Henderson’s estimation, the reward of black women’s participation in athletics outweighed the risks, because their achievements, like those of black men, demonstrated that blacks possessed the capability to contribute to the nation’s advancement. Beginning with the ascendance of black women Olympians in the 1940s, the black and mainstream press, although in language less nationalistic than Henderson’s, continue to note black women athletes’ contributions to the advancement of the nation.⁴⁹

In addition to improving the image of blacks by aiding the defeat of Soviets on the field, the prominence of athletes presented blacks with another notable Cold War opportunity for service to the nation. Beginning in 1945 and extending through the Cold War, the US State Department sent hundreds of athletes, entertainers and other Americans on Goodwill tours abroad and in particular to Third World nations. The stated purposes of the tours were to foster cultural relationships between the nations and as it concerned sport, help prepare foreign athletes and sports associations for international competition. Less stated was the US’s attempt to suggest that the benefits of American capitalism exceeded those of Communism and to expunge the perception of American foreign policy as imperialistic and Washington as the head of a racist state that oppressed its minorities.⁵⁰ Indeed, in 1955, Young enthusiastically reported that black athletes have “flashed their speed, many times, in the faces of people whose propaganda says Negroes in America are no more than pitiful serfs, and the United States is a land without hope for any man of a darker hue.”⁵¹ Black athletes, especially Olympians, were chosen for Goodwill tours because their pinnacle success suggested a practiced racial democracy in the US.

Black athletes were certainly expected to intimate as much during visits to the Third World. Johnson remembered that the purpose of a 1957 State Department tour through the Middle East, Africa,

⁴⁸ Edwin B. Henderson, “Negro Women in Sports,” *Negro History Bulletin*, December 1951, 55; Michael D. Davis, 80-1.

⁴⁹ “Chicago Comets, Tennessee State now Outrank Tuskegee,” *Ebony*, June 1955, 28; “9 Negro Athletes Go to Melbourne, Australia: 9 of them are women- all on track and field squad- 3 more are basketball,” (*Baltimore Afro-American*, 3 November 1956, p.15; “Tigerbelles for Rome,” *Time*, 25 July 1960, 54; *New York Times*, 16 July 1958, p. 34; Bill Gilbert, “See How They Run,” *Saturday Evening Post*, 19 October, 1968, 86.

⁵⁰ Michael D. Davis, 145-6; Damion Thomas, “Spreading the Gospel of Democracy: Athletics, Race and the Cold War” in *Revolutions of the Mind: Cultural Studies in the African Diaspora Project, 1996-2002*, ed. by Dionne Bennett, et al. (Los Angeles, CA: CAAS Publications, 2003), 78, 83.

⁵¹ Young, “The Jackie Robinson Era,” 156.

Asia and eastern Europe was “to make friends in places where the United States wanted to improve relations.” At each locale, he conducted track and field clinics, posed with local dignitaries and spoke with “students and educators about sports and the importance of contact between people of different cultures.” He also remembered that the “school desegregation crises in Little Rock was in the world’s news at the time, so I also had to clarify certain misconceptions and assure people that Arkansas Governor Faubus did not represent all white Americans.”⁵² By contrast, when Bill Russell, a 1956 Olympian, criticized racism in the US and the racist white US State Department officials he encountered on a Goodwill tour through Africa in 1959, the mainstream press labeled him a Communist-duped “Black Muslim.”⁵³ Additionally, during the Cold War, black athletes were often celebrated for espousing American exceptionalism during international sporting events. For instance, Cassius Clay’s reply to a Russian reporter that “To me, the USA is still the best country in the world including yours, counting yours,” at the 1960 Rome Olympics garnered him as much, if not more, press attention than his heavyweight boxing gold-medal.⁵⁴

The mainstream establishment’s Cold War disseminated belief that sports presented a progressive nature of racial advancement and integration in the US also strengthened the traditional black establishment’s articulation of the belief. Adolph H. Grundman notes that in the two decades between WWII and the Sixties, the mainstream press presented several developments in sports, such as the relative peaceful integration of blacks into white-controlled sports, the refusal of non-southern college teams to accept Jim Crow customs in sports, the desegregation of college teams in the border South and the sports awards reaped by blacks, as civil rights advances. Indeed, in January 1967, *The Saturday Review* proudly concluded that “The world of sport has now become, along with the Supreme Court decisions, the civil rights movement, the exploding post-war economy, and world opinion, an undeniable force in moving the

⁵² Rafer Johnson, 107.

⁵³ Bill Russell, *Go Up for Glory* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1966), 152-3; Bill Russell, *Second Wind: The Memoirs of an Opinionated Man* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1979), 89-90.

⁵⁴ Mike Marqusee, *Redemption Song: Muhammad Ali and the Spirit of the Sixties* (New York: Verso, 2000), 46; Muhammad Ali with Richard Durham, *The Greatest: My Own Story* (New York: Random House, 1975), 61.

United States toward full integration.” Grundman notes that by the eve of the Sixties mass black protest movement in sports, such declarations were common in the mainstream press and therefore, the average America accepted as “conventional wisdom...that sport treated blacks fairly and that it contributed mightily to good race relations.”⁵⁵

Therefore, by the Sixties, the belief that the significant presence of blacks in white-controlled sports indicated improved race relations was hegemonic in both the black and mainstream presses. The traditional black establishments’ response to a proposed black Olympic boycott in 1964 illustrates the validity the belief had obtained prior to the Olympic Project for Human Rights (OPHR) in the Sixties. In March 1964, two-time Olympic gold-medalist Mal Whitfield suggested that qualifying blacks boycott the upcoming summer Olympics in Tokyo, “if Negro Americans by that time have not been guaranteed full and equal rights as first-class citizens.” The direct action campaigns of the civil rights movement and the death of President John F. Kennedy had forced the federal government to finally consider comprehensive civil rights legislation that would outlaw institutional segregation and racial discrimination. As civil rights advocates planned more campaigns to pressure Congress, Whitfield proposed that “it is time for American Negro athletes to join in the civil rights fight, a fight that is far from won, despite” the pending legislation. As notable, Whitfield suggested that black participation in the upcoming Olympics would only perpetuate the façade that the US was a “free country,” thus contributing to the further delay of much needed federal action against anti-black discrimination. Whitfield declared that the accomplishments of black Olympians might receive significant attention in the press, as they always had, but contrary to widespread societal belief that black athletic accomplishments contributed to black advancement, blacks were “not going to receive justice along with economic, political and civil rights” because of their athletic accomplishments or service to the state. “If we want them, we are going to have to fight for them, and

⁵⁵ Adolph H. Grundman, “The Image of Intercollegiate Sports and the Civil Rights Movement: An Historian’s View,” *ARENA-Review* 3, 3 (October 1979): 17-24; “Sports as an Integrator,” *Saturday Review*, 21 January 1967, 32.

fight from all quarters,” athletes included. “For the Negro athlete, the 1964 World Olympics is as good a place as any to begin.”⁵⁶

Although Whitfield’s suggestion spurred little activism,⁵⁷ it garnered an earnest, although anonymous, rebuke in the June 1964 issue of *Sepia*, a black monthly. Characterizing it as part of “a scatter gun attack...leveled at Negro athletes by people who believe that they should take a more active part in various civil rights movements,” the article suggested that the demands were being made by those who lacked a proper historical understanding of black athletes’ contribution to the black struggle- “So-called “militant” Negroes who don’t know the score.” Even if illogical, however, Whitfield’s proposal could not be ignored because the lent credence of the celebrated black “ex-Olympian” challenged the proliferating belief that blacks’ athletic accomplishments and presence in white-controlled sports improved whites’ image of blacks, thus advancing the race.⁵⁸

For *Sepia*, the question of “should Negro athletes be civil rights fighters?” was actually a question of the preferred strategy of black advancement. The article declared that “Black Nationalism,” the demand that immediate uncompromised black equality could only be achieved through black protest, had become fashionable. It “may sound harsh,” the article declared, “but, the obvious fact is, the mass demonstrations of 1963, so highly publicized in the press, amounted to no more than a fad like the Twist.” It was “one prong only in what should be a diversified attack on the conditions that plague us” because equality could not be achieved “solely” by boycotts and demonstrations. A far more proven strategy, the further article insinuated, was demonstrating that blacks possessed character and a superior manliness. Having done so through athletics, *Sepia* noted, “Negro athletes have already done more than most to “make things better’ in this country” and therefore, “shouldn’t be asked to play ‘unnatural’ roles” as protestors. The article projected a litany of examples to validate its supposition. For instance, Louis’s

⁵⁶ Mal Whitfield, “Let’s Boycott the Olympics: Negro Champ asks Negro Athletes to Act,” *Ebony*, March 1964, 95-6, 100.

⁵⁷ Activist Dick Gregory organized pickets of the 1964 US Olympic track and field trials; Harry Edwards, *Revolt of the Black Athlete* (New York: The Free Press, 1969), x,-xi, 40-1; Whitfield’s proposal also received belated support from the *Liberator*, an important black transnational journal; November 1964, 19; December 1964, 23-4.

⁵⁸ “Negro Athletes and Civil Rights,” 35.

fists and character had changed “anti-Negro attitudes to pro-Negro attitudes” and “No American civil rights fighter has yet reached the 300 million (or more) people as Willie Mays does around the world, in a World Series.”⁵⁹ *Sepia* and the traditional black establishment condemned Whitfield’s proposal to boycott the 1964 Olympics because it believed that demonstrating that blacks possessed manliness and character, as black athletes did through participation in white-controlled athletic institutions, was a more effective means of advancing the black struggle for equality than protest.⁶⁰ Indeed, just a year before Whitfield’s proposal, an article in *Ebony* detailing black athletes’ “total impact on the American scene” explained that “What Dr. Martin Luther King and other Civil Rights leaders are now fervently attempting to accomplish in vital areas of education, employment and housing already has been achieved in mass-appeal sports” and “the break-through gains in the cited areas of Dr. King’s concentration often are made more easily because sports have previously proven the human practicality of integration.”⁶¹

Sepia also opposed Whitfield’s proposed boycott of the 1964 Olympics because the games presented black athletes with another opportunity to advance the US’s Cold War agenda. A boycott, the article noted, would likely allow the Russians to outscore the US at the games and suggest that blacks were unpatriotic, or had a “lack of interest in the national welfare.” *Sepia* announced uncompromising support for “full fledged equality, fully deserved,” but also a rejoinder that “like all other Americans, [blacks] have obligations to the United States too.”⁶²

Lastly, *Sepia* opposed a black Olympic boycott because such action could possibly do irreparable damage to the superior manly image in believed black athletes to have. The article asked “Where is the gain” if while Willie Mays was on a picket line and the San Francisco Giants lost a pennant, if blacks boycotted the Olympics and the Russians earned more medals than the US or if former heavyweight boxing champion Sonny Liston was waterhosed during a march and decided to retaliate? The insinuation

⁵⁹ “Negro Athletes and Civil Rights,” 36-7.

⁶⁰ Kevin K. Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 74-5; Martin Summers, *Manliness and Its Discontents: The Black Middle-Class and the Transformation of Masculinity, 1900-1930* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 1-9.

⁶¹ “How Sports Helped Break The Color Line,” *Ebony*, September 1963, 114.

⁶² “Negro Athletes and Civil Rights,” 36-7.

was that the resulting criticism and humiliation would damage the capable manly image of those black athletes and possibly annul athletics as a significant means of group and individual black advancement. Therefore, rather than protest, *Sepia* concluded that when Willie Mays “makes a fine, clutch catch or hits a pennant-winning homerun,” Jim Brown “scores a touchdown” and Wilt Chamberlain “dunks a shot,” those accomplishments contributed significantly more to blacks’ struggle for equality than protest.⁶³

In the Sixties, the traditional black establishment would reiterate these in opposition to the black radical-supported OPHR. Activist-athletes attempting to organize a black boycott of the 1968 US Olympic team would surmise that the hegemony of the belief, that the accomplishments of blacks in white-controlled sports advanced their race, was the foremost obstacle to the boycott movement. Harry Edwards would write “that the very idea of either using sport as a protest vehicle or protesting the character or circumstances of Afro-American involvement in sport- particularly in connection with their Olympic Games participation- seemed to most as quite mystifying, to some ludicrous, and yet to others treasonous.”⁶⁴ The OPHR, as well as Whitfield’s proposed boycott of the 1964, engendered significant opposition because of the widespread validity the belief had achieved in the public discourse decades earlier.

II

By the mid-1950s, integration of professional and intercollegiate team revenue producing sports was complete, save in the Jim Crow South of course. Rader notes that from 1870 to WWII, “a tiny number of blacks (probably less than one percent of total players) played on racially integrated college football teams in the North; likewise, a somewhat larger number engaged in track and field competitions.” Other less lucrative, but popular intercollegiate sports, including lacrosse and basketball remained rigidly

⁶³ “Negro Athletes and Civil Rights, 38-9; Gaines has demonstrated that in an attempt to sunder themselves from the anti-black stereotypes that circumscribed blacks, black elites routinely attempted to avoid or conceal the racial slights and injuries they experienced because they caste aspirations on the traditional black cultural uplift’s belief that whites were predisposed to recognize properly cultured and accomplished blacks as equals; Gaines, 5-8.

⁶⁴ Edwards, “The Olympic Project for Human Rights,” 2; also see Edwards, *Struggle that Must Be*, 218; and Smith, “Why Negroes should Boycott?,” 40-1, 68.

segregated in the period. In professional team sports, blacks were barred from white-institutional professional baseball in the 1880s. In the 1920s, “a few blacks” continue to play in various white-controlled professional football leagues until barred in the 1930s and professional basketball remained unpopular and segregated in most parts of the US. Prior to the 1960s, Rader notes that with the exception of the working man’s sport of boxing, integration “rarely” occurred in club sports like tennis, golf and swimming.⁶⁵ By the end of the WWII, however, Spivey suggests that “Practically all major collegiate [football and basketball] teams, with the exception of the Southern conferences, had one black member.”⁶⁶ While there are no statistics to validate these assertions, professional team sports also integrated in the immediate post-war years. Robinson entered MLB in the spring of 1946 and professional football integrated the same year. The mass integration of team sports was a result of the substantial revenue growth of professional and intercollegiate sports in the decades after WWII. This section will argue that black athletes were simply one of several innovations used by professional franchises and college athletic departments to capitalize on the increasing economic growth and revenue of sports in the period. Additionally, the chapter concludes that because the integration of sports was motivated by economics, rather than social notion that sports altruistically fostered fair play and democracy, blacks’ experiences in sports, like their experiences in other institutions, continued to be shaped by anti-black discrimination.⁶⁷

In the 1920s, the nationwide popularity of spectator team sports, especially professional baseball and college football, exploded. With the full advent of the American consumer economy, millions spent their increased disposable income paying to see the star players and coaches covered by the burgeoning new sports sections in daily newspapers. Team sports quickly gained the support of college administrators because a winning sports program, particularly football, could translate into significant financial and publicity benefits for a school. It stimulated alumni, community and even regional interest

⁶⁵ Rader, *American Sports*, 130; Ron Thomas, *They Cleared the Lane: The NBA’s Black Pioneers* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 4-16.

⁶⁶ Donald Spivey, “The Black Athlete in Big-Time Sports, 1941-1968,” *Phylon*, 44, 2 (1983), 20n.

⁶⁷ Estes, 1-9.

that could garner a school national publicity and generate substantial gate receipts and later broadcasting revenue, both of which supported the entire athletic department and in exemplarily cases, such as Notre Dame and the University of Southern California, contributed additional income to a school's annual operating budget. From the outset, however, intercollegiate athletics could also be a tenuous affair for a school. By the 1930s, although football game attendance doubled in the decade, of the 400 intercollegiate teams, approximately 40 schools attracted 60 percent of the gate, and therefore were profitable. Additionally, a successful "big-time" college football team, one that consistently won and produced revenue, usually had to financially support a 70,000 seat stadium, a full-time sports information bureau, a source of "jobs" for athletes in financial need and an extensive recruiting network that competed nationally with other schools for athletic recruits. As the cost and competition between schools to field a winning team increased and the depression deepened, a number of schools dropped football in the 1930s. Several other schools, influenced by the recruiting and academic scandals that paralleled the escalation of "big-time" college football, de-emphasized or terminated their intercollegiate sports.⁶⁸

Basketball became a second source of substantial revenue for collegiate athletic departments during the mid-1930s. To fill newly built boxing coliseums on off nights, promoters in the Northeast began scheduling the nation's best college basketball teams to play local colleges in double and triple-headers. By the 1939, two annual season-ending championship tournaments, both held under the marquee of New York's Madison Square Garden, helped enhance the popularity of the sport and by the early 1940s, the double and triple-header promotions spread to the Midwest. The numerically smaller number of athletes, and therefore cheaper cost, required to field a successful basketball team also led a number of schools to abandon football. By the 1940s, for instance, a number of small city colleges and Catholic universities perennially fielded teams ranked among the nation's best and in the coming decades would compete with better funded universities for college basketball championships. As the popularity

⁶⁸ Murray Sperber, *Onward to Victory: The Crisis that Shaped College Sports* (New York: Henry Holt, 1998), xx-xxi; John F. Rooney, *The Recruiting Game* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1980), 16; Rader, *American Sports*, 183-8.

and revenue of college basketball increased, the competition between schools for players soon rivaled that of football recruiting.⁶⁹

WWII radically altered the public perception of the purpose of college sports in American society and ultimately contributed to its growing popularity. In the first half of the twentieth century, sportswriters, many of them influenced by Victorian notions of manliness, articulated that the primary purpose of sports, like that of other revered institutions such as family, church, school and the military, was to contribute to the necessary character-building of young men. However, the war's emphasis on defeating the enemy, the military's extensive use of athletics for physical preparedness and the widespread enlistment and drafting of coaches and athletes led to a post-war emphasis on winning in college sports. For instance, in attempt to restore the institution's football glory, in 1940, West Point administrators hired a new coach, who subsequently violated intercollegiate regulations by using academy appointments as athletic scholarships, officer training assignments as military deferments for his players and poached other college teams for talent. As in war, to the victor go the spoils; throughout the 1940s, Army consistently competed for college football's national championship and was hailed by many experts as the best college football program of the decade. The discovery of an extensive cheating network among present and past cadets on the football team in 1951, however, shook the public and former graduate President Dwight D. Eisenhower's faith in the institution.⁷⁰

The Second World War also unintentionally contributed to the escalating the cost of college athletics. The GI Bill supplied schools with a substantial boost in enrollment, which also provided college sports with an abundant, cheap supply of players. Paul "Bear" Bryant, a future hall-of-fame football coach, for instance, composed his first post-war team at the University of Maryland mainly from GIs he coached during the war. Resultantly, football and the pursuit of the "big-time" financial and publicity benefits associated with the game proliferated. Between 1945, the year the war ended, and 1946, the number of college gridiron teams increased from approximately 220 to 650. However, as the

⁶⁹ Rader, *American Sports*, 270-3; Sperber, 285-93.

⁷⁰ Sperber, 345-56, xx-xxi.

supply of veterans waned, recruiting and retaining players became the most expensive, as well as the most controversial, aspect of college football. To lure and retain athletes, schools built luxurious dormitories and funded special diets for athletes, shepherded athletes into “Mickey Mouse” courses that kept them eligible for athletic participation and increased extralegal financial support to athletes. By the 1950s, several schools reportedly had illegal player payrolls that exceeded \$100,000 annually. (Adjusted for inflation, Murray Sperber suggests the contemporary sum would exceed \$1,000,000.) One exasperated college football coach complained that the “slush fund” of his school’s state rival was at least \$200,000. Myles Jackson, a former University of Michigan football player, recounted that in the immediate post-war years, “One way or another, aboveboard, below board or sideways, every single school in the country that had a football team of any standing was engaged in buying high-school football players.” Those illegal inducements also began finding their way to blacks in the post-war era. For instance, after serving in the Navy during WWII, Buddy Young, a black half-back from Chicago, accepted a substantial monetary offer to spurn more than twenty-five other schools and return to the University of Illinois to complete his collegiate football career. In his study of the recruiting and gambling scandals that plagued college sports in the decades after the war, Sperber concluded that “the illegal offers to [Young] showed that segregation was ending in intercollegiate athletics...When schools started extending the same under-the-table deals to blacks as [they did to] whites, they indicated the pursuit of winning tolerated no creed, class, or color lines.”⁷¹ Another historian suggests that the disproportionately high involvement of black student-athletes in gambling and financial scandals in 1950s and 1960s also reflects the evolution of the win-at-all cost mentality that pervaded postwar intercollegiate sports.⁷²

Economic motives also initiated the integration of professional team sports. In the decades surrounding WWII, professional sports underwent economic consolidation and expansion, which allowed it to capitalize on the expanding consumer economy. By the 1940s, there were approximately forty major professional sports franchises, the substantial majority of which were located in northeastern and

⁷¹ Sperber, xx-xxv, 168-76; Rooney, 18-9; Myles Jackson, “College Football is a Losing Business,” *Fortune*, December 1962, 119-21, 174-84.

⁷² Spivey, “Black Athlete in Big-Time Intercollegiate Sports,” 122-3.

midwestern cities. By the 1960s, however, a number of franchises had relocated or been added to the emerging metropolises of the West and Southwest. In MLB, beginning in the 1950s, franchises abandoned eastern cities that hosted two teams for exclusive fan bases and markets in the Midwest and West and later the South. In 1953, the Braves surrendered Boston to the Red Sox and relocated to Milwaukee and then moved to Atlanta in 1966. Between 1954 and 1958, the St. Louis Browns, Philadelphia Athletics, Brooklyn Dodgers and New York Giants also relocated to midwestern and western localities. In 1960, the threat of a rival league also caused MLB to establish franchises in emerging western metropolises such as Minneapolis, Dallas, Houston and San Diego. In addition to exclusive fan bases and broadcasting rights, franchises were lured to new localities by subsidies, tax breaks and local and state funded facilities with expansive seating capacity, which increased gate receipts. After a short period of mergers and reconsolidation in the immediate post-war years, pro football and basketball underwent similar expansion in the 1950s and 1960s.⁷³

Broadcasting rights also became a substantial source of revenue for professional sports in the immediate post-war years. In the early 1940s, for instance, the Brooklyn Dodgers sold their radio broadcasting rights for \$70,000 a season. A decade later, the three teams in the New York metro area sold their radio rights for an average of \$210,000 each and MLB received approximately \$100,000 from each radio network that broadcast the World Series. By the late 1950s, teams began selling their individual broadcasting rights to television and in 1961, Congress passed the Sports Broadcasting Act, which exempted professional sports leagues from certain anti-trust legislation and allowed them to negotiate as a collective entity. As a result, television revenue became a substantial source of income for professional sports teams. In 1964, for instance, the National Football League (NFL) sold its television broadcasting rights to CBS for \$14 million, nearly three times as much as its previous contract. The same year, NBC agreed to pay the American Football League, a rival upstart league, \$42 million over five years, for the rights to broadcast its games. In baseball, in addition to league television revenue, teams

⁷³ Rader, *American Sports*, 224-59; James Olsen and Randy Roberts, *Winning is the Only Thing: Since in America since 1945* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 1989), 68-9.

also capitalized on local television rights. In 1963, the Braves sold their local rights in Milwaukee for \$500,000 and three seasons later were lured to Atlanta by Turner Broadcasting's offer of \$1.2 million a year for local rights. In 1968, the Athletics raised their local television revenue from \$98,000 to \$705,000 by moving from Kansas City to Oakland. In all, between 1952 and 1971, MLB's television revenue increased from \$5.4 million to \$40.7 million and the NBA's television revenue increased from \$130,000 to \$5.5 million during the same era. Likewise, the NFL's television revenue increased from \$4.9 million to \$50 million between 1960 and 1970. By the late 1960s, television money accounted for more than forty percent of baseball's revenue and fifty percent of pro football's revenue.⁷⁴

In an attempt to increase its spectator appeal and audiences in the era, college and professional team revenue-producing sports altered their games to accommodate audiences and advertisers. For instance, professional baseball and college and professional football and basketball all enacted rule changes designed to increase scoring and thus, make games more exciting. Television broadcasts also added announcers and commentators, multiple camera angles, instant replays and slow motion clips, all of which made contests easier to follow for viewers and to accommodate advertisers, television added as many as fourteen television timeouts to a single broadcast. Television revenue was the most lucrative, but by no means the only significant revenue source for professional sports. In 1967, one disgruntled NFL player union representative exaggerated that broadcasting revenue, increasing gate receipts and licensing agreements made professional sport "one of the great American industries" of the post-war era. The NFL's net increased from an estimated \$1.2 million and profit margin of 9 percent in 1956 to an estimated net of \$48 million and a profit margin of 65 percent in 1966. He further claimed that while the profit of team owners soared 4,300 percent in that period, player salaries only increased 73 percent.⁷⁵ By the Sixties, players had organized unions in all four major team sports leagues in attempt to increase their salaries and establish pensions.⁷⁶ They were likely motivated by what one veteran sports journalist suggested had motivated all of the tremendous post-war growth of sports; the prodigious amounts of

⁷⁴ Rader, *American Sports*, 224-59; Olsen and Roberts, 139-40.

⁷⁵ Bernie Parish with Ed Linn, "Pro Football's Player Mutiny," *Look*, 22 August 1967, 66.

⁷⁶ *Daily Worker*, 4 February 1968, p. 5; Olsen and Roberts, 57, 64-70, 135-7.

“money” generated by and sports since WWII.⁷⁷ Indeed, money also motivated the integration of team sports in the period.

In addition to indicating the growth of spectator sports, citing revenue statistics are important because in the decades surrounding WWII, franchises that generated more revenue generally had greater on-the-field success than others. Although many leagues and teams engaged in some scheme of profit-sharing to ensure the financial solvency of all franchises, generally teams in larger markets with larger fan bases and broadcast revenue fared better than others because they could afford more outstanding players. For instance, between 1946 and 1969, the New Yankees, who played in the nation’s largest market and whose ballpark accounted for 40 percent of the American League’s attendance, won fifteen pennants in eighteen seasons. The most any other American League competitor won in the era were two. In the same period, the Brooklyn-Los Angeles Dodgers, who also played in the first and third largest markets respectively, won ten National League pennants, which exceeded their nearest league competitor by six. As indicative between 1903 and 1964, at least one of the three teams from New York appeared in thirty-nine of the sixty-one World Series.⁷⁸

Perhaps no person in the immediate post-war years better understood the correlation between revenue and winning in professional sports as much as Branch Rickey, the architect of the integration of MLB. Prior to his arrival in Brooklyn, from 1926 to 1942, Rickey served as general manager of the major leagues’ St. Louis Cardinals, where he invented the modern “farm” system, which transformed the small-market team into a perennial contender for the next quarter of a century. Beginning during his tenure as field manager from 1919 to 1925, the Cardinals purchased thirty-two minor league teams, which fielded more than six hundred players. Those minor league clubs served as baseball schools to develop talent for the parent club, the Cardinals. During Rickey’s sixteen-year tenure in St. Louis, the Cardinals won six National League pennants and four World Series, which was only topped by the eight championships won by the Yankees, the team from the nation’s largest market. After Rickey’s departure,

⁷⁷ Joseph Durso, “Sportswriting- and the All-American Dollar,” *Saturday Review*, 9 October 1971, 67.

⁷⁸ Rader, *American Sports*, 245; Rader, *Baseball*, 179-80.

the Cardinals won two more World Series, largely with players he developed and acquired. In addition to winning, Rickey traded or sold the player's contracts of many of the Cardinal's farm prospects to other franchises, which during the depression kept the small-market club financially solvent and afterwards made the Cardinals one of the more profitable MLB franchises. His accomplishments are further remarkable, considering that the Cards shared St. Louis, the smallest market in MLB, with another MLB team, the Browns of the American League. With the exception of the Cardinals, small-market teams usually sacrificed winning to continue operation by selling talented players to larger market teams. Rickey was also instrumental in building a southern radio network that helped routinely attract fans from nine states to their St. Louis's ballpark and made the Cardinals, the southern-most MLB team in the era, "the South's team." Despite his genius, by the early 1940s, Cardinals' owner Sam Breadon usurped Rickey's authority in the organization and in 1942, he accepted a lucrative offer to become general manager of the Dodgers, the Cardinal's fiercest rivals.⁷⁹ After transforming the Dodgers into perennial contenders and integrating baseball, he was forced out of the Brooklyn in 1950. Afterwards, using black and Latino players, he built the small-market Pittsburgh Pirates into perennial contenders and in 1960, forced MLB to expand by threatening to form a competing professional league. Rickey, then and now, was considered the premier "baseball man" of his generation.⁸⁰

Although the majority of sports writers and scholars have credited WWII's liberalizing effect on the nation and Rickey's altruism as the primary impetuses for "the noble experiment," Lee Lowenfish, a baseball scholar and Rickey biographer, concludes that Rickey's obsession with winning, as well as succeeding economically, was at least as equal a catalyst in Rickey's initiation of baseball's integration as the former factors. Prior to signing Robinson in 1945, Rickey confidentially told several Dodger colleagues that experienced Negro League players were an untapped resource that would allow the Dodgers to compete rather quickly with the Cardinals and cross-town perennial contending Yankees. It

⁷⁹ Lee Lowenfish, "When all Heaven Rejoiced: Branch Rickey and the Origins of the Breaking of the Color Line," *Nine: A Journal of Baseball History and Culture* 11, 1 (Fall 2002), 1-6; Rader, *American Games*, 166-8; Rader, *Baseball*, 147-9, 176.

⁸⁰ Thomas W. Gilbert, *Baseball and the Color Line* (New York: Watts, 1995), 144.

was one of several innovations that he employed to build the Dodgers into contenders. During the war, as many clubs decreased player scouting and development budgets, Rickey doubled Brooklyn's, which allowed the Dodger's to acquire more quality high school prospects than other clubs. In addition to expanding the Dodgers farm system, he also began a secret extensive scouting program of black players, which, after the integration of MLB in 1947, allowed the club to sign more quality black players, including all-stars Roy Campanella, Don Newcombe and Junior Gilliam, than any other MLB franchise in the era. As a result, between 1947 and 1957, primarily with the talent developed or acquired by Rickey, the Dodgers earned six World Series berths, which again was only second to the Yankees.⁸¹

The Dodgers and MLB also experienced significant attendance and financial success in the initial years of integration. In 1947, as the Dodgers, MLB's first integrated team, traveled the National League circuit, they set attendance records in five cities. The same year, MLB set an attendance record of 10,388,470 paid admissions, an increase of more than 1.5 million from the preceding year. Over the next decade, until the advent of televised games in the 1950s, the major leagues would enjoy its best attendance since prior to WWI, three decades earlier.⁸² As telling, near the end of Robinson's first season with Brooklyn, 1947, the Cleveland Indians and St. Louis Browns signed and fielded black players in an attempt to draw excited blacks and other curious fans to bolster their gate receipts. Additionally, months

⁸¹ Lowenfish, 5-13; Rader, *Baseball*, 183.

Popular lore and Rickey suggests that his motivation to integrate baseball was initially triggered by an incident that occurred in 1904, four decades before the integration of MLB, when he was a college baseball coach at Ohio Wesleyan. After a game against Notre Dame, a South Bend, IN hotel denied Wesleyan's black catcher Charles Thomas lodging. Rickey successfully intervened and convinced hotel management to allow Thomas to sleep on a cot in his room and accordingly, he consoled the weeping black man. In the immediate years after Robinson's entrance into baseball, the press, both black and mainstream, often detailed the incident as the sole impetus for Rickey's noble experiment. However, numerous observers, including Lowenfish, have argued that in the four decades between the two incidents, Rickey demonstrated very little concern for ameliorating anti-black discrimination. For instance, during his tenure as lead executive of the St. Louis Cardinals, from 1926 to 1942, for instance, Rickey did not contest the Jim Crow seating at Cardinal's Sportsman Stadium. Evidence also suggests that as manager of the crosstown St. Louis Browns in 1916, he rescinded the contract offer of a pitching prospect after learning he was Jewish. Additionally, in the early years of the integration of baseball, Rickey consistently justified signing black players from the Negro League teams without compensation to those teams by denigrating the Negro Leagues as "rackets" operated by numbers runners and other deviants; Gilbert, 136-47; for an example of Rickey and disparagement of black concerns see, Arnold Rampersad, *Jackie Robinson: A Biography* (New York: Knopf, 1997) 160.

⁸² Henry D. Fetter, "Robinson in 1947; Measuring an Uncertain Impact," in the *Jackie Robinson: Race, Sports and the American Dream* ed. by Joseph Dorinson and Joram Warmund (Armond, NY: Sharpe, 1998,) 183-92.

after Robinson began his first season on the Dodgers farm in 1946, professional football integrated. The Los Angeles Rams, a recently transplanted franchise from Cleveland, signed two of Robinson's former UCLA black teammates, Woody Strode and Kenny Washington, to bolster home attendance.⁸³

The mass integration of blacks into revenue producing sports occurred during the initial years of the post-war growth of the sports economy and like franchise relocation, league expansion, expansive new stadiums, rule changes and adjustments for television, talented black athletes were simply another means to enhance the product and capitalize on the increasing sports revenue in the period. As a consequence, sports, paraphrasing James Baldwin's discussion of larger society in the period, never dealt with the "hard problems" of race and racism.⁸⁴ In his examination of the integration of sports in the Sixties, sportswriter Jack Olsen concluded that virtually all blacks in white-controlled sports institutions endured discrimination. He noted that the "essential white attitude" that pervaded white-controlled athletics included not only the typical stereotypes that blacks were "inferior, stupid and immoral," but also that whites should remain in authority. Despite the significant presence of blacks, athletics, he concluded, remained "white men's pursuits. The Negro may integrate them, or even almost take them over, as in college and pro basketball, but the essential character of the game, the ethics and folkways, remain white- and basically Anglo-Saxon...The Negro...is a hired performer, and he has a job as long as he knows his place in the white game and stays in it."⁸⁵ Just as in other white-controlled institutions, those blacks integrating into white-controlled athletics prior to the Sixties were expected to accommodate white supremacy to remain in those institutions.⁸⁶

Other examinations of race and sports in the era have also detailed that blacks in white-controlled athletic institutions between WWII and the Sixties, like their predecessors, encountered persistent educational, social and cultural discrimination. In their study of the plight of scholarship black athletes at

⁸³ Neil Lanctot, *Negro League Baseball: The Rise and Ruin of a Black Institution* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 314-5; Olsen and Roberts, 33-4; "Negroes Come Back to Pro Football," *Ebony*, October 1946, 13.

⁸⁴ James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time* in *James Baldwin: Collected Essays* (New York: Library of America, 1998), 336, 340.

⁸⁵ Olsen, *Black Athlete*, 158-9.

⁸⁶ Estes, 1-9.

the University of Illinois between 1931 and 1967, Donald Spivey and Thomas Jones demonstrate that most were recruited from poorly funded urban or rural Jim Crow school systems, and as a result, many were unprepared academically to attend the school. However, to keep blacks eligible for athletics, all-white coaching staffs often advised them to major in physical education and/or suggested that they take “Mickey Mouse” classes, which kept them eligible for athletic participation, but often did not earn them credit toward a degree. Of the 227 blacks on athletic scholarships at Illinois during the three decades studied, 66 percent, twice the percentage of white scholarship athletes, majored in physical education. That department, however, had one of the highest attrition rates at the university and the attrition rate of black scholarship athletes far exceeded that of white athletes and the general student body. Jones and Spivey noted that as a result, it was typical for black student-athletes to exhaust four years of athletic eligibility, but be substantially short of the credits necessary for a degree.⁸⁷ Similar conditions existed at several other predominately white universities. Between 1960 and 1964, Michigan State University graduated eighty-three percent of its white freshman student-athletes, but only 46.3 percent of black freshman student-athletes. Additionally, on average, it took the MSU black athletes an additional 1.4 semesters to graduate. Only thirty-five percent of black football players graduated from the University of Washington between 1957 to 1967. From 1964 to 1968, the University of Utah graduated only twelve of forty-six black student-athletes and Utah State graduated only nine of forty in the same period. A study of black athletes’ experiences in the Big Ten, a Midwestern intercollegiate athletic conference of predominately white universities, concluded that similar low graduation rates existed at schools in that conference because all-white athletic department personal had low academic expectations of blacks and consistently counseled black student-athletes to take easier elective courses that kept them eligible for athletic competition, but often did not earn them credit toward a degree.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Thomas Jones and Donald Spivey, “Intercollegiate Athletic Servitude: A Case Study of the Black Illini Student Athletes, 1931-67” *Social Science Quarterly* 55, no.4 (1975), 939-47.

⁸⁸ Robert L. Green et al, “Black Athletes: Educational, Economic and Political Considerations,” *Journal of Non-White Concerns in Personal and Guidance*, 3, no. 1 October 1974: 14-5.

Additionally, black athletes at predominately white universities endured a number of other social and cultural slights. At Illinois, for instance, university housing did not admit blacks until the 1950s. At many other universities, housing was segregated and in many localities, blacks had difficulties securing suitable housing near campus. In most instances, blacks were customarily barred from campus social organizations, such as fraternities, and at schools that were distant from indigenous black populations, they were culturally and socially isolated. Many predominately white schools lacked black female students and those blacks who dated white women were harassed and threatened with the loss of scholarships. Olsen remarked that the presence of black athletes at predominately white schools may have been presented as an enlightened civil rights advancement in the press, but in reality, white-controlled athletic departments had “done little more than hire out Hessians for four years, or long enough to bring a conference championship” to their school.⁸⁹ Indeed, Edwards similar concludes that “the black athlete in the predominately white school was and is first, foremost, and sometimes only, an athletic commodity.”⁹⁰

These observers further note that the institutionalized discrimination that black athletes in white-controlled institutions typically endured was masked from the public by the “myth” that the presence and accomplishments of blacks in white-controlled athletic institutions improved race relations. Olsen suggests that the visibility of black athletes often helped to invalidate arguments concerning the continued detriment of anti-black prejudice on black life in American society, reinforced beliefs that racial democracy was in full practice in the US and that the foremost obstacles to the equality for many blacks was their own inferiority. Edwards suggest that because of the hegemonic of the belief in the black community, black athletes were expected to accommodate the racism they experienced in white-controlled institutions in order to further advance their race. Olsen agreed, noting that it was a common among blacks in the era to believe that with “each victory, every knockout of a white boxer, every new sprint record and every long run from scrimmage,” their race advanced “a tiny step forward in their

⁸⁹ Edwards, *Revolt of the Black Athlete*, 8-16; Jack Olsen, *The Black Athlete, A Shameful Story: The Myth of Integration in American Sport* (New York: Time-Life, 1968), 11.

⁹⁰ Edwards, *Revolt of the Black Athlete*, 9.

everyday relations with the white majority.” However, “What they did not realize was that the white American was able to compartmentalize” the black athlete’s accomplishments and expected that after he “performed” he returned to “his place.”⁹¹ Although the “myth” continued to increase in society as the presence of blacks in white-controlled sports increased, the contradiction between myth and reality, the next section will demonstrate, fueled black protest in sports in the period.

III

Those in the know considered Oscar Robertson the best high school basketball player in the nation in 1956. From more than seventy-five athletic scholarship offers, he chose the small, private University of Cincinnati, because despite its absence of a big-time basketball tradition, it was close to his hometown of Indianapolis, it offered a “good education,” its recent entrance into the “big-time” Missouri Valley Conference would provide him exposure to professional basketball scouts and because he was “naive” enough to be convinced by university officials and boosters that there would be, as he explained it, “no black problem” at the school. Unbeknownst to Robertson, he and four other males weren’t just the first black student-athletes, but among the first black students at the school. He remembered that whites gawked at him on campus and one white grad student argued that it was degrading to the university to “import” blacks just to win athletic contests. In addition to the persistent social awkwardness and cultural isolation he endured, he also encountered bold anti-black discrimination. An honor student in high school, Robertson and other blacks soon learned that no matter how well they performed academically, there were a few white professors that “did whatever they could to *prevent* black students from graduating.” Disenchanted by such experiences, twice trusted advisors had to convince him to continue at the university. In spite of the academic and social challenges, Robertson thrived on the basketball court. In his sophomore year (freshman were ineligible for varsity competition in the late 1950s and 1960s), his play improved the Bearcats from an average team the year before to a fourth-place national ranking and

⁹¹ Jack Olsen, “The Cruel Deception,” *Sports Illustrated*, 1 July 1968, 17, 23; Edwards, *Revolt of the Black Athlete*, 20.

after ten games, he averaged almost thirty points. By mid-season, basketball aficionados hailed him the best college basketball player in the nation. Late that season, the Bearcats traveled to Texas to play two conference games. After the team checked into a Houston hotel, his head coach George Smith came to his room around midnight to explain that hotel management wanted Robertson out. His white teammates and coaches remained at the hotel, but Robertson spent the night at a dormitory on the campus of Texas Southern, a historically black university in the city. He recalled that “As much as it bothered me that the hotel wouldn’t let me stay there, I was just as bothered at being the only person who had to move. All this talk about being a team and winning and losing together, staying together and doing things together—as a team...What the hell’s going on here?” Robertson composed himself and played the two games in Texas, but once back in Cincinnati, he confronted Coach Smith and “I told him that I did not think he had anything to do with what happened” and that if I thought he had, “I would have left school and never come back.” However, he held the coach and the university responsible for the travel plans. Robertson, the catalyst of Cincinnati’s sudden emergence as a national basketball contender, threatened that “If anything like this ever happened again...I would leave UC.”⁹²

The next season, Cincinnati was invited to play in the famed Dixie Classic, a premier holiday college basketball tournament that invited several of the nation’s best teams to the segregated city of Raleigh, NC to play against North Carolina’s venerated white college teams. Before the trip, Robertson decided that if he were Jim Crowed, he would refuse to play in the tournament and leave the team. Whether its decision was influenced by Robertson’s ultimatum to Coach Smith a year earlier is not known, however, UC arranged for its team to stay at a vacated fraternity house in Raleigh. Robertson “appreciated the gesture and unity” of rooming with his teammates, but also considered it hollow. He believed that had UC officials told Raleigh officials that the nationally ranked Bearcats would not participate in the tournament unless their black players were afforded the same privileges as whites, the team would have had access to the plush downtown hotels. Having read the Board of Trustees minutes

⁹² Oscar Robertson, *The Big O: My Life, My Times, My Games* (Emmaus, PA: St. Martin’s, 2003), 65-90; *emphasis in text*; Dick Schaap, “The Mixed Emotions of “The Big O” in *The Best of Sport, 1946-1971* ed. by Al Silverman, (New York: Viking, 1971), 165-74; originally published in *Sport* magazine, 1960.

concerning the tournament several years later, Robertson concluded that the university “backed down and capitulated” to racial prejudice. “The trustees knew about the racial climate in North Carolina. Why else would they have to vote that it was okay to go down there, unless there was a tacit knowledge that black players would have to stay separately from the team...They were on the trip with us, and they stayed downtown, in the hotel.”⁹³

Robertson’s account of his experiences is significant because it contradicts the historiography’s suggestion that black activist-athletes in the Sixties were primarily motivated by black militant peer pressure by demonstrating that prior to the media-dubbed “Revolt of the Black Athlete” in the Sixties, the discrimination that blacks encountered in locker rooms, on campus or in society motivated them to protest. Indeed, this section demonstrates that prior to the Sixties, blacks in white-controlled sports institutions, publicly and privately, individually and collectively routinely challenged the discrimination they encountered and suggests black athletes in the Sixties inherited their struggle from earlier generations of black athletes in white-controlled institutions.

The most influential accounts of the movement against racism in sports in the Sixties, written by historian David K. Wiggins, argue that black athletes in the Sixties faced tremendous pressure and possible ostracism by black militants if they did not join black protest movements. In response to the peer pressure, Wiggins suggest that many black student-athletes protested by “donning dashikis, sporting large Afros, and exhibiting other outward trappings of racial militancy,” but “stopped just short of quitting” or joining sit-ins and other disruptive measures. Likewise, he surmises that because black athletes were not committed activists, the 1968 Olympic boycott drive eventually compromised into protest demonstrations. Wiggins arrives at such a conclusion by arguing that the activism of sixties’ black activists was antithetical to the traditional racial advancement advocacy of the black athlete. Prior to the sixties, he notes that the success of black athletes, even more than white athletes, demanded that they submit to the dictates of white-controlled sports institutions and establish a moral, accommodating persona, often at the expense of “a black identity.” Historically, blacks in white-controlled sports

⁹³ Robertson, 98-101.

institutions were expected to be “humble, tolerant and respectful of power,” or essentially accommodate white supremacy, and the Edwards’s derived boycott drive encouraged them “to be something they [historically] were not.” Wiggins does reference the “various forms of insensitivity and discrimination” that black athletes endured, however, his suggestion that Edwards and other black militants were the originators of the boycott and the lack of the analysis of the institutionalized racism that black athletes in white-controlled institutions historically endured discounts the possibility that actual discrimination served as a primary motivating factor for their protest and activism in the Sixties. Ultimately, Wiggins concludes that Edwards and black militant peer pressure of the Sixties could not annul black athletes’ adherence to the traditional belief that athletic accomplishments were an “ideal starting point for wiping out inequities of race” and therefore, black athletes refused to boycott the 1968 Olympics or discontinue their participation in white-controlled athletics.⁹⁴

A foremost concern with Wiggins’ scholarship is his construction of a singular “black athlete” from what I argue is the unrecognized *dissemblance* of Owens, Louis and other black athletes in white-controlled sports institutions in the early twentieth century. A number of scholars have demonstrated that blacks often had to dissemble, or feign ignorance of anti-black discrimination and injuries, as a means to participate, and indeed, survive in white-controlled institutions. Kevin Gaines has also successfully argued that a significant result of dissemblance is that it often sunders its subject(s) from the common grievances, struggles and ambitions of blacks as a group, or as Wiggins unwittingly phrased it, “a black identity.”⁹⁵ Wiggins does not discuss the possibility that dissemblance contributed to the accommodating personas of black athletes. Nor does Wiggins, as other scholars have, consider that the white-controlled sports establishment’s portrayal of blacks as accommodating was an actual requirement for their participation in white-controlled athletic institutions.⁹⁶ As concerning, Wiggins does not explore episodes in the careers of other early twentieth century black athletes such as Jack Johnson, Paul Robeson, Louis

⁹⁴ Wiggins, *Glory Bound*, 120-49, 200-16.

⁹⁵ Estes, 1-9; Gaines, 5.

⁹⁶ Grundman, 19; Edwards, *Revolt of the Black Athlete*, 26-9; Jack Scott, *The Athletic Revolution*, (New York: The Free Press, 1971), 80-2; Amy Bass, *The Struggle, Not the Triumph: The 1968 Olympics and the Making of the Black Athlete* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 6-10.

and Robinson among others, which demonstrate that some blacks in white-controlled athletic institutions were less accommodating of discrimination as his monolith suggest. In the absence of such analysis, the protest of black athletes in the Sixties seems sudden and spurious, which lends to the validation of his conclusion that militant black peer pressure forced black athletes to join the Sixties.

Another related egregious problem in Wiggins's work is the lack of black athletes' voices. For instance, in his chapter on the dynamics of black athletes' activism at three predominately white universities only two black athletes and one supporter are quoted, and all from mainstream media sources. His most significant source is a series of articles by *Sports Illustrated* reporter John Underwood entitled "The Desperate Coach," which themselves quote very few activist-athletes and undertook as its mission to illustrate how altruistic white coaches were desperately attempting to counter the misguided suasion of so-called hippies and black militants on athletes. As a result, Wiggins' arguments and conclusions replicate those of the white-controlled sports establishment, coaches and mainstream journalists of the period, such as Underwood, which illustrated very little understanding of the socioeconomic, cultural and academic concerns of protesting student-athletes and asserted that an aimless militancy, (rather than the everyday racism and cultural conservatism that many young athletes experienced on campus), was the motivation of their activism.⁹⁷ Jeffery T. Sammons has expressed similar criticisms of Wiggins' work, noting that without the voice of activist-athletes, "only part of the story can emerge, a distorted one at that."⁹⁸

By examining the autobiographical works of the first generations of black athletes in white-controlled sports institutions, the remainder of this section will demonstrate that in the two decades before the Sixties, blacks routinely challenged the racism they experienced in white-controlled sports. Like Robertson, many of those black athletes initially choose to challenge discrimination privately, because they understood that the white-controlled sports establishment and mainstream media would likely

⁹⁷ John Underwood, "The Desperate Coach," *Sports Illustrated*, 25 August 1969; 1 September 1969; 8 September 1969.

⁹⁸ Jeffrey T. Sammons, "Race' and Sport: A Critical Historical Examination," *Journal of Sports History*, 21, no. 3, (fall 1994), 259-60.

portray them as “ungrateful” or as an “uppity nigger,” charges frequently employed to discredit the protest of blacks in society and in this particularly instance, sports.⁹⁹ However, by expanding our definition of resistance and protest, as labor historians have, to include “infrapolitics,” those daily acts that workers and the oppressed employ to ameliorate conditions and the establishment’s response to that resistance, it becomes evident that blacks in white-controlled athletics between WWII and the Sixties not only routinely encountered racism, but frequently contested it. Furthermore, this section suggests that their experiences informed the activism of black activist-athletes in the Sixties.¹⁰⁰

For instance, in his 1966 autobiography *Go Up For Glory*, Bill Russell, a perennial NBA all-star and key member of the Boston Celtics dynastic championship teams in the 1950s and 1960s, noted that by 1958, he and other black members of the Celtics tired of segregated accommodations when their teams traveled through the South and in response, boycotted an exhibition game in Lexington, KY. He noted that a month earlier, Elgin Baylor, an all-star and black member of the Los Angeles Lakers, boycotted a game in West Virginia for similar reasons. Celtic’s coach Red Auerbach, whom Russell “characterized as a middle-of-the-roader” white liberal, attempted to convince the black players that “it was better for our race, better for all Negroes, if we stayed.” Russell, however, “was sick and tired of that argument,” that somehow his accomplishments would annul discrimination. “I believe, most sincerely, that for decades a proud race- the American Negro- has attempted to make it better ‘for young people’ by playing the game of life with bigots by maintaining the status quo. It never worked.” He concluded that “The only way to gain rights is to fight for them” and “Regardless” of the consequences, “I was going to fight.” Although maligned by the mainstream press, Russell refused to play where blacks were Jim Crowed.¹⁰¹ In the Sixties, through retired, he supported those black athletes who protested the discrimination they

⁹⁹ Olsen, *Black Athlete*, 9; Robinson, *I Never Had It Made*, 80.

¹⁰⁰ Robin D. G. Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics and the Black Working Class* (New York: The Free Press, 1994), 8, 33.

¹⁰¹ Russell, *Go Up for Glory*, 88-93, 165-8.

experienced in white-controlled sports institutions and the black Olympic boycott drive to raise awareness of institutionalized racism in US society.¹⁰²

Like Robertson and Russell, other blacks withdrew or threatened to withdraw from competitions held in segregated facilities or from teams and events that adhered to such policies. In 1946, “Buddy” Young of Illinois’ fame declined to travel to San Antonio, Texas to defend his sprint title at the annual prestigious AAU meet. He explained that he had traveled through the South once and that “cured me once and for all.”¹⁰³ Jim Brown, an all-American running back at Syracuse, was also prepared to contest Jim Crow by withdrawing from his college team. In 1957, Syracuse University completed their football schedule with seven wins and just one lost and then accepted an invitation to the Cotton Bowl, an annual post-season game held in Dallas, TX. Until the late 1950s, it was common for non-southern teams playing in the South to play without their black members. Brown wondered if he would be permitted to participate in the game and if so, would he be expected to lodge and dine separately from his white teammates. To avoid attention and segregation, the Syracuse team lodged at a hotel outside the Dallas city limits and Brown played in the game without incident. Brown believed that his coaches only made an effort to lodge the team together because he had previously challenged his white teammates and coaches’ racism and by “my senior year my coaches knew a little about me, enough to know I would not [accommodate.]” Brown was unwilling to be “hurt and humiliated, because that’s what racism does,” just to be in the predominately white sports establishment and personally vowed to quit, rather than endure the “certain [inferior] feelings dredged up by racism.”¹⁰⁴ The actions of Brown, Russell, Baylor and Robertson suggest that in the decade prior to the Sixties, several predominately white teams risked losing the services of athletes essential to their success, if they adhered to *de jure* or *de facto* discrimination.

Also like Robertson, race and racism were significant factors in many blacks’ decisions concerning when and where to enter white-controlled athletic institutions. In 1952, for instance Hank Aaron, an eventual twenty-four time MLB all-star and career homerun leader, chose to sign with the

¹⁰² Russell, *Second Wind*, 176-7; Edwards, *Revolt of the Black Athlete*, 72.

¹⁰³ *Pittsburgh Courier*, 23 February 1946, p. 12.

¹⁰⁴ Jim Brown, *Out of Bounds* (New York: Kensington, 1989), 38-43; *emphasis in text*.

Milwaukee Braves rather than the New York Giants because the former team had fewer blacks on their roster. Aware that in the 1950s, MLB teams subscribed to secret quotas, which limited the number of blacks on their rosters to four or five and the number they would place in the lineup at once to approximately three, Aaron believed that he had a better chance to make the Braves teams because the Giants already had several contributing black players, including an all-star in Willie Mays.¹⁰⁵ Brown also noted that when he entered the NFL in 1957, “there was a quota for blacks,” even though, “I doubt it was written, you probably couldn’t prove it in court, every owner would deny it, but it was there.” Each NFL team, he surmised, had six or eight blacks, but never an odd number, “so none of the white guys would have to share a room with a black” when traveling. There “were even restrictions within the quotas.” Blacks were “stacked,” or restricted to certain positions such as receiver and defensive back, so that there would not be a dominant number of black starters. He noted that when the all-white coaching staffs made the “final cuts” of players for the team, “some great black ball players would lose their jobs” for no other reason than they were black. The all-white coaching staffs, he noted, usually preferred to keep “nice guy blacks, humble blacks, just-glad-to-be-there blacks, lower-pay, hard-work, say-the-sky-was-blue, the sun-was-shining blacks.”¹⁰⁶ Brown’s comments suggest that blacks in sports, as they were in other white-controlled institutions, were expected not only to acquiesce to white supremacy, but also to dissemble to assure whites they took no offense of the perceived natural order of white supremacy.¹⁰⁷ Given the regularity of quotas and staking, it is plausible that other blacks’ decisions to enter team athletics were similarly influenced by race and racism.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵ Hank Aaron, *I Had a Hammer: The Hank Aaron Story* (New York: Harper Collins, 1991), 39.

¹⁰⁶ Brown, 55-6, 80-2.

¹⁰⁷ Estes, 1-9; Leon Litwack, *Trouble in Mind: Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow* (New York: Knopf, 1998), 39.

¹⁰⁸ Indeed, blacks’ decisions to choose a destination to enter athletics based on the anti-black discrimination they might encounter, or the lack thereof, actually preceded the mass integration of athletics. In December 1936, *The Crisis* reported that halfback Oze Simmons had chosen to play football at the University of Iowa “because he heard they had no prejudice at the university.” Contrary to his expectations, the magazine insinuated that incidents “of prejudice, of non-support, of jealousy” continued throughout his athletic career at the school; Roy Wilkins, “Negro Stars on Big Grid Teams,” *The Crisis*, December 1936, 362-3; The literature on racial quotas and stacking in sports is voluminous; for an overview see Olsen, *The Black Athlete*, 155-8; Edwards, *Revolt of the Black Athlete*, 17-8; Ashe, *Hard Road to Glory*, v. 3, 4-5.

Just as discrimination influenced many blacks' decision concerning when and where to enter white-controlled institutional sport, many blacks chose to exit white-controlled institutions rather than acquiesce to discrimination. In the mid-1950s, Jesse Louis Jackson attended the University of Illinois on an athletic scholarship. He remembered that "while the white guys were out there partying with girls on the weekend, the blacks sat in the dorm, drinking cokes and playing cards." Tired of the social isolation, after his freshman year, the future civil rights spokesman and namesake of Jesse Owens and Joe Louis transferred to North Carolina A&T, a historically black college. A study of the black student-athlete experience at Illinois revealed that between 1931 and 1967, the attrition rate of black student-athletes at Illinois was twice that of white student-athletes. Although poor academic performance was also a factor, the study noted that because of the discrimination they encountered, many blacks simply quit athletics at the university.¹⁰⁹ Similarly, after five games, Hank Dezonie, one of the four black players to integrate the NBA in 1950, quit rather than endure the discrimination he encountered in the institution.¹¹⁰ In 1965, All-American football player Fred Carr and Eugene Jackson, teammates at Texas Western (now the University of Texas El-Paso) became so disgusted with the racist attitude of the all-white football coaching staff that they "packed up" with the intentions of returning to their hometown of Phoenix, AZ. Head coach Bobby Dobbs enlisted the highway patrol to find them and subsequently, as West noted, "the man stopped us at the inspection station on the border" and made him phone Dobbs. The two returned to Texas Western, but West did not acquiesce to racism. In the fall of 1967, he joined with other black student-athletes and orchestrated a "sit-in" protest against institutionalized racism in the athletic department. It was rumored that West and other black players were prepared to boycott at least the opening game of the football season if their grievances were not addressed.¹¹¹

Although these examples represent only a modicum of the hundreds of blacks participating in white-controlled sports institutions in the two decades between WWII and the mid-1960s, they suggest that prior to the Sixties, blacks in white-controlled athletics frequently contested the racism they

¹⁰⁹ Jones and Spivey, 941-4.

¹¹⁰ Ron Thomas, 3.

¹¹¹ Olsen, *Black Athlete*, 60-1; Wiggins, *Glory Bound*, 111-2.

experience in sports. In fact, white coaches and athletic departments engendered responses to black concerns of institutionalized racism on campus. For instance, Olsen noted that by the mid-1960s, coaches at several schools purposely mislead or lied to black recruits about the social and racial conditions at their university. They either avoided directly answering questions concerning the social opportunities for blacks or suggested that blacks encountered little to no racial obstacles on campus. However, the duplicity of white coaches, as well as the discrimination, insensitivity, isolation and reprisals often motivated black protest. In 1963, four years prior to the mainstream media's reports of "The Revolt of the Black Revolt," black athletes at both UTEP and Illinois collectively protested the racism they endured on those campuses.¹¹² In 1960, blacks and Latinos in MLB obtained the assistance of the NAACP and the black press in challenging the Jim Crow conditions they historically endured when their respective teams camped for spring training in the South.¹¹³ Additionally, in January 1965, twenty-two blacks forced the relocation of the American Football League all-star game to Houston, after arriving and experiencing hostile discrimination in the original host city of New Orleans.¹¹⁴ These examples of collective action further demonstrate that prior to the Sixties, blacks, motivated by the discrimination they endured, willingly challenged anti-black discrimination in sports.

The discrimination they endured in the white-controlled sports establishment frequently caused many blacks to doubt the burgeoning social belief that their presence and accomplishments advanced their race's struggle for recognition of their rights and humanity. Robinson, for instance, remembered that after another bout of racial insults suffered at the hands of white opponents, he questioned "How could I have thought that barriers would fall, that, indeed my talent would overcome bigotry?"¹¹⁵ Approximately twenty-five years later, after a hall-of-fame career in MLB, he remarked that his ten-year sojourn in the

¹¹² Jack Olsen, "In an Alien World," *Sports Illustrated*, 22 July 1968, 31, 35; Spivey and Jones, 946; for recruiting, also see *New York Amsterdam News*, 23 December 1967, p. 34.

¹¹³ Michael E. Lomax, "Major League Baseball's Separate-and-Unequal Doctrine: The African American and Latino Experience in Spring Training, 1946-1961," in *Race and Sport: the Struggle for Equality on and off the Field* ed. by Charles K. Ross (Oxford, MS: University of Mississippi Press, 2004), 59-90; *Pittsburgh Courier*, 3 February 1941, sec. 2, p. 27.

¹¹⁴ Ron Mix, "Was This Their Freedom Ride?," *Sports Illustrated*, 18 January 1965, 24-5; *New York Times*, 12 January 1965, p. 1.

¹¹⁵ Robinson, *I Never Had It Made*, 60.

white-controlled institution had only taught him that “A black man, even after he has proven himself on and off the playing field, will still be denied his rights.” Despite his accomplishments and notoriety, he argued that he had only been “partially accepted” in MLB, because he was constantly subjected to anti-black bigotry. Therefore, he “warn[ed] the white world that young blacks today are not willing –nor should they be- to endure the humiliations I did.”¹¹⁶ Protest, he advocated, was a more effective means to acquire blacks’ rights than accommodation. Beginning in 1949, his fourth year in MLB, Robinson practiced as much. During his remaining six MLB seasons, Robinson vigorously challenged bigoted opponents and refused segregated accommodations as the Dodgers traveled. Robinson also ardently supported the civil rights movement, despite mainstream criticism that he was injecting politics into sports, and fundraised for the NAACP, unions and other civil rights groups. After baseball, Robinson authored a newspaper column that examined civil rights issues and debated the likes of Malcolm X, Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. and Martin Luther King, Jr. He used his induction speech into the baseball Hall-of-Fame in 1962 to criticize the MLB’s lack of minority hires in coaching and management. In the 1960s, he also campaigned for several Republican presidential candidates, hoping to influence their commitments to blacks’ equality, and became an assistant to the Mayor’s office in New York City, a platform he used to vocally and organizationally challenge discrimination in the city. Robinson also directly participated in civil rights protest, including the March against Fear in 1966.¹¹⁷ Having been perceived as a black person who “made it” into a white institution, Robinson noted that he was one of many integrated blacks who had been continually “mistreated, humiliated” in those institutions and therefore, advocated that complete recognition of blacks’ agency and humanity must accompany integration.¹¹⁸ For that racism, Robinson, as well as Russell, Brown and several other black athletes discussed above, supported the black movement against racism in sports in the Sixties. They understood

¹¹⁶ Ibid, 76.

¹¹⁷ Robinson’s activism is well-chronicled in his 1972 autobiography *I Never Had It Made*; and Jules Tygiel, *Baseball’s Great Experiment: Jackie Robinson and His Legacy* (New York: Oxford Press, 1983).

¹¹⁸ Robinson, *I Never Had It Made*, 77-8.

that despite the adulation black athletes garnered, as blacks in white-controlled institutions, they “never had it made.”¹¹⁹

¹¹⁹ Ibid, xxii.

Chapter III

“We Are Men First and Athletes Second:” Black Student-Athletes, Black Power and the Origins of the 1968 Olympic Projects for Human Rights

In November 1967, *Track and Field News [TFN]* published an interview with Tommie Smith and Lee Evans, two athletes associated with a black radical proposed boycott of the upcoming 1968 US summer Olympic team. Dick Drake, the interviewer, thought publishing the interview necessary because of the “misinformation” circulating concerning the student-athletes and the boycott proposal. In the introduction, he noted that typically the mainstream media reported that an “outside individual or group from the black ranks” forced the boycott proposal on the two athletes and that Smith, the most prolific sprinter of his generation, was now also “a militant Negro leader.” Drake wrote that contrary to the information circulating, on 3 September at the World University Games in Tokyo Smith was approached by a Japanese reporter inquiring “about the possibility of Negroes boycotting the 1968 Olympics.” The question was likely prompted by a resolution passed at the first national Black Power Conference in July 1967 that suggested that blacks boycott the Olympics and other sports until the exoneration of Muhammad Ali, who was stripped of the world’s heavyweight boxing title in 1966 for refusing induction into the US military and criticizing American involvement in the Vietnam War. Smith responded that “Depending upon the situation, you can not rule out the possibility that we Negro athletes might boycott the Olympic games.” In the month interim, Drake noted that “Pressmen the world over rushed to their typewriters to picture Tommie as a militant Negro leader or as an athletic stooge for extremist black groups and promptly scorned the merits of a boycott.” The assertions were so pervasive that Drake noted that “Realms of copy have been devoted to the possibility of such a boycott – and much of it on misinformation- but little of it has dealt with the question of *WHY* the blacks would forfeit an opportunity to compete in the world’s most important athletic event that many of them have already devoted countless

hours striving to reach.”¹ Contrary to prevailing assertions, Drakes’ interview of Evans and Smith would revealed immensely different motivations for the boycott proposal and as such, was praised and reprinted in the international press including the *Washington Post*, *Los Angeles Times* and the *London (England) Times*.²

Drake’s introduction to the interview also revealed many of the mainstream press and sports establishment’s assertions that influenced how the public viewed the Olympic Project for Human Rights (OPHR), the name eventually given to the organized black drive to boycott the 1968 Olympics. Foremost, both asserted that black athletes were being coerced or misled by black militants into supporting the boycott proposal. How else, they suggested, could an action that would almost certainly ensure that the US lost the Olympics, a significant Cold War propaganda event, to the Russians and refute a proven, indeed, traditional means of black advancement, be explained? Since the 1930s, when Joe Louis and Jesse Owens defeated Nazi athletic representatives, both entities participated in disseminating the since well-accepted notion that champion black athletes demonstrated blacks’ manly capabilities to participate in the nation’s defense, thus improving white’s images of blacks.³ The belief further proliferated in the press and sports establishment during the mass integration of the white-controlled college and professional team sports between WWII and the Sixties.⁴ Over those decades, blacks had been essential to US team success at the Olympics. *Ebony* estimated that in the six games between 1948 and 1964, blacks garnered eighteen percent of the US’s gold medals and thirty-four percent of its gold medals in the premier Olympic sport of track and field. Drake estimated that of the thirty-three medals, he expected the US team to win in track and field at the 1968 games, blacks were expected to win eighteen or fifty-five percent. Only three of the medals, he believed, could be garnered by whites in the

¹ Dick Drake, “Tom, Lee Discuss Boycott,” *Track & Field News*, November 1967, 3; *emphasis in text*; for a discussion of the first national Black Power Conference, see L. H. Stanton, “The Black Power Conference,” *Liberator*, August 1967, 9.

² “Official, Coaches, Reporters” *Track & Field News*, December 1967, 3; *Washington Post*, 10 December 1967, p. C4.

³ This development is the subject of chapter one.

⁴ This development is the subject of chapter two.

absence of blacks, thus diminishing the expected US total by almost half.⁵ Blacks were also the only likely gold medal contenders on the US boxing team, including in the marquee heavyweight division. Cassius Clay and Joe Frazier, two blacks, had won the last two heavyweight gold medals at the 1960 and 1964 games, respectively. Blacks, including all-Americans Elvin Hayes, Wes Unseld and Lew Alcindor, were expected to form the core of the US basketball team, which had never lost a game and captured every gold medal in the sports' Olympic history.⁶ As such, from the initial suggestion of a black Olympic boycott in the summer 1967, the offended mainstream media, white-controlled sports and traditional black establishments reasoned that black athletes, contrary to their better judgment and history of patriotic duty, were being forced and misled to support the boycott by Black Power militants. In the mainstream media of the period, Black Power activists were frequently reduced to subversive, Communist and anti-American. From the initial mention of the boycott proposal, the mainstream media and sports establishment forwarded assertions that "unpatriotic militants" were coercing the athletes to join protest movements as a means of attacking the legitimacy and rational of the boycott proposal and shame sympathizing black athletes such as Smith and Evans into refuting the radical boycott proposal.⁷

The dominance of the mainstream assertions, especially in the early months of the boycott drive, obscured the actual impetuses and goals of the boycott initiative in much of the public discourse. Drake's interview with Evans and Smith revealed that the two were foremost motivated by a desire to combat the "institutionalized racism" that continued to malign black and minority life in the US and the international Left's struggle to end apartheid in South Africa; these were impetuses that the two activist student-athletes and the black radical boycott proposal shared with the Black Power and Black Students' movements of the era. The establishment responded by arguing that the athletes' prioritization of the grievances and the improvement of the black community before that of the nation's Cold War agenda was

⁵ "Should Negroes Boycott the Olympics?," *Ebony*, March 1968, p. 110-6.

⁶ "The Olympic Jolt: Hell No, Don't Go," *Life*, 15 March 1968, 28; Arthur R. Ashe, Jr., *A Hard Road to Glory: A History of the African-American Athlete since 1946*, vol. 3 (New York: Amistad, 1993), 43.

⁷ "Olympic Jolt", 23; for a discussion of Black Power and the mainstream media see, William Van DeBurg, *New Day in Babylon: The Black Power Movement and American Culture, 1965-1975* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 12-6.

irrational and unpatriotic. For instance, Evans noted that Stan Wright, a black assistant coach on the US Olympic track team, advised Smith to consider himself “an American first, a Negro second” and participate on the US Olympic team. Evans responded that in spite of his accomplishments and service, the pervasiveness of anti-black discrimination constantly reminded him that “you’re a Negro,” an inferior second-class citizen. Evans and Smith, like the Black Students’ and Black Power movements, emphatically rejected traditional black advancement ideology that blacks serve to the nation in hopes of garnering the rights and advancement of their race. The boycott prioritized the advancement of blacks before that of the nation’s Cold War agenda. Evans concluded that “We are men first and athletes second” and he, like other activist-athletes, were considering a boycott to highlight that imperative.⁸

Like Drake’s interview, this chapter is concerned with the impetuses and goals of the black drive to boycott the 1968 Olympics. As noted above, the boycott proposal was motivated by progressive black activists’ desires to combat “institutional racism.” The second major impetus, opposition of apartheid is referenced in this chapter, but fully explored in the next, chapter four. These impetuses contradict the historiography’s conclusion, and the sixties’ mainstream press and sports establishment’s assertions they are based on, that participating black athletes were coerced by black militants into joining the boycott and other black student protest movements in the period, by illustrating that the activist-athletes, like other members of the Black Students’ and Black Power movements, had substantive grievances that motivated their protests and thus, were genuine activists. The second section illustrates that the dominance of the mainstream’s assertions, in particular, the widely-accepted social belief that the black presence and accomplishments in sports contributed to significant black advancement and that a boycott was radically unpatriotic, and the establishment’s accompanying repression of the boycott, not only significantly shaped public discussion, but as importantly, influenced black athletes’ opinions of and decisions concerning the boycott.

⁸ Drake, “Tom, Lee Discuss Boycott,” 3, 22; for a discussion of traditional black advancement, see Kevin K. Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1996), 74-5.

The black radical proposal to boycott the 1968 US Olympic team had its origins in the Black Power and Black Student's movements of the era. Shortly after Evans and Smith returned from the World University games in Tokyo in September 1967, the two student-athletes joined the Black Students' Movement in progress at San Jose (CA) State College (SJS). The movement began after a discussion of the civil rights movement between Harry Edwards, a twenty-four year old part-time sociology instructor, and Ken Noel, a graduate student, dovetailed into an examination of the discrimination that blacks endured at SJS. The two former student-athletes concluded that the anti-black discrimination that shaped their experience at the school in the early 1960s, "racism in 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," had only exacerbated for current black students. Over the next few days they drafted a list of blacks' grievances and then attempted to meet with the president, various administrators and faculty. After two days of rebuffs, they were "finally granted ten minutes with the dean of students" Stanley Benz, who, according to Edwards, "made it crystal clear that where the traditions, desires, and interests of the white majority are concerned, the needs of the minority of black students were inconsequential." Incensed by the white chauvinism they encountered, Noel and Edwards began planning a "Rally on Racism" on campus and contacted "every Bay Area Black organization we could find a number for." Edwards had recently joined the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense and SJS was in close proximity to the University of California-Berkeley, a vanguard in the students' movement, and San Francisco State and Merritt colleges, sites of the two earliest organized Black Students' Movement demonstrations. All three schools, as well as nearby Stanford University, were in the throes of anti-war and black students' demonstrations. Edwards and Noel's organizing effort attracted more than 700 people to the rally, where on behalf of approximately sixty of SJS's seventy-two black students, Edwards demanded that the administration end segregated on-campus housing assignments and declare off-campus segregated housing off-limits to students, recruit more black students, incorporate black and other minorities into student government, and that both the administration and the athletic department ban whites-only fraternities. If there were no compliance to the demands, Edwards announced that black

students and their supporters “would mount a movement on campus to prevent the opening football game of the season from being played- by any means necessary.”⁹

Almost immediately, Edwards and Noel were criticized for organizing a protest in sports, one of the few vocations perceived to afford blacks an equal opportunity in an otherwise blatantly hostile anti-black society. However, as former student-athletes at SJS, they detailed discrimination at the school from firsthand accounts. They further justified the use of sports by explaining that because the only black students on campus were athletes or former athletes, “sports were the only area of campus life where Blacks could exercise any leverage- and there *only* if we organized.” They argued that sports, particularly the revenue-producing sport of football, was a focal point of interest for the university community and a significant source of revenue for the city at large and therefore, protest in sports would attract significant attention, which would compel the administration to respond to the black students’ grievances. If the administration reacted passively, it would be perceived as condoning racism. Additionally, a breach of contract agreement stipulated that SJS pay the University of Texas-El Paso, its’ football opponent, \$12,000, if the game were canceled and that all other scheduled athletic engagements between the two schools would be automatically forfeited, which would also result in a significant financial penalty for SJS; this financial factor was critical considering that in the 1960s, less than ten percent of all college athletic departments profited annually.¹⁰

Another important factor in the development of the movement was that the “by any means necessary” threat of Edwards drew violence responses from white students and others. California Governor Ronald Reagan, whose 1966 gubernatorial campaign emphasized an anti-student protest plank of “law and order,” suggested surrounding the field with National Guardsmen. However, SJS’s administration, fearing a deadly clash between activists, opponents and armed troops, declined Reagan’s offer. The administration also considered relocating the game to El Paso. However, rumors circulated

⁹ Harry Edwards, *The Revolt of the Black Athlete* (New York, The Free Press, 1969), 42-6; Harry Edwards, *The Struggle that Must Be* (New York: McMillan, 1980), 159-63; *emphasis in text*.

¹⁰ Edwards, *Revolt of the Black Athlete*, 42-4; for the financial state of college football and intercollegiate sports in the 1960s, see Myles Jackson, “College Football has become a Losing Business,” *Fortune*, December 1962, 119-21; and Dave Wolf, “The Growing Crisis in College Sports, Part I,” *Sport*, June 1970, 14-5, 68, 90-92.

that if the game were moved, SJS's forty-year-old wooden stadium would be razed. Within a week, black students formed a Black Student Union and the movement gained the support of a significant number of white faculty and students. Black football players at both schools tacitly lent support to the movement by suggesting that they would rather not play the game under such hazardous circumstances. Finally, SJS president Robert D. Clark canceled the game, against the athletic department's will, because of the unpredictability of the situation and assigned a committee to investigate the black students' demands.¹¹

Contrary to the establishment and historiography's assertions that black student-athletes were coerced to participate in protest movements by an ambiguous black militancy in the Sixties, several SJS black student athletes note that the discrimination that they as blacks endured on predominately white campuses and sports institutions served as the primary impetus of their activism. Thirty years after the event, for instance, Evans stated that he participated in the black students' movement at SJS because "no one would rent us housing close to the university."¹² In the Drake interview, which was conducted shortly after the SJS movement, Smith complained of white coaches that regarded "Negroes...as only an athlete," meaning they were at the university only to participate in athletics, and as such, advised blacks to enroll in courses such as ROTC, which kept them eligible for participation in athletics, but did not earn them credits toward a degree. In the weeks prior to the SJS movement, he and Denise, his seven month-pregnant wife, responded to more than thirteen housing ads before finding a landlord who would rent to blacks.¹³ Evans and Smith participated in the SJS Black Students' movement precisely because they had been victims of the institutionalized racism that Edwards and Noel described. As detailed in chapter two, prior to the so-called "Revolt of the Black Athlete" in the Sixties, similar discriminatory practices had inspired black professional and college athletes to protest.

Edwards's experiences at SJS also suggest that the racism that black students and athletes typically endured in predominately white sports institutions motivated their protests. A native of East St.

¹¹ Edwards, *Struggle that Must Be*, 164-5, 182; Edwards, *Revolt of the Black Athlete*, 44-7; *New York Times*, 3 October 1967, p. 33.

¹² Lee Evans, "Lee Evan's Keeps on Pushin'" interview in *What's My Name, Fool?: Sports and Resistance in the United States* by Dave Zirin (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2005), 79.

¹³ "Tom, Lee Discuss Boycott," 23; Edwards, *Revolt of the Black Athlete*, 75-6.

Louis, IL, Edwards accepted an athletic scholarship to the SJS in 1960 because a family friend informed him that the Bay Area generally was racially liberal. Edwards, a standout discus thrower, was also enthused by the track and field program's history of developing black Olympians and therefore, he "anticipated no problems of a racial sort" at the school. Additionally, SJS was attractive to Edwards because it "had a very strong social work program." Edward's childhood circumstances of poverty and abandonment stimulated his desire to be a social worker and SJS was one of the few California schools that offered a Masters in the field. The latter, however, facilitated Edwards's first encounter with racism at the school. Most black student-athletes, he quickly learned, were expected to major in physical education, classes that coaches typically taught, and even fewer seemed to graduate. "In fact," Edwards recalled, "no Black athlete in school at the time I entered could recall any recent Black athlete who had graduated, regardless of major." Only after agreeing to have his instructors sign a "satisfactory work sheet" every week, was Edwards allowed to enroll in social work courses, and then on a "provisional basis." He explained that the stipulation was "a kind of an early-warning system to protect the schools' athletic scholarship investment. Any sign that I was having difficulties and I was to be shifted immediately into the physical education curriculum." It was just one of several policies employed by athletic departments more concerned with the athletic eligibility of blacks than their progress toward a degree.

Blacks were also socially and culturally isolated at the school. Of the more than twenty thousand students enrolled, there were approximately seventy blacks, only three of which were women. Interracial dating was customarily forbidden; white students, teammates, coaches and some faculty harassed white co-eds whom dated black males. Most campus activity and student life, including student government, fraternities and sororities and parties, also customarily excluded blacks. Black students usually had to travel a considerable distance to Oakland, Richmond and San Francisco to be accepted socially. Additionally, on-campus room assignments were segregated and most white landlords in the campus area refused to rent to blacks or did so at inflated prices.

Although blacks contributed to the athletic success of SJS sports teams, they were also discriminated against in the locker room and on the playing field. Edwards remembered that he and other blacks were often the subject of their white coaches and teammates' racial jokes and slurs. On several occasions, he confronted and fought bigoted teammates. Blacks were also routinely denied the job help and extralegal financial assistance given to SJS's white athletes. During Christmas break his freshman year, Edwards, as well as another black student-athlete he knew, wandered the streets of San Jose and ate from dumpsters because they lacked the financial means to travel home. Over his four year student-athlete career at SJS, Edwards increasingly developed a "tremendous difficulty coping with the racism at the school." A leading sports sociologist diagnosed him with a passive-aggressive complex that was likely to result in a violent outburst and during his senior year, at just age twenty, he was diagnosed with an ulcer. Edwards also realized that many of the coaches, including those he admired, were racially insensitive, if not racist. Edwards did, however, develop a friendship with one white assistant coach. That amicability, however, dissolved after a conversation in which he asked the coach why his white teammates belonged to fraternities that barred blacks from membership? The coach responded that Edwards should not concern himself with that because he was not the type of person who needed to belong to a fraternity. Stunned, Edwards pressed that the issue was not that he could not join, but why the administration and athletic department condoned such organizations? The coach excused himself without answering the question, but for Edwards the answer "was clear."

For the sake of team harmony, team unity and keeping to our primary athletic priorities, I'd best drop any concern, much less conversation, about my teammates' membership in racist fraternities. So what if [to my white teammates] I was just a nigger off the basketball court...The only thing that really mattered [to the white coaches] was that I was ready to defend the honor and reputation of the big team. But in racial issues, I could speak out only at the risk of alienating my liberal friends and antagonizing racists (114).

Edwards learned that blacks in white-controlled sports institutions, as they were in other white-controlled institutions in the twentieth century, were expected to accommodate their equality and agency to white supremacy. Indeed, later that year, Edwards confronted the head track coach about the perceived racial

slight of another black student-athlete. The inquiry disintegrated into a heated exchange and Edwards's dismissal from the track team. Edwards, the holder of junior college discus record, abandoned track and field and a likely invitation to try out for the US Olympic team.¹⁴

Edwards retained an athletic scholarship by continuing to play on the SJS basketball team, but gradually became less interested in sports. Unlike most black athletes at SJS, he excelled academically, and further developed an "increasing interest in the integration struggle then raging in the South." His probing of racial and class concerns prompted a professor to suggest he change his major to sociology. He graduated with honors in June 1964. Disappointed by his athletic experiences at SJS, he declined two tryout offers from professional football teams and accepted a prestigious Woodrow Wilson fellowship and chose to pursue a Masters in sociology at Cornell University. The decision precipitated an argument with his father, who once aspired to be the next Joe Louis and believed that athletics were a better means of social advancement and economic security for a black man than an advanced degree. After completing his Masters in 1966, Edwards returned to San Jose, where he became involved in several "human rights" causes, such as improved housing for blacks in the city, and taught sociology at SJS. The next fall (1967), he was instrumental in organizing the black student demonstrations on campus.¹⁵ The literature and scholarship that emerged from the black movement against racism in athletics show that the academic, socioeconomic and cultural discrimination that blacks at SJS experienced were nearly-universal.¹⁶ Indeed, *Life* interviewed black athletes on seven campuses in 1968 and concluded that 'the

¹⁴ Edwards, *Struggle that Must Be*, 101-135; Harry Edwards, "Why Negroes Should Boycott Whitey's Olympics," *Saturday Evening Post*, 9 March 1968, 6; for a discussion of blacks in white-controlled institutions in the twentieth century and Jim Crow, see Steve Estes, *I am a Man: Race, Manhood and the Civil Rights Movement* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 1-9.

¹⁵ Edwards, *Struggle that Must Be*, 124-35.

¹⁶ Pete Axthelm, "The Angry Black Athlete," *Newsweek*, 15 July 1968, 56-60; Arnold Hano, "The Black Rebel who 'Whitelists' the Olympics," *New York Times Magazine*, 12 May 1968, 44-8; Edwards, *Revolt of Black Athlete*, 8-16; Adolph H. Grundman, "Image of Intercollegiate Sports and the Civil Rights Movement: A Historian's View," *Arena Review*, 3 (1979), 17-24; Jack Olsen, "Pride and Prejudice," *Sports Illustrated*, 8 July 1968, 18-31; Thomas Jones and Donald Spivey, "Intercollegiate Athletic Servitude: A Case Study of Black Illini Students Athletes, 1931-1967," *Social Science Quarterly*, 55, 4 (1975), 939-47.

second-class treatment [blacks] got at San Jose was typical of the conditions at many colleges, and their complaints are echoed, with local modifications, in every section of the country.”¹⁷

Evans, Smith and Edwards’s explanations of their involvement in the SJS Black Student’s Movements contradicts the historiography’s conclusion that black student-athletes were coerced by black militants into joining black protest movements. The predominance of that assertion partially derives from the historiography’s uncritical acceptance of the era’s mainstream press’ explanation that Black Power movements were the products of angry degenerative black militants whose foremost aims were to destroy American society and thus, black student-athlete protests and the Olympic boycott proposal must have similar origins and goals.¹⁸ The strength of the assertion also derives from the belief, then and now, that integration into white institutions was and remains the primary objective of black advancement. In the case of black student-athletes’ protest, the historiography asserts that athletic scholarships to predominately white schools provided a prized and rare means of escape from black America, or the “ghetto” as it is often pejoratively termed in these texts. Both scholars Joy James and Michael Eric Dyson explain that the authors and subscribers to such liberal race theory do not, and often cannot, fathom that racial discrimination, in various forms, is perpetrated in desegregated institutions, especially in the supposedly liberal bastions of predominately white colleges.¹⁹ However, contrary to that belief, the discrimination that black athletes experienced served as their impetus for protest. Indeed, many black athletes, especially those socialized in the belief that athletics provided a significant means of individual and group black advancement, were shocked at the discrimination they encountered in white-controlled intercollegiate institutions. Edwards, for instance, remembered that “before very long it became clear” that his friend “had been wrong about California” and its liberalism. Edwards found the major difference between his native segregated East St. Louis and SJS to be that at home “racism was right in your face.” At SJS, however, “the false liberalism blinded unwary Blacks so that they couldn’t see the racist

¹⁷ “Olympic Jolt,” 22.

¹⁸ Van DeBurg, 13-8.

¹⁹ Joy James, *Shadowboxing: Representations of Black Feminist Politics* (New York: Palgrave, 1999), 93-5; Michael Eric Dyson, “The Liberal Theory of Race” in *The Michael Eric Dyson Reader* (New York: Basic Civitas, 2004), 37-41.

steamroller until it crushed them flat.”²⁰ Dyson suggests that unbeknownst to many liberals, the contradiction between blacks’ expectations of integrated environs and the discrimination they experienced in white-controlled institutions often compelled blacks, as it did Edwards, into activism.²¹ One white journalist investigating the student-athlete protests in the Sixties suggested as much, by noted his surprise at learning that a group of disgruntled black student-athletes “were happier back in the ghetto” than at a predominately white college campus.²²

Additionally, Edwards, who has written several scholarly analysis of the movement, notes that SJS’s black student-athletes were influenced by the civil rights demonstrations and civil unrest continuing to occur throughout the nation. He remembered that in the semesters prior to the SJS movement, black students, the majority of whom were athletes or former athletes, openly discussed Black Power and participated in “heated debates on campus about the merits and advantages of violence versus non-violence, about separatism versus integration, about the philosophies of Malcolm X and Stokely Carmichael versus that of Martin Luther King.” Many of them, including Smith, had previously enrolled in Edwards’s class, Racial and Ethnic Minorities, one of the few Black Studies courses offered at the school, and like other black activists of the period, were influenced by ideological tomes such as *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* and Louis Lomax’s *The Negro Revolt*.²³ Black Studies classes and groups often served as incubators of radical black thought.²⁴ Evans and Smith would later admit that it was during this period they began “thinking” about how to improve the quality black life.²⁵

In addition to forcing the SJS administration and athletic department to address blacks’ grievances, as significant, the SJS movement, Edwards noted, taught black students and student-athletes across the nation the use of protest in sports as a means to leverage the redress of discrimination on

²⁰ Edwards, *Struggle that Must Be*, 112.

²¹ Dyson, 41.

²² Jack Olsen, “The Black Athlete- A Shameful Story: Part 1: The Cruel Deception,” *Sports Illustrated*, 1 July, 1968, 14.

²³ Edwards, *Struggle that Must Be*, 158; David Wolf, “Lee Evans’ Grim Education” in *The Best of Sport, 1946-1971* ed. by Al Silverman (New York: Viking Press, 1971), 445; Kareem Abdul-Jabbar (Lew Alcindor), *Giant Steps* (New York, Bantam, 1983), 139.

²⁴ Peniel Joseph, “Dashikis and Democracy”: Black Studies, Student Activism and the Black Power Movement,” *The Journal of African American History* 88, (Spring 2003): 187-8.

²⁵ Drake, “Tom, Lee Discuss Boycott,” 22-3.

campus. The movement resulted in the first college athletic event canceled by the threat of protest and additionally, Edwards estimated that the surrounding university community lost more than \$100,000 dollars. Before the 1967-8 academic year concluded, black student-athletes organized against racism at more than thirty-five universities. Edwards and Noel were critical to the development of these movements, traveling across the country speaking to and aiding student-athletes organizing against racism on their campuses. However, Edwards notes that a movement was “probably inevitable” without their assistance because BSUs, in response to the institutionalized racism blacks typically encountered on predominately white campuses, were already proliferating across the country. Indeed, at the time of the SJS demonstrations in September-October 1967, black students-athletes were also organizing at the University of Washington, California-Berkeley and UTEP. Nevertheless, the SJS movement was significant, because as Edwards noted, “the mold had been forged...We had discovered the utterly untapped power potential inherent in the Black involvement in America’s collegiate sports institutions.”²⁶ In the year following, Edwards would be instrumental into linking black student-athlete protest and the black radical Olympic boycott proposal into a substantial expression of black discontent with continued discrimination in the post-Jim Crow US.²⁷

Edwards’s assessment that the black protest movement in sports evolved from the Black Students’ Movement is verified by a cursory examination of the latter. In February 1960, the modern Black Students’ movement began with southern black youth and their allies challenging segregated public accommodations. Subsequently, the sit-ins spread to integrated student and activist communities across the nation and in the next two years, several national student protest organizations, including the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), were formed and black youth became a vital constituency of the direct action and voting registration campaigns of the Civil Rights Movement. The Black Students’ Movement was also influenced by post-war Supreme

²⁶ Edwards, *The Struggle that Must Be*, 164-5, 182; Edwards, *Revolt of the Black Athlete*, 44-7; for the development of student-athlete protest in 1968, see Pete Axthelem, “The Angry Black Athlete,” *Newsweek*, 15 July 1968, 56.

²⁷ *Washington Post*, 26 May 1968, p. C4.

Court decisions desegregating institutions of higher education, which increased black enrollment at predominately white colleges, especially outside the south. In 1964, for instance, there were 234,000 blacks in college and fifty-one percent attended historically black schools, primarily located in the South. By 1970, that number doubled to more than 500,000, but only thirty-four percent attended black institutions. Historically, black students on predominately white college campuses simply attended classes, but were excluded from all other facets of university life, including campus housing. However, as the number of black students swelled at predominately white universities in the 1960s, black students moved to challenge the customary and institutionalized racism they endured on predominately white campuses and surrounding communities. By 1967 and 1968, ninety percent of all black student protests occurred on predominately white college campuses and despite being only six percent of the nation's college students in 1969, fifty-one percent of all college protests involved black students.²⁸

1968 and 1969 marked not only the apex of the Black Students' Movement, but the peak of black student-athletes' protest as well. In 1968, black student-athletes protested at more than thirty-five predominately white schools and between 1967 and 1971, they organized against racism on more than 100 campuses.²⁹ In a post-movement analysis Edwards noted that as "the concept of "institutionalized racism" had come to symbolize the by now well-established *raison d'être* for the black students' movement," it "was not coincidental that the organized revolt of athletes in sport initially occurred at around the same time period that institutional racism became generally accepted by black students as the appropriate definition of the problem." Edwards explained that even though black student-athletes were "lauded sports heroes," off the court, they were black and thus, experienced the same discrimination, such as difficulty renting housing and social alienation, as other black students.³⁰ In addition to being motivated by the same factors, black activist-athletes and the Black Students' movements shared the same aims. Although not always readily apparent in mainstream press, both generally demanded an increase in

²⁸ William H. Exum, *Paradoxes of Protest: Black Student Activism in A White University* (Philadelphia Temple University Press, 1985), 7-8; Van DeBurg, 67-8.

²⁹ Jack Scott, *The Athletic Revolution* (New York: The Free Press, 1971), 80; David K. Wiggins, *Glory Bound: Black Athletes in a White America* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University, 1997), 123-5.

³⁰ Harry Edwards, *The Sociology of Sport* (Homewood, IL: Dorsey Press, 1973), 144-5.

black student enrollment, black faculty, a Black Studies curriculum and an end to de facto segregation and discrimination in the university community.³¹ Black student-athlete movements at SJS, California-Berkeley and Washington, for instance, not only challenged discrimination in housing and campus activities, but also advocated and achieved an increase of black faculty and students and the initiation of a Black Studies curriculums.³² In many instances, including SJS, athletes were the only or vast majority of blacks enrolled at a predominately white school and therefore, their participation was critical to the success Black Students' Movement on campus.³³ Although the mainstream media of the Sixties and the resulting historiography have concluded that militants pressured athletes to join movements, athletes like Evans and Smith regarded themselves as participants in the black struggle for humanity and equality and their protest as "another step in a series of movements" already occurring among blacks and students. Black student-athletes, as Smith explained were not solely protesting the discrimination they encountered in athletics, "but to improve things for the entire Negro community." Indeed, Evans added that "We are men first, athletes second."³⁴

Following the SJS demonstrations, Smith and Edwards met to discuss the critical media accounts and hate mail that Smith had received since his September response that blacks were considering boycotting the US Olympic team. Afterwards, Edwards contacted and learned that several other Olympic-caliber black athletes on the West Coast were also contemplating such action. Noting their strong pro-boycott sentiments, on 7 October 1967, Edwards, Smith and Noel supported by several local black Bay Area activists including Jimmy Garrett, Bob Hoover and SNCC activists George Washington Ware founded the Olympic Committee for Human Rights (OCHR), and then invited "as many black

³¹ For examinations of the Black Students' Movement, see Joseph, 191-2; and *Militant*, 24 May 1968, p. 8; for discussions of the black student-athletes' protest see, Harry Edwards, "The Olympic Project for Human Rights: An Assessment Ten Years Later," *Black Scholar*, 1979 10, 6-7: 3; and *The Daily Worker*, 18 June, 1968, p. 4; for an excellent example of athletes' role in a Black Students' movement on campus, see Joseph Declan Moran's discussion of black protest at Marquette University, *You Can Call Me Al: The Colorful Journey of College Basketball's Original Flower Child* (Madison, WI: Prairie Oaks Press, 1999), 190-6.

³² Hano, 41; *Los Angeles Times*, 31 January 1969, p. A2; Edwards, *Revolt of the Black Athlete*, 80-88.

³³ *New York Times*, 16 November 1969, p. 85; Moran, 193-6.

³⁴ Drake, "Tom, Lee Discuss the Boycott," 3.

athletes as possible” to “spell out formally the direction that the boycott phase of the revolt would take” at a workshop at the Western Youth Conference, a regional subset of the National Black Power Conference, in Los Angeles on Thanksgiving Day. Whereas the SJS Black Students’ Movement or more accurately, the cancellation of the football game, drew nominal media attention, the announcement of the Thanksgiving workshop garnered substantial national media and public attention because of its Olympic implications. Almost immediately, Edwards began receiving hate mail and death threats and the mainstream vituperation of Smith also increased.³⁵

The workshop began with a half-hour speech by Edwards and afterwards, several potential Olympians, including Smith and Lew Alcindor, the college basketball’s reigning player of the year, spoke in favor of the boycott proposal. Alcindor, like Smith and Edwards, understood the boycott as a means to “dramatize and protest the systematic discrimination” that continued to debilitate black life. He later remembered explaining to the workshop audience that “If white America was going to treat blacks poorly, then white America could win the Olympics on its own. We had all felt the effects of racial prejudice, from individual hurtful remarks to difficulties getting decent housing or good jobs, and while some of us were obtaining the privileges that athletic celebrity will bring, none of us had forgotten where he came from.”³⁶ Alcindor, and those who agreed with him, demanded the amelioration of blacks’ grievances before they would use their athletic talents to further the nation in its Cold War Olympic competition against Russia.³⁷ Despite arguments from a few older retired athletes who attempted to articulate, as Edwards explained it, “how much sport had done for Negroes” and that it was an honor to represent the US in the Olympics, a pro-boycott sentiment pervaded and the conference passed a resolution fully endorsing the boycott proposal.³⁸

³⁵ “Black Pride,” *Time*, 6 October 1967, 70; Edwards, *Struggle that Must Be*, 174-6; Edwards, *Revolt of the Black Athlete*, 49-52.

³⁶ Abdul-Jabbar (Alcindor), 170-1.

³⁷ *Chicago Defender*, 28 November 1967, p. 25.

³⁸ Jonathan Rodgers, “A Step to an Olympic Boycott,” *Sports Illustrated*, 4 December 1967, 30-1; Edwards, *Revolt of the Black Athlete*, 53-6.

Edwards excluded white reporters from the workshop and afterwards, he and the few prominent athletes in attendance dispersed without speaking with reporters. Edwards had taken such precautions because he believed that white reporters who represented the white-controlled sports establishment, which was overwhelmingly opposed to the boycott proposal, would highlight the debate that took place in the workshop as a means of discrediting the proposal.³⁹ He later wrote that in regards to the black struggle, the mainstream media “acted upon many occasions as an unofficial arm of the establishment in America” and sports reporters were no exception. In addition to being an unconscious racist and therefore, unable to accurately report the intent of the workshop, the livelihood of most white sports reporters demanded that they “must be responsive to the desires and needs of the sports industry,” which had a substantial interest in publicizing sports as “recreational,” and publicly minimizing its “significant social, economic and political impact.” Most of their “Negro” counterparts, he argued, were concerned with furthering the myth of black athletes as substantial contributors to black advancement. Like the traditional black establishment, they concentrated on illustrating “black people striving as hard as possible to be like white folks” and at best, took a “middle-of-the-road position” on mass black direct action. Edwards’s distrust of the mainstream and Negro media was a shared among Black Nationalists. As such, the OCHR arranged for a “black” sports reporter from a Los Angeles paper to release the first “official” report of the session.⁴⁰

The Thanksgiving workshop succeeded in publicizing the radical boycott proposal, but despite the resolution, a black boycott of the US team was far from a certainty. Only five likely Olympians attended and with the exception of Alcindor’s firm pledge, the other four, including Evans and Smith, sympathized but noted that they would only boycott if the majority of black Olympians agreed on such a course of action.⁴¹ Other black potential Olympians would issue similar equivocations through the media.⁴² The athletes’ ambiguousness meant that OCHR would have to compete against the US Olympic

³⁹ Edwards, *Struggle that Must Be*, 176-8; Edwards, *Revolt of the Black Athlete*, 51-6.

⁴⁰ Edwards, *Revolt of the Black Athlete*, 30-5, 54-5; for Sixties Black Nationalists and the mainstream media, see Van DeBurg, 13; and Stokely Carmichael, “Towards Black Liberation” in *Black Fire: An Anthology of Afro-American Writing* ed. by LeRoi Jones and Larry Neal (New York: Morrow, 1968), 119-21.

⁴¹ *New York Times*, 26 November 1967, p. S12; Rodgers, “A Step to an Olympic Boycott,” 31.

⁴² Dick Drake “Olympic News,” *Track and Field News*, December 1967, 12.

establishment and its supporters, most notably the mainstream press, to convince the athletes of the positive necessity of a boycott, as well as maintain their loyalty until the opening of the Olympics, which was eleven months away. It would be an arduous task. Many black potential Olympians were not only ideologically and geographically disparate from the OPHR, in some cases, because Olympic trials for several sports would not be held until August or September 1968, they were yet to be chosen. Additionally, the only reliable source of funding to wage the boycott campaign was Edwards's salary as a part-time sociology instructor.⁴³

The workshop, held at the Western Youth Conference in Los Angeles, a subsidiary of the national Black Power Conference, however, did indicate the support of the Black Power community and black progressives, both of whom would be helpful in organizing and publicizing future boycott-related activities. Indeed, the Olympic boycott idea had its origins among the period's black progressive and radical intellectuals. In 1963, activist and comedian Dick Gregory unsuccessfully attempted to convince black athletes to help raise awareness of racism on black life by withdrawing from the US team competing in an annual US-USSR track and field meet to be held that year.⁴⁴ Four years later, in July 1967, Gregory and Floyd McKissick, the executive director of CORE, spearheaded a National Black Power Conference resolution that blacks boycott the 1968 Olympics in protest of Ali being stripped of the heavyweight boxing championship for refusing to participate in the US war in Vietnam.⁴⁵ That resolution likely prompted a Japanese reporter at the World University Games less than a month later to ask Smith if blacks were considering boycotting the games. His affirmative reply initiated the furor surrounding the boycott proposal developing in the press.⁴⁶ Throughout the black drive to boycott the 1968 Olympics, as the next chapter will demonstrate, Black Power and progressive black activists would play a critical role in attracting support and disseminating the OCHR's agenda.

⁴³ Edwards, *Revolt of the Black Athlete*, 51.

⁴⁴ Dick Gregory with Robert Lipsyte, *Nigger: An Autobiography* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1968), 192-3.

⁴⁵ *Chicago Defender*, 29 July 1967, p. 15; *New York Times*, 24 July 1967, p. 16; Komozi Woodard, *A Nation within A Nation: Amiri Baraka (Leroi Jones) and Black Power Politics* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 84.

⁴⁶ Drake, "Tom, Lee Discuss Boycott," 3.

The modern Black Power conferences were a product of the prolonged urban rioting of the 1960s and the organic black intellectuals who emerged to articulate the grievances of the disgruntled black masses. Significant among them was Carmichael, a veteran black student activist. Shortly after the mainstream press seized on his declaration that blacks would use Black Power to obtain the realization of blacks' equality and constitutional rights in the summer of 1966, he coined another term, "institutionalized racism," to explain why the new black call for self-determination was a necessity.⁴⁷ Carmichael wrote that despite the defeat of legalized discrimination, blacks continued to be defined by two forces; a socioeconomic and political "powerlessness" to participate in decisions that shaped their communities and a cultural and racial stigmatization of "blackness." The civil rights movement produced legislation that desegregated white-controlled institutions, which provided a few blacks opportunities, but the black majority remained locked in communities ghettoized by a legacy of socioeconomic, structural and cultural racism. Carmichael noted

the difference between individual racism and institutionalized racism, and society's response to both. When unidentified white terrorists bomb a Negro church and kill five children, that is an act of individual racism, widely deplored by most segments of society. But when in the same city, Birmingham, Alabama, not five but five hundred Negro babies die each year because of a lack of proper food, shelter and medical facilities, and thousands more are destroyed and maimed physically, emotionally, and intellectually because of conditions of poverty and deprivation in the ghetto, that is a function of institutionalized racism. But the society either pretends it doesn't know of this situation, or is incapable of doing anything meaningful about it. And this resistance to doing anything meaningful about conditions in that ghetto comes from the fact that the ghetto is itself a product of a combination of forces and special interests in white community, and the groups that have access to the resources and power to change the situation benefit, politically and economically, from the existence of that ghetto (123-4).⁴⁸

Carmichael's analysis, that blacks remained shackled by poverty and structural racism, had substance. In his treatise on Black Nationalism, *Black Awakening in Capitalist America*, activist Robert Allen wrote that in 1966, the same year that Carmichael announced the need for Black Power,

⁴⁷ "The Man who coined the term "Institutional Racism," *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, 23, (Spring 1999): 39.

⁴⁸ Carmichael, 121-4.

despite eleven years of intense civil rights activity and the new anti-poverty programs, the median income of a black family was 58 percent of the income of a white family, and black unemployment still ran twice as high as white unemployment, despite the war-induced prosperity, which the country was enjoying. Unemployment among black teenagers ran at 26 percent... Residential segregation proved to be the toughest nut for the integrationist movement to crack. In 1966, a survey of twelve cities in which special censuses were taken revealed *increased* rates of segregation in eight of them... Perhaps the most significant indication of the middle-class nature of the civil rights movement was the fact that it did absolutely nothing to alleviate the grim plight of the poorest segments of the black population. As late as 1968, a group of six doctors found evidence of widespread and long-standing malnutrition and starvation in the rural South. The situation in the cities was little better... In U.S. cities of one million population or more, the percentage of nonwhite families living in "poverty areas" between 1960 to 1966 remained constant at 34 percent. In New York and Chicago, however, the percentage increased (26-7).

"It is in these figures," Allen concluded, "that one clearly sees the genesis of urban rebellion."⁴⁹

The analysis is also endorsed by contemporary scholars. In addition to a wide disparity in income and unemployment that continued to mark the color line, historian Jack Bloom contends that federal policies continued to be at least partially responsible for the perpetuation of socioeconomic and structural racism that ghettoized black America following the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Until the late 1960s, the Federal Housing Authority refused to underwrite loans for homes in black and integrated locales and by 1959, it was estimated that minorities had received less than two percent of the \$120 billion administered by the FHA since World War II. The agency introduced redlining and encouraged the use of restrictive covenants to maintain segregated neighborhoods. In addition, federally funded highway construction programs and urban renewal contributed to the confinement of minorities to the poorest sections of urban areas. As a result, Bloom notes that for decades after the Civil Rights Act of 1964, even those minorities who could reasonably afford flight were often literally trapped in deteriorating inner cities, forced to pay more for less housing and attend inadequately funded schools.⁵⁰ Historian Gerald Horne asserts that such residential segregation fueled other socioeconomic problems for

⁴⁹ Robert L. Allen, *Black Awakening in Capitalist America* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1992), 23-8.

⁵⁰ Jack M. Bloom, "Ghetto Revolts, Black Power and the Limits of the Civil Rights Coalition," in *The American Civil Rights Movement*, ed. by Raymond D'Angelo (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2001), 385-7; C. C. H. Pounder, et. al, *Race: The Power of an Illusion*, Part III (San Francisco, CA: California Newsreel, 2003).

minorities “such as distance from employment and the difficulty of being transported beyond the ghetto.” For instance, in 1960’s Los Angeles, where 12.5 percent of blacks were unemployed and 44.5 percent lived below poverty, the Kerner Commission concluded that to travel to the nearest shopping center, a resident located in the south central inner city community of Watts would have to ride two buses for one and a half hours at a substantial cost of 45 cents. According to Horne, by public transportation, it took almost four hours to reach jobs at the unionized Douglas Aircraft plant in Santa Monica and even longer to reach the General Motors plant in Van Nuys. The result, Horne concluded, was that “As industry developed in LA County-soon to be the most industrialized region in the nation- many blacks were left without work, away from higher Union paying jobs.” These conditions, Horne notes, precipitated the 1965 Watts’ riots, the most destructive of all black civil unrest in the sixties.⁵¹ The work of Horne, Bloom, Allen and others such as George Lipsitz and Manning Marable illustrate that decades after the Civil Rights Act of 1964, urban minorities and the poor remained ghettoized by the socioeconomic and structural racism fostered decades earlier.⁵²

Carmichael further argued that the eradication of institutionalized racism exceeded the interests and comprehension of most whites and as such, required a united Black Nationalists’ effort. Although Carmichael called for a broad experimentation of political and economic Black Nationalism and purposely remained ambiguous concerning a Black Power strategy and implementation, his essay suggested that blacks withdraw their perpetual allegiance from the Democratic Party and form a black political party that elected black officials, particularly in the South, and prioritize the political, socioeconomic and cultural reforms necessary to make humanity and self-determination in black communities a reality. Like the riots, Carmichael’s call for Black Power, was a call for a new emphasis on solving the crisis of poverty, structural racism and the widely accepted cultural and racial assumptions

⁵¹ Gerald Horne, *Fire this Time: The Watts Uprising and the 1960s* (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1995), 247-50.

⁵² Ponder, *Race, episode III*; George Lipsitz, “The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics,” *American Quarterly*, 52(2) 2000: 369-87; Manning Marable, *Race, Rebel and Reform, The Second Reconstruction in Black America, 1945-1990* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1991).

that buttressed discrimination.⁵³ The resulting Black Power conventions provided many black progressives, including Edwards, who agreed that institutionalized racism remained the main impediment to black equality with a forum to discuss, disseminate and implement strategies to realize black equality.⁵⁴ Indeed, many influential Black Power theorists like Ron Karenga, Charles V. Hamilton and Eldridge Cleaver eventually endorsed the black protest in sports.⁵⁵

Although Black Power is obligatory associated with young black radicals, the pervasiveness of institutionalized racism, the proliferation of rioting and continued disaffection of the black masses also propelled a significant number of respected venerable black activists to support progressive black protest movements such as the OCHR. On 15 December 1967, Martin Luther King, Jr., McKissick and Louis Lomax, a noted journalist and Edwards's chief advisor, appeared with Edwards at an OCHR press conference at the Americana Hotel in New York to endorse the boycott proposal. Edwards used the platform to attempt to clarify the purpose of the boycott and expound on the Olympic Project for Human Rights (OPHR), a list of demands previously disseminated to the press, which he suggested, if met, might abate the boycott. Edwards did the majority of speaking, but the most significant development of the press conference was King's presence. The nation's most recognized civil rights spokesperson endorsed the OCHR because he believed that the movement articulated the grievances of the masses of blacks, many of whom were otherwise rioting to be heard. At the press conference, he paraphrased that sentiment by approving of the boycott proposal because, as Edwards paraphrased, "little else in the way of non-violent protest was left to them."⁵⁶

Five months earlier, in June 1967, the month before the afore-mentioned Black Power conference was held, King explicitly explained his support for movements such as the OCHR in a *New York Times*

⁵³ Carmichael, 122-6; Allen, 21-8; Woodard, 41-2; for discussions concerning the ambiguity and implantation of Black Power, see Carson Clayborne, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 215-28.

⁵⁴ Woodard, 84-7; *New York Times*, 22 July 1967, p. 1, 11; Edwards, *Struggle that Must Be*, 147-9.

⁵⁵ "Should Negroes Boycott the Olympics?," *Ebony*, March 1968, 110-6; Eldridge Cleaver, *Soul on Ice* (New York: Bantam Doubleday, 1992) 85-95.

⁵⁶ Edwards, *Revolt of the Black Athlete*, 57-9; *New York Times*, 16 December 1967, p. 63; "Dr. King, McKissick Support Olympic Boycott," *Jet*, 28 December 1967, 45; *New York Amsterdam News*, 23 December 1967, p. 44.

Magazine article aptly-entitled “Black Power Defined.” He criticized Negro “leaders” for their narrow construction of the means of blacks’ struggle for equality. King suggested that they acted as if the black masses and their ideas were beneath them and attempted to elevate their own authority by consenting to being used by the powers-that-be to condemn and denigrate the direct action of the masses. To stem the current tide of rioting and frustration and realize black equality, King suggested that black self-determination needed to be encouraged. In addition to fostering more black-owned businesses, increased union membership and economic boycotts to raise wages and secure better jobs, King suggested assistance to the organic movements that emerged from the masses; “We must utilize the community action groups and training centers now proliferating in some slum areas to create not merely an electorate, but a conscious, alert and informed people who know their direction and whose collective wisdom and vitality demand respect.” After all, King proclaimed earlier in the article, it was only through the organized mass protests that blacks effectively exposed the shame of America and defeated legalized racism. He declared that “Nonviolent direct action will continue to be a significant source of power until it is made irrelevant by the presence of justice.”⁵⁷ In essence, King championed increased constructive agitation from all classes of blacks, especially support for the organic movements emerging from among the masses that were otherwise rioting to be heard.

King preached as he practiced. In 1966, following the onset of the riots and the failure of several SCLC’s campaign to win economic gains in northern and Midwestern cities, he strengthened his ties with black radicals, student, labor and anti-war movements and engaged in what historian Michael Honey has termed “civil rights unionism,” which involved the SCLC in worker strikes and union organizing. In late 1967, King lend his voice to a sanitation workers’ strike in Memphis and claimed that their struggle for socioeconomic equality- union recognition, higher wages and safe and modern working conditions- was indicative of the next phase of struggle that the nation’s working poor and black proletariat waged for the recognition of their dignity and humanity. In 1967, King condemned US involvement in Vietnam as

⁵⁷ Martin Luther King, Jr., “Black Power Defined,” in *I Have a Dream: Writing and Speeches that Changed the World* edited by James Washington (New York: HarperCollins, 1992), 155-65: originally published in *The New York Times Magazine*, June 11, 1967.

imperialistic and a misappropriated economic expenditure that would be better spend stemming poverty in the US. Later that year, he initiated the Poor People's Campaign, a movement to force the federal government to insure full employment and a living income to all citizens, thus eradicating poverty. Like many progressives of the era, King advocated far-reaching socioeconomic reform as an antecedent to realizing equality and humanity for minorities and the poor in the US.⁵⁸ King supported the boycott proposal because its purpose was to stimulate awareness of such an agenda.

The endorsements of King, and the two other well-respected black progressives, Lomax and McKissick, were significant for Edwards and the OCHR because it legitimated the boycott in many communities, including those of several likely black Olympians and liberals. Vincent Matthews, a sprinter and likely Olympian attending North Carolina's historically black Johnson C. Smith College, remembered "The fact" that King and the others endorsed Edwards "added further credibility" to the boycott.⁵⁹ King's endorsement also drew positive assessments from members of the black press, which was largely opposed to the boycott. *The Chicago Defender*, for instance, noted that the presence of the venerable activists was evidence that the proposal was "gaining acceptance and active support by civil rights leaders and concerned people who take stock in the logic of fair play and equality."⁶⁰

The New York press conference capped a significant number of endorsements for the OCHR in its initial two months of existence. In addition to attracting the support of the Black Power community and black progressives, earlier that month, Bill Russell, the professional basketball perennial most valuable player and a former Olympian, and Jackie Robinson, the first African American in modern major league baseball and now a significant black political voice, both endorsed the boycott proposal. As black men with significant experience in white-controlled institutions and representing the US, they sympathized with the OCHR. Although Robinson's initial opposition to the boycott proposal was widely

⁵⁸ Michael K. Honey, "Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Crisis of the Black Working Class, and the Memphis Sanitation Strike," in *Southern Labor in Transition*, ed. Robert H. Zeigler (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1997), 147-64; Robert Cook, *Sweet Land of Liberty?: The African American Struggle for Civil Rights in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Longman, 1988), 190-202.

⁵⁹ Vincent Matthews with Neil Amdur, *My Race Be Won* (New York: Chartreuse, 1974), 161.

⁶⁰ *Chicago Defender*, 20 December 1967, p.15.

reported, after “some careful thought,” he declared that the athletes’ aims to “change the racial conditions in America and destroy the exploitation of the Negro athlete” were noble. He questioned the boycott’s “leadership,” suggesting that he believed the mainstreams’ description of Edwards as a militant, but ultimately concluded that a black Olympic boycott was a progression of the black struggle. Robinson noted that in the 1940s, when he integrated the white baseball establishment, his success depended as much on his ability to accommodate the racial humiliation, hate and even the physical abuse he encountered, as much as his physical ability to excel in the game. He accommodated because he believed that his accomplishments might foster opportunities for other blacks, but after four years in white-institutional baseball, his experiences led him to conclude that blacks entering white-controlled institutions, including sports, were usually not afforded the same agency as whites and therefore were still denied their equality and manhood. In his fourth season, 1949, Robinson ended his accommodation and began to speak out against discrimination in both baseball and society. Against the will of the team’s management, who suggested he was creating “trouble,” Robinson objected to Jim Crow accommodations when he traveled with the team, challenged bigots in the game and used his celebrity to raise money and assert the validity of the civil rights movement. On several occasions, the mainstream press and sports establishment lambasted Robinson as an “uppity nigger,” but he continued to speak out, often using the unfavorable publicity to attract attention to racial discrimination and other social ills. Two decades after entering the white-controlled baseball establishment and a decade after retiring from the game, Robinson supported the activist-athletes of the Sixties, including the boycott proposal, because his experiences in white-controlled sports and the military during WWII and the experiences of other prominent blacks he knew lead him to conclude that blacks’ accomplishments (and accommodation) would never result in the recognition of their complete citizenship and humanity. He warned white America and black moderates that younger blacks were not willing, nor should they be, to accommodate and subvert their agency to only have their humanity and citizenship “partially accepted.” That was not progress, he concluded, but rather the continuation of racism in a different form.⁶¹ Throughout the eleven month boycott drive, in

⁶¹ *Chicago Defender*, 16 December 1967, p. 12; Jackie Robinson, *I Never Had It Made* (Hopewell, NJ:

interviews and through his columns, Robinson lauded the activist-athletes for their courage and willingness to sacrifice their Olympic dreams for the struggle.⁶² Robinson's endorsement was significant because the mainstream media highlighted the opposition of a number of prominent black athletes to condemn the boycott proposal. His endorsement, however, legitimated the boycott among some blacks and liberal communities.⁶³

King and Robinson's sentiments were also prevalent in black communities. A number of polls and letters-to-the-editors in the black press suggested that there was significant sympathy for the proposal among the black masses.⁶⁴ The opening of the Olympics, however, was still nine months away and the OCHR would have to vie with the sports and traditional black establishments for the allegiance of black Olympians.

II

In a post-movement analysis, Edwards concluded that the OCHR's foremost obstacle in attracting support for the boycott proposal was the traditional widely-accepted belief that the presence and accomplishments of black athletes in white-controlled athletic institutions had significantly fostered black advancement by improving whites' images of blacks.⁶⁵ As illustrated in chapter one, the belief was solidified in the traditional black establishment in the 1930s during the ascendance of Louis and Owens and the 1936 black Olympians. Chapter two further demonstrates that in the following three decades, the belief achieved near-hegemony in the black and mainstream press because of the mass integration of white-team sports and the state's Cold War utilization of black athletes between WWII and the Sixties. From the initial suggestion of the boycott in the summer of 1967, those entities opposed to a boycott reasserted the belief that historically the accomplishments of black athletes, improved whites' images of blacks and thus advanced race relations, as a means to combat the rational and legitimacy of the boycott

Ecco Press, 1995), 76-9.

⁶² *Chicago Defender*, 18 May 1968, p. 10.

⁶³ *Chicago Defender*, 2 December 1967, p. 15.

⁶⁴ *Chicago Defender*, 2 December 1967, p. 11; *New York Amsterdam News*, 2 December 1967, p. 1.

⁶⁵ Edwards, "The Olympic Project for Human Rights," 2; also see Edwards, *Struggle that Must Be*, 218.

proposal. Although several analyses of the movement note that the anti-boycott perspectives of the traditional black establishment, the mainstream media and the white-controlled sports establishment were easily discernible, none explore the consequences of the belief's near-hegemony on the public's perception and opinion of the boycott. Sociologist Douglas Hartmann, the one scholar who cursorily examines the issue, concludes that there was no "unholy" collusion between those entities against the proposal, despite revealing through his work, that many of them concomitantly articulated similar oppositional critiques of the boycott. Hartman concluded that such an assertion would be hard to "accept (much less prove) that so many could have so deliberately and so skillfully mystified, manipulated or obscured their view on race as would be necessary to account for these peculiarities."⁶⁶

Contrary to Hartmann's conclusion, this section illustrates that the dominance of the belief, that black athletes' presence and accomplishments in white-controlled institutions advanced blacks, had a tremendous influence on the discussion of the boycott proposal in the public discourse. While there is no evidence to suggest that the sports establishment, mainstream media and the traditional black establishment strategically conspired against the boycott, primary sources illustrate that these entities all suggested that in comparison to the traditional belief of athletics as a means of improving race relations, an Olympic boycott was irrational, radically unnecessary and unpatriotic. Bill Russell, an OCHR supporter, noted that the dominance of this perspective formed the "starting points" of the discussion of the boycott in the mainstream, and as such influenced most people's opinion of the boycott, including, as this chapter concludes, those of the athletes being asked to support the movement.⁶⁷

From the initial announcement of an organized drive to build a black boycott of the 1968 Olympic team in October 1967, the mainstream press, the white-controlled sports establishment and traditional black establishment all opposed the boycott proposal. The predominate reason they offered

⁶⁶ Douglas Hartmann, "Golden Ghettos: The Cultural Politics of Race, Sports and the Civil Rights Movement, 1968 and Beyond," (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1997), 120.

⁶⁷ Bill Russell with Taylor Branch, *Second Wind: The Memoirs of an Opinionated Man* (New York: Simon Schuster, 1979), 176-9.

was that the majority of whites would interpret it as irrational, unnecessarily radical and unpatriotic, thus damaging whites' image of blacks. Shortly after the Thanksgiving workshop, *Los Angeles Times* sports columnist Charles Maher wrote that "no course of action could be more hopeless...What could it accomplish for the *American Negro*?" If the US team were outscored by Russia and other nations at the Olympics, would whites "then be disposed to treat the Negro more generously" or will they "be angered and resist the Negro's demand more resolutely?" He suggested that "the latter response is for more probable."⁶⁸ Perhaps, the opinion was best expressed by Bert Nelson, a co-founder and publisher of *TFN*, the foremost US track and field magazine. In an open letter to the activist-athletes, Nelson urged them to terminate the boycott proposal, "not because I disagree with your objective," but because he feared that it was already doing irreparable harm to race relations. The letter was both critical and apologetic, suggesting that he understood that racism was "unfair and frustrating, but the progress of Negroes toward deserved equality depends on the whites. Blacks can influence whites, for good or bad, but whites make the final decisions." Nelson concluded that a boycott "could not favorably influence the white man." He also admitted that the mainstream press was "more interested in taking sides than presenting your views" and therefore, as "a public forum for your beliefs the boycott must be regarded as a failure." As a result of both the biasness of the mainstream press and the unconscious prejudice of many whites, Nelson surmised that most whites "will react negatively to your boycott" and that, in fact, was counter to the liberal discourse of black advancement; "Your effort has to be in winning over the other side." "But," a boycott, in effect would be "pushing some of those you most need deeper into the arms of prejudice and bigotry." Although Nelson admitted that Olympic participation would not appreciatively diminish the impact of discrimination on blacks, he did not totally discard the liberal belief that

countless other Negro athletes, in track and pro sports, have earned the respect and admiration of millions of whites. They have been made to see, to some degree at least, the correctness of your demand for equality. No one will ever know, but I suspect much of the real progress made in recent years has been made possible by the impact of the Negro athlete. By continuing to excel in athletics you continue to prove you are as good

⁶⁸ *Los Angeles Times*, 25 November 1967, p. 21; *emphasis in text*.

as the white man, if not better. And you create opportunities to be heard, individually and as a group.⁶⁹

Most mainstream periodicals were less explicit than Nelson concerning the proposal, but as definitive that a boycott was potentially damaging to black advancement. An editorial in *Life* stated that “In their long struggle for equal rights, Negroes have often made good use of the boycott weapon, especially...where the target was clear and vulnerable. But,” it asked rhetorically, “what can they gain by boycotting the Olympics, which have been notably free of racial discrimination? The last games at which race was an issue were in Nazi Germany in 1936, when Negroes won nine gold medals under Adolf Hitler’s racist’s eyes. Jesse Owens...won four of those medals.” The article concluded, “The more young Negro athletes add to these powerful examples, the more they will do for their race.”⁷⁰ At the outset of the boycott proposal, most mainstream periodicals suggested that participation, and the patriotism and service it represented, were a better means of black advancement.

The traditional black establishment was sympathetic to the motivations of the activist-athletes, but the assertion that a boycott would be viewed by whites as unpatriotic, militantly destructive and thus, injurious to blacks, initially influenced much of the traditional black establishment to also condemn the proposal. An editorial in the *New York Amsterdam News* noted “that although we can understand the motivations, the sensitiveness, the anger and the long agonizing reasoning that must have gone on among” the activist-athletes, “we can not go along with its proposal.” The editorial lamented that because it would likely not result in any increased favorable sentiment for blacks, the athletes would be engaging in “a meaningless sacrifice, courageous as it may seem.”⁷¹ Whitney Young, executive director of the Urban League also disapproved of a boycott, but urged the federal government to support measures that would improve the quality of blacks’ life and thus, negate the growth of radicalism in the black community. He warned that because of the persistence of discrimination and poverty in black America, the Olympic boycott proposal and several other radical measures proposed at the 1967 national Black

⁶⁹ Bert Nelson, “Dear Tommie,” *Track and Field News*, December 1967, 14-5.

⁷⁰ “Negro Olympics Boycott is Off Target,” *Life*, 8 December 1967, 4.

⁷¹ *New York Amsterdam News*, 16 December 1967, p. 16.

Power conference had strong and growing support among blacks.⁷² The NAACP's executive director Roy Wilkins made a similar statement.⁷³

Shared experiences of discrimination, however, motivated several black entities to endorse the boycott and reject the traditional black uplift belief that character and service earned their race advancement. An editorial in the *Chicago Defender*, the largest circulating black newspaper, responded to whites who suggested that a boycott would only "aggravate whatever tensions that now exist" between white and blacks, by agreeing that there remained "the need for preserving goodwill and amicable race relations." However, blacks reserved the right to protest their grievances and "We think that Negro stars have a right to take a stand against mistreatment or unfair arrangement when such a situation arises." The paper concluded that the strategy of "winning friends and influencing people is inviting rhetoric that looks good on paper," but "the realities of life often call for decisions that transcend sentimentality."⁷⁴ *The Defender* later responded to those who suggested that "Negro athletes would hurt their cause" with a boycott by suggesting that "Save loyalty to the country in time of national peril, there is no cause greater than racial justice or equality."⁷⁵ There were also several columnists, black and white and usually younger, including Drake, freelance journalist Pete Axthelm, Lawrence Casey of the *Defender*, Dick Edwards of the *Amsterdam News* and Robert Lypsyte of the *New York Times*, who supported the proposal, even though the majority of columnists at their periodicals opposed the action.⁷⁶ At the *Defender*, differences of opinions between columnists escalated into a heated tiff that played out between the paper's pages.⁷⁷

Opponents also attempted to discredit the boycott by suggesting that the radical and unnecessarily drastic action would contradict a proven means of black advancement and therefore, must be the product

⁷² *Chicago Defender*, 5 August 1967, p. 4.

⁷³ "More Boycott Reaction," *Track and Field News*, II February 1968, 21.

⁷⁴ *Chicago Defender*, 2 December 1967, p. 10.

⁷⁵ *Chicago Defender*, 20 December 1967, p. 1.

⁷⁶ Axthelm, "The Angry Black Athlete," 56-60; *Chicago Defender*, 28 November 1967, p. 25; *New York Amsterdam News*, 13 January 1968, p. 33; *New York Times*, 25 November 1967, p. 54; Edwards, *Struggle that Must Be*, 182; Edwards, *Revolt of the Black Athlete*, 36.

⁷⁷ *Chicago Defender*, 6 January 1968, p. 10.

of Black Power militants' coercion of athletes. The mainstream asserted that, historically, through athletics, Louis and Robinson and other black athletes had improved whites' images of blacks. *New York Times* sports editor Arthur Daley reminded his readers that in 1936, Owens "proved to the world that the master race was not quite as masterful as Hitler would have liked everyone to believe." Because a boycott asked the athletes to sacrifice such an opportunity, as well as personal advancement, it was irrational and seemed to Daley that the athletes "were being victimized" by militants.⁷⁸ Prominent sports officials like Avery Brundage, the influential head of the IOC, and Payton Jordan, the head coach of the US Olympic track team, agreed. Jordan suggested that "There must be some coercion to have an individual who has worked so long and hard (to qualify for the Olympics) to change his mind in the middle of the stream, but I don't know all the reasons."⁷⁹ The establishment was reminding the activist-athletes that historically blacks in white-controlled sports institutions, as in other white-controlled institutions, had been accommodating and that white interpretations and recognition of their achievements were decidedly influenced by that behavior.⁸⁰

Again, a *TFN* columnist provided the most ardent articulation of an anti-boycott rationale. Corder Nelson, also co-publisher and a founder of the magazine, appeared liberal, if not objective, by suggesting that he did object to the boycott along the patriotic lines that black athletes must participate in the Olympics as a duty to their country. He supported Smith and Evans' right to boycott the US team. However, he was concerned that they were being influenced by Edwards, the "leader and self-styled originator of the boycott." "When I use the word 'influenced,' I mean everything from persuasion through the emotions or intellect all the way to intimidation by threats of force or the shame of being a called a traitor to the race." Contrary to the deviant militancy he assigned with Edwards, Nelson suggested that the athletes did not understand the ramifications of a boycott. He advised Smith that "The

⁷⁸ *New York Times*, 28 November 1967, p. 60.

⁷⁹ "Boycott Major Issue," *Track and Field News*, December 1967, 18.

⁸⁰ The agency of black athletes in white-controlled athletes in the early twentieth century is the subject of chapter one; it is also discussed in David K. Wiggins, *Glory Bound: Black Athletes in White America* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1997), 200-2-13; for a discussion of blacks' agency in early twentieth century white-controlled institutions, see Estes, 1-9.

size of the sacrifice may be greater than you or they think.” In addition to personal acclaim, income and group advancement, black athletes were being asked to sacrifice years of preparation and their desire of competing in the Olympics. Furthermore, black athletes were the only ones being asked to make such a sacrifice. Edwards “should, at the very least, join them in the sacrifice by giving up his profession, although the sacrifice would not be as great theirs.” That he did not offer to do so, Nelson suggested, indicated the “dubious value” of the boycott. “Therefore, I want to appeal for a strong defense against any undue influence by Harry Edwards and his followers.”⁸¹ Nelson spoke for dozens of mainstream writers who argued that the boycott was ill-conceived and therefore proof that it was authored by black militants, hell-bent on destroying American society and in much of their coverage of the movement, they labeled Edwards the chief instigating militant.⁸²

The establishment’s assertion that the boycott proposal was a product of black militancy served a dual purpose. First, it allowed the establishment to absolve black athletes, who the establishment portrayed as historically, a patriotic, capably manly group equally as concerned with advancing their race as their own personal gain, of conceptualizing the boycott. By contrast, they often described Edwards as a militant lacking the manly ability to be successful; Nelson, for instance, termed him “an angry young man with a chip on his shoulder, a man who does not have the experience of working hard to develop a great athletic talent.”⁸³ Other activist-athletes like Smith and Evans worried that in absence of any detailed discussion of their motivations in the mainstream press, they were also being stereotyped as black militants.⁸⁴ The establishment’s assertion that militants were coercing the athletes to support the boycott would also allowed activist-athletes to reject the boycott, support participation and suffer no loss of prestige in the mainstream. Secondly, the assertion served to discredit the boycott and its advocates in the mainstream press, particularly among whites and others who only encountered black radicals or Black

⁸¹ Cordner Nelson, “See You in Mexico City,” *Track and Field News*, December 1967, 14.

⁸² *Washington Post*, 17 December 1967, p. B5; *Los Angeles Times*, 25 November 1967, p. 21; 21 February 1968, p. D2; 3 July 1968, p. E2; Mark Winters, “The Olympics and Black Power,” *Sepia*, December 1968, 76.

⁸³ Nelson, “See You in Mexico City,” 14.

⁸⁴ Drake, “Tom, Lee Discuss Boycott,” 22; *Los Angeles Times*, 9 November 1967, p. C2.

Power through the mainstream media.⁸⁵ For instance, a *Washington Post* columnist could write, seemingly with sincerity, that the boycott proposal was another attempt by Black Power advocates to establish “apartheid” (separatism) in the US.⁸⁶

These criticisms were repeated, often with veracity in the traditional black establishment. One of the more vehement critics of the boycott was A. S. “Doc” Young, the era’s most accomplished black sports writer. Young’s family had owned and operated the influential *Norfolk (VA) Journal and Guide* for four generations. He also served as sports editor of *Ebony* and *Jet* magazines and from his column in the *Chicago Defender*, he articulated the traditional black establishment’s criticism of the boycott proposal and those who supported it, especially Edwards. Young, as he had done in his writings for a decade, reminded readers that sports were one of the few vocations in American society where democracy was practiced and as a result, black achievements educated whites to blacks’ abilities, which improved whites’ image of blacks, ultimately contributing to improved race relations.⁸⁷ In one column, he exclaimed that “There is actually no way of telling just how important Negro athletic heroes have been to the cause of racial equality in this country. Whenever a bigot cheers for an integrated team in this country, he loses a bit- even if it is the slightest bit- of his bigotry.” Young also noted that historically, black athletes, because they were on white-controlled teams, desegregated hotels and other entities.⁸⁸ This argument developed in the traditional black establishment following the emergence of black boxers and runners like Louis and Owens, respectively, in the mainstream consciousness in the 1930s and was continually reasserted in both the black and mainstream press as the number of blacks on white-controlled college and professional sports steadily increased over the next three decades.⁸⁹ The traditional black establishment, that is the black press and civil rights entities, had participated in disseminated the well-

⁸⁵ Van DeBurg, 11-22.

⁸⁶ *Washington Post*, 4 December 1967, p. A19.

⁸⁷ A. S. “Doc” Young, “The Jackie Robinson Era,” *Ebony*, November 1955, 152-5; A. S. “Doc” Young, *Negro Firsts in Sports* (Chicago: Johnson Publishing Co., 1963), 1-14; “Negro Athletes and Civil Rights,” *Sepia*, June 1964, 35.

⁸⁸ *Chicago Defender*, 30 November 1967, p. 32.

⁸⁹ For an examples of the development of the belief in black America, see Edwin B. Henderson, “The Negro Athlete and Racial Prejudice,” *Opportunity*, 14 (March 1935): 77-9; and Rufus E. Clement, “Racial Integration in the Field of Sports,” *Journal of Negro Education*, 23, 3, (Summer 1954), 222-3.

accepted belief that the achievements of black athletes advanced blacks and Young sought to defend their advancement against any sympathy for the boycott proposal in black and liberal America. Young told readers that “Since Jackie Robinson made his debut with the Montreal Royals in 1946 and pro football re-integrated that same year, Negro athletes have [been] the answer to all those people who would sell short America’s resources for solving racial problems.”⁹⁰ Black athletes’ accomplishments were evidence that their race possessed a similar manly ability as whites. By contrast, he characterized Black Nationalists as manipulative, unpatriotic, immature and bigoted. The boycott, he suggested, was an attempt by militants like Edwards, who he described as a frustrated unsuccessful ex-athlete, “to use the fine athletes who collectively and individually have contributed immeasurably to the cause of racial advancement” for their own means of “destructive madness.”⁹¹ A boycott, Young suggested, would destroy the patriotic and capably manly image that athletes contributed to the race. Therefore, he concluded that “There is nothing for Negro athletes to gain by boycotting the Olympiad. There are members of the American team and they must carry their share of the load. Negro athletes have contributed mightily to improvement in this country by merely playing games well. This is what they should continue to do.”⁹²

As notable, a significant number of black older retired and former Olympians shared the traditional black establishment’s opinion and opposed the boycott. Like Young, they argued that athletics, and in particular the Olympics, provided a prominent means to educate whites to the manly capabilities of blacks. In his autobiography, Rafer Johnson, a member of 1956 and 1960 US Olympic team, explained that because of his athletic achievements he was often “the first and only black in various situations” and that “By doing whatever I did well and doing it with integrity, I felt I could break down stereotypes, chip away at ignorance, and shed light on a common humanity.” Johnson understood racism as whites’ “misunderstanding” that blacks were inferior and believed that his Olympic medals helped “build bridges and educate people” to blacks’ capabilities. Through such “moderation,” he noted, a

⁹⁰ *Chicago Defender*, 29 November 1967, p. 32; Wilkins quoted in the *Michigan Chronicle*, 26 April, 1947, p. 7.

⁹¹ *Chicago Defender*, 5 December 1967, p. 24; 6 December 1967, p. 28; 7 December 1967, p. 44.

⁹² *Chicago Defender*, 4 December 1967, p. 24.

“lasting and meaning” change occurred in the “individual hearts and minds” of whites he encountered. Ironically, he opposed a boycott because he believed that unlike the history of blacks’ athletic accomplishments, it would not produce tangible results. He asked “Is it going to help housing...education...job opportunities?”⁹³ Both the mainstream and traditional black press highlighted similar sentiments by popular athletes like Louis, Willie Mays and black former Olympians.⁹⁴ Their vocal opposition supported oppositional assertions that service (and accommodation) was a better means of black advancement than protest.⁹⁵

For that reason, no black athlete’s opposition to the boycott received as much attention in the press as Owens’s. Like the *Life* editorial noted above, much of the mainstream media highlighted his unprecedented four gold medal performance at the 1936 Olympics and accentuated the myth that he was snubbed by Hitler to reassert the dominance of the belief that by demonstrating manly virility, blacks disproved notions of their inferiority and advanced their claims to equality. Indeed, the editorial quoted Owens as saying “we shattered this so-called Aryan supremacy then by our own supremacy and by standing and saluting the American flag.” Such “deeds...are far more important than a boycott. There is no prejudice in the Olympics. I believe you contribute more by entering than by staying out.”⁹⁶ Throughout the boycott drive, the establishment would cite Owens as evidence that service and accommodation wrought significant black advancement.⁹⁷ Indeed, the *New York Times*, the nations’ largest circulating newspaper, termed Owens “the best possible argument for Negro participation.”⁹⁸

The outspoken opposition of Owens and many other prominent black ex-athletes was fueled at least in part by preservation of their legacies as important contributors to black advancement. In 1970, two years after the Olympics, in an autobiographical sketch purposely written to refute the “blackthink,”

⁹³ Rafer Johnson, *The Best that I Can Be: An Autobiography* (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 188-90.

⁹⁴ “Boycott Major Issue,” 17; Edwards, *Struggle that Must Be*, 180; Donald McRae, *Heroes without a Country: America’s Betrayal of Joe Louis and Jesse Owens* (New York: Ecco, 2002), 335; *Chicago Defender*, 2 December 1967, p. 16.

⁹⁵ Edwards, *Revolt*, 59-60; Gaines, 74-5.

⁹⁶ “Negro Olympics Boycott is Off Target,” *Life*, 8 December 1967, 4.

⁹⁷ *Washington Post*, 26 May 1968, p. C4; also see *Washington Post*, 20 October 1967, p. D3.

⁹⁸ *New York Times*, 28 November 1967, p. 25.

as he called it, of Edwards, he wrote that “until Jackie Robinson came along in 1947, Joe [Louis] and I had to carry a major load as far as the Negro image is concerned. Of course there were black men in other fields or endeavors more than anyone suspects, but sports and show business get all the attention in this country.” So “In a sense,” Owens concluded, “Joe and I *were* in entertainment and politics as well as athletics.” Owens, as he implied throughout the book and interviews during the boycott drive, understood himself as a leader and senior spokesman for blacks, a position he believed he earned because of his contributions, four Olympic gold medals, to the black struggle.⁹⁹ An Olympic boycott would not only attract attention to persistent racial inequality, but also, as Edwards noted, diminish previous black athletes’ accomplishments by calling into question the notion that athletic achievements had resulted in any significant advancement for blacks.¹⁰⁰ Such a development would annul the significance of Owens and other notable black athletes, which motivated many of them to oppose the boycott. Owens’s vehement opposition even motivated him to question the wisdom of King because the activist endorsed the boycott.¹⁰¹

The establishments’ charges provoked responses from the activist-athletes. However, as its primary organizer and the focus of the establishments’ criticism, Edwards’s attempted to provide a plausible rationale for the boycott. Initially, he situated the boycott as a derivative of the liberal civil rights movement. Shortly after the press conference with King, Edwards explained to the *New York Times* that because of the prominence of sports, if black athletes demonstrated their dissatisfaction, it would command society’s attention and raise the significant awareness of blacks’ discontent with the effects of poverty and racism on their communities. Countering opponents’ assertion that a boycott would be injurious to the black struggle and contextualizing the boycott within the pervasiveness of civil unrest and rioting occurring, he noted that the protest was not just “about the 1968 Olympics...We’re talking about the survival of society. What value is it to a black man to win a medal if he returns to be regulated to the

⁹⁹ Jesse Owens, *Blackthink: My Life as Black Man and White Man* (New York: William Morrow, 1970), 126-7; *emphasis in text*.

¹⁰⁰ Edwards, *Revolt*, 60-1; Edwards, “Why Negroes Should Boycott Whitey’s Olympics?,” 6.

¹⁰¹ *Chicago Defender*, 28 December 1967, p. 32.

hell of Harlem? And what does society gain by some Negro winning a medal while other Negroes back home are burning down the country?" Although Edwards suggested the same discontent that motivated the riots also motivated the boycott proposal, he also attempted to combat establishment assertions that the proposal was the product of black militants, whom according to the boycott's opponents were hell-bent on destroying US society. "We have to use whatever means are available to wake up the country. We don't want a full-scale revolution- not even for one day." As King had, Edwards suggested that the boycott was a means of protest that would avoid "destruction" and still further blacks' goal of realizing their "human rights." Edwards also had to combat the very serious insinuation that the boycott was the product of subversives Communists. Paraphrasing James Baldwin, the seminal voice of black discontent in the period, Edwards asserted that "No one attempts to change anything they are not in love with, and the Negro loves his country, fights for it in war and runs for it." The boycott was necessary because "the country the Negro loves doesn't love him."¹⁰² The response contrasted notably with earlier comments that challenged the state-enforced Cold War consensus. Earlier that month, he told a reporter, that

For years we have participated in the Olympic games, carrying the US flag on our backs with our victories, and race relations are worse than ever. Now they are even shooting people in the streets. We're not trying to lose the Olympics for the Americans. What happens to *them* is immaterial. If they finish first, that's beautiful. If they finish 14th, that's beautiful, too. But it's time for the black people to stand up... You see, this may be our last opportunity to settle this mess short of violence.¹⁰³

The comment was characteristic of Edwards's defiance; even as he sought to explain the constructiveness value of the boycott, he attempted to articulate the urgency of blacks' discontent with the nation. However, Edwards and other OCHR supporters generally observed the Cold War consensus because subversive rhetoric would not only validate the establishments' assertion that the boycott was the product of militants, but also be used to justify the state repression of the boycott movement that had already begun.

Edwards reserved his most pointed responses for the boycott's black critics. Reflective of the vituperation that characterized the public debates between traditional black intellectuals like Roy Wilkins

¹⁰² *New York Times*, 16 December 1967, p. 63.

¹⁰³ Rodgers, "A Step to a Boycott," 30-1; *emphasis in text*.

and Whitney Young and younger black organic intellectuals like Carmichael in the Sixties, Edwards disparaged Owens and other opposing black athletes as “Uncle Toms” and race “traitors.”¹⁰⁴ Perhaps, it was a response to the vituperation spewed at him by Owens and other critics like A. S. Young. However, the activist-athletes believed that the prominent black ex-athletes were being used by the establishment to illegitimate the boycott proposal in the public discourse and wondered how these black men could be “so gullible and misinformed” to allow themselves to be used *again*, considering their experiences within the white-controlled athletic establishment.¹⁰⁵ Owens, in particular, had been exploited by the white-controlled sports establishment. Before the “Nazi Olympics” could conclude, the US Olympic establishment shuttled Owens throughout Europe to capitalize on his phenomenal performance and raise funds for its coffers. Competing in eight cities over ten days, Owens lost fourteen pounds and despite headlining the tour, he once had to depend on the kindness of strangers for food. His accompanying college coach complained to the media that Owens was treated worse than an animal. Frustrated and destitute, after reaching London, Owens refused to participate further without rest and compensation. Within a week, Brundage, who ostensibly controlled amateur sports in the US, banned Owens from any further amateur, intercollegiate and Olympic competition, citing his refusal to complete the tour as a breach of contract. Shortly thereafter, the boosters providing his college tuition abandoned him and because track had no stable professional circuit, his career as a competitive athlete ended just days after he achieved what was generally considered the greatest track achievement in recorded history. By contrast, Owens’s returning stateside welcome rivaled that of victorious servicemen, but within weeks, the lucrative endorsement offers, as they usually did for black Olympians, quickly dissipated and he settled for a series of service jobs in his hometown of Cleveland, Ohio. In need of additional income to provide for his growing family, over the next decade, the greatest Olympian in modern history participated in a number of carnival-like publicity stunts, including racing dogs, horses, motorcycles and other celebrity-athletes such as Louis, which eventually provoked the black press to lament on how low

¹⁰⁴ Hano, 32; Drake; *Chicago Defender*, 6 December 1967, p. 28.

¹⁰⁵ Edwards, *Revolt*, 61; *emphasis mine*.

and hard their black hero had fallen. Participation in the War Department's effort to rally blacks' to the nation's WWII effort brought Owens an improving income in the 1940s, and afterwards he participated in several business ventures with varying degrees of success. By the late 1950s, however, Owens again was financially strapped and owed the IRS a substantial settlement.¹⁰⁶

His personal and financial setbacks contrasted measurably with his celebrated public persona. Over the thirty years following the Berlin games, Owens was celebrated as a symbol of American virility and racial democracy in the US. In the 1950s, several media, civic and athletic organizations named him the most significant athlete of the first half of the twentieth century.¹⁰⁷ Despite his recognition and appeals, however, neither the US Olympic bureaucracy nor any other white-controlled sports institution ever offered Owens any substantive administrative position, as they often did white former Olympians. In fact, the visibility the establishment afforded Louis refutation of the boycott allowed Edwards to highlight the white-controlled sports establishments' discard of black athletes following the end of the playing days. Edwards noted that as of 1968, there had been nineteen Olympiads and dozens of black Olympic medalists, but "no black ever has been a member of the American Olympic Committee's governing board, nor held a responsible post on any of the multiple individual sport federations."¹⁰⁸ Other prominent black athletes, active and retired, including Jackie Robinson, Hank Aaron and Russell, echoed Edwards finding that coaching, sports administrative, media and product endorsement opportunities, all of which former prominent white athletes routinely obtained, were virulent nonexistent for retired black athletes.¹⁰⁹ The banishment of retired black athletes, one observer noted, was another example of blacks' inferior status in the white-controlled sports establishment.¹¹⁰ In spite of his

¹⁰⁶ McRae, 161-176, 212-8, 247-55; for the black press and Owens's post-Olympic career, see Frank A. Young, "May 23, 1942" in *Black Writers/ Black Baseball: An Anthology of Articles from Black Sportswriters who Covered the Negro Leagues* ed. by Jim Reisler (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1994), 64-5; originally published in the *Chicago Defender*, 23 May 1942.

¹⁰⁷ *Norfolk (VA) Journal and Guide*, 21 November 1959, p. 1; *Chicago Defender*, 4 February 1950, p. 16; *Baltimore (MD) Afro-American*, 8 April 1961, p.24.

¹⁰⁸ Edwards, *Revolt*, 79.

¹⁰⁹ Edwards, "Why Negroes Should Boycott Whitey's Olympics," 10; Edwards, *Revolt*, 76-9; Mal Whitfield, "Let's Boycott the Olympics," *Ebony*, March 1964, 98; *Daily Worker*, 27-29 July 1968, p. M-11; *Wall Street Journal*, 19 January 1968, p. 1.

¹¹⁰ Olsen, *The Black Athlete*, 158-9.

denunciation of their activism, a number of black activists-athletes continued to respect Owens, mainly for his athletic accomplishments, but questioned his motives and asserted that he was being used by the establishment again.¹¹¹

A decade after the movement, removed from the heat of battle, Edwards provided the most substantive analysis of black opposition. He noted that many blacks genuinely believed “the great American sports myth...the prevailing notion that sports were a panacea promising salvation, not just for star Black athletes but for the Black masses as well. They really believed that Black athletic participation contributed toward diminishing racism, that it made Blacks more acceptable to whites.” Champion black athletes verified the traditional black establishment’s belief that demonstrating capability or performing service advanced the recognition of blacks’ rights. Indeed, Edwards suggested that “Mentally,” critics such as Owens and Young “were “still living in a time when black people were proving themselves qualified for full citizenship by uncritical accommodation to white definitions of the situation, to white characterizations of what was right, what was fair, what was best.”¹¹² Indeed, many blacks in the press, for instance, opposed the boycott not on ideological grounds, but because they realized that most whites would interpret an Olympic boycott as subversive.¹¹³ For Edwards that made them either, at best, members of a “controlled generation,” still limited to advancing their race by illustrating that blacks possessed certain abilities, or at worst, “Uncle Toms,” who uncritically accepted that white approval was a necessary precursor for all means of black advancement.¹¹⁴ Indeed, it seems that Owens’s belittling of the activist-athletes tainted his reputation in black America. Over the course of the boycott movement, several newspapers, in effort to rehabilitate his image, printed favorable short bios of Owens that emphasized his contributions to the race.¹¹⁵

Despite the rational that the OCHR and activist-athletes provided the mainstream, letters-to-the-editor in mainstream periodicals and the volumes of hate mail they received indicated that their

¹¹¹ Edwards, *Revolt*, 60; Zirin, interview with Lee Evans, 81-2; Matthews, 193-5.

¹¹² Edwards, *Struggle*, 181-2.

¹¹³ *New York Amsterdam News*, 16 December 1967, p. 16.

¹¹⁴ Edwards, “Why Negroes Should Boycott Whitey’s Olympics?,” 10; Hano, 46.

¹¹⁵ *New York Amsterdam News*, 23 March 1968, p. 49; 30 March 1968, p. 46.

opponent's perspective of the boycott was far more accepted in the American public, especially amongst whites. The majority of the responses not only rejected the boycott as an ill-conceived means of protest, but also as a subversive Communist attempt to embarrass or destroy the US. One respondent to *TFN* asked "Who do Tommie Smith and Lee Evans think they're fooling by boycotting the Olympics? How idiotic can you get? Negroes are better off today in the US than any of their ancestors were in Africa or America." Another responded that regardless of racism, blacks needed to be "Americans first" or "Smith and his crew should go to Russia." A third suggested that Smith "Go to Africa, you lousy Commie."¹¹⁶ White chauvinism pervaded much of the hate mail and suggested that regardless of blacks' accomplishments or service, many whites would still regard them as inferior. A self-described "white infantry soldier (draftee) on R&R in Japan from Vietnam" wrote that there are "a high percentage of blacks in my company, and they are as good as the next soldier. However, they are still niggers and that is as far as it goes. We work together. The Army requires it." Regardless of Smith's Olympic medals or protest, the social equality of blacks was undesirable and the writer was "sure that at least 98% of whites (north and south) (and I am from the north) feel that way."¹¹⁷ The white chauvinism embedded in the opposition to the boycott demonstrated to Edwards that blacks challenging white-approved means of improving race relations were considered subversive and in the wake of the defeat of legalized racism in the Sixties, the virulence of white supremacy further radicalized many activists.¹¹⁸ Drake also noted that the boycott's implicit challenge of liberalism is what made it "so all-fired important" to whites. He wrote "I hear it this way,"

Be a good quite American nigger (even if I'm not a good white), don't disrupt the status quo (since it might challenge my own personal security and happiness), be patient (even if I'm not willing to do anything for you in the meantime), and show you're patriotic by competing for your country in the Olympics (even if I'm not willing to share the same rights I have when you return home to your fatherland).

¹¹⁶ "Fans, Readers" *Track and Field News*, December 1967, 19; "Fan Mail" Received by Tom, Lee," *Track and Field News*, December 1967, 19.

¹¹⁷ Quoted in Edwards, *Struggle*, 176.

¹¹⁸ Edwards, *Struggle*, 177.

Drake declared such attitudes were an affront to true democracy and that those who supported equality should also support black student-athletes' attempt to expand democracy through the proposed boycott of the Olympics.¹¹⁹

III

The powers-that-be in the US also deemed the boycott subversive. Shortly before the Thanksgiving workshop, activist-athletes began to experience the harassment and repression typically directed at leftists and radicals during the Cold War. In early 1968, Evans noted that he and Smith “receive plenty of hate letters calling us black bastards.”¹²⁰ After announcing the founding of the OCHR, the boycott organizing committee, in October 1967, Edwards also began receiving hate mail and being harassed. He was unwittingly sequestered to a meeting and questioned by the FBI and several Bay Area law enforcement agencies. Considering the recent assassinations of Malcolm X and other black radicals, Edwards disassociated himself from the Black Panthers, which he had recently joined, and cultivated “a healthy dose of paranoia as a necessary.” His suspicions were merited; between October 1967, the month the organizing for the domestic boycott was initiated, and December 1968, the FBI's COINTELPRO and other counterintelligence plans, resulted in the arrest of at least 348 black radical activists, mostly Panthers, and the murder of ten Panthers. In the fall of 1967, Edwards and Smith were placed in the FBI's “Rabble Rouser” index and the agency began to monitor his classes and other lectures. Edwards noted that other OCHR-associated athletes supported the boycott “encountered difficulties of every imaginable sort: difficulties with landlords, the telephone company, mail service and so forth.” At the height of US military escalation in Vietnam, Smith was honorably, but forcefully discharged from his ROTC commission. The most heinous harassment, however, was reserved for Edwards. One evening, he returned home to find his dogs slaughtered and their remains splattered throughout his apartment. He was astonished “that none of my neighbors had seen or heard a thing, although the commotion must have been

¹¹⁹ Dick Drake, “An Unequivocal Right,” *Track and Field News*, December 1967, 15.

¹²⁰ “Olympic Jolt,” 23.

horrendous.” Subsequently, sewage was dumped into his car and “KKK” scratched into its sides. His pay was held up on occasion and he believed his home telephoned was tapped. He also “received thirteen tickets for moving violations and numerous tickets for parking violations,” including one for falling to signal a turn into his driveway.¹²¹

The mainstream media asserted that black athletes were being pressured by militants to join black protests, but the harassment and establishment pressure directed against the activist-athletes was never chronicled in the mainstream press.¹²² In fact, many activist-athletes also considered the mainstream media complicit in the establishment’s repression of the boycott. Smith noted that the “press has not come to me asking my opinions, but used me to present their own opinions. I have been misquoted a great deal.”¹²³ Evans added that he “talked to one television cat, and two hours later I hear him saying that Tom and I were against each other and we’re both against Professor Edwards. They write what they think, not what we say.”¹²⁴ After it was reported that he attended the Thanksgiving workshop, Otis Burrell, another black likely Olympian, lost a Christmas job that he worked the three previous holiday seasons. He declared that because “The newspapers have distorted the purpose of the boycott,” he feared further repression.¹²⁵ The media’s distortion of the boycott and activist-athletes as militantly destructive and fear of repression eventually compelled several athletes, including Smith and Alcindor, who sympathized with the OCHR to deny any direct connection with its organizing effort.¹²⁶

Although unacknowledged in the mainstream press, and in the historiography that privileges the mainstream accounts, the influence of the establishment’s repression is also discernable in many black athletes’ responses to the boycott proposal. In an article he penned for *Sport*, Smith, for instance, attempted to refute the assertion that he was a militant and that the purpose of the boycott was to

¹²¹ Edwards, *Struggle that Must Be*, 162-5, 179, 192-5; Edwards, *Revolt*, 56-7; for a discussion of the FBI’s annihilation of the Black Panther Party, see Kenneth O’Reilly, *Racial Matters: The FBI’s Secret Files on Black America, 1960-1972* (New York: Free Press, 1989), 297.

¹²² The harassment and attempted repression of Edwards was occasionally noted in the black press; *Muhammad Speaks*, 29 March 1968, p. 31; and the *New York Amsterdam News*, 10 February 1968, p. 31.

¹²³ Tommie Smith, “Why Negroes Should Boycott,” *Sport*, March 1968, 40-1, 68.

¹²⁴ “Olympic Jolt,” 23.

¹²⁵ “Reaction to the Boycott,” 16.

¹²⁶ *New York Amsterdam News*, 30 December 1968, 28; *New York Times*, 9 June 1968, p. SM90; “Olympic Jolt,” 28.

embarrass the US. He acknowledged that a boycott would likely cause the US to be outscored by the Russians at the Olympics, but he was simply attempted to demonstrate the discontent of his people. Anticipating the reach of the establishment's repression, he noted "I act on my own, not in behalf of my family or any other individuals or groups."¹²⁷ The majority of athletes' opinions and responses to the proposed boycott, whether they opposed or supported it, as shall be seen, were influenced by the mainstream assertion that the boycott was militant, which they realized justified state repression.

Most black potential Olympians couched their opinions of and decision to support or oppose the boycott within terms that denoted either patriotism to the nation and/or their race. In early December 1967, Drake reported that of the twenty-seven blacks likely to qualify for the US Olympic track team quoted in the press or that he polled, only seven supported the boycott and none unequivocally. Eighteen indicated they were committed to competing in the games and the two others were undecided.¹²⁸ Further telling is that they framed their pro or con explanations within the context of being "black" or "American." For instance, of those that outright opposed the boycott, sprinter Charlie Greene suggested, "It comes down to a matter of if you're an America, or if you're not. I am American, and I'm going to run."¹²⁹ Ralph Boston agreed that despite being sympathetic to the boycott, he believed that it was "my duty as a Negro and as an athlete and an American" to compete in the on the US Olympic team. He added that the traditional black advancement ideology of demonstrating blacks' capabilities through education and accomplishments was a better means of advancement than "rioting, looting, destroying" and boycotting the US Olympic team.¹³⁰ Such responses were praised as patriotic in the mainstream press. One *TFN* reader responded that he "was very pleased and proud" of Green and Boston because "They said they were Americans first." He contrasted Smith as a Communist.¹³¹

The patriotic overtones of the discourse also influenced many of those who sympathized with the OCHR, but opposed the boycott to verify their loyalty to the nation. Sprinter Clarence Ray suggested that

¹²⁷ Smith, "Why Negroes Should Boycott," 40-1, 68.

¹²⁸ Drake, "Boycott Major Issue," 12.

¹²⁹ "Reaction to Boycott: Negro Olympic Contenders," *Track and Field News*, December 1967, 16.

¹³⁰ Ralph Boston, "Why They Should Not," *Sport*, March 1968, p. 42-3, 68-9.

¹³¹ "Fans, Readers," *Track and Field News*, December 1967, 19.

a “boycott will exploit the fact that there is a racial problem in the US, but on the other hand...We must always keep our personal affairs to ourselves for solving America’s problem is a problem for Americans alone. By division, we show disunity and America’s image will be destroyed. I am an American first, last and always.”¹³² The comments of several opposing athletes suggested that being an American, athlete or Negro first meant adhering to the traditional liberal discourse of racial advancement; even at the expense of further advancement, less black open themselves to charges as militant subversives or Communists.¹³³ Thus, even those athletes who did not explicitly cite patriotic concerns in their opposition to the boycott reiterated their faith in American liberalism. High jumper Ed Caruthers was “in sympathy with what the boycotters are trying to do. “But,” he noted “Athletics have been mighty good to the Negro.” Hurdler Larry Livers added “My own feelings are myriad. But I am convinced of one thing...the games [are] the one place the black man can enhance his image throughout the world.” Afterwards, that individual should “use whatever influence he has gained to help suppress many of the injustices found here.”¹³⁴ Discrimination remained a detrimental force in the majority of black lives, but they maintained faith in America’s liberal discourse of advancement. A respondent praised this discourse as patriotic and accessed that blacks would advance as long as they “realize that we are Americans first and Negroes second.” By contrast, “Black Power” and the boycott, which privileged realization of blacks’ equality before a US Olympic victory “is senseless and stupid.”¹³⁵

By contrast, those athletes who prioritized the liberation of the black community before that of nation’s advancement termed themselves “black” or “men,” which denoted their rejection and independence of traditional black advancement ideology and the Cold War consensus. Evans, for instance, suggested that his and Smith’s participation in the boycott made them “men first and athletes

¹³² “Reaction to Boycott: Negro Olympic Contenders,” 16.

¹³³ Joy James, 91.

¹³⁴ “Negro Olympic Contenders,” *Track and Field News*, December 1967, 16-7.

¹³⁵ “Fan Mail” Received by Tom, Lee,” *Track and Field News*, December 1967, 19.

second.”¹³⁶ Thirty years later, John Carlos, another activist-athlete explained that the boycott “was a revolt of Black men.”¹³⁷

In an effort to use the mainstream media’s fascination with militants to the boycott’s advantage, Edwards, who quickly realized that affirmations of patriotism did little to legitimate the boycott in mainstream, went further than others to disavow traditional liberal advancement ideology. Following the December press conference with King, Edwards discussed the media’s distortion of the boycott proposal with Lomax. A noted investigative journalist and television analyst, Lomax explained that by attempting to provide a rational explanation of the boycott movement, Edwards appeared to be “just another middle-class Negro with something to say about civil rights.” To attract media attention to its purpose, Edwards would have to “talk loud” and establish an “image.” Lomax taught Edwards what several black radicals of the era had already learned; bad blacks made good news copy. In response, Edwards developed a militant persona. He began wearing “pseudorevolutionary rags,” including work boots, jeans, beads, shades and the occasional book of matches pinned to a black leather jacket and employed strident rhetoric that characterized the mainstream’s perception of black militants in the period. He noted that “At times it was as much as I could do to keep a straight face, standing before crowded auditoriums, under blazing television lights, delivering a lecture...or bombarding white America with rhetoric calculated to outrage. When I couldn’t bedazzle them with brilliance, I bamboozled them with bullshit.”¹³⁸ During the eleven month-long boycott drive, the strategy would be effective. However, it also seemingly confirmed their opponents’ assertions that the boycott was militantly destructive. It was a dilemma that the OCHR would find difficult to escape.

¹³⁶ Drake, “Tom, Lee Discuss Boycott,” 3.

¹³⁷ John Carlos, interview in *What’s My Name, Fool?: Sports and Resistance in the United States* by Dave Zirin (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2005), 86.

¹³⁸ Edwards, *Struggle that Must Be*, 169-71; Van DeBurg, 11-5.

Chapter IV

“Rather than Run and Jump for Medals, We Are Standing Up for Humanity, Won’t You Join Us?”: Publicizing the Olympic Project for Human Rights

At the 15 December OCHR press conference featuring Martin Luther King, Jr., Edwards elaborated on a list of grievances, the Olympic Project for Human Rights (OPHR), that he suggested, if redressed, would negate the Olympic boycott proposal. The list of six grievances included (1) the restoration of the heavyweight boxing title and boxing licenses to Muhammad Ali, who had been stripped of both in April 1967 for refusing induction into the US armed forces, (2) the resignation of Avery Brundage from the executive chair of the International Olympic Committee (IOC), the parent body of the Olympic games, because of his support of South Africa’s reentrance into the Olympics, (3) that all US sports organizations end competition with South African sports entities, (4) the addition of two black coaches to the 1968 US Olympic team, (5) the addition of two blacks to executive “policy making” positions in the United States Olympic Committee (USOC), the controlling body of the US Olympic team (6) and the complete desegregation of the New York Athletic Club (NYAC), an elite athletic club that sponsored an annual prestigious international track and field meet.¹ The list had been compiled a month earlier by Edwards and Louis Lomax, his chief advisor, who decided that with the Olympics more than a year away, they needed to devise a means to keep the boycott proposal in the nation’s consciousness, as well as attract support for the movement. They both believed that the already compelling issues of the Vietnam War, Cold War, the Poor’s People Campaign and the Presidential race would marginalize the boycott proposal in the media. Therefore, they reasoned, the movement needed to be exceedingly proactive. Indeed, in addition to the contentious issues they could predict, the year of shock, as 1968 would eventually be known, witnessed several other events, including the Tet Offensive, the assassination of both King and Robert F. Kennedy, the escalating students’ and peace movements, the attack on

¹ Harry Edwards, *The Revolt of the Black Athlete* (New York: The Free Press, 1969), 58-9.

protestors at the Democratic Party Convention in Chicago and the withdrawal of incumbent Lyndon Baines Johnson from the presidential race.²

By organizing protest movements against racist policies and linking themselves to other movements and ideologies, the Black Power boycott movement attracted international media attention, and endorsements and support from several entities that were either previously opposed or indifferent to the movement. Much of that new support, however, would be conditional; most traditionally liberal entities, for instance, would only support the OPHR demands that coincided with their liberal agenda. By contrast, other demands attracted attention and support from leftist and Black Nationalists that would endure the campaign. Despite their diverse political philosophies, the legitimacy and support these entities provided the OPHR, helped the boycott proposal remain newsworthy in the press over the next several months. By the end of April 1968, four months after the December press conference, the OPHR events had succeeded in raising the visibility, feasibility and legitimacy of the boycott proposal in the national and international media and forced its opponents, including the mainstream press and sports establishment in the US, to examine activist-athletes and their movements more objectively.

The first major OPHR initiative was organizing a boycott of the NYAC's annual track and field meet to be held on the 16 February 1968. The meet usually attracted the best international track and field athletes and significant press. The 1968 event, its centennial, was expected to attract "even more press and television coverage than the meet usually would," the *New York Times* reported, because it would also inaugurate a new Madison Square Garden (MSG).³ Additionally, the entrance of a seven-person Russian team touring the US prompted ABC to nationally televise the 1968 meet. The NYAC was also attracting significant attention from the OPHR because of its racist policies; in its 100 year history, the elite club had never had any blacks and only two Jewish members. Officers refused to issue membership information, but defended the club by asserting its sponsorship of athletic events, teams and other clubs

² Harry Edwards, *The Struggle that Must Be: An Autobiography* (New York, Macmillan, 1980), 182; for an examination of 1968, see Mark Kurlansky, *1968: The Year that Rocked the World* (New York: Ballentine, 2004).

³ *New York Times*, 9 January 1968, p. 48.

that included minorities. Several mainstream reporters also defended the club by suggesting that it was the members' rights to determine their own membership.⁴ The movement against the NYAC, however, challenged the club's traditional liberalism by declaring that it was no longer considered an advance for blacks to participate in institutions that would deny them membership, thus deeming them inferior;⁵ Black Power advocates argued that it was a continued denial of blacks' humanity and dignity. Indeed, Edwards declared that the "[NYAC] boycott marked the end of an age when Afro-American athletes would compromise black dignity for a watch, a television set, a trophy, or merely the love of competition."⁶ Eventually, many supportive traditional black and liberal entities would agree and join the protest of the NYAC's racist policies.⁷ For the OPHR, however, it was as important to demonstrate that black athletes and much of the black community sympathized with protest in sports and that the OCHR could effectively organize such a movement.⁸

Organizing the protest, Edwards explained, was a daunting project; "For facing the California-based [OPHR] was the task of mounting a boycott and demonstration to be held more 3,000 miles away and this with no available funds other than my salary and no means of communication with the East Coast other than by telephone." Edwards began by contacting several New York area Black Power-associated activists, including Omar Abu Ahmed, a National Black Power Conference organizer, Jay Cooper, head of the Columbia University Black Law Students Association and H. Rap Brown of SNCC. "It was these persons," Edwards later explained, "working through their various organizations, who took on the major responsibility of mobilizing black people to demonstrate and picket the meet." He further noted the importance of Marshall Brown, a black official in the important Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) with contacts throughout intercollegiate and track networks, who "enlightened" a number of schools and black athletes on the East Coast to the NYAC's racial policies. From San Jose, Edwards contacted athletes in

⁴ *New York Amsterdam News*, 23 December 1967, p. 36; *New York Times*, 16 February 1968, p. 41.

⁵ Estes, 1-9; Estes had demonstrated that blacks in post-Reconstruction early Twentieth Century white-controlled institutions were expected to subvert their equality and agency to whites.

⁶ Edwards, *Revolt*, 65.

⁷ *New York Amsterdam News*, 13 January 1968, p. 33; *Chicago Defender*, 20 February 1968, p. 13; *New York Times*, 16 February 1968, p. 41.

⁸ *New York Times*, 9 January 1968, p. 48; "Hobbling the Winged Foot," *Newsweek*, 19 February 1968, 85.

the Midwest and on the West Coast, international athletes and handled publicity for the protest. He also sent the Russian embassy a telegram, noting the he could not insure the safety of any athletes attempting to attend the OPHR.⁹

By late January, their efforts were having a devastating effect on the NYAC. Smith and Evans were the first to decline invitations to the meet and were followed by other notable athletes, including sprinter John Carlos, a recent transfer to San Jose State. Rather than openly endorse the boycott, a number of others, including football all-American O. J. Simpson and his University of Southern California teammate, world-class hurdler Earl McCullough, cited scheduling conflicts.¹⁰ Simpson later told a reporter, “I wouldn’t run that weekend even if my mother was holding the meet.”¹¹ Over the next few weeks, the black colleges and track clubs that usually entered the meet withdrew.¹² After New York City’s public and catholic high school associations withdrew, the prep portion of the event was canceled.¹³ By early February, several catholic universities, all three military service academies and a number of predominately white athletes and teams, citing the concerns of their black teammates and student-athletes, declined invitations as well.¹⁴ With less than two weeks until the meet, the media reported that less than twenty of the more than two hundred blacks originally expected to participate would attend and the NYAC was frantically inviting other college and foreign teams in hopes of fielding a meet worthy of its tradition.¹⁵

The massive withdrawal of schools and athletes attracted national media attention. *The New York Times* and *New York Amsterdam News*, an important traditional black weekly, followed the development of the local story closely and eventually national periodicals like *Time* and *Newsweek* reported on the

⁹ Edwards, *Revolt*, 65-6; Edwards, *Struggle*, 183-4.

¹⁰ *Chicago Defender*, 15 February 1967, p. 33; *New York Times*, 9 January 1967, p. 48; *Washington Afro-American*, 13 January 1968, p. 15.

¹¹ Pete Axthelm, “Boycott Now-Boycott Later,” *Sports Illustrated*, 26 February 1968, 25.

¹² *New York Amsterdam News*, 3 February 1968, p. 31; *Washington Post*, 11 January 1968, p. E1.

¹³ *New York Times*, 28 January 1968, p. S1.

¹⁴ *New York Times*, 4 February 1968, p. S7.

¹⁵ *New York Times*, 13 February 1968, p. 59; “Hobbling the Winged Foot,” 85; “Negroes, NY Preps Boycott NYAC Meet,” *Track and Field News*, 1 February 1968, 11; *Washington Post*, 15 February 1968, p. 53.

protest.¹⁶ Because of the significant number of potential black Olympians at West Coast colleges, the *Los Angeles Times* and *Los Angeles Sentinel*, a black weekly, also provided detailed coverage of the movement. The protest also attracted the attention of leftist periodicals to the boycott proposal for the first time. The socialist newspaper *The Worker*, as well as the London-based *The Militant*, contextualized the protest within “a general [black] revolt in the sports world” that included support for Ali, opposition to South African international sports participation and the development of black student-athletes’ movements.¹⁷ The *National Guardian*, which provided stalwart coverage of student, leftist, labor and nonwhite movements, had already begun reporting on the boycott proposal.¹⁸ Black Nationalist’s newspapers such as The Nation of Islam’s (NOI) *Muhammad Speaks* also initiated supportive coverage of the movement and would also eventually situate the boycott proposal as support for Ali, a NOI minister.¹⁹ In addition to providing important alternative discussions of the movement, these periodicals introduced the OPHR to Leftist and Black Nationalists’ constituencies, and would become some of the OPHR’s most stalwart supporters.

The protest also received welcomed, but perhaps unexpectedly overwhelming support from traditionally liberal black press and liberal civil rights organizations. A number of these entities voiced their approval of the NYAC boycott and pledged to contribute to or lead their own efforts against the NYAC’s discriminatory policies. The New York City-based Commission on Human Rights, for instance, began investigating the club’s policies and eventually recommended halting the club’s use of city and state property for events.²⁰ In the week before the meet, the NAACP, the Urban League, both of whose national leadership opposed a black Olympic boycott, and the Anti-Defamation League of B’nai B’rith

¹⁶ *New York Amsterdam News*, 13 January 1968, p. 33; *Chicago Defender*, 20 February 1968, p. 13; *New York Times*, 16 February 1968, p. 41; “Hobbling the Winged Foot,” 85; “The Black Boycott,” *Time*, 23 February 1968, 61.

¹⁷ *Worker*, 18 February 1968, p. 8, S3; also see *Militant*, 26 February 1968, p. 8.

¹⁸ *National Guardian*, 24 February 1968, p. 4.

¹⁹ *Muhammad Speaks*, 26 January 1968, p. 26.

²⁰ *New York Times*, 13 January 1968, p. 22; 16 April 1968, p. 58; “Boycott Runners,” *Newsweek*, 26 February 1968, 83.

held a press conference to announce their support of the NYAC protest.²¹ The NAACP asked the AAU, the powerful parent body of US amateur athletics, to not sanction the meet, which would force most athletes to withdraw or lose future amateur eligibility.²² Baseball great Jackie Robinson, then an assistant to the Mayor's office also supported the protest. His criticism of the club's policies in 1962 had resulted in the mayor, Robert F. Wagner, resigning membership.²³ Local New York newspapers followed the story that John Mosler, the Jewish head of the city's Urban League chapter, was an NYAC member. After intense scrutiny and pressure, Mosler resigned, citing the club's failure to respond adequately to the charges against it.²⁴ A number of Catholic organizations also endorsed the boycott and successfully appealed to their brethren to terminate their club memberships.²⁵ In fact, so many liberals condemned the NYAC's policies that a reporter for the *Amsterdam News*, which had been reporting on the club's discriminatory policies for years, accused them of jumping on the "wagon" just to keep pace with more progressive black activists.²⁶

Contrary to the *Amsterdam News*' assertion, the smug white chauvinism that motivated Edwards and many black athletes like Vincent Matthews, a native New Yorker enrolled at North Carolina's historically black Johnson C. Smith College, to boycott the NYAC also offended many liberals. Another *Amsterdam News*' columnist spoke for the traditional liberal black establishment, when he declared that "if I were an athlete and participated in events for the NYAC and swelled the tills with greenbacks of large dominations...I darn sure would like to have the right to join the NYAC or any other organization that exploited me." Indeed, throughout the drive to boycott the NYAC, much of the traditional black community agreed with Edwards and rejected the liberal argument that participation in a white-controlled

²¹ *Pittsburgh Courier*, 17 February 1968 p. 15; for the opposition of the National Urban League, see the *Chicago Defender*, 5 August 1967, p. 4; for the opposition of the NAACP, see "More Boycott Reaction," *Track and Field News*, II February 1968, 12.

²² *New York Times*, 14 February 1968, p. 35.

²³ *Pittsburg Courier*, 17 February 1968, p. 15; *Chicago Defender*, 17 February 1968, p. 9.

²⁴ *New York Amsterdam News*, 3 February 1968, p. 1; 17 February 1968, p. 1; *New York Times*, 15 February 1968, p. 53.

²⁵ *New York Times*, 16 February 1968, p. 41.

²⁶ *New York Amsterdam News*, 10 February 1968, p. 33.

institution, even if denied them equality, was an advance.²⁷ Indeed, the joint statement of the NAACP, Urban League and ADL concluded that the protest against the NYAC “puts an old problem [racism] into focus.”²⁸

However, many of the liberals who supported the protest against the NYAC did not endorse a black Olympic boycott. The *Amsterdam News*, Jesse Owens, Morgan State College officials and Mosler, explicitly noted that their condemnation of the NYAC should not be construed as support of the boycott proposal. Robinson supported both, but questioned the “leadership” (Edwards).²⁹ Several others, such as the NAACP and the Catholic groups, simply did not reference the boycott. Nonetheless, Edwards welcomed the liberal support and activism because ultimately it increased the media visibility of the black radical Olympic boycott initiative. The day before the NYAC, at a press conference at the Tenets’ Rights Party headquarters in Harlem, Edwards invited “anybody who is sincerely interested in doing something to help end racism in this society” to join the pickets. He facetiously advocated that “If George Wallace wants to get on the picket line, he’s more than welcome.”³⁰ Even if its liberal allies against the NYAC opposed a black boycott of the US Olympic team, their presence and protest created publicity for the Olympic boycott, which remained the OPHR’s foremost agenda.

Although the press and the OPHR’s liberal allies focused on the NYAC’s racist membership policies, Edwards attempted to point out that the club and track meet were indicative of the racist structure and attitudes that dominated US sports organizations. Edwards declared that the NYAC was part of a “racist conspiracy involving many of the would-be great institutions of the Society” that included the AAU, which sanctioned and partially financed the event, and MSG, which hosted the meet.³¹ That conspiracy also included other private athletic clubs, most of which had similar racist membership policies. *Sports Illustrated* reported that the NYAC’s policies were “neither isolated nor unusual.” In a

²⁷ Edwards, *Revolt*, 65; Vincent Matthews with Neil Amdur, *My Race Be Won* (New York: Charterhouse, 1974), 162-5; *New York Amsterdam News*, 13 January 1968, p. 33.

²⁸ *Pittsburgh Courier*, 17 February 1968 p. 15

²⁹ *New York Amsterdam News*, 16 December 1967, p. 16; *Washington Post*, 11 January 1968, p. E1; 20 January 1968, p. D3; *New York Times*, 15 February 1968, p. 53.

³⁰ *New York Times*, 16 February 1968, p. 41.

³¹ Edwards, *Revolt*, 67.

survey of twenty major cities, only an athletic club in Washington D.C. had black members and most others had only token Jewish members. The article further reported that since the immediate post-war years, many clubs had ceased sponsoring open athletic events in response to the increasing integration of sports. Others had curtailed complimentary memberships to the government and press because those entities were increasingly integrating.³² As notable, the IOC and the USOC routinely met at and had members of in these elite clubs.³³ Brundage, who ostensibly controlled both organizations, owned a private club in California with a similar membership policy. Like the NYAC, Brundage attempted to defend himself by asserting the club's history of sponsoring and financially supporting events and sports teams that provided black, Jewish and other minorities' opportunities to compete.³⁴ Edwards, however, argued that NYAC was indicative of powerlessness that blacks continued to experience in white-controlled institutions. Many institutions were integrated or allowed black participations, but blacks were still expected to accommodate white supremacy and authority. The movement against the NYAC, as Edwards defined it, was not simply an attempt to integrate the NYAC, but a protest of the white insensitivity and recalcitrance in the sports establishment that contributed to the continued denial of black equality in society. OPHR demands included the addition of at least two blacks to the USOC executive committee, in hopes of curbing the racist insensitivity of administering board that would approve of athletes participating in an event sponsored by a club that continued to denigrate blacks.³⁵ The OPHR was further willing to orchestrate a black Olympic boycott to achieve that goal. Although the traditional black establishment condemned similar racist insensitivity, with the notable exception of the *New York Amsterdam News*' Dick Edwards, few in the traditional black establishment endorsed the OPHR's logic.³⁶

³² "Blackballed" *Sports Illustrated*, 18 March 1968, 14; *Chicago Defender*, 6 May 1968, p. 7.

³³ Ironically, in 1935, it was at the NYAC, which excluded Jews from membership, that the Brundage-led American Olympic Committee (USOC) voted to support Germany's hosting of the game, despite increasing Nazi anti-Semitism and accusations of Jewish exclusion from the German Olympic team; Richard E. Lapchick, *The Politics of Race and International Sport: The Case of South Africa* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1974), 18.

³⁴ *New York Times*, 16 December 1967, p. 63.

³⁵ Edwards, *Revolt*, 67.

³⁶ *New York Amsterdam News*, 13 January 1968, p. 33.

On the evening of 16 February 1968, the day of the event, more than 750 picketers descended on MSG. Throughout the day, they marched, harassed spectators and blocked athletes and buses from entering the venue. Despite the palpable tension between the protestors on one side and police and attendees on the other, the confrontations and violence expected by the mainstream press were minimal. Twelve were arrested and two protesters were transported to the hospital with minor injuries after the police broke up what it determined to be an illegal picket.³⁷ Surprisingly, several mainstream sources credited Edwards, whom was otherwise characterized as a black militant, with maintaining order.³⁸ Of course, much of the mainstream press did blame what violence that did occur on “militants” and the leftist press blamed the police who “were determined to create a situation where they could employ violence.”³⁹ MSG sold out its 18,000 seats in advance, thus making the event profitable, but observers estimate that there were less than 12,000 in attendance and blamed the vast sections of empty arena seating on the demonstrations outside. Inside, several participating athletes noted that the tense atmosphere and nervous crowd dimmed the competitive spirit of the meet. A disappointed *Track and Field News (TFN)*, “the bible of the sport,” blamed the lackluster athletic performances on the protest outside and the missing blacks inside.⁴⁰ One of the OPHR’s most notable successes, however, did not occur at the meet. The morning of the event, the Russian team withdrew from the meet. As noticeable, there was a near consensus boycott of black athletes. Although nine blacks, including world-class athletes John Thomas and Bob Beamon participated, more than a hundred blacks had declined invitations, withdrawn or simply did not show.⁴¹

The stupendous activist turnout at the MSG was a result of both the NYAC’s overt discrimination, which attracted liberals, and the effort of its Black Power organizers. In addition to working with Brown, Ahmed and Cooper to inform New York area activist communities, Edwards

³⁷ Axthelm, “Boycott Now,” 24-6; *Worker*, 26 February 1968, p. 4.

³⁸ *New York Times*, 17 February 1968, p. 19; Arnold Hano, “The Black Rebel who ‘Whitelists’ the Olympics,” *New York Times Magazine*, 12 May 1968, 41.

³⁹ *Worker*, 20 February 1968, p. 1, 4.

⁴⁰ “NYAC: Boycott Mars Garden Inaugural,” *Track and Field*, II February 1968, 5.

⁴¹ “Boycott Runners,” 82-3; *New York Times*, 17 February 1968, p. 19; Axthelm, “Boycott Now,” 24-6.

reached out to other black radicals, including Chuck Stone, also a National Black Power Conference organizer, Callis Brown and Roy Innis of CORE, Lincoln Lynch of the United Black Front and Jesse Gray, who organized tenant strikes against Harlem slum lords. They all attracted their constituencies to the Garden.⁴² As a result, *The Worker's* John Morin could report that the picket lines “represented virtually every civil rights and Black Liberation group, including SNCC, CORE, DuBois Clubs, Black Power Conference, United Black Front, Black American Student Alliances, Association of Catholic Trade Unionists, NAACP, Urban League [and] Anti-Defamation League.”⁴³ The American Jewish Congress announced they would have participated, but the event occurred during their Sabbath.⁴⁴ Despite their differing opinions on the Olympic boycott, these activists coalesced, as they had done before, to call attention to another injustice.⁴⁵

Although many radicals did not endorse the black radical boycott proposal, they did agree with Edwards and the Black Power community, that the movement against the NYAC was connected to blacks’ wider struggle for humanity and dignity. For instance, the local DuBois clubs and SNCC marched a coffin through the streets surrounding the Garden to raise awareness of the three unarmed South Carolina State students killed by police during the protest of a segregated bowling alley in Orangeburg, SC a week earlier. Several pickets read “The NYAC is New York’s Orangeburg bowling alley.”⁴⁶ Others carried pickets supporting Ali and, like Edwards, would return to the Garden on 4 March to join the National Black Anti-War Anti-Draft Union-directed protest of the “phony” heavyweight championship bout between Joe Frazier and Buster Mathias and demanded the title be returned to Ali.⁴⁷ All these issues, although unrelated in occurrence, were only recent examples of the continued denial of blacks’ agency and humanity and the NYAC provided the black community another outlet to protest. The

⁴² *New York Times*, 16 February 1968, p. 41.

⁴³ *Worker*, 20 February 1968, p. 4.

⁴⁴ *New York Times*, 17 February 1968, p. 19.

⁴⁵ Many of these organizations, liberal and otherwise, had all attended the 1967 National Black Power Conference. See Komozi Woodard, *A Nation within A Nation: Amiri Baraka (Leroi Jones) and Black Power Politics* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 85-6; and *New York Times*, 21 July 1967, p. 1.

⁴⁶ *Worker*, 20 February 1968, p. 1, 4; *Guardian*, 24 February 1968, p. 4.

⁴⁷ *Militant*, 11 March 1968, p. 1; *Guardian*, 9 March 1968, p. 4; Edwards, *Revolt*, 89.

sentiment was embodied in one picketer's sign that read "RATHER THAN RUN AND JUMP FOR MEDALS, WE ARE STANDING UP FOR HUMANITY, WON'T YOU JOIN US?"⁴⁸ Soon the phrase would adorn a poster hanging on a wall of the OPHR headquarters and, as one reporter noted, symbolized the rationale of the black Olympic boycott proposal.⁴⁹

The NYAC boycott was an overwhelming success for the OCHR, even if many of its mainstream opponents were reluctant to admit so. The mainstream media routinely noted that nine blacks did participate in the financially successful meet. They further suggested that rather than integrate the club's membership, the more likely result of the protest would be that the NYAC ended its sponsorship of athletic events, thus insinuating the curtailment of a source of significant opportunities for future black advancement.⁵⁰ Most mainstream accounts also made references to what they considered the malignancy of black militancy in the boycott drive. Arthur Daley, sports editor of the *New York Times*, wrote "The most disturbing aspect of the New York A.C. boycott was the threat of physical violence that kept so many of the Negro stars away. Since it produced the desired result, it's logical to believe that the rabble-rousers will follow the same process of intimidation before the various tryouts for places on the Olympic team."⁵¹ In the weeks prior to the meet, Edwards suggested that if any blacks did participate in the NYAC, "brothers" in their communities would retaliate against them. Several black athletes also reported receiving anonymous phone threats warning them not to attend the NYAC. Additionally, the day before the demonstration, H. Rap Brown appeared with Edwards at the press conference in Harlem. Brown, who once declared that "Violence is as American as apple pie" and supported the proliferating rioting of the period as a form of black liberation struggle, had been charged with inciting a race riot in Cambridge, MD, the previous summer. At the Harlem press conference, he responded that an alternative to the

⁴⁸ Axthelm, "Boycott Now," 25.

⁴⁹ Hano, 32; also see *Washington Post*, 7 April 1967, p. C7; *Los Angeles Times*, 31 March 1968, p. H1; the poster is also found in Edwards, *Revolt*, illustrations following p. 140.

⁵⁰ "The Black Boycott," 61; *New York Times*, 18 February 1968, p. 173; "Boycott Runners," 83; *Los Angeles Times*, 18 February 1968, p. 173.

⁵¹ *New York Times*, 18 February 1968, p. 173.

NYAC boycott would be that MSG be “blown up.”⁵² *Washington Post* columnist William Gildea, who opposed the boycott proposal, wrote that Edwards, “By his remarks and his association with H. Rap Brown...clearly stamped himself a militant and lost support of athletes of both races who had yet passed judgment on him as a leader. By the same token, his talk of an Olympic boycott was further discredited.”⁵³

At least one reporter, however, considered the mainstream media’s obligatory references to militancy a means to discredit both movements against the NYAC and the Olympics. Pete Axthelm, a freelance journalist who joined the picketers outside MSG, wrote that “The threats of violence preceding the meet, blown out of proportion, were unfortunate, but not very important in the long run.” He found that many of the black athletes he interviewed beforehand agreed with the NYAC protest and simply did not want to attend the meet. He suggested that the boycott’s opponents in the mainstream media attempted to focus on the prior threats and clashes outside the arena until “the issue at stake- the crusty old Irish-dominated club’s refusal to admit Negroes and all but a few Jews into its hallowed dining rooms and steambaths was almost irrelevant.”⁵⁴ Despite opposition, a few mainstream reporters did admit, albeit reluctantly and agitatedly, that the protest against the NYAC was “enough of a success” that the OCHR should be encouraged to continue the black Olympic boycott drive.⁵⁵ Indeed, the avid and widespread denunciation of the NYAC in the black community prompted Daley to ponder “what Negro leaders,” who once seemed adamantly opposed the Olympic boycott, “will do.”⁵⁶

Those Negro leaders, especially in the black press that adamantly supported the movement against the NYAC, were asking a similar question. A week after the NYAC, the *Amsterdam News*, for instance, asked “now that the noise and threats and nationwide publicity over the meet boycott have died down, just what will follow the move of those who would like to see the NYAC change its policies be?”

⁵² *Washington Post*, 16 February 1968, p. D1; *Los Angeles Times*, 18 February 1968, p. C11; Axthelm, “Boycott Now,” 24-5.

⁵³ *Washington Post*, 18 February 1968, p. C4.

⁵⁴ Axthelm, “Boycott Now,” 24-6.

⁵⁵ “The Black Boycott,” 61; also see *New York Times*, 18 February 1968, p. 173; “Boycott Runners,” 83; *Los Angeles Times*, 18 February 1968, p. 173.

⁵⁶ *Los Angeles Times*, 18 February 1968, p. 173.

Like other liberals, the paper had enthusiastically supported the boycott of the NYAC, but also issued a sharp critique of Edwards and other radicals. “We think that those who planned and executed the boycott did themselves no great service with the threats of violence to the various athletes. Right or wrong, a man still has the right to make his own choice of what he will do.”⁵⁷ The words were a warning to the OPHR that despite its success, it provided its detractors with ammunition to label it militant, which functioned to disparage the boycott proposal in the public discourse. That factor would continue to temper liberal and black establishment support of the OPHR.⁵⁸

II

The success of the NYAC boycott was almost overshadowed before it occurred. On 15 February 1968, the day before the NYAC, the IOC, meeting at a session during the winter Olympics in Grenoble, France, voted by a slim majority to extend an invitation to the South African Olympic Committee (SAOC) to participate in the 1968 Mexico City summer Olympics. SAOC had been expelled from the 1964 Olympics because the South African government’s apartheid policies violated Principle I, Clause 25 of the Olympic Charter, by barring non-whites from the South Africa Olympic team.⁵⁹ In 1966, SAOC announced that it would send a multiracial team to the 1968 games and at the May 1967 IOC sessions in Tehran, Iran began detailing its plan. The South African government would still not allow interracial trials, but a multiracial committee would choose the Olympic team by holding separate trials for different racial groups and if necessary, once the team was abroad, conduct interracial trials to determine Olympians. Additionally, the athletes would travel, lodge and dine together and wear South Africa’s colors. South Africa would be represented by a multiracial team, but within the country, apartheid, government-enforced race separation, would be upheld.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ *New York Amsterdam News*, 24 February 1968, p. 16.

⁵⁸ *New York Amsterdam News*, 17 February 1968, p. 33.

⁵⁹ Lapchick, 60-3; *New York Times*, 28 January 1964, p. 36; 27 June 1964, p. 5.

⁶⁰ Lapchick, 74, 92-4.

From its initial announcement in 1966, SAOC's plan for a multiracial team was rejected by apartheid's most stringent opponents, South African multiracial activists and African Nationalists across the continent, who argued that the plan would have no tangible benefits for South Africans of color, but would result in praise for the South African government, thus tacit approval of apartheid.⁶¹ Several African national Olympic committees and representatives of the Supreme Council of Sport in Africa (SCSA), a sports association of thirty-two independent black and Arab African nations, met days before the IOC Tehran sessions in May 1967 and announced that if SAOC was admitted to the 1968 Olympics, their nations would boycott. The IOC, hoping to stall criticism and protest, decided to postpone a vote on SAOC until after a three-man IOC committee was sent to investigate athletic conditions for non-whites within South Africa.⁶² Nine months later, on 15 February 1968, based on that committee's favorable report, the Grenoble vote culminated in an Olympic invitation for SAOC.⁶³ Within two days of the announcement, at least seven African nations, led by Ethiopia and Ghana, announced their intent to boycott the Olympics in protest. The Western press correctly anticipated that within the next few days, more nations would withdraw. Indeed, several African sports officials noted that they would raise the question of a total African boycott of the Olympics at a meeting of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), a political compact of thirty-eight independent African nations dedicated to the total decolonization and independence of the continent, scheduled later that month. As important, the Soviets announced they were also considering boycotting the games in protest.⁶⁴

The IOC's initial response to the developing crisis was to praise the South African government for its "concessions" to IOC policies. The day after the vote, Avery Brundage, the IOC's chief executive, declared that for the first time, South Africa would be represented by a multiracial team. "Only the power of the Olympic movement could have secured this change. Many people talk about the problem, but this

⁶¹ Tex Maule, "A Flare in the Dark," *Sports Illustrated*, 3 June 1968, 74.

⁶² *New York Times*, 5 May 1967, p. 50; 8 May 1967, p. 59.

⁶³ Lapchick, 107-10; *New York Times*, 31 January 1968, p. 34; 16 February 1968, p. 41; *Washington Post*, 16 February 1968, p. D1.

⁶⁴ *New York Times*, 18 February 1968, p. 172; 17 February 1968, p. 19.

is the first time anything has been accomplished for the non-whites of South Africa.”⁶⁵ Brundage asserted that sports and the Olympics in particular, provided the non-white South African with an opportunity “to show his qualities and win his rights.” He acknowledged that apartheid would continue to shape the South African Olympic team, but asserted, “let one non-white South African win a medal at Mexico City and he will be a national hero.” As such, he claimed the developing protest aimed at forcing South Africa out of the Olympics would only adversely affect the country’s non-whites. Brundage’s explanation intimated the widely-held social belief that sports, and the Olympics in particular, had a history of altruistically improving political, social and racial relationships, a belief that Brundage had played a significant role in disseminated during his more than three decades as an Olympic administrator.⁶⁶ Motivated by the certainty of the belief, Brundage declared, as he had during previous Olympic crises, that the games would be held and that they would be prosperous.⁶⁷

Brundage, in his sixteenth year as IOC president and thirty-second as an IOC delegate, had done as much as anyone to prevent, as defenders of SAOC’s invitation explained it, politics from entering the Olympics. Previously, when public opinion objected to Nationalist China, Russia or the divided Germanys entering the Olympics, Brundage led the IOC’s defense of their inclusions, explaining that a nation’s political, racial and religious policies did not disqualify their athletes from the games. However, it was his defense of Nazi Germany more than thirty years earlier that had established him as an Olympic standard barrier and launched his ascendance to the head of the IOC. After the Nazi Party commandeered the German government in 1933, much of European and US civil society demanded that their countries boycott the 1936 Olympics, which had been awarded to Weimar Germany in 1931, or that the games be relocated. Brundage, then head of the US Olympic establishment, however, worked skillfully to defeat the international protest movement. In the US, where opposition enjoyed the widest public support, the AAU, whose permission was required for American amateurs to participate in the Olympics, passed a

⁶⁵ *Washington Post*, 17 February 1968, 1968; *New York Times*, 16 February 1968, p. 41.

⁶⁶ *Chicago Defender*, 19 February 1968, p. 26; William Barry Furlong, “A Bad Week for Mr. B,” *Sports Illustrated*, 11 March 1968, 19.

⁶⁷ Allen Guttmann, *The Games Must Go On: Avery Brundage and the Olympic Movement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 238.

resolution advocating that unless the Nazis guaranteed that Jews would be allowed to participate on the German team, the US would boycott. After the American Olympic Committee (later renamed the USOC) and the American Olympic Association, a fund raising organization, passed similar resolutions, Brundage, then the president of both, visited Germany to inspect Jewish access to athletic facilities. Despite the documented evidence of discrimination against Jewish athletes presented elsewhere, the Brundage-authored favorable report influenced both organizations to endorse US participation. To combat other opponents and persuade public opinion, he published pamphlets and gave interviews which explained that historically the Olympics and sports in general were apolitical, and further suggested that athletes, a virtuous group, were unfairly being asked to sacrifice their aspirations and years of toil because of geopolitics. As important, as the AAU's former president, he used his influence among its members to table the organization's boycott resolution. After he secured US participation in the games, the international boycott dissipated. Subsequently, the Nazis, even by Olympic standards, staged an impressive affair. According to Allen Guttman, a Brundage biographer, foreigners left the Berlin games with the "vague impression that National Socialism was not the horror that they had imagined it to be on the basis of newspaper or newsreel reports."⁶⁸ Scholars since have suggested that the magnificence and civility of the games aided Europeans' acceptance of their government's appeasement of Nazi Germany.⁶⁹

As notable, the Nazis discriminated against Jewish athletes, thus violating the Olympic Charter. The 477 member German team included only two Jews, both of whom were of partial Jewish origin and as such, were not technically recognized as Jewish by Nazi law at the time. Most German Jews did not have access to Olympic-caliber training facilities, therefore, lacked the means to qualify for the team and other Olympic-caliber Jewish athletes were conspicuously absent from the team. Although Brundage often manipulated the facts concerning the 1936 games the inclusion of two Jews on the German team (and the spectacular performance of the eighteen US black Olympians at the games) allowed Brundage to not only continually defend the decision of Nazi Germany to host the games, but to assert that the

⁶⁸ Guttman, *Games Must Go On*, 68-79; Lapchick, 16-9, 103-4.

⁶⁹ This conclusion is debated by several scholars in a work edited by Arnd Kruger and William J. Murray, *The Nazi Olympics: Sports, Politics and Appeasement in the 1930s* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2003).

Olympics altruistically furthered societal goodwill. For instance, two months before the important Grenoble vote, he reminded reporters that in 1936, “I supported the Jews against Hitler. It was our threat to take the Olympic games away from Berlin that forced Hitler to include two Jews...on the German national team, to demonstrate that Nazi Germany observed Olympic principals.” As a reward, during the IOC sessions at the Berlin games, the executive committee unanimously chose Brundage to replace an American member they expelled for supporting the boycott.⁷⁰ Sixteen years later, in 1952, he was elected the IOC’s president and continued diligently exercising the charge of keeping politics from entering the Olympic movement. Through Cold War tensions that included the divisions of Germany, China and Korea, the Western seizure of the Suez Canal, and Arab-Israeli wars, Brundage worked, often with a great deal of success, to prevent the games from being used as a political tool by combatants. The IOC often defended its invitations to combatants by claiming that it invited athletes, regardless of their government’s political, religious or racial creeds, and not nations, to the Olympics and often implied that the goodwill engendered by athletes at the games had an ameliorating influence on the sociopolitical and military conflicts involving their countries. Indeed, one astute observer of the African-led boycott remarked that Brundage’s defense of SAOC was motivated by his belief “that the Olympics have an almost supernal power for spreading goodwill and fellowship, that they are the only thing that has been prevented one half of the world from giving the other half 24 hours to get out.”⁷¹

While Brundage implied that SAOC’s Olympic admission would have a positive effect on South African race relations, the US mainstream press worried that the developing Third World boycott not only threatened the Olympics, but also bolstered support and the legitimacy of the OPHR. Arthur Daley, the sports editor of the *New York Times*, for instance, had initially given the initiative little chance to succeed, but following the readmission of SAOC he wrote, “But now a guy has to wonder. The action on South Africa has pried the lid off Pandora’s Box and there is no calculating how much mischief had been released.” The IOC’s decision “supplied the black power militants with ammunition they had lacked.”

⁷⁰ Guttman, *Games Must Go On*, 77-81; *New York Times*, 16 December 1967, p. 59.

⁷¹ Furlong, “A Bad Week for Mr. B,” 19-21.

The crux of the developing protest, he explained, was not a multiracial team; “it’s really the national policy of apartheid that makes South Africa unacceptable.” Indeed, opposition to apartheid, rather than questions of patriotism and duty, would now determine support for the OPHR. Although he, like much of the mainstream American press, disagreed with the developing Third World boycott, Daley, seemingly quicker than most of the establishment, realized that virtually all Africans and African Americans would never acquiesce to competing against South Africa, an action they considered a tacit approval of apartheid. Therefore, he urged Brundage and the IOC’s other “fuzzy-minded idealists” to reverse their decision before the 1968 games and the US Olympic team were irreparably decimated.⁷² Most of the American mainstream press seemed worried that SAOC’s readmission would manifest support for the OPHR and thus, impair US success at the Olympics. However, rather than condemn apartheid or the IOC for inviting SAOC, they blamed Africans for introducing politics into the Olympics.

On the 24 February, nine days following the Grenoble vote, the African-led boycott solidified. The OAU’s executive committee, meeting in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, asked that if South Africa’s Olympic invitation was not immediately rescinded, all nations to join all of Africa in boycotting the Olympics,. Two days later, all thirty-two member nations of the SCSA endorsed the boycott, ensuring that virtually all of Africa would boycott the 1968 games. The endorsements prompted other Third World nations, many of who had already spoken out against SAOC’s readmission, to officially declare their intent to boycott the Olympics.⁷³ Following the announcement, the Soviets again condemned the IOC, but would only state that their participation in the boycott was still being discussed.⁷⁴

The solidification of the international boycott movement stimulated several individual IOC delegates to public criticize the IOC’s decision and Brundage. Worried that a boycott would permanently politicized the Olympics as an issue between Western and Third World countries and thus, decimate the Olympics, several IOC delegates suggested that Brundage call an extraordinary IOC session to reconsider

⁷² *New York Times*, 27 February 1968, p. 48; 18 February 1968, p. 173; “The Olympic Jolt: Hell No, Don’t Go!,” *Life*, 15 March 1968, p. 20.

⁷³ *New York Times*, 25 February 1968, p. S1; 27 February 1968, p. 1; *Chicago Tribune*, 25 June 1968, B6.

⁷⁴ *New York Times*, 27 February 1968, p. 48.

the issue.⁷⁵ Despite their uncharacteristic vocal criticism, Brundage declined. Instead, he continued to rail against the use of the Olympics for political purposes. In response to the OAU and SCSA announcements, he told reporters “No matter what countries withdraw, the games in Mexico will go on. We’re not involved in politics. The Olympics want the youth of the world to get together.” He further explained that the IOC’s invitation to SAOC was not an approval of apartheid. Theoretically, SAOC was independent of the South African government and like all other national Olympic committees, was first and foremost, a branch of the IOC. Despite the South African government’s policy of apartheid, SAOC had done its best to conform to IOC guidelines and was sending a multiracial team to the Olympics. That development, Brundage reminded everyone, was an advance from South African teams past, which had never included a non-white. His argument suggested that the South African government was not being allowed to make an affirmative political statement concerning apartheid and therefore, neither should its opponents be allowed to use the games as a tool of opposition. As such, Brundage emphasized that it was the protestors attempting to interject politics into the games. He concluded that “We are very sorry if countries want to withdraw for political reasons... We want every country at the Olympics.” However, as a consequence of their impropriety, “there is no chance of an extraordinary meeting of the IOC being called to consider the issue. The Mexico Games will go on, and they will be a success, like all other Olympics.”⁷⁶ Politics, as Brundage construed them, would not be allowed to influence the games.

The US mainstream press reiterated Brundage’s opinions. Beginning in 1966, when SAOC initially announced its plan to select a multiracial Olympic team, editorials and feature stories in the mainstream American press frequently praised the “concessions” as “revolutionary,” a “breakthrough” or a “giant” leap of progress, which, despite the apartheid detailed in the process, might eventually lead to greater race reform in South Africa.⁷⁷ In February 1968, after the OAU and SCSA called for a boycott of the games, the mainstream press declared the boycott a deviance, an interjection of politics into sports,

⁷⁵ *New York Times*, 28 February 1968, p. 57; *Washington Post*, 16 February 1968, p. 16; *Atlanta Daily World*, 2 March 1968, p. 1;

⁷⁶ *New York Times*, 27 February 1968; p. 48; 26 February 1968, p. 50.

⁷⁷ *Washington Post*, 26 March 1967, p. B6; *Los Angeles Times*, 1 March 1968, p. A4; *New York Times*, 21 February 1968, 46; Maule, “A Flare in the Dark,” 64.

which would have adverse results for the Olympics, and, as notably, for Africans. The mainstream press emphasized that the IOC's report concluded that "despite apartheid," black South Africans' wanted to participate in the Olympics, and based on that recommendation, an IOC majority voted to extend an invitation to SAOC. As such, the mainstream press surmised that a boycott, even though aimed at opposing apartheid, would foremost "hurt" black South Africans because it would deny them an prized opportunity to compete in the Olympics, which the articles further insinuated, would led to improved conditions for black South Africans. Indeed, several major mainstream newspapers carried articles reporting that black South Africans opposed the boycott and would cooperate with SAOC's multiracial team plan.⁷⁸ Other articles asserted that boycotting nations would also be hurting their own athletes by denying them an opportunity to compete the Olympics. The confounding results, *the Los Angeles Times* exclaimed, is why "Politics, not athletes, should be kept out of the Olympics."⁷⁹ The mainstream press also declared that the IOC's decision should have been final. Indeed, several white columnists displayed contempt for Africans' that questioned their widely promulgated belief that sports acted to ameliorate racial tensions and further intimated that Africans' failure to understand that politics and sports were separate spheres was evidence of an innate backwardness that continued to impede Africa's material and political progress in the modern world. *The Chicago Tribune* suggested that Africans' politics and concerns often rendered the United Nations ineffective and now threatened to debilitate the Olympics.⁸⁰ The African boycott initiative, *The New York Times* suggested, was just "one more example of the refusal of African nations to live by accepted rules of international conduct."⁸¹ The mainstream press, however, routinely failed to note that the seventy-one member IOC was dominated by whites from imperialist nations and North America, and had only three representatives from African nations, only one of which

⁷⁸ Maule, "A Flare in the Dark," 61-6; also see *Chicago Tribune*, 17 February 1968, p. W12; *Washington Post*, 20 February 1968, p. B2; 3 March 1968, p. D9; *Los Angeles Times*, 4 March 1968, p. B2; *New York Times*, 28 February 1968, p. 57.

⁷⁹ *Los Angeles Times*, 1 March 1968, p. A4.

⁸⁰ *Chicago Tribune*, 7 March 1968, p. 18.

⁸¹ *New York Times*, 2 March 1968, p. 28.

was phenotypically African.⁸² As such, the mainstream's assertion of the fairness of the IOC's report and vote was also an assertion of white supremacy. On the basis of its belief in its liberalism and the altruism of sports, the mainstream press, like Brundage, concluded that African peoples' uncompromising opposition of apartheid, rather than the West's accommodation of racism, was the greater detriment to the Olympics. Indeed, *The Chicago Tribune* argued that Africans' failure to follow the conventional wisdom of the West suggested they were "anti-white" and therefore, their presence at the Olympics would be as "distasteful" as South Africa's.⁸³

That philosophical argument, however, was eviscerated on the 29 February, when three worried Mexican Olympic Organizing Committee (MOOC) officials flew to Chicago to meet with Brundage. Initially, MOOC noted that it would honor the outcome of the IOC vote. However, as the number of boycotting nations increased to more than thirty and the Soviets intimated withdrawal, MOOC became increasingly critical of the IOC's decision.⁸⁴ Just before the meeting, a MOOC official had announced that Mexico was "joining the movement that now exists throughout the world in favor of the IOC meeting again to reconsider (readmitting South Africa) [*sic*] that is causing so much damage to the Olympics."⁸⁵ In an effort to raise the nation's international business and investment profile, the Mexican government and private sector had invested a huge sum of money (estimates vary from \$84 to more than \$120 million) into hosting the games. The vast expenditure invigorated peasants and students' movements already protesting the country's depressed economy, an increasing rural famine and the government's inadequate spending on housing and education. Additionally, a Soviet withdrawal would annul the Cold War storyline of US/Soviet medal competition, a compelling issue expected to attract spectators, international attention, lasting historical reference and profits. The failure of the games would certainly embolden the

⁸² For a thorough explanation of the IOC's racial and ethnic composition, see Lapchick, 196; also see "South Africa and the 1968 Olympics in Mexico," *Africa Today*, (April-May 1968), 28; and Tex Maule, "Switcheroo from Yes to Nyet," *Sports Illustrated*, 29 April 1968, 29.

The member count of the IOC differs from seventy-one to seventy-four according to different sources, suggesting the committee may have added delegates over the course of the international boycott. As well, the number of African delegates differs in these sources. They do agree, however, that there was only one phenotypically black African IOC delegate during the period.

⁸³ *Chicago Tribune*, 5 March 1968, p. B3.

⁸⁴ *New York Times*, 27 February 1968, p. 48.

⁸⁵ *Chicago Tribune*, 1 March 1968, p. C1.

mass movements and political opponents of President Diaz Ordaz one party rule, both of which were already interrupting the sanctimonious domestic image that the Mexican government was attempting to present as the games' October start date neared. According to one report, the developing boycott caused the Mexican government to suspend funds, construction of facilities and promotion of the Olympics.⁸⁶ Another report noted that Mexican IOC delegates had voted against SAOC's admission and following the invitation began advertising the games as the most integrated Olympics ever in an effort to force SAOC to withdraw.⁸⁷ On 1 March, after two days of meetings with MOOC officials, Brundage announced that the nine-man IOC executive committee would meet soon, but refused to acknowledge that the development was influenced by the international boycott. He further noted that it could take as long as sixty days to gather the committee and that the nine men were not empowered to expel SAOC. That could only occur if a full meeting of all seventy-one IOC delegates were called to an extraordinary session, which would only occur if the majority of the nine executives agreed to call such a meeting. It would then take several additional weeks to arrange the full meeting. As chief executive, Brundage had the authority to call a full meeting, but refused, thus initiating what several observers believed was a course of bureaucratic procrastination meant to force the protesting nations to call off the boycott before the Olympic registration deadline.⁸⁸

A week later, however, several executive members again used the press to urge Brundage to skip an executive meeting and call a full session. Both the Mexican and French officials openly criticized Brundage's handling of the matter and were joined by Lebanese, Italian and Russian officials in calling for a full IOC session.⁸⁹ Brundage, however, continued to resist, but finally set the date of 20-21 April for the executive council meeting. Much of the mainstream press lamented that the growing criticism inside

⁸⁶ *Worker*, 5 March 1968, p. 4; 4 October 1968, p. 12; Elaine Carey, *Plaza of Sacrifices: Gender, Power and Terror in 1968 Mexico* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 2005), 44-7, 59-60.

Government repression of the students and peasants' movements included a massacre of more than 300 protesters at a downtown Mexico City rally on 2 October 1968, less than two weeks before the Olympics opened. The complicity of silence of successive Mexican governments and the media, would keep much of the world, including Olympic participants, oblivious to the most of the details and death toll for the next three decades; for an excellent discussion of the massacre and the Olympics, see Carey's *Plaza of Sacrifices*.

⁸⁷ Furlong, "A Bad Week for Mr. B.," 19.

⁸⁸ *New York Times*, 2 March 1968, p. 33; 23 April 1968, p. 53; Furlong, "Bad Week for Mr. B.," 19-21.

⁸⁹ *New York Times*, 10 March 1968, p. S13, 12 March 1968, p. 53.

the IOC and the forthcoming meeting signaled that SAOC's invitation would be withdrawn and politics had irreverently influenced the Olympics.⁹⁰ The five week interim, however, would allow Brundage to stealthily travel to South Africa, in an attempt to arrange a face-saving alternative for both the IOC and SAOC.⁹¹ In the interim, world opinion and pressure would continue to mount against the IOC; forty-two nations eventually joined the international boycott, the Russians continued to intimate withdrawal and as importantly the OPHR joined the international boycott.⁹²

Although the organizational and philosophical details were absent from the mainstream press, by linking itself to the pan-African and international Left's struggle to oust South Africa from the 1968 Olympics and end apartheid, the OPHR attracted substantial domestic and international endorsements, which increased its legitimacy and support in the public discourse and therefore, also the likelihood of a black boycott of the US Olympic team. In October 1967, Dennis Brutus, an exiled South African anti-apartheid activist living in London, England read about the OPHR's initial organizing workshop planned for Thanksgiving in Los Angeles. Brutus was a key member of the South African Non-Racial Olympic Committee (SAN-ROC), a multiracial South African organization that had worked for a nearly a decade to have apartheid-observing sports organizations banned from international sports. In anticipation of the Grenoble vote in February 1968, he instructed Dan Kunene, a South African exchange student at UCLA, to ask Edwards to add the demand that South Africa continued to be banned from the Olympics to the OPHR's the list of grievances and demands.⁹³ By doing so, Edwards fostered a relationship of cooperation between the domestic black radical boycott movement and the international African Nationalist-led movement, which increased the international publicity, feasibility and political leverage of both. The resulting anti-apartheid endorsements attracted significant press to the OPHR, which for the

⁹⁰ *New York Times*, 13 March 1968, p. 57; Furlong, "Bad Week for Mr. B," 19; "Boycotting South Africa," *Time*, 8 March 1968, 74.

⁹¹ *New York Times*, 20 April 1968, p. 41; Guttmann, *Games Must Go On*, 238.

⁹² Lapchick, 107-9; Furlong, "Bad Week for Mr. B," 19; *Washington Post*, 7 March 1968, p. C2; *Chicago Tribune*, 8 March 1968, p. 16.

⁹³ Lapchick, 102.

duration of the pending African boycott (February through April 1968) made a black boycott of the 1968 US summer Olympic team all but eminent.

As notable, African American participation in the anti-apartheid movement to expel South Africa from the 1968 Olympics was indicative of the rejuvenation of racial Pan-Africanism that was a significant component of Black Power. Many Black Power activists argued that blacks were a colonized people whom shared a history of racialized socioeconomic exploitation with colonized Third World people of color. Additionally, Black Power activists argued that US foreign policy often supported continued European colonization of the Third World as a means of stemming the spread of Communism, thus challenging the state-enforced US Cold War consensus of unequivocal anti-Communism. By 1967, for instance, the Black Power community, among other progressives, condemned US participation in the Vietnam War as imperialism and continued Western colonialism. Similar critiques had emanated from the black community during WWII; however, with the onset of the Cold War consensus in the late 1940s and the state's persecution of leftist and black dissenters, the traditionally liberal black civil rights community distanced itself racial Pan-Africanism. The liberal civil rights establishment discarded arguments that racism was rooted in the socioeconomic class exploitation of blacks and accepted instead, that racial discrimination was an aberration in the otherwise democratic continuum of the US, which needed to be annulled because it provided the Soviets with propaganda to undermine the US's agenda of winning allies in the Third World. Discontent with the liberal civil rights discourse of legal and constitutional equality to improve the socioeconomic quality of black lives and communities and the flourishing of African and Third World independence, however, rejuvenated racial Pan-Africanism among blacks, especially among those who understood the proliferating riots of the 1960s as a call for socioeconomic relief by the black masses. Just as racial Pan-Africanism and Cold War dissent were repressed in the late 1940s, however, black internationalists of the Black Power era, including those involved in the OPHR, would also suffered severe state repression.⁹⁴

⁹⁴ For a discussion of the rejuvenation of racial Pan-Africanism, see Ron Walters, *Pan Africanism in the African Diaspora* (Detroit: Wayne State University, 1993), 54-70; for a discussion of racial Pan-Africanism during

After Brutus established contact with Edwards and the OPHR in October 1967, opposition to South Africa in international sports became a profound plank in the OPHR. In a statement following its Thanksgiving organizing workshop, the OPHR explained that in addition to attempting to raise awareness of institutional racism in the US, it also advocated that blacks boycott any sporting event that included South African teams. Edwards's reiterated this directive at a December 1967 New York press conference.⁹⁵ However, even prior to contact with Brutus, Edwards understood the black struggle in the US as part of the larger pan-African and Third World struggle for liberation. While an undergraduate at SJS in the early 1960s, he concluded that the success of the Civil Rights movement was due to the direct action of the black masses, the television coverage of the reactionary white South and the demise of colonialism, which, he suggested, "particularly in the continent of Africa, provided a new source of dignity and pride for Afro-Americans." Third World independence struggles, he noted, "accelerated the new militancy" among younger blacks, many of whom, like Edwards, believed that the "gradualism" produced by the liberal civil rights discourse "was too slow."⁹⁶ Edwards was one of many in the Black Power generation, who were inspired by the ongoing liberation struggles in the Third World. By the mid-1960s, for instance dozens of SNCC and CORE student activists routinely traveled to Africa and strategized with Third World Nationalists.⁹⁷

For much of the Black Power generation, Malcolm X, the black radical firebrand and Muslim minister speak, served as an ideological bridge to Third World liberation and black internationalism.⁹⁸ In March 1964, internecine conflict forced Malcolm X to resign the apolitical Nation of Islam (NOI), and

WWII and its demise, see Penny Von Eshen, *Race against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937-1957* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), 22-121, passim; for the meaning of the riots among the Black Power community, see Robert L. Allen, *Black Awakening in Capitalist America* (Trenton, NJ: African World Press, 1992), 26-8.

⁹⁵ Edwards, *Revolt*, 58-9.

⁹⁶ Edwards, *Struggle*, 138-9.

⁹⁷ Walters, 59; Fanon Che Wilkins, "The Making of Black Internationalists: SNCC and Africa before the Launching of Black Power, 1960-1965," *Journal of African American History*, 92, no. 4 (fall 2007), 479-483; also see Max Elbaum, *Revolution in the Air: Sixties Radicals Turn to Lenin, Mao, and Che* (New York: Verso, 2002).

⁹⁸ Walters, 59-60; Wilkins, 468-71; There were, of course, other notable influences including black radical intellectuals St. Clair Drake, Robert Williams and Harold Cruse and the black press.

afterwards he initiated an effort to sue the US federal government for the persistent violation of blacks' human rights in the international courts of the United Nations (UN). On a trip through the Middle East and Africa in April and May, he discussed the continued impact of racism on blacks in the US with several Arabic and African audiences, including Prince Faisal of Saudi Arabia and Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, a leading African Nationalist.⁹⁹ Intent on forging tangible links between black and African liberation movements, in June, he founded the Organization of African America Unity (OAAU), ostensibly as the African American branch of the OAU, and the following month, as a self-appointed spokesperson for the US's twenty-two million blacks, managed to be admitted to the OAU's Heads of State conference in Cairo, Egypt. He stressed the pan-African belief that Africans throughout the Diaspora shared a common history of socioeconomic exploitation and racial oppression at the hands of Western nations and pointed out that as a means of containing the spread of Communism, US Cold War foreign policy often helped prolong European imperialism in the Third World. He further noted that Africans, as many of the Africans present were already aware of, visiting the US were often the victims of racial discrimination and violence. He asked that "If Africans are brutally beaten while only visiting in America, imagine the physical and psychological suffering received by your brothers and sisters who have lived there for over 300 years." It was reasonable to conclude, he declared, that you "will never be recognized as free human beings [by the West] until and unless [blacks] are also recognized and treated as human beings." He concluded by asking the OAU to support his effort to "bring our problem before the United Nations, on the grounds that the United States government is morally incapable of protecting the lives and property of twenty-two million African-Americans."¹⁰⁰ The OAU passed a "mild" resolution that recognized the pending Civil Rights Act of 1964, but also noted that it was "deeply disturbed" by the

⁹⁹ Rudy M. and E. U. Essien-Udom, "Malcolm X: An International Man" in *Malcolm X: The Man and His Times* ed. by John Henrik Clarke (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1990), 240-53; Malcolm X, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (New York: Ballantine, 1999), 315-70.

¹⁰⁰ Malcolm X, "An Appeal to African Heads of State," 17 July 1964, in *Malcolm X Speaks: Selected Speeches and Statements* ed. by George Breitman, (New York: Evergreen, 1990), 72-6.

black condition in the US and urged the US government to intensify its efforts to eradicate discrimination.¹⁰¹

The American press downplayed the OAU resolution and the traditional black establishment, as Malcolm X predicted, distanced themselves from his movement, but his actions attracted the attention of the US State Department, which was concerned that if the question of black equality and humanity in the US was discussed in the UN, it would provide Communists with damaging propaganda and undermine the state's effort to garner allies among Third World peoples of color. In December-January (1965), his efforts bore fruit. During a UN session, several African spokespersons condemned US intervention in the Congo. According to one report, he was the source of one African's comments that "likened the United States' role in the Congo to its treatment of black people in Mississippi." Malcolm X refused to take credit, but a month earlier he suggested that the "greatest accomplishment that was made in 1964 toward real progress was the successful linking together with our problem and the African problem, or making our problem a world problem." Blacks had strengthened their political power by gaining allies in the Third World; "Because now," he told an audience of black youth, "whenever anything happens to you in Mississippi," the federal government was in the untenable position of having to explain the events to African and other nonwhite peoples.¹⁰² Six weeks after that UN session, Malcolm X was assassinated.

In the spring of 1964, Edwards graduated SJS and having earned a prestigious Woodrow Wilson fellowship, began graduate studies in sociology at Cornell University in upstate New York that fall and began periodical travel to OAAU meetings in New York City.¹⁰³ The primary purpose of these meetings, according to Malcolm X, was to illuminate "the relationship between the struggle that is going on on the African continent and the struggle that is going on among the African Americans here in this country"

¹⁰¹ Essien-Udom, 253-6; Malcolm X, *Autobiography*, 377-8.

¹⁰² Malcolm X, *Autobiography*, 371; Essien-Udom, 256-8; Malcolm X, "To Mississippi Youth," 31 December 1964, in *Malcolm X Speaks: Selected Speeches and Statements* ed. by George Brittan (New York: Evergreen, 1990), 143; Thomas Bertelsmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line: American Race Relations in the Global Arena* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 74-84.

¹⁰³ Edwards, *Struggle*, 139.

and to build domestic support for suing the federal government on the behalf of blacks.¹⁰⁴ He routinely stressed the radical pan-African belief that blacks and Africans were not just racially, biologically or culturally related, but shared a common history of exploitation and oppression at the hands of Europeans that would only be ended by mutual pan-African and Third World internationalism. He further advocated that blacks alter their strategy of appealing to whites and the federal government for their rights, which had only produced gradual improvement, and expand the civil rights struggle into a human rights struggle, which would be supported by sympathetic Third World nations who were waging similar struggles against Western imperialists.¹⁰⁵

Edwards's conception of the black struggle was profoundly influenced by his encounter with Malcolm X. He later wrote in his autobiography that "What I heard and what I witnessed changed my entire outlook on the world, on America, on Black people, and on myself...But more than merely stimulating new ideas for me, Malcolm X incited, inflamed and legitimized a passion to act on deeply felt convictions." A Malcolm X lecture on the "sanctity of the Black family" and "the historical treatment of the Black woman" inspired Edward's thesis on the Black Muslim family. Additionally and as importantly, Edwards discovered the "ongoing pan-Africanist debate, worldwide and decades old, and the general debate over where and how Black people should proceed socially and politically."¹⁰⁶ Although Edwards did not explicitly cite Malcolm X during the course of the OPHR, the influence of Malcolm X is notable in his discussion of the OPHR in the press. In March 1968, he told a reporter that the ultimate accomplishment of an Olympic boycott would be that it lead to "international recognition for the plight of 30 million black people in this country and then take our case to the United Nations."¹⁰⁷ Edwards also framed the OPHR's participation in the anti-apartheid movement as part of the larger pan-African and Third World struggle to liberate people of color. In a statement that mirrored Malcolm X's belief that

¹⁰⁴ Malcolm X, "Speech at the Audubon," 13 December 1964, in *Malcolm X Speaks: Selected Speeches and Statements* ed. by George Breitman, (New York: Evergreen, 1990), 90.

¹⁰⁵ Malcolm X, "Speech at the Audubon," 20 December 1964, in *Malcolm X Speaks: Selected Speeches and Statements* ed. by George Breitman, (New York: Evergreen, 1990), 118-31.

¹⁰⁶ Edwards, *Struggle*, 139, 144-7; Kurlansky, 6.

¹⁰⁷ *Los Angeles Times*, 31 March 1968, p. H1, 11.

blacks should join and/or initiate a Third World liberation struggle, Edwards told a reporter that “The crackers are losing all over. In Vietnam, in Thailand, Laos, Bolivia, all over. The blue-eyed devil is in trouble. The third-world power –black, red, yellow, brown- is taking the world apart in chunks.” He concluded that “We must get the cracker off our backs, by Olympic boycott, by out-and-out revolution, by whatever means.”¹⁰⁸ Three decades later, Edwards was even more explicit concerning Malcolm X’s influence. He explained that the OPHR evolved from Malcolm X’s argument that

[blacks] must move beyond civil rights, which made us depend on the political machinery of the United States and begin to talk about *human rights*, which made our struggle of international significance...This meant that we had to move beyond appeal to the US Court system, the Congress and so forth, to the world stage. There are certain inalienable rights which the United Nations...recognizes as legitimate, but which were violated in the US. That’s what made us think of the Olympic Games... [It] was second only to United Nations as an international political forum.¹⁰⁹

Throughout the international anti-apartheid campaign to expel SAOC from the Olympics, Edwards was an enthusiastic participant, often speaking out against apartheid in the press and endorsing the campaign. However, Edwards reserved his strongest criticism of the USOC and Brundage for supporting SAOC’s readmission to the Olympics. Their actions, he declared, justified the OPHR’s demand that blacks be added to executive positions in the USOC and claim that Brundage was a racist whom should be forced to resign as the IOC’s head. Their support for South Africa was indicative of the US’s prioritization of winning the Cold War before that of securing functional democracies both domestically and abroad. Edwards’s focus on Brundage, the USOC and the US was indicative of his prioritization of the domestic agenda of the OPHR before that of the anti-apartheid movement and would briefly become a point of contention among members of the two movements. Nevertheless, Edwards welcomed the attention and support that anti-apartheid issue brought to the OPHR. He correctly predicted that SAOC’s readmission to the Olympics would rally blacks to support of the OPHR and further

¹⁰⁸ Hano, 41; for Malcolm’s comments, see Walters, 58.

¹⁰⁹ Harry Edwards, “What Happened to the Revolt of the Black Athlete?,” *ColorLines: Race, Culture and Action* 1, 1 (Summer 1998), 20-1; *emphasis in text*.

attempted to capitalize on the publicity.¹¹⁰ In March, the height of the movement against SAOC, the OPHR drew up a poster of two black fists, one emerging from the US and the other from Africa, clasping; “BLACK AMERICA & AFRICA UNITED.” It stated that “32 Black African Nations Have Voted To Boycott The ’68 Olympics” and asked “Can We Do Less?” That poster, along with the OPHR’s more recognizable poster, “Rather than Run and Jump for the Medals, We are Standing Up for Humanity,” were prominently featured in press coverage of the OPHR.¹¹¹

In comparison, Smith and Evans and other potential black Olympians situated the South Africa issue as equally important as domestic institutionalized racism in their motivations to boycott the US team. In a November 1967 interview, Evans and Smith expressed displeasure with the IOC’s expected decision to invite SAOC to the Olympics. Evans explained “I can’t dig why the US voted to permit South Africa to compete in the Olympics. That’s what I was told, anyway...They sent this cat Paul Nash, [an Afrikaner], to run here in the US. If I went to South Africa, they wouldn’t let me run in no damn met with Paul Nash. But he can come here and run with us.” Evans and Smith asserting that participating with a representative of South Africa’s racist regime would further lent tacit approval of apartheid and as such were offended.¹¹² Although Evans and Smith’s statements were made three months before the IOC’s vote, the mainstream press interpreted them as an indicator that blacks would boycott the US Olympic team in opposition to SAOC’s entry into the Olympics. Indeed, in February 1968, after the Grenoble vote, Smith, Evans and John Carlos, another black likely Olympian, signed a petition opposing SAOC’s entrance into the games.¹¹³

Evans and Smith’s opinions were representative of the general opinion of African Americans’ on the SAOC issue. By the Sixties, anti-apartheid resistance in South Africa such as the Defiance Campaign

¹¹⁰ Edwards, *Revolt*, 92-4; *Worker*, 17 March 1968, p. 6.

¹¹¹ *Muhammad Speaks*, 29 March 1968, p. 7; Arnold Hano, “The Black Rebel who ‘Whitelists’ the Olympics” *New York Times Magazine*, 12 May 1968, p. 32; the poster can be found in Edwards, *Revolt*, in the pictures following page 40.

¹¹² Dick Drake, “Tom, Lee Discuss Boycott,” *Track & Field News*, November 1967, 23.

Similar rationale would motivate blacks at dozens of universities in the Sixties to protest competing against Brigham Young University, a Mormon Church-affiliated school that deemed blacks spiritually inferior; Edwards, *Revolt*, 84-7; *Los Angeles Times*, 26 March 1969, p. G5.

¹¹³ *New York Times*, 12 April 1968, p. 28; 24 April 1968, p. 35.

of 1952-3 and the detention of 156 African resistance leaders in 1956 had raised black and liberal opposition of apartheid in the US. Most, however, continue to balance their advocacy of anti-apartheid with the US Cold War consensus that often supported continued European imperialism in Africa as a means of combating the growth of Communism. However, apartheid's similarities to Jim Crow and the South African government's reactionary violence focused black and liberal America's attention on South Africa. For instance, following the Sharpeville Massacre, the South African government's violent repression of a native anti-pass campaign that resulted in the death of sixty-nine Africans and injuries to hundreds more, in 1960, the traditional black establishment issued unmitigated calls for the end of apartheid and petitioned the US government to sever its political and economic support of South Africa. Additionally, the massacre occurred just six weeks after the student sit-ins began in the American South. Blacks interpreted the two events as kindred developments and despite the non-violent ethic of the US Civil Rights' movement, following the Massacre, many blacks and liberals not only refused to condemn the adoption of armed struggle by South African resistance groups, but also materially aided armed liberation movements in southern Africa.¹¹⁴ The traditional black establishment's unmitigated support for anti-apartheid would manifest as support of the OPHR as a means to expel SAOC from the 1968 Olympics.

Following the OPHR's stated opposition to SAOC's readmission to the Olympics, the black radical boycott proposal gained endorsements from a number of significant international anti-apartheid groups, including SAN-ROC, the native South African group that launched the anti-apartheid sports movement into an international campaign in the 1950s. SAN-ROC was headed by Brutus, a mixed African and European who had been reared in the central coastal city of Port Elizabeth, South Africa. Despite poverty and limited opportunity, excellent grades and the local Catholic Church enabled Brutus to attend high school and South African Native College, the only college for non-whites in southern Africa. In 1946, after earning degrees in English and Psychology, Brutus returned to his hometown to teach in the

¹¹⁴ Von Eschen, 153-4; Houser, 22; James H. Meriwether, *Proudly We Can Be Africans: Black Americans and Africa, 1935-1961* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 90-123, 181-96.

segregated schools he attended as a youth. He eventually became involved in the teacher's union and communities affairs, including successfully organizing local resistance to the new apartheid housing laws in 1948. Brutus also participated in local socialist studies groups, ultimately declaring himself a Trotskyite and advocating non-cooperation with the conservative Nationalist Party-led government; a position that would define Brutus' activism over the next half century. Eventually, the government deemed him a subversive and terminated his teaching assignment. Afterwards he immersed himself in the freedom struggle and worked with other African and socialist activists, including the African National Congress (ANC) and the South African Communist Party, attempting to advance the rights of non-whites and South African workers. In the process, he aided local organization of the 1952 Defiance Campaign and contributed ideas to the Freedom Charter, the 1955 document that united leftist South African resistance groups on the goals of a multiracial democracy and socioeconomic equality for all South Africans.¹¹⁵

As a teacher in the 1940s, Brutus became involved in sports by organizing his school's athletic events and eventually obtained offices in national non-white sports associations. In the mid-1950s, when African, Colored and Indian sportsmen began petitioning international sports federations to recognize non-apartheid sports associations as the official South African affiliates and expel Afrikaner-only sporting bodies, Brutus founded the Coordinating Committee for International Relations in Sport, a clearinghouse to coordinate their efforts. Fear and government repression, however, caused the association to dissipate within the first year. In 1958, Brutus and other nonracial sports activists, including Alan Paton, author of *Cry the Beloved Country*, organized twenty non-apartheid sports associations into the South African Sports Association (SASA), an organization aimed at forcing the integration of sports in South Africa and the right of non-whites to represent South Africa in international competition. As important, Brutus also began sending reports documenting apartheid in South African sports to allies abroad, the IOC and international sports federations. As a result of SASA's efforts, over the next three years, several of South

¹¹⁵ Dennis Brutus, *Poetry and Protest: A Dennis Brutus Reader* ed. by Lee Sustar and Aisha Karim (Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books, 2006), 23-33.

Africa's white-only sports bodies were suspended from international sports federations and several foreign sports teams canceled tours of South Africa. Following the Sharpeville massacre in 1960, the government outlawed most African resistance groups. SASA officers received government orders banning them from meetings and publishing. Notably, Brutus was also denied a passport to attend an IOC meeting in Rome, where he planned to campaign for SAOC's expulsion from the 1960 Olympics.¹¹⁶

In 1963, government repression and the IOC's policy of only corresponding with only "Olympic" organizations forced SASA to reorganize as the South Africa Non-Racial Olympic Committee (SAN-ROC), with the more radical expressed purpose of replacing SAOC as the official Olympic committee of South Africa. In September, while awaiting trial for violating his banning orders, Brutus attempted to travel to an IOC meeting in Baden-Baden, Germany. He was detained by authorities in Mozambique and transferred to South African police. Because his whereabouts were unknown to colleagues, Brutus feared for his life and once he reached Johannesburg, he attempted to escape and was subsequently shot. Refused assistance by a whites-only ambulance service, he lay bleeding on a main thoroughfare for approximately an hour before an ambulance for non-whites transported him to a hospital. Brutus' eventually spent eighteen months in prison, where he befriended other African resistance spokesmen like Nelson Mandela. Despite SAN-ROC's decimation, their international allies successfully campaigned to have SAOC expelled from the 1964 Olympics.¹¹⁷

Brutus was released from prison in 1965 and fearing an endless circle of government detention, he relocated to London, where in 1966, in response to SAOC's suggestion that it would pick a multiracial team for the 1968 Olympics, he and other exiled South African activists reorganized SAN-ROC and began coordinating international opposition to the proposal. SAN-ROC activists embarked on an international speaking tour and attended international athletic events, asking athletes and activists to protest the subterfuge.¹¹⁸ SAN-ROC attempted to combat assertions that the liberalism supposedly

¹¹⁶ Lapchick, 25-35; Brutus, 34-9.

¹¹⁷ Brutus, 40-4; Lapchick, 48-51, 80-1; Douglas Booth, *The Race Game: Sport and Politics in South Africa* (London: Cass, 1998), 75-80, 96-7.

¹¹⁸ Brutus, 134; Lapchick, 76-7.

inherent in the plan would advance Africans. Reginald Hlongwane, SAN-ROC's secretary and a former Olympic caliber weightlifter, explained "They would let us fly in the same plane, live in the same hotel, wear the same coat when we leave the country. We can do that anyway. The South African white man is often a liberal away from his country. But he is not at home." Emphasizing that the plan would not improve African conditions within South Africa, but garner the government praise for facilitating racial advancement, Hlongwane concluded that "It is no better to put blacks on the team for show than it is to exclude them."¹¹⁹ As a world-class sprinter attending San Jose State (CA) College, Evans heard this message at a London track meet in 1966. He befriended several African athletes who convinced him to attend "a South African resistance meeting," where Brutus spoke. Evans remembered that "They said a prayer for the brothers that had fallen during the week and I didn't even know there was a war going on down there." He later concluded that the meeting was seminal in his decision to participate in the Black Students' movement and the OPHR in the next few immediate years.¹²⁰ Brutus was also instrumental in the founding of SCSA, the OAU's thirty-two member nation sports council, which sanctioned a unanimous African boycott of the 1968 games. Brutus and fellow SAN-ROC activist Chris de Brogoli, ostensibly as South African representatives, attended the founding meeting of SCSA in December 1966 and helped write the organization's statement of principles, which included a declaration to "use every means to obtain the expulsion of South African sports organizations from the Olympic movement and from International Federations should South Africa fail to comply fully with IOC rules." In response to SAOC's multiracial Olympic team plan, the document stated that its members would "subject their decision to participate in the 1968 Olympic games to the reservation that no racist team from South Africa takes part." Despite the statement, Brundage and the IOC seemed bewildered when Africans called for an Olympic boycott following the Grenoble vote.¹²¹ Brutus, SAN-ROC, SCSA and other African Nationalists endorsed the OPHR as a means to force the IOC to reverse its decision and expel

¹¹⁹ Maule, "A Flare in the Dark," 74.

¹²⁰ Interview with Lee Evans, "Lee Evans keeps Pushin'" in *What's My Name, Fool?: Sports and Resistance in the United States* by ed. by Dave Zirin (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2005), 79.

¹²¹ Lapchick, 80-1; Brutus, 133-4.

SAOC from the Olympics.¹²² The ANC, a leading South African civil rights and African resistance group, for instance, sent Edwards a letter of appreciation for his work of enlightening other Americans to anti-apartheid concerns in sport and society.¹²³

As a result of the IOC's invitation to SAOC, the OPHR also received endorsements from the traditional liberal and black establishments in the US, both of which had previously condemned or been skeptical of the domestic boycott initiative. The nation's largest circulating black newspaper, *The Chicago Defender*, which had been scathingly critical of the OPHR, criticized the IOC's vote and concluded that even though South Africa's team would be multiracial, the tacit approval that apartheid would garner "is grounds enough for Negro athletes to abstain from participation." The editorial further praised those athletes willing to join the boycott for confronting racism "beyond their own immediate concerns."¹²⁴ It was the editorial staff's most affirmative statement on black athletic protest during the eleven-month OPHR initiative. *The Washington Afro-American* also reversed its opinion of the OPHR. Columnist Frank Lee listed several reasons why he was initially unable to support the domestic boycott initiative, "But," he noted, "when the IOC...had the audacity to even reconsider a vote to readmit segregationist South Africa...I immediately could think of nothing else...boycott!"¹²⁵

In the black community, the IOC's invitation to South Africa transformed debate concerning the OPHR from a discussion concerning blacks' patriotic duty to their country and race to one concerning the recognition of African people's humanity. Dick Edwards of *The New York Amsterdam News* reported that as a former US merchant marine who had been stationed in Capetown, South Africa for six months, "Embarrassment was the order of the day for me as a black American," just as it was for blacks in the Jim Crow South. Edwards, who previously had been sympathetic to the OPHR, declared that "If I had any sort of wavering attitude about blacks boycotting the 1968 Olympics, I have put it aside in the light of recent happenings." He concluded that any African American that would compete against South Africa

¹²² Maule, "Switcheroo from Yes to Nyet," 29; Brutus, 133.

¹²³ Edwards, *Revolt*, 95.

¹²⁴ *Chicago Defender*, 30 March 1968, p. 10; also see 12 February 1968, p. 13; 16 May 1968, p. 10; 4 May 1968, p. 10.

¹²⁵ *Washington Afro-American*, 24 February 1968, p. 13.

was an “uncle tom,” complicit in maintaining apartheid and white supremacy.¹²⁶ Lewis P. Bohler, Jr., a minister from Los Angeles, agreed. Initially, he had also been “unable” to support the OPHR, but declared “the readmission of South Africa is something else.” He suggested that participation against South Africa was tacit approval of apartheid and comparable to “fighting beside a companion in Vietnam, only to discover that you cannot live beside him when you return home.”¹²⁷ Indeed many blacks opposed competing against South Africa for the same reasons they opposed US involvement in Vietnam.¹²⁸ Although service, be it military or athletic, and opposition to Communism historically provided blacks opportunities to demonstrate their capabilities to aid the nation and affirm their patriotism and thus, advance their race’s claims to equality, both the Vietnam War and black competition against SAOC also bolstered white supremacy, even if unintentionally and therefore, was detrimental to the realization of people of color’s self-determination. As such, just as an increasing number of blacks opposed the war in Vietnam, after SAOC’s entrance into the 1968 Olympics, an increasing number opposed blacks’ Olympic participation.

The ardency of liberal black America’s opposition to SAOC is illustrated in its rebuke of those among them who suggested SAOC’s presence at the games was inconsequential to black Americans. When the *Chicago Defender’s* “Doc” Young, a scathing critic of the OPHR and the era’s most accomplished black sportswriter, surmised that the struggle of Africans and blacks were unrelated and concluded that “one is not so sure that this concession, small as it maybe, isn’t an important crack in the rock-ribbed structure of apartheid,” several days later a *Defender* editorial responded that “We do not share that opinion. Even if South African athletes, white and black, are chosen for the Olympics as one team, even if they travel together, and in Mexico live together, wear the same uniform, and march together under the same flag, the convulsive racial oppression under which blacks live in that country cannot be either condoned or forgotten.” The editorial concluded that the concessions were made not in

¹²⁶ *New York Amsterdam News*, 2 March 1968, p. 31.

¹²⁷ *Los Angeles Times*, 11 March 1968, p. A4.

¹²⁸ Paul Westheider, *Fighting on Two Fronts: African Americans and the Vietnam War* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 19.

the recognition of Africans' rights and humanity, but "to avoid unpleasant worldwide publicity while apartheid in sports remained unchanged in South Africa."¹²⁹ Indeed, much of the black press agreed with Edwards and branded Brundage and the IOC racists for inviting a team that would be chosen by an apartheid-influenced process. The *Defender* eventually concluded that Brundage "was a racist at heart" who must be literally crazy, the "very essence of senility," if he could not "see the racial implications" in South Africa's attempt to enter the Olympics.¹³⁰ Several other black columnists opined that Brundage and the IOC were showing their "true colors" indeed by extending an Olympic invitation to SAOC.¹³¹ Blacks like Young, who continue to advocate any opinion but opposition to SAOC risked being derided as "Uncle Toms" in the black community.¹³² Perhaps, such passionate opposition to SAOC developing among blacks caused several prominent retired black athletes such as Owens, Louis and Mal Whitfield, who once suggested that blacks boycott the 1964 Olympic team as an effort to further civil rights legislation, to avoid the SAOC issue in their continued opposition of the OPHR.¹³³

As the boycott became a racial matter, some black sports columnists even began rejecting the traditional black advancement belief that blacks' presence and accomplishments improved whites' image of blacks and thus resulted in some veritable form of black advancement. L. I. Brocknenbury of the *Los Angeles Sentinel*, a black weekly, termed the belief, "that the best way to fight racism is to prove one's superiority in athletic competition" against whites, "bunk, pure and simple...Negroes in this country have been proving athletic superiority for years and there is more racist thinking rampant in America than ever before." He concluded that the virulence of white supremacy, which often invented rationalizations of black inferiority, demonstrated that "no amount" of black achievement, athletically or otherwise, would convince a white majority of blacks' equality; therefore blacks should protest whenever necessary.¹³⁴

¹²⁹ *Chicago Defender*, 6 March 1968, p. 28; 16 March 1968, p. 10.

¹³⁰ *Chicago Defender*, 4 May 1968, p. 10.

¹³¹ *New York Amsterdam News*, 2 March 1968, p. 31; *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 25 April 1968, p. D2; 2 May 1968, p. B2.

¹³² *New York Amsterdam News*, 2 March 1968, p. 31.

¹³³ *New York Times*, 3 April 1968, p. 54; *Washington Post*, 3 March 1968, p. D4; *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 8 February 1968, p. D1.

¹³⁴ *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 29 February 1968, p. B2.

Opposition to SAOC's readmission to the Olympics found in the traditional liberal black press demonstrated one of the profound ideological differences between traditional black advancement ideology and Black Power. For more than three decades following the ascendance of Louis and Owens in the 1930s, the traditional liberal black establishment advocated that black participation and accomplishments in white-controlled sports institutions demonstrated that blacks' possessed character and manliness, which improved whites' image of blacks, thus advancing the race's claims to equality.¹³⁵ Black Power movements like the OPHR challenged traditional black liberalism, by arguing that the complete agency and humane and equal treatments of blacks within white-controlled integrated institutions was as equally as important as integration. During the African Nationalist's boycott drive of the Olympics, the traditional black press echoed Harry Edwards and other young black radical's articulation that accommodating white supremacist, either by competing in athletic events against or sponsored by racists, demeaned blacks' humanity and legitimated, even if unintentionally, white supremacy.¹³⁶ By contrast, mainstream pundits often construed such Black Power arguments and demands as "militant."¹³⁷

Throughout the SAOC ordeal, many blacks hoped SAOC would be ousted from the Olympics so that blacks would compete and do well at the Mexico City games. However, most of them unequivocally rejected arguments that SAOC's plan provided Africans with an opportunity to advance their race and

¹³⁵ This belief was articulated in black America at various times. For instance, in 1935-6, as much of European and US civil society called for a boycott of the 1936 "Nazi Olympics" to protest Nazi anti-Semitism, most of the traditional black establishment argued for participation in the games, largely so black athletes could demonstrate that races manly capability and thus, garner their race notoriety and advancement. For that discussion see chapter 1, p. 13-4; and David K. Wiggins, *Glory Bound: Black Athletes in White America* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1997), 63-7; for primary examples of this belief in black America, see Edwin B. Henderson, "The Negro Athlete and Race Prejudice," *Opportunity*, 14, 3 (March 1936), 77-8; Joseph H. Rainey, "The Negro Athlete as Goodwill Ambassador," in *The 1938 Bulletin of The Colored Intercollegiate Athletic Association with Proceedings of the Nineteen Thirty-Seven Meeting* compiled by J. L. Whitehead (Hampton, VA: Hampton Institute Press, 1938), 24-6; "Negro Athletes and Civil Rights," *Sepia*, June 1964, 35.

¹³⁶ Edwards, *Revolt*, 65.

¹³⁷ William L. Van DeBurg, *New Day in Babylon: The Black Power Movement and American Culture, 1965-1975* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 13-6.

reasoned that black participation at the Olympics would be complicity in the South African government's discrimination of Africans, and thus complicit in all further black oppression, including their own.¹³⁸

After SAOC was readmitted to the Olympics, the OPHR also drew endorsements from many liberals who were previously indifferent to the domestic black boycott, including the American Committee on Africa (ACOA), the most significant US anti-apartheid advocacy group in the Sixties. The ACOA was founded in 1951 by Fellowship of Reconciliation activists Bill Sutherland and George M. Houser to support the 1952-3 South African non-violent Defiance Campaign organized by the ANC and the South African Indian Congress, two South African resistance groups. Never more than a handful of committed activists, the organization succeeded in disseminating anti-apartheid information to hundreds, raising thousands of dollars for the campaign and attracting the support of Harlem congressman Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., pacifist A. J. Muste and ACLU founder Roger Baldwin. After the South African government succeeded in repressing the campaign in 1953, the ACOA broadened its purpose to publicizing and contributing materially to all African liberation movements, but because of apartheid and the reactionary South African government, southern Africa remained a primary focus. In 1956, the ACOA established the South Africa Defense Fund for the 156 mostly African resistance activists tried for treason in the country. The committee raised seventy-five thousand dollars over three years for their defense and covertly sponsored Erwin Griswold, dean of the Harvard Law School, as an observer at the trials. The committee also initiated the *Declaration of Consciousness*, a document signed by 133 world intellectuals condemning apartheid and the persecution of the activists. Following the Sharpeville Massacre in 1960, the ACOA directed black and liberal criticism of the South African government, as well as criticism of the US government's lack of condemnation of its Cold War ally. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, the ACOA focused on fundraising, facilitating college education for Africans, raising US public awareness of African independence struggles and organizing US speaking engagements for African independence spokesmen. Its contacts with African Nationalists allowed its organ, *Africa Today*,

¹³⁸ Spencer Raab, "Moral Issue," *Sports Illustrated*, 1 April 1968, 79; *New York Amsterdam News*, 2 March 1968, p. 31.

to become an important primary source of information on African liberation struggles in the period. Additionally, although most activists associated with the ACOA were pacifists, in the wake of Sharpeville, the organization, like most liberals, materially aided armed liberation groups in southern Africa. Nevertheless, the ACOA remained avowedly anti-Communist, often refusing to work with foreign and domestic groups sympathetic to Socialists. As a result, by the late 1950s, the organization had eclipsed the Paul Robeson-lead and socialist-oriented Council on African Affairs, which suffered repression at the hands of the federal government's enforced Cold War consensus, as the foremost advocacy group for African independence in the US and attracted support from several of the nation's moral celebrities. Early honorary chairpersons of the ACOA campaigns included King, Eleanor Roosevelt and James Pike of the Cathedral of St. John's the Divine. Others who lend their names to the committee's work included Benjamin Mays, Mordecai Johnson, Hope Stevens, Roy Wilkins, A. Phillip Randolph and John Gunther.¹³⁹

In the early 1960s, the ACOA began collaborating with Brutus and SAN-ROC to expel Afrikaner-only teams from the Olympics and other international sports bodies and for more than a decade, functioned as the US branch of the anti-apartheid sports movement.¹⁴⁰ During the campaign to expel SAOC from the 1968 games, the ACOA worked with Jackie Robinson, the pioneering baseball player turned activist, to raise US awareness of apartheid in South African sports. Robinson had worked with the committee since at least 1960, when following the Sharpeville massacre, he hosted the ACOA's Emergency Action Conference, an initiation of US liberal, black and leftist anti-apartheid activism. During the conference, he suggested that the Africans' struggle against apartheid was the same as the black struggle against Jim Crow.¹⁴¹ In May 1967, following SAOC's detailing of its multiracial team plans, Robinson and the ACOA collected the signatures of thirty prominent Americans on an open letter

¹³⁹ George Houser, "Meeting Africa's Challenge: The Story of the American Committee on Africa" *Issue* 6, (2-3), 1976, 16-22; Meriwether, 118-22, 180-207; for a discussion of the ACOA and anti-Communists efforts, see Von Eschen, 141-4.

¹⁴⁰ Ann Morrisett, "South Africa and the Olympics," *Liberation*, (July-August 1960), 28; emphasis in text; Brutus, 132.

¹⁴¹ Meriwether, 191.

to Douglas Roby, the head of the USOC, urging him to oppose SAOC's admission to the 1968 games. The letter noted that the plan still fostered apartheid in sport and society and therefore, was unacceptable by both Olympic rules and standards of humanity, respectively. Other signers included Stokely Carmichael, Reinhold Niebuhr, Langston Hughes, Bayard Rustin, Ruby Dee, Ed Sullivan and black athletes Arthur Ashe, Jr., Oscar Robertson and Roy Campanella.¹⁴² Nine months later, during the Grenoble session that culminated in the IOC's Olympic invitation to South Africa, Robinson headlined an ACOA press conference in New York announcing that twenty-five prominent American athletes opposed SAOC's readmission to the 1968 games. Although not present, among the signers were six likely Olympians, including Smith, Evans and Carlos, all three of whom were intimately associated with the OPHR. Ultimately, the press interpreted their signatures as pledges to boycott the games unless SAOC was barred. When asked, Robinson, who had previously endorsed the OPHR, expressed admiration of the young black athlete's courage and sacrifice. Before concluding the press conference, George Houser also read a statement from Edwards that demanded the expulsion of SAOC. Robinson and the ACOA endorsed the OPHR, particularly as a means of protesting SAOC's admission to the Olympics.¹⁴³

Following the Grenoble vote in February 1968, the ACOA continued to pressure the IOC to reverse its admission of SAOC. *Africa Today* urged readers to write the three US IOC delegates asking them to reconsider their support of SAOC, to support the actions of SCSA and OCHR, and to inform MOOC and the Mexico Department of Tourism that they would boycott the games if South Africa participated.¹⁴⁴ As the extraordinary IOC session approached in April, the ACOA held another press conference to announce that more than sixty amateur, college and professional athletes signed a petition supporting anti-apartheid boycott. In addition to the signatures of Robinson, Ashe and Wilt Chamberlain, it was also signed by a number of former white Olympians. Five signers attended the press conference. Most notably, Heyward Dotson, a black Columbia student-athlete and likely invitee to the US Olympic

¹⁴² *Chicago Defender*, 8 May 1967, p. 25; *New York Times*, 8 May 1967, p. 59.

¹⁴³ "Athletes Call for Continued South African Suspension from the Olympics," *Africa Today*, (February-March 1968), 38; *New York Times*, 9 February 1968, p. 48; 24 April 1968, p. 35; Edwards, *Revolt*, 92-4; Lapchick, 108.

¹⁴⁴ "South Africa and the 1968 Olympics in Mexico," *Africa Today*, (April-May 1968), 29.

basketball trials, noted that collegiate athletes were under tremendous pressure not to support the boycott, but that a number of them supported both the anti-apartheid campaign and the OPHR. Steve Mokone, a black South African soccer star attending the University of Rochester (NY), was also present. He read letters from fellow Africans that contradicted the mainstream assertions that nonwhite South Africans opposed the international boycott. He explained that “prison or worse” awaited those who contradicted the government’s support of SAOC. The April petition, because it was signed by such a significant number of former and likely Olympians, made news in most major dailies. However, only the black weeklies and *The Worker* noted Mokone’s letters and statements.¹⁴⁵

The IOC’s readmission of SAOC also strengthened support for the OPHR among Black Nationalists, a community that had been instrumental in launching the domestic boycott initiative. Specifically, the Nation of Islam (NOI) supported both movements and linked the struggle against apartheid to the black struggle for humanity in the US. Since its founding in the 1930s, the NOI condemned the US government for allowing the socioeconomic racialized exploitation and brutality of blacks and despite the onset of the state-enforced Cold War consensus in the late 1940s, the NOI condemned the state’s support of European imperialists as complicit in whites’ historical exploitation and oppression of people of color.¹⁴⁶ Since its founding in 1960, the NOI’s news organ, *Muhammad Speaks*, forwarded an anti-colonial critique, and like black liberal periodicals focused on US support for South Africa’s Afrikaner government and the heinousness of apartheid. A year prior to the SAOC issue, the paper interviewed Brutus and approved of his pan-African argument that “There is a close link between rights for black people in America and rights for black people in South Africa.” Pan-Africanists generally argued that the racialized subjugation of blacks in one nation undermined the rights and equality of all people of African descent.¹⁴⁷ In addition to carrying articles sympathetic to both boycott drives and anti-apartheid in general, *Muhammad Speaks* carried cartoons depicting the servile conditions of the would-be

¹⁴⁵ *Worker*, 16 April 1968, p. 8; *New York Times*, 12 April 1968, p. 28; *Washington Post*, 12 April 1968, p. D4; *Chicago Defender*, 13 April 1968, p. 20; *New York Amsterdam News*, 20 April 1968, p. 34.

¹⁴⁶ Von Eschen, 173-4.

¹⁴⁷ *Muhammad Speaks*, 21 April 1967, p. 7; Manning Marable, *Black Leadership* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 104.

African athletes on the South African team. A cartoon in the 22 March edition entitled “Free Until You Get Back” depicted Africans being unshackled from chains by gun-toting Afrikaners to travel to the Mexico City games.¹⁴⁸ A cartoon in 3 April edition depicted blacks in chains being forced marched at the Olympics by Klu Klux Klan robbed, whip-toting whites.¹⁴⁹ The cartoons insinuated that SAOC’s Olympic participation would have no domestic benefits for Africans and illustrated that apartheid was akin to American slavery and Jim Crow and therefore, as equally repugnant and heinous to blacks.¹⁵⁰ *Muhammad Speaks* also hinted at the pan-African origins of the boycott movements by suggesting that the African-led boycott was a protest of the persecution of Muhammad Ali, the deposed world’s heavyweight boxing champion and an NOI member, for his refusing induction in the US military and criticism of US involvement in Vietnam.¹⁵¹ Although the assertion was disingenuous, the origins of the boycotts had close historical proximity. In 1963, Dick Gregory proposed that blacks boycott the 1964 US Olympic team as a way of generating further civil rights advances. Significant support for a black boycott of the US Olympic team, however, did not materialize until after SCSA’s December 1966 declaration that Africans would boycott the Olympics in protest of SAOC’s participation. Seven months later, in July 1967, the National Black Power Conference passed a resolution asking that blacks boycott the US Olympic team in support of Ali.¹⁵² Regardless of their origins, however, the NOI supported both movements. Like Edwards and others involved in the international anti-apartheid campaign, the NOI understood SAOC’s plan as an attempt on the part of country’s Afrikaner ruling regime to obtain tacit approval of apartheid and therefore, sought to expose it as partial of the historical immorality and evilness of “white devils” that fueled the continued oppression of non-whites, including African Americans.¹⁵³ As

¹⁴⁸ *Muhammad Speaks*, 22 March 1968, p. 8.

¹⁴⁹ *Muhammad Speaks*, 3 April 1968, p. 11.

¹⁵⁰ Meriwether, 113.

¹⁵¹ *Muhammad Speaks*, 8 March 1968, p. 16; 1 March 1968, p. 7.

¹⁵² Dick Gregory with Robert Lipsyte, *Nigger: An Autobiography* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1968), 192-3; *Chicago Defender*, 5 August 1967, p. 4.

¹⁵³ *Muhammad Speaks* 18 May, 1968, p. 6; 26 July 1968, p. 11, 30.

a result, *Muhammad Speaks* continued to carry articles on the OPHR and the anti-apartheid movement after the SAOC issue was resolved.¹⁵⁴

By contrast, *The Black Panther*, the news organ of the radical Black Panther Party, of which Edwards was a member, carried little information concerning the SAOC issue or the OPHR. The Panthers, who supported Third World revolutionary nationalism, however, also likely supported both. Eldridge Cleaver, the party's spokesmen in 1967 through 1968, believed that the widespread protest of black athletes in the Sixties was indicative of a current generation of black celebrities' refusal to allow the establishment to use their success to suggest the efficacy of racial democracy in the US.¹⁵⁵ Additionally, Carmichael, who briefly served as a party spokesperson in 1968, supported both movements and in May 1967 signed an ACOA petition asking the USOC to oppose SAOC's Olympic bid.¹⁵⁶

The SAOC issue also strengthened leftist support of the OPHR. *The Worker*, the news organ of the Communist Party USA, supported both boycott movements and suggested that the socialist-backed African-led boycott was "strengthening the movement by black athletes...to boycott the US Olympic team."¹⁵⁷ The paper contextualized the South African issue within the Cold War, the struggle of capitalism versus communism, and white supremacy and European imperialism versus the humanity of all and Third World self-determination. It further correctly pointed out that the IOC was dominated by white Westerners, and because of its absence of African and Asian members, it did not accurately represent the interests of emerging and Socialist countries. *The Worker* demanded the representation of those peoples in the IOC.¹⁵⁸ The paper also emphasized the Soviet Union's support and seemed certain that the mother country would join the international boycott, even though Russia never publicly committed to the boycott.¹⁵⁹ Many Africans and blacks were less certain than the *Worker* concerning the Russian's

¹⁵⁴ The extensive coverage was likely a product of the relationship that Edwards cultivated with the NOI during his thesis research on the NOI's family structure in the mid-1960s; Edwards, *Struggle*, 145-6.

¹⁵⁵ Eldridge Cleaver, *Soul on Ice* (New York: Ramparts, 1991), 90-6.

¹⁵⁶ *Chicago Tribune*, 8 May 1968, p. E8; Stokely Carmichael with Ekwueme Michael Thelwell, *Ready for Revolution: The Life and Struggles of Stokely Carmichael [Kwame Ture]* (New York: Scribner, 2003), 708.

¹⁵⁷ *Worker*, 5 March 1968, p. 4.

¹⁵⁸ *Worker*, 17 March 1968, p. 2.

¹⁵⁹ *Worker*, 12 March 1968, p. 5.

commitment. Throughout the ordeal, Brutus, for instance, continued to press, albeit unsuccessfully, for the Russians' explicit commitment to the boycott.¹⁶⁰ Black newspapers also were skeptical, suggesting that the Soviets were hesitant to commit because of the propaganda value the USSR placed on outperforming the US at the Olympics.¹⁶¹ Nevertheless, the endorsement of *The Worker* and sympathetic coverage in *The Militant*, an English leftist publication, suggests that the African-led boycott had solidly support across the western New Left. As significant, their coverage of the anti-apartheid boycott referenced the OPHR, thus presenting it sympathetically to other international leftists.¹⁶²

The usually audacious Edwards was further exuberated by the international support and attention the SAOC issue focused on the OPHR. Shortly after the announcement of the African-led Third World boycott in February, Edwards told reporters, "Where are all the people who say the Olympics should be above racism? Who can say the Olympics shouldn't be the target now? The new issue will force the black man to fight. They've virtually said the hell with us. Now we'll have to reply: Let whitey run his own Olympics." SAOC's Olympic admission, he proclaimed, had aided the development of "black unity," which would ultimately lead to the liberation of all people of color.¹⁶³ The extensive leftist and Socialist support particularly emboldened Edwards. In an interview with *The Worker*, he declared that South Africa "was admitted to the Olympics because the USA controls it." Edwards's comment paralleled leftists and black radicals' criticisms that US Cold War foreign policy, in its effort to prevent the spread of Communism, often supported imperialist and racist regimes. In previous interviews, Edwards, who had been under FBI surveillance since the semester he initiated organizing of the OPHR (fall 1967), noted that while the OPHR was an attempt to focus international attention on institutionalized racism, it was not, he explicitly noted, an attempt to aid the state's enemies by embarrassing the US. He told *The Worker*, however, that the Soviets' support indicated that "Russia understands the significance of

¹⁶⁰ Lapchick, 116.

¹⁶¹ *New York Amsterdam News*, 4 March, 1968, p. 7; 27 April 1968, p. 34; *Atlanta Daily World*, 2 March 1968, p. 1.

¹⁶² *Militant*, 4 March 1968, p. 6.

¹⁶³ *New York Times*, 25 February 1968, p. S2; Hano, 48.

the boycott!”¹⁶⁴ Such statements were a daring risk, considering the state’s ongoing repression of Cold War dissenters and Black Nationalists in 1968.¹⁶⁵ Edwards, however, would never advocate socialism, but like his black radical heroes Malcolm X and Paul Robeson, he was not reluctant to work with leftist or radical ideologies to achieve the liberation of black America. The “Considerable publicity...given Edwards” and the OPHR by socialists and leftists’ periodicals during the international campaign, an FBI memo noted, merited his increased surveillance by the FBI.¹⁶⁶

In addition to endorsing the OCHR, many of the international anti-apartheid movements attempted to include OPHR-related activists in their efforts to pressure the IOC to reverse its decision. As noted, Carlos, Evans and Smith endorsed ACOA letters to the USOC and IOC urging them to act against SAOC’s participation in the games.¹⁶⁷ Additionally, in an effort to leverage the IOC’s vote against SAOC, SAN-ROC invited Edwards to join them and other activists lobbying the IOC at Grenoble in February 1968.¹⁶⁸ The session, however, occurred during the OPHR’s protest of the NYAC and Edwards was unable to attend. Edwards also participated in a subterfuge with SCSA, the OAU’s sports council. In March, while awaiting the extraordinary IOC session, he and Jean Claude Ganga, SCSA’s secretary, both pledged to support an “African games” as an alternative to the Olympics. While it does not appear that such an event ever entered the planning stages, the suggestion was a part of the international effort protesting SAOC’s entrance into the Olympics.¹⁶⁹ The ACOA and several African activists, including SAN-ROC, ANC and SCSA, considered the OPHR important in leveraging the IOC to reverse SAOC’s admission and throughout the ordeal, expressed gratitude to Edwards, the OPHR and other activist-athletes in the US for their highly visible support to end apartheid.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁴ *Worker*, 17 March 1968, p. 6; Edwards previous insinuations concerning the Cold War are noticeable in Jonathon Rodgers, “A Step to An Olympic Boycott,” *Sports Illustrated*, 4 December 1967, 30-1; Harry Edwards, “Why Negroes Should Boycott Whitey’s Olympics,” *Saturday Evening Post*, 9 March 1968, p. 6.

¹⁶⁵ Kenneth O’Reilly, *Racial Matters: The FBI’s Secret Files on Black America, 1960-1972* (New York: Free Press, 1989), 297-9.

¹⁶⁶ For the FBI memo, see Edwards, *Struggle*, 183-4.

¹⁶⁷ *New York Times*, 12 April, 1968, p. 28.

¹⁶⁸ Lapchick, 107.

¹⁶⁹ *New York Times*, 2 March 1968, p. 33.

¹⁷⁰ Edwards, *Revolt*, 95.

III

On 20 April 1968, the nine-man IOC executive committee gathered at an extraordinary session in Lausanne. After two days of discussion, on the 21st, the executive committee, by way of telegram, informed the IOC's other sixty-two members that it was "unanimously of the opinion that it would be most unwise for a South African team to participate in the Games of the 19th Olympiad. Therefore, the Executive Board strongly recommends that you endorse this unanimous proposal to withdraw the invitation to these games." Brundage, speaking at a press conference, blamed its reversal on the prevailing "international climate," which one executive later explained, was meant to suggest that Edwards or other militants might attack white South Africans at the games. The assertion played on mainstream fears heightened by the wave of riots and civil unrest in the US that followed the 4 April assassination of King and the escalating student and worker movements occurring throughout the Western world and Mexico City.¹⁷¹

The assertion, however, could not veil the reality; the international anti-apartheid movement had forced the IOC to bar SAOC from the 1968 games. Brundage, who made the announcement, never acknowledge that geopolitics had entered the Olympics, but mainstream articles obligatorily noted that he was a "saddened" man. Having failed to convince SAOC to withdraw from the games, he had arrived in Lausanne from South Africa, armed with a list of non-white athletes in contention for the South African team, intent on fighting for SAOC's inclusion. The majority of the executives, however, had arrived as determined and prepared to call a full session of all seventy-one members if their advice to expel SAOC was not heeded. Outnumbered and fearing that further divisiveness would weaken the Olympic movement, Brundage acquiesced and announced the telegram to the IOC's other delegates stressing the executive committee's "unanimous" recommendation to rescind SAOC's invitation. The press considered the full vote a formality; a member vote had never defied an executive committee's recommendation; South Africa had been ousted from the games. One reporter believed he saw tears in

¹⁷¹ Maule, "Switcheroo from Yes to Nyet," 28-9; for a discussion of 1968 and student movements, see Kurlansky, 202.

Brundage's eyes during the announcement.¹⁷² Brundage privately told another reporter that he was strongly considering retirement after completing the current term as president.¹⁷³

Following the expulsion, the US mainstream press articulated a sense of relief. *Track and Field News*, the foremost US periodical on the subject, noted that Olympic fans were "breathing easier now that the threat of a multi-nation boycott has been eliminated" because "there is less a chance of a boycott of the Games by America's black athletes."¹⁷⁴ Most establishment entities, however, couched their relief in continued condemnation of the international and domestic protests. Daley, who was still reluctant to admit that the black or African boycotts had any ideological validity, surmised that SAOC's admission "made too many blacks hesitate and wonder" about boycotting the games. With SAOC's dismissal, however, "Now they need wonder no longer."¹⁷⁵ The mainstream press was also quick to report that several black athletes, including Smith and Evans, indicated that as a result of the reversal, they were more likely to join the US Olympic team.¹⁷⁶

By contrast, opponents of apartheid celebrated the reversal. Ganga, the SCSA's secretary-general, and Russian IOC delegate Constantin Andrianova, both of whom attended the Lausanne session, were seen enthusiastically shaking hands and congratulating one another immediately following Brundage's announcement.¹⁷⁷ Their enthusiasm was duplicated in the black and leftist press. *The Worker* announced that the African and Socialist nations had won the "World Fight" to bar South Africa from the Olympics against the "retired European nobility" the IOC represented. The paper termed the reversal as "a crushing blow to South Africa, which hoped desperately for the 'respectability' fostered by international sports competition."¹⁷⁸ The black press also enthusiastically celebrated the reversal and continued to term Brundage and the IOC racists for supporting SAOC's plan. *The Defender* declared that

¹⁷² Maule, "Switcheroo from Yes to Nyet," 29; Guttman, *Games Must Go On*, 238-40; *New York Times*, 22 April 1968, p. 1; *Los Angeles Times*, 22 April 1968, p. B1.

¹⁷³ *New York Times*, 23 April 1968, p. 53.

¹⁷⁴ "Olympic Ouster Imminent," *Track and Field News*, II April 1968, p. 3.

¹⁷⁵ *New York Times*, 23 April 1968, p. 53.

¹⁷⁶ *New York Times*, 24 April 1968, p. 35; *Chicago Tribune*, 23 April 1968, p. C6.

¹⁷⁷ Maule, "Switcheroo from Yes to Nyet," 28-9.

¹⁷⁸ *Worker*, 23 April 1968, p. 16.

the “invitation should have never been issued in the first place, because it tended to connote approval of South Africa’s brutal separation of the races.”¹⁷⁹ A *Los Angeles Sentinel* columnist thought the rumor, that Brundage retire after his current term as IOC president was completed, a good idea.¹⁸⁰ Robinson also claimed victory and condemned Brundage for suggesting that the impetus for the reversal was the threat of black violence, rather than noting the influence of the anti-apartheid movement. He declared, this “is one time that Black Power was used to put the fear of Green Power into Mexico City, which had a multi-million dollar production” in the Olympics. He declared that “Any violence which might have come about would have been a direct result of those, who like Brundage, believed they could continue to wink their eyes at the inhumanity practiced by South Africa.”¹⁸¹ Robinson’s strident statement underscored black and leftist’s sentiment that the reversal was not only a tactical victory in the anti-apartheid campaign, but a moral victory over white supremacy and Western imperialism.

As detailed, the OPHR’s participation in the anti-apartheid movement to expel SAOC from the 1968 Olympics attracted international support for the OPHR. Although the attention enhanced the recognition and legitimacy of the OPHR in the public discourse, much of the new support was conditional. For instance, SCSA’s Ganga once suggested that if the IOC reversed SAOC’s admission, he might “write to the Negroes of the United States and ask them to reconsider their boycott of these Games. Of course, I realize they have taken their position antecedent to ours, but it is possible that we would be able to influence them.”¹⁸² The statement was indicative of SCSA and the international anti-apartheid movements’ support of the OPHR as only leverage to have SAOC expelled. Additionally, after the IOC rescinded SAOC’s invitation in late April 1968, support for the OPHR also quieted in the traditional black press. In the remaining months leading up to the Olympics in October, the black press continued to cover OPHR developments and many black reporters would sympathize with the activist-athletes. However,

¹⁷⁹ *Chicago Defender*, 4 May 1968, p. 10; also see *New York Amsterdam News*, 27 April 1968, p. 14.

¹⁸⁰ *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 2 May 1968, p. B7.

¹⁸¹ *Chicago Defender*, 18 May, 1968, p. 10.

¹⁸² Maule, “Switcheroo from Yes to Nyet,” 29.

both ceased to issue the fervent support for the OPHR they had during the campaign to expel SAOC from the Olympics.¹⁸³

Unlike the international anti-apartheid movement and the US traditional black and liberal establishments, Edwards's advocacy of the OPHR never equivocated on SAOC's Olympic admission. In March 1968, the height of the international campaign, he reminded the public that the foremost purpose of the OPHR was to attract attention to the discrimination that blacks continued to endure in the US and that while apartheid was an important issue, it was secondary. Edwards declared that the US "is the arch-racist in the world" and he intended to "keep drilling this home" until "no Black athletes show up" for the Olympics. "The US not South Africa is going to be seen as the main oppressor on the face of the earth. If it were not for the US, the rest of these racist countries could not stand up."¹⁸⁴ A month later, after the Lausanne meeting, he declared that the IOC's reversal "will have absolutely no effect on the boycott by Black athletes from this country. Our fight is with the racists in this country- in the White House, in the Congress and on college campuses. We don't live in South Africa. We live in these United States."¹⁸⁵ For Edwards, during and after the SAOC issue, the foremost purpose of the OPHR remained raising awareness of the institutionalized racism blacks continued to endure in the US. After SAOC was ousted from the Olympics in April, over the remaining five months (May-October 1968) until the Olympics, Edwards's would diligent continued to work to produce a black boycott of the US Olympic team, despite attempts by the mainstream media to pronounce the OPHR dead.¹⁸⁶

The dwindling support of the international apartheid movement not only highlights Edward's prioritization of the OPHR, but also a significant philosophical difference between the domestic and international movements. The international anti-apartheid movement based its protest on SAOC's clear violation of the Olympic Charter, whereas the OPHR tied its demands to not only integrating the US Olympic structure, but also to restoring the heavyweight championship to Ali and alleviating the effects

¹⁸³ *Chicago Defender*, 14 September 1968, p. 10; *New York Amsterdam News*, 21 September 1968, p. 23.

¹⁸⁴ *Muhammad Speaks*, 29 March 1968, p. 7-8.

¹⁸⁵ *Worker*, 23 April 1968, p. 16.

¹⁸⁶ Pete Axthelm, "The Angry Black Athlete," *Newsweek*, 15 July 1968, 56; Edwards, *Revolt*, 85.

of poverty and discrimination on black America in general. The latter two directives, as several critics of the OPHR pointed out, were beyond the means of Brundage and the USOC. However, Brutus noted that during the movement to reverse the IOC's decision, several of his African American allies criticized him for not using the anti-apartheid sports movement to leverage an end to apartheid in South Africa. Brutus, who participated in dozens of anti-apartheid groups, suggested that it was beyond the means of the anti-apartheid sports movement to end apartheid in all aspects of South African life. However, ending apartheid in South African sports, he believed, would motivate South Africans to challenge apartheid in other areas of South African society.¹⁸⁷ These differences, however, did not prevent Edwards and other related OPHR activist-athletes from continuing to support the international anti-apartheid sports movement after the SAOC issue was resolved.¹⁸⁸

Additionally, the IOC's reversal did not end African American participation in the anti-apartheid sports movement. In May, a number of black journalists and athletes spoke out against an attempt by Rhodesia, another apartheid-practicing nation, to enter the Olympics. The UN agreed and citing the Rhodesian government's violations of Africans' human rights, instructed its member-nations to deny entrance to anyone with a Rhodesian passport. That decision effectively excluded Rhodesia from the 1968 Olympics.¹⁸⁹ Additionally, the SAOC issue reemerged at the games and had a profound effect on the historical meaning of 1968 and the Mexico City Olympics. At the IOC sessions held at the games in the days before the Olympics opened, Brundage was reelected as the organization's chief executive. Black and African athletes arriving for the games and a number of IOC delegates, including Third World and Socialists members, used the press to express their disappointment and opposition, respectively. Mel Pender, an American black Olympian who had previously distanced himself from the OPHR, indicated that blacks and African Olympians were circulating a petition asking that Brundage be dismissed from the IOC. As will be demonstrated in chapter five, discontent with Brundage's support of SAOC and his

¹⁸⁷ Brutus, 133.

¹⁸⁸ Lapchick, 148, 184.

¹⁸⁹ Lapchick, 123-4.

vituperative opposition of the OPHR partially served as the catalysts for the Black Power fists protest now synonymous with the Mexico City Olympics.¹⁹⁰

The anti-apartheid campaign to expel South Africa from the Olympics, like the Defiance Campaign of 1952-1953 and the Sharpeville massacre of 1960, raised American's awareness of apartheid and motivated many blacks and leftist to continue to participate in the anti-apartheid movement. For instance, for several months after the reversal, the black press asked readers to support the anti-apartheid movement by boycotting US companies and banks that did business in South Africa and condemning the federal government for its tacit support of South Africa.¹⁹¹ Additionally, the black press, Edwards and several black athletes, most notably tennis star Arthur Ashe, continued to participate in the anti-apartheid sports movement, which successfully expelled South Africa from all international sports, including the Olympics, by 1971.¹⁹²

The SAOC issue and the successful February boycott of the NYAC raised the visibility and legitimacy of the OPHR and thus, were critical to combating the establishment's condemnation of the boycott proposal and demonstrating its feasibility in its early months (January-May 1968). The OPHR was also aided by several other events in the late spring. First, a partial fruition of a black Olympic boycott manifested in February and March, when more than twenty-five college basketball stars, black and white, declined invitations to the Olympic basketball trials. With the exception of Lew Alcindor, none named the OPHR as their reason. Several expressed academic concerns, citing the timing of the trials during the spring semester and that the summer Olympics would be held during the unusual fall semester month of October (because of Mexico City construction delays). Several others noted injuries, fatigue and professional concerns. Nevertheless, the team would be without the stalwart talent of

¹⁹⁰ *Los Angeles Times*, 4 October 1968, p. F9; *Daily World*, 10 October 1968, p. 12; 12 October 1968, p. 1, 12; 17 October 1968, p. 2.

¹⁹¹ *Daily World*, 26 July 1968, p. 8; *New York Amsterdam News*, 27 April 1968, p. 14; 25 May 1968, p. 35; *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 25 April 1968, p. D2.

¹⁹² *Daily World*, 11 October 1968, p. 12; *Black Times*, 22 April 1971, p. 24; *Chicago Defender*, 1 June 1970, p. 13; Lapchick, 193-6.

Alcindor, generally considered the best college player of the era, his two UCLA championship teammates, Lucuis Allen and Marcus Warren, and two other All-Americans, Wes Unseld and Elvin Hayes. As a result of the mass absences, the media speculated that the 1968 US Olympic basketball team would be the weakest in two decades and probably finish with less than a gold-medal for the first time in the games' history.¹⁹³

The most startling event of relevance to the OPHR was the assassination of King on the 4th of April. As a result, rioting exploded in more than 125 urban areas, and within a week, forty-six, mostly blacks, were killed, thirty-five thousand injured and thousands more arrested and billions of dollars in property destroyed.¹⁹⁴ Black athletes were among those aggrieved and radicalized. Within weeks, black student-athletes' protests were reported on more than ten campuses.¹⁹⁵ Black track and field athletes at the University of Texas-El Paso, for instance, refused to participate in a meet against a Mormon-affiliated university, citing both the Mormon Church's denunciation of blacks as spiritually inferior and the need to grieve King.¹⁹⁶ Ralph Boston, a 1964 Olympian and Army specialist who had previously opposed the OPHR, announced that he was now considering boycotting the games. Echoing a common sentiment among blacks at the moment, he lamented that King's strategy of non-violently campaigning for equality had failed and therefore, perhaps it was time to apply the more radical strategies being articulated by "people like Stokely Carmichael and Rap Brown and Harry Edwards."¹⁹⁷ Edwards believed that if the 1968 games had been held in the summer, as they usually were, there would have been a "total" black boycott of the US team.¹⁹⁸ The opening of the Olympics, however, was still six months away.

Black discontent, in the form of black student-athletes' protest at predominately white universities in the spring of 1968, however, proved to be the most beneficial to the OPHR. Joined by the

¹⁹³ Curry Kilpatrick, "The Team That Went Over the Hill," *Sports Illustrated*, 15 April 1968, 91-3; *New York Times*, 9 June 1968, p. SM90.

¹⁹⁴ Robert L. Allen, *Black Awakening in Capitalist America* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1992), 126; Adam Fairclough, *Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1995), 124.

¹⁹⁵ "All-American Problem," *Sports Illustrated*, 6 May 1968, p.8; *New York Times*, 19 May 1968, p. S16.

¹⁹⁶ Jack Olsen, "The Black Athlete- A Shameful Story: Part 3: In an Alien World," *Sports Illustrated*, 15 July 1968, 29-43.

¹⁹⁷ *Los Angeles Times*, 9 April 1968, p. B1; "Scorecard," *Sports Illustrated*, 15 April 1968, p. 21.

¹⁹⁸ *Los Angeles Times*, 12 April 1968, p. B13.

surrounding black communities, other activists and students, their protest disrupted college sports programs and fostered unfavorable publicity for their universities and white coaches.¹⁹⁹ Edwards and OPHR member Ken Noel helped organize many of these movements.²⁰⁰ By May, the mainstream press reported and the sports establishment worried that a black student-athletes' movement of national proportions was developing.²⁰¹ These student-athlete movements would allow the OCHR to retain a presence in the mainstream press in the months leading up to the Olympics.

¹⁹⁹ Edwards, *Revolt*, 80-88; *Washington Post*, 7 April 1968, p. C7.

²⁰⁰ Edwards, *Struggle*, 165, 182-3.

²⁰¹ "All-American Problem," *Sports Illustrated*, 6 May 1968, p.8; *New York Times*, 19 May 1968, p. S16.

Chapter V

“Revolt of the Black Athlete”: The Meanings of Black Protest in Sports in the Sixties and at the 1968 Olympics

Following the forced withdrawal of South Africa from the Olympic movement in late April 1968, the OPHR lacked legitimacy in the mainstream once again. However, the development of black student-athletes' movements on campuses across the country in the spring through the summer and into the fall of 1968 threatened to bolster black protest in sports, including a boycott of the Olympics in October. The mainstream press, however, responded by characterizing the movements as typical of Black Power; trivial and a product of black militants' coercion on athletes, typically non-militants, to protest. As a result, most Americans would never comprehend protest in sports, especially a black Olympic boycott, as a means to redress black grievances, but only as an ill-conceived tactic that would only regress race relations. The dominant notion of the boycott as a backward, dangerous idea in the mainstream press further concealed the influence of the establishment's repression on the OPHR. Contrary to the establishment's suggestion that a boycott did not manifest because black athletes were not committed activist, the second section of the chapter illustrates that establishment repression was a key obstacle to a successful Olympic boycott, even ultimately shaping black protest at the Olympics. In the wake of the Olympics, activist-athletes and their supporters had to compete with the mainstream press to define the meaning of their actions at the 1968 games.

In the fall of 1967, when black student-athletes began to protest *en masse* on predominately white college campuses, the mainstream press made no distinctions between those movements and the larger, encompassing Black Students' Movement, which it characterized as subversive. The mainstream press generally suggested that Black Power and black student activists were motivated by a degenerative angry militancy and their movements were characterized by a superficial emphasis on black agency. For instance, in the fall of 1967, *Time* characterized the Black Students' movements as “Negro

students...returning to campus with a new and aggressive pride in being black” that frequently disrupted campus and defied the traditional black advancement and dominant civil rights’ goal of integration.

According to *Time*, black students were motivated by demands for

all-Negro fraternities, surging memberships in “Afro-American” student-action groups, demands for more “black culture” in the curriculum and a growing scorn for the white, middle-class world that lies within reach of the college-trained Negro. The new mood ranges from angry militancy to a brotherly desire for mutual improvement- and it does not reject violence as one way to make the black presence felt.

The article placed the first student-athletes’ movement and Edwards’s “threat to burn down campus unless discrimination...stopped” at the school within the mainstreams’ understanding of Black Power and the Black Students’ movement as illogically militant and destructive.¹ The mainstream’s paradigm, however, usually omitted that a significant motivating factor in the development of Black Students’ movements were the various forums of socioeconomic, academic and cultural discrimination that blacks typically endured on predominately white campuses and the reluctance of white-dominated administrations to otherwise act to ameliorate those discriminations. This section of the chapter will illustrate that similar mainstream analyses and omissions characterized black movements against racism in sports in the mainstream press, thus undermining their legitimacy, as well as continuing to undermine the OPHR, in the public discourse.

Despite the occurrence of several black student-athlete movements in the fall of 1967, the eruption of black student-athletes’ movements across the country in the spring of 1968 startled the public and the white-controlled sports establishment. As illustrated in chapter two, prior to the Sixties, previous generations of black athletes routinely challenged the racism they encountered in white-controlled sports institutions, but had rarely organized or protested publicly. As a result, the white-controlled sports establishment perceived and disseminated the notion that blacks were grateful to be integrated into

¹ “Black Pride,” *Time*, 6 October 1967, 70; Harry Edwards, *Revolt of the Black Athlete* (New York: Free Press, 1969), 47; for a discussion of the mainstream interpretations of Black Power, see William Van DeBurg, *New Day in Babylon: The Black Power Movement and American Culture, 1965-1975* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 13-8.

predominately white institutions and for the opportunity to improve whites' image of their race.² Indeed, one activist supporter of athletes' protest noted, "the white American sports establishment...mistakenly assumed that the docility and acquiescence common in Negro athletes of the past was an inherent quality rather than a posture Negroes had adopted as the only way to survive a racist sports world."³ In the Sixties, as blacks organized to challenge the racism they encountered in white-controlled institutions, including the military, colleges and prisons, black athletes also challenged the discrimination they endured in the white-controlled sports establishment.⁴ Inspired by Muhammad Ali's continued fight against state repression, the OPHR and the leftist anti-apartheid movement to expel South Africa from the 1968 Olympics, black professional and student-athletes in the Sixties organized to protest the specific discriminations they encountered in sports and on campus and contributed to the civil rights and Black Power struggles of the period.⁵

The sports establishment's shock was noted in the mainstream press's initial coverage of black student-athletes' protest. In late May 1968, the *Washington Post* reported that black student-athletes had organized on twenty predominately white campuses and exasperatedly noted that the "number grows almost daily."⁶ The 6 May edition of *Sports Illustrated (SI)* also emphasized the unpredictable aggressive character of the movement when it reported that the "newly militant attitude of Negro college athletes...has spread to...Michigan State, a most unlikely place." In its determination to become a national power in big-time college athletics, Michigan State University (MSU) lobbied into the Big Ten, a prime intercollegiate athletic conference of Midwestern universities, and "recruited more Negro athletes than any other college" in the conference. Unlike other big-time programs that subscribed to quotas of playing only a few blacks at a time and only at certain positions, for several years, almost half the starters

² Jack Olsen, *The Black Athlete, A Shameful Story: The Myth of Integration in American Sport* (New York: Time-Life, 1969), 9.

³ Jack Scott, *The Athletic Revolution*, (New York: Free Press, 1971), 80.

⁴ Van DeBurg, 63-111, Max Elbaum, *Revolution in the Air: Sixties Radicals turn to Lenin, Mao and Che* (New York: Verso, 2002,) 31-2; for the protest of black soldiers in the period, see James E. Westheider, *Fighting on Two Fronts: African Americans and the Vietnam War* (New York: New York University Press, 1997).

⁵ *Daily Worker*, 26 May 1968, p. 4; "Olympic Jolt," *Life*, 15 March 1968, 20.

⁶ *Washington Post*, 26 May 1968, p. C4.

on MSU's football team were black, including its famed "Soul Brother" offensive backfield. Additionally, as the euphemism suggests, the school included blacks in its publicity efforts to attract attention to the football program and university. Consequently, its head coach Duffy Daugherty was known as "sensitive" to blacks' concerns and parlayed his rapport with them (as well as MSU's illicit financial support to athletes) into a winning big-time football tradition, including the 1965 national championship. Therefore, it was a "surprise," *SI* surmised, that a week earlier approximately twenty black players led by All-American tailback Lamar Thomas walked out of spring football practice and leveled several charges of anti-black discrimination against the athletic department. The article insinuated that if protests could occur at a program perceived as liberal as MSU, they were likely to occur at other schools. Indeed, the article concluded that white coaches across the nation were worrying that "If it could happen to Duffy..."⁷

By the end of the 1968 spring semester, black athletes would demonstrate on more than thirty-five campuses and, as one reporter investigating the movement noted, "many new protests are planned for the fall."⁸ These protests often disrupted the success of teams, attracted unwanted media attention, heightened racial tensions on campuses and occasionally resulted in the expulsion of student-athletes and jeopardized winning and coaches' jobs. In April, several black track athletes at the University of Texas-El Paso (UTEP) lost their scholarships after refusing to participate in a meet following the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. The turmoil all but ended championship expectations of the team and renewed black student protest at the school.⁹ The same month, after black student-athletes' protest racially factionalized the California-Berkeley men's basketball team, coach Rene Herrerias and athletic director Pete Newell were forced to resign their posts after being cited as racially insensitivity and mishandling the

⁷ "All-American Problem," *Sports Illustrated*, 6 May 1968, 8; for the development of big-time athletics at MSU, see Murray Sperber, *Onward Toward Victory: The Crisis that Shaped College Sports* (New York: Henry Holt, 1998), 364-76; and Beth J. Shapiro, "John Hannah and the Growth of Big-Time Intercollegiate Athletics at Michigan State University," *Journal of Sports History*, 10, 3 (Winter 1983), 33-4.

⁸ *Los Angeles Times*, 22 September 1968, p. A18; Pete Axthelm, "The Angry Black Athlete," *Newsweek*, 15 July 1968, 56-7.

⁹ Jack Olsen, "The Black Athlete- A Shameful Story: Part 3: In an Alien World," *Sports Illustrated*, 15 July 1968, 29-43.

situation.¹⁰ Over the next five years, as black student-athlete movements influenced the development of general student-athlete protests, similar results occurred at predominately white universities across the nation.¹¹ Penn State University football coach Joe Paterno recalled that black student-athletes' "protests swept the country like wildfire" in the Sixties and that coaches "whose schools were not hit, sat waiting fearfully for the other shoe to drop." Paterno and other white coaches lamented that these protests attracted the attention of "liberal whites" and "national magazines and periodicals," many of whom joined the athletes in challenging racism and exploitation in intercollegiate athletics, thus contributing to the turmoil that black student-athletes' movements caused in college athletics in the Sixties.¹²

As the eruption of student-athletes' protests drew substantial local and national coverage, so did the sports establishment's concern that the protests were disrupting athletics. On 19 May, the *New York Times* reported that currently "Negro athletes at 10 large American universities" were protesting. However, rather than discussing the concerns of the protesting athletes, the article listed the participatory status of student-athletes on a case by case basis. At the universities of Oklahoma and Texas-El Paso, for instance, blacks had been suspended from teams after presenting their grievances and organizing, but had since been reinstated at Oklahoma. At Kansas, blacks boycotted spring football drills for two days, but returned after the administration agreed to place blacks on the cheerleading squad, offer a black history course, increase black faculty and discuss the hiring of black assistant coaches. At the University of Washington, blacks threatened to boycott if their grievances were not readily addressed, but the action was slow in materializing. Only in one instance, at California-Berkeley, the *Times* noted, were blacks boycotting. By contrast the article did not explore what motivated black student-athletes' protests and only referenced that the athletes "have presented demands ranging from the appointment of Negro coaches to the selection of a Negro girl cheerleader, and threatened boycotts." The coverage suggests that the sports establishment seemed as concerned, if not more, with the effect of protest on a team's

¹⁰ *Los Angeles Times*, 12 April 1968, p. B3; 13 March 1968, p. D3; Edwards, *Revolt*, 80-1.

¹¹ *Los Angeles Times*, 13 December 1970, p. 205; Scott, v-vi.

¹² Melvin D. Hyman and Gordon S. White, Jr., *Joe Paterno: "Football My Way"* (New York: MacMillan, 1971), 153; also see John Underwood, "The Desperate Coach," *Sports Illustrated*, 25 August 1969, 73-4.

performance as the causes of black athletes' protests. Most mainstream articles similarly only referenced the academic, social and economic discrimination practices that blacks encountered in white-controlled intercollegiate sports and rarely concluded that these practices motivated their protests.¹³

In addition to marginalizing and/or omitting their academic, economic and athletic grievances, much of the mainstream press trivialized the black student-athletes' social and cultural grievances, such as the demand for black cheerleaders and the desire to wear the "natural" hairstyles and goatees. *SI* noted that while several of the charges by MSU's black athletes had validity, others, such as the demand for black cheerleaders "sounded silly."¹⁴ *Look* also noted that blacks did have some "significant" demands, but the demand for black cheerleaders was among the "trivial."¹⁵ The dismissal of blacks' cultural concerns partially resulted from many whites' insensitivity or ignorance about emerging and shifting discourses of black cultural liberation in the Sixties. One black athlete at MSU concluded, "That the most humiliating thing about my career was to play my heart out and not even have a black cheerleader to encourage me." It was tantamount, he suggested, to "A half hour after the game, [when] you were just another black boy walking down the Grand River," the main college drag, encountering familiar anti-black discriminations. Furthermore, for many blacks in the period, so-called "trivial" cultural practices, such as the "afro," were visible indicators of the moral and cultural authority they invested in their efforts to realize black equality and self-determination. After losing a job because of her "natural," Linda Evans, wife of SJSU sprinter Lee Evans, remarked, "I won't straighten my hair for those white devils, unless they want to kink their hair for me." Lee later added that in 1967, an afro was a "statement of black nationalism," indicating that you were "proud" to be "black."¹⁶ Although misconstrued and derisively commented on in the mainstream, black student-athletes' insistence on integrated cheerleading squads, wearing naturals, Malcolm X-like goatees, dashikis and other African-themed symbols and respect for

¹³ *New York Times*, 19 May 1968, p. S16; for other examples see, *Washington Post*, 26 May 1968, p. C4; Dick Schapp, "Revolt of the Black Athletes," *Look*, 6 August 1968, 72.

¹⁴ "All-American Problem," 8.

¹⁵ Schapp, 72.

¹⁶ Axthelm, "Angry Black Athlete," 58-9; Kenny Moore, "A Courageous Stand," *Sports Illustrated*, 5 August 1991, 66; for a discussion of Sixties "soul" as a culture of black liberation, see Robin D. G. Kelley, *YO' mama's dysfunctional!: fighting the cultural wars in urban america* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997), 23-6.

their African and Islamic spiritual and name conversions, stood alongside demands for Black Studies and faculty and an end to *de facto* discrimination as issues that motivated black protest and establishment recalcitrance.¹⁷

In the absence of any detailed discussion of the housing, academic and socioeconomic discrimination and the trivialization of black's cultural and social demands, mainstream coverage once again asserted that black athletes were being coerced by militants (like Edwards) into protesting, as well as manifesting Black Power's superficial emphasis in being black and irrational defiance. The *Times* article, for instance, added that at Berkeley blacks "demanded the right to say who should play what position and when."¹⁸ The article, however, avoided any reference to "stacking," a common practice of regulating blacks to certain positions to limit the number on the roster or in the game simultaneously. The dominance of these assertions in shaping the public's opinion of the movement against racism in sports continues to be reflected in the historiography, which because of its dependency on the mainstream sources, also ignores the actual discriminatory practices that blacks endured and suggest their motivations were either superficial or the result of black militant peer pressure.¹⁹

Alternative conceptions of black student-athletes' protest, however, are found, most notably in leftist and black radical periodicals. The *Worker*, the CPUSA's newspaper, for instance, firmly articulated that black student-athletes' "grievances center on offcampus housing, academic advice and counseling, summer jobs, black scholarship quotas and unfair treatment from white coaches." In other words, the leftist periodical reported that the blacks were motivated by the detrimental educational and socioeconomic impact that racial discrimination in the white-controlled sports establishment had on their lives. As a result, the *Worker* expected "More and more action against racism by black athletes...Those

¹⁷ "Catching it All: Ahmad Rashad has gone from All-Pro Receiver to All-Network Announcer," *Cigar Aficionado*, Winter 1994, 45; Harry Edwards, *Sociology of Sport* (Homewood, IL: Dorsey Press, 1969), 146-7; William Johnson, "Collision on the New Underground Railroad," *Sports Illustrated*, 12 February 1968, 52-3; For a mainstream discussion of black athlete and culture issues, see John Underwood, "Part 2: Desperate Coach, Shave off that Thing!," *Sports Illustrated*, 1 September 1969, 21-7.

¹⁸ *New York Times*, 19 May 1968, p. S16.

¹⁹ David K. Wiggins, *Glory Bound: Black Athletes in White America* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1997), 148-51.

school officials, coaches and students which refuse black students first class citizenship cannot longer expect first class athletics from them.”²⁰ William L. Patterson, a black Communist, noted that the mainstream media’s description of black athletes’ activism was “misleading” and “a subtle form of racism” aimed at stemming further protest that might affect the “dollars and cents” of the white-controlled sports establishment.²¹

Although the student-athletes’ motivations and demands were initially trivialized in the mainstream press, the rapid spread of the student-athlete movements in the spring of 1968 indicated that black and student protest “moved into the locker rooms of college athletics” and threatened to impair college athletics and strengthen the OPHR’s drive to boycott the 1968 summer Olympics.²² As a result, the mainstream media began to issue another interpretation of black student-athletes’ grievances; the campus movements were partial of Edwards’s plot to handicap the US Olympic team. *The New York Times* reported that Edwards was attempting to boost “his revolt” by persuading black athletes across the country to support Black Students’ movements on their campuses.²³ *The Washington Post* added that Edwards lead the “battle for the Negro athlete’s mind” against the establishment.²⁴ *Look* noted that without Edwards, “the revolt might fizzle and die” because until his advocacy blacks typically endured the racism they encountered in sports quietly.²⁵ According to these articles, Edwards was a typical irrational black student militant; although he had attended a predominately white college, he was motivated by a bitterness and anger fomented during his upbringing in the “ghetto,” which continued to render him dysfunctional and incapable of functioning in white, normative environments.²⁶ In addition to

²⁰ *The Worker*, 26 May 1968, p. 4; also see 6 February 1968, p. 4; 18 February 1968, S3.

²¹ William L. Patterson, “The Black Athlete and Democracy USA,” *Black Panther Party*, 13 December 1969, p. 13; for the mainstream media establishment, see Stokely Carmichael, “Towards Black Liberation,” in *Black Fire: An Anthology of Afro-American Writing* ed. by LeRoi Jones and Larry Neal (New York, Morrow, 1968), 119-22; Edwards, *Revolt*, 30-4.

²² “Olympic Jolt,” 20; Arnold Hano, “The Black Rebel who ‘Whitelists’ the Olympics,” *New York Times*, 12 May 1968, 32.

²³ Hano, 39.

²⁴ *Washington Post*, 26 May 1968, p. C4.

²⁵ Schapp, 72-3.

²⁶ Following the proliferation of civil unrest and riots in the 1960s, ethnographers, usually white, studying the “ghetto” concluded that socialization in inner city black America and its culture of poverty made normative behavior, implied as “white,” alien to most, if not all of its black residents. As a result many blacks remained

organizing the drive to boycott the US Olympic team, the articles suggested that his militancy was evidenced in his dress, manner and words. One reporter noted that in the course of an hour long interview, Edwards never smiled and that “cracker” was the “dominant word in his conversation.”²⁷ Another reported that he constantly referred to “Lynchin’ Baines Johnson” and that other “Cracker Dick Nixon.”²⁸ Edwards, they also noted, emphatically did not accept nonviolence as a means of black advancement. Shortly after the assassination of King, he responded to a reporter that the federal government should kill those southern whites who murdered blacks and civil rights workers with “dull axes,” just “as a gesture of good faith” to black America. Edwards also reportedly suggested that the ardency of the black struggle dictated that no black man should die a natural death, but should die fighting to obtain the realization of black equality.²⁹ Reporters seemed shocked that Edwards, whose calculated media savvy, wit and education otherwise suggested sophistication and respectability, expressed such a profound lack of faith in whites and liberal gradualism. Although several reporters understood that Edwards’s “firebrand” image was calculated to capitalize on the mainstream’s fascination with militants, “gut and gutter-tough language of Black Power,” another reporter noted, was interpreted as evidence of his hatred of whites and the irrational defiance and destructiveness that characterized militants.³⁰

As Edwards later acknowledged, he cultivated the militant image to attract media attention to the boycott proposal. But, he acknowledged, the media most often centered attention on him.³¹ As the articles cited above illustrate, the media often portrayed Edwards as the inventor or cause of the black movement against discrimination in sport. Edwards, however, often attempted to redirect the media’s attention to blacks’ dissatisfaction with the “institutionalized racism” that continued to detrimentally shape black life in the US. In April 1968, shortly after several basketball players, black and white,

incapable of succeeding and frustrated in an increasingly integrated society; Kelley, *YO’ mama’s dysfunctional*, 16-7.

²⁷ *Los Angeles Times*, 31 March 1968, p. H1, 11; *Washington Post*, 7 April 1968, p. C7; also see Hano, 42-44.

²⁸ Schapp, 72.

²⁹ Hano, 50.

³⁰ “Olympic Jolt,” 20; Hano, 32, 39.

³¹ Harry Edwards, *The Struggle that Must Be* (New York: Macmillan, 1980), 169.

spurned the Olympic trials and as black and leftist Americans joined the international protest against South Africa's participation in the Olympics, Edwards explained that the movement "is taking on a great many new dimensions. It's not just my thing. It's not just me picketing the New York Athletic Club track meet and the Mathis-Frazier fight, saying 'no' to the Olympic teams. It's black people."³² Contrary to the mainstream's conception of Edwards, he, as well as many of activists he worked with, understood him as the movement's prime national organizer and spokesperson, rather than a Svengali and strong man. Ewart Brown, a Howard University student activist, explained that Edwards did not cause black student-athletes to protest "as thought by remote control. He does not push a button and there is an uprising." As the most prominent spokesperson for the black protest movement in sports, Edwards was "spreading awareness" that black athletes on disparate campuses encountered similar forms of racial discrimination and he counseled and connected those movements. As a result of his efforts, Brown noted, "The word is spreading from West Coast to East Coast. It's a mood. Harry Edwards has done a lot to create it."³³ Pete Axthelm, a young white reporter, agreed. He surmised that although Edwards was prone to "Demagoguery, hysteria, fanaticism," "If the colorful quotes were all Edwards had to offer college athletes...it is doubtful if the Olympic Project would have gotten much past the talking stage." Edwards, as Axthelm wrote, was "in good position to understand how it feels to be black and athlete: he is both" and therefore capable of articulating their grievances.³⁴ Nevertheless, the perception of Edwards as black militant manipulating athletes into activism through peer pressure, as the mainstream suggested, predominated, influencing how many potential black Olympians understood the movement. After meeting Edwards for the first time, Charlie Green, a long jumper and student at the University of Nebraska, remarked that "I was misled by newspaper reports that made Harry Edwards sound like some kind of fanatic." Green, however, was "impressed" by Edwards.³⁵

³² *Washington Post*, 7 April 1968, p. C7.

³³ *Washington Post*, 26 May 1968, p. C4.

³⁴ *Los Angeles Times*, 22 September 1968, p. A17.

³⁵ Axthelm, "The Angry Black Athlete," 60.

Although there were exceptions, such as Axthelm's reporting and the *Wall Street Journal's* lone discussion of black protest in sports, the mainstream media's trivialization of black athletes' motivations and its emphasis on Edwards suggested that black student-athletes' movements were archetypal of the mainstream's understanding of Black Power militancy as a discourse of destructiveness, illogical defiance and a superficial emphasis on black agency.³⁶

With *Sports Illustrated's* publication of Jack Olsen's five part series "The Black Athlete-A Shameful Story" in July 1968, the establishments' explanation received a tremendous challenge. *SI* had the largest international circulation of any sports publication and Olsen was a well-respected sports journalist with several acclaimed titles to his credit.³⁷ From the outset, Olsen warned that the series would challenge the accepted axiom that white-controlled sports institutions provided blacks with tremendous, unparalleled opportunities for individual and group advancement. He wrote that while "The cliché that sports has been good to the Negro has been accepted by black and white, liberal and conservative, intellectual and red-neck," black athletes "Almost to a man" say they are "dissatisfied, disgruntled and disillusioned." They felt "dehumanized, exploited and discarded" by the sports establishment and, to his disbelief, said they were "happier back in the ghetto." He further noted that his investigation had been spurred by the proliferation of black student-athletes' movements and the OPHR. After traveling the country to interview dozens of black athletes and white coaches and administrators, the first paragraph of the first article concluded that "the roots and validity of the black athlete's unrest" were "well founded."³⁸

Olsen's first article explained that prior to entering white-controlled intercollegiate athletics, most black athletes believed that sports provided them an opportunity to escape racism and the limited socioeconomic opportunities that circumscribed black life, but quickly found themselves the victims of a

³⁶ Axthelm, "The Angry Black Athlete," 56-60; *Wall Street Journal*, 19 June 1968, p. 1; for a discussion of mainstream perceptions of Black Power, see Van DeBurg, 13-8.

³⁷ Michael MacCambridge, *The Franchise: A History of Sports Illustrated Magazine* (New York: Hyperion, 1997), 159.

³⁸ Jack Olsen, "The Black Athlete- A Shameful Story: Part 1: The Cruel Deception," *Sports Illustrated*, 1 July 1968, 12.

“cruel deception.” He found that black athletes were unmercifully exploited; they were recruited to bolster a school’s chances of winning athletic contests, but in most instances, little regard was given to their education, graduation or to ensure that they lead healthy social and cultural lives in predominately white university communities. Olsen noted that in many instances, a school’s use of blacks as an athletic commodity was discernable by its recruitment of blacks, who, because of inadequate rural Jim Crow and/or underfunded urban schools, were ill-prepared to handle academics at many of the nation’s leading universities. Discrimination was further perpetuated by coercing them to enroll in courses that keep them eligible to participate in sports, but often did not earn them credits toward a degree. As a result, after exhausting his athletic scholarship, it was typical for a black athlete at a predominately white school to be substantially short of credits necessary for a degree and lack the financial means to complete his education. If the athlete was exceptional, he might earn a professional sports contract. However, as Olsen demonstrated, that was rare. Nevertheless, the publicity that black athletes typically garnered only furthered the well-established social belief that sports provided blacks with a tremendous opportunity for advancement. Additionally, Olsen demonstrated that the same discrimination and slights that blacks experienced in everyday society occurred with as much frequency on predominately white campuses. In locations distant from indigenous black populations, blacks were often socially isolated and culturally alienated. Olsen noted that until recently, black athletes were “expected to...take it, keep his mouth shut and perform valiantly in front of cheering white audiences” and be grateful for the opportunity to be integrated into a predominately white institution and to improve whites’ image of blacks. Although, Olsen made little attempt to incorporate the wider Black Students’ movement, he did suggest that the advancement goals of younger blacks exceeded that of integration. They were not satisfied with simply entrance into white-controlled institutions, but were also demanding the same privileges and agency, “dignity and humanity” as they referred to it, as their white counterparts. And that, Olsen noted, set them on a collision course with those who controlled intercollegiate sports, namely white coaches and athletic administrators.³⁹

³⁹ Olsen, “The Black Athlete- A Shameful Story: Part 1: The Cruel Deception,”12-18.

Olsen's second installment noted that black student-athletes' athletic, academic and social lives were guided by white coaches, who in addition to being as racially insensitive, if not racist, as other whites, were foremost and ultimately concerned with winning and brooked no actions or controversies that might hinder that goal. Although coaches were often lauded as altruistic men who cultivated character in the nation's youth, Olsen suggested that the fallacy of the liberality of coaches, other white athletic personal and most predominately white universities was exposed by their ardent opposition to interracial dating. In many instances, the only blacks enrolled at white universities were black athletes and with few or no black woman on campus or in the vicinity, they dated white coeds. Olsen detailed that it was typical for black athletes to receive an indirect warning to terminate such relationships. In other instances, blacks were dismissed from the team and/or had their scholarships revoked. In addition, white teammates, students and faculty sometimes harassed the student-athlete and/or the coed. Although white coaches usually blamed the intolerance on recalcitrant boosters, alumni or the surrounding community and "society," black athletes noted that it was just one of several racist policies that white coaches enforced. Olsen documented that despite the post-war emphasis on winning, which seemingly dictated playing the best athletes regardless of race, there was a history of discrimination on the fields and courts at many schools across the country. First, most predominately white schools only recruited blacks to participate in football and men's basketball, the college sports that generated the most revenue and publicity. However, in an effort to balance winning and the favor of their white fan base, boosters and alumni, coaches often employed quotas that limited the number of blacks on the team and "stacked" blacks at certain peripheral playing positions to limit the number they played simultaneously. Few teams, save those at small obscure schools pursuing an entrance into "big-time" athletics and the money and exposure it wrought, started a majority black lineup. Black athletes interviewed also noted that it was typical to be assigned segregated accommodations on road trips, to be the butt of their coaches and teammates' racial jokes and harassment and to be misled about injuries. As a result, Olsen found that contrary to the popularly-accepted axiom that college sports and teamwork fostered racial conciliation, most blacks in the white-controlled sports establishment failed to develop few, if any, meaning

relationships with whites. Nevertheless, most whites coaching integrated teams reveled in the media notion that they were playing a significant role in improving race relations. However, the reality of the situation, Olsen concluded, was that blacks in sports were circumscribed to an inferior position, just as they continued to be in other white-controlled institutions. He concluded that as of 1968, college sports remained “white men’s pursuits. The Negro may integrate them, or even almost take them over, as in college and pro basketball, but the essential character of the game, the ethics and folkways remain white. The Negro may be permitted to help out, but his role is clearly defined: he is a hired performer and he has a job only so long as he knows his place in the white game and stays in it.”⁴⁰

Although Olsen documented racism and insensitivity at such universities as Kansas, Washington and UCLA, his third article suggested that it was at UTEP, known as a Texas Western until 1967, that discrimination was most ironic. In 1966, on the strength of an all-black starting five and two black reserves, Texas Western won the NCAA men’s basketball championship. It was a significant accomplishment for a school with little athletic tradition to speak of until the 1950s. Like a number of other small, private colleges and second and third-tier state universities that were unable to capitalize on the post-war sports revenue boom because they were unable to successfully recruit against better endowed, more prestigious institutions, Texas Western began offering athletic scholarships to blacks in the 1950s. The subsequent fortune and fame that followed its athletic success allowed the school to double its enrollment by the 1960s and expand its facilities. Additionally, Texas Western’s 1966 championship came to be regarded as a hallmark in both society and sport. In the title game, the Miner’s defeated the all-white perennially contending and southern stalwart Kentucky Wildcats program and their legendary coach Adolph Rudd, a suspected bigot. In the coming years, observers would suggest that the occurrence was one of two games that signaled that no team could expect to contend in the “big-time” without black talent and as a result, segregated white universities in Dixie finally began offering athletic

⁴⁰ Jack Olsen, “The Black Athlete- A Shameful Story: Part 2: Pride and Prejudice,” *Sports Illustrated*, 8 July 1968, 18-27; quote on pgs. 26-7; for a discussion of black agency in mid Twentieth Century white-controlled institutions, see Steve Estes, *I am a Man!: Race, Manhood and the Civil Rights Movement* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 1-9.

scholarships to blacks. Despite its dependency on blacks, however, Olsen documented that at UTEP, blacks endured the gamut of athletic, academic, economic and social discrimination. They had organized and successfully forced the school to address some of their grievances in the mid-1960s, but the current crisis at the school, Olsen suggested, exemplified the white insensitivity that would continue to fuel black protest at schools across the country. Following the assassination of King on 4 April, several blacks on UTEP's national contending track and field team, including likely Olympic long jumper Bob Beamon, suggested the team withdraw from a meet that coming weekend to mourn their slain hero. Their request was denied. The next week, eight blacks decided to boycott a meet at Brigham Young University in Utah because of the school's affiliation with the Mormon Church, an entity which deemed blacks inferior and denied them priesthood. In a decision upheld by the athletic department, the athletes were expelled from the team by the track coach and told that their scholarships would be terminated. As they and concerned faculty and students continued to seek redress, Olsen reported that the athletic department had quietly decided to curb its recruitment of blacks and that track coach Wayne Vandenberg seemed more distraught about the loss of a potential national track and field championship, than the education and concerns of the student-athletes.⁴¹

The last two articles of the series detailed the racial tensions among players that fractured the championship hopes of the NFL's Cleveland Browns and the prejudice that prevented retired black players from obtaining coaching, front office and other professional jobs in the sports establishment.⁴²

The strength of Olsen's series was the dozens of interviews with both black athletes and white sports officials. The interviews revealed the asininity of white coaches who causally called blacks "nigger" and threatened to terminate their scholarships if they dated white coeds, but yet believed they had rapport with blacks and basked in their contributions to race relations.⁴³ They further highlighted the

⁴¹ Olsen, "The Black Athlete- A Shameful Story: Part 3: In an Alien World," 29-43; for a reading of the significance of the 1966 NCAA basketball championship game, see Sperber, 343.

⁴² Jack Olsen, "The Black Athlete- A Shameful Story: Part 4: In the Back of the Bus," *Sports Illustrated*, 22 July 1968, 28-41; Jack Olsen, "The Black Athlete- A Shameful Story: Part 5: The Anguish of a Team Divided," *Sports Illustrated*, 29 July 1968, 20-35.

⁴³ Olsen, "In an Alien World," 29-35.

resentment of young black men who, after being purposely misled about academic and social life at predominately white schools and career threatening injuries, mistrusted white coaches and athletic trainers, respectively. Olsen further allowed black student-athletes to clarify that contrary to racist stereotypes, they were not particularly fascinated with white girls. One athlete explained, “But we *do* want to date. *Anybody*. Black girls, purple girls, striped girls. And if there’s nobody else available, then white girls.”⁴⁴ The results of the numerous firsthand accounts were that Olsen’s condemnation of the white-controlled college sports establishment was deemed credible. Indeed, one reviewer surmised that because Olsen made “liberal use of the personal experiences of many players in many sports and citing names and places, the author effectively achieves his purpose” of proving the axiom that sports facilitated meaningful integration in sports was a myth. “The writing technique tends to become repetitious, but it is hard to see how the author could have achieved the effect otherwise.”⁴⁵ Indeed, one historian has suggested that it was necessary for Olsen to engage in such a muckraking detailing of discrimination to combat the hegemony of the belief that blacks were treated equally in white-controlled sports institutions.⁴⁶

Another indication of the effectiveness of the series is the extensive and impassioned public response it engendered. Michael McCambridge, author of *The Franchise: A History of Sports Illustrated Magazine*, notes that the series “elicited over a thousand letters, the largest of any story in history of the magazine.”⁴⁷ Most of the responses reprinted in *SI* were affirmative; dozens of readers thanked Olsen for his effort and *SI* for having the courage to print the series. Several readers explicitly noted that the series destroyed the belief that sports provided a notable example of racial advancement in American society. Benjamin Davis wrote that “Not only have you shot down the absurd notion that sports got rid of

⁴⁴ Olsen, “In an Alien World,” 33; *emphasis in text*.

⁴⁵ A. L. Fleming quoted in *Book Review Digest 1969*, (Bronx, NY: H. W. Wilson, 1970), 995; originally published in *Bestseller*, 15 March 1969, 90; Olsen developed the articles into a manuscript which was published later that year; Jack Olsen, *The Black Athlete- Shameful Story: The Myth of Integration in American Sport* (New York: Time Life, 1968).

⁴⁶ Adolph L. Grundman, “The Image of Intercollegiate Sports and the Civil Rights Movement: An Historian’s View,” *Arena Review*, 3, (1979), 17.

⁴⁷ MacCambridge, 162.

prejudice, but your able series reveals with startling clarity the savage racism throughout our society.”⁴⁸

Others wrote in to name other schools that also discriminated against black athletes, thus validating Olsen’s argument that racism was as pervasive in sports as it was in society.⁴⁹

The black and liberal press also applauded the series. After the first article, *The New York Amsterdam News* wrote that Olsen’s work reinforces “Our long suffering cry in the wilderness, about the blatant, arrogant and shameless exploitation of the black athlete in all segments of sports.” The paper offered Olsen praise in the black vernacular of the day, declaring his series “tells it like it is.”⁵⁰ Following subsequent articles, the paper carried detailed summaries and similar praise for Olsen and *SI*.⁵¹ Also of note, “Doc” Young of the *Chicago Defender*, a staunch opponent of black protest in sports, declared the series “will do a lot to clean up the remaining inequities in sports. Hurray for Jack Olsen- and for *Sports Illustrated*.”⁵² *The Nation* and the *Daily World*, two influential periodicals on the ideological left, also encouraged people to read the series.⁵³

The series also spurred several readers to take action to negate the exploitation of black athletes and challenge racism. One reader reportedly founded the Black Athlete’s Fund of Kansas City to “provide high school coaches teaching in the ghetto with money so that they can help these athletes without having to reach into their own pockets” and a senior staff member at the Brookings Institution planned to include the articles in a packet of important public-policy readings that government and corporate leaders would be required to read in the institute’s executive development conferences.⁵⁴ The third article also brought swift public condemnation down upon UTEP’s athletic department and administration. In the week after the article, a faculty petition supporting the students was circulated, students organized to present their opinions on the matter and a joint faculty-student committee was established to investigate and make recommendations to combat discrimination in the athletic

⁴⁸ “19th Hole: The Readers Take Over,” *Sports Illustrated*, 5 August 1968, 68.

⁴⁹ “19th Hole: The Readers Take Over,” *Sports Illustrated*, 29 July 1968, 63;

⁵⁰ *New York Amsterdam News*, 13 July 1968, p. 31.

⁵¹ *New York Amsterdam News*, 20 July 1968, p. 25; 17 August, 1968, p. 20.

⁵² *Chicago Defender*, 11 July 1968, p. 40.

⁵³ *Daily World*, 24 July 1968, p. 8; “Black Hired Hands,” *The Nation*, 5 August 1968, p. 68.

⁵⁴ “19th Hole: The Readers Take Over,” *Sports Illustrated*, 22 July 1968, 71-2.

department.⁵⁵ Eventually, two professors, a former student body president and the wife of one of the dismissed athletes wrote to *SI* to confirm and add details to Olsen's description of anti-black discrimination on the El-Paso campus. Along with *The Nation*, they also solicited for the Dissociated Students Fund, an attempt to raise tuition for the disaffected students.⁵⁶

The praise, public outcry and action were indicative of the increased sympathy that the Olsen series generated for black activist-athletes and their struggle for dignity and humanity. One respondent to *SI*, for instance, noted that "I am filled with a sense of anger and pity...at those of us who place more value on a championship team" than equality and education. He declared that Olsen "presented a clear understanding of the reasons for the recent revolt of the Negro athlete" and as a result, "He [black activist-athletes] has my full support."⁵⁷ *The Amsterdam News* also suggested that the persuasiveness of the series would alter the opinion of anyone who previously disagreed with black activists' "negative attitude to the forthcoming Mexican Olympics."⁵⁸ According to MacCambridge, "The Black Athlete" series became "the single most important piece in *SI*'s history, clearly changing the terms of the debate about the black athlete." Black athletes had and would continue to detail the discrimination they endured in their autobiographies. However, the primacy and ardent defense of the belief that black athletes improved whites' image of blacks that dominated in both the mainstream and black press demurred assertions of institutionalized racism in white-controlled sports.⁵⁹ Olsen's series, however, not only increased awareness of discrimination in sports, thus increasing the legitimacy of the OPHR, but also spurred discussion of other forms of discrimination in sports. Over the next decade, dozens of popular and academic articles and books would validate Olsen's conclusions. Additionally, as the Sixties continued, the black student-athletes' movement expanded into a general protest movement against

⁵⁵ *Chicago Defender*, 3 July 1968, p. 38; "The 19th Hole: The Readers Take Over," *Sports Illustrated*, 19 August 1968, 63.

⁵⁶ "Black Hired Hands," 68; "19th Hole: The Readers Take Over," *Sports Illustrated*, 29 July 1968, 62-3; 5 August 1968, 67.

⁵⁷ "19th Hole: The Readers Take Over," *Sports Illustrated*, 29 July 1968, 64.

⁵⁸ *New York Amsterdam News*, 13 July 1968, p. 31

⁵⁹ For an example of the ardency and defense, see "Negro Athletes and Civil Rights," *Sepia*, June 1964, 35-39; for criticism of the ardency of the belief, see Dan Parker, "How Democratic is US Sports?," *Negro Digest*, January 1950, 52-3; originally published in *Sport (magazine)*.

conservative authoritarianism (*loco parentis*) in sports. In the immediate years following Olsen's Black Athlete series, *SI* would also examine gender, sexual and physical discrimination in sports.⁶⁰

By contrast, mainstream periodicals, including *the New York Times*, *Los Angeles* and *Washington Post*, all of which devoutly covered OPHR developments, were conspicuously silent concerning the *SI* series. That response or the lack thereof was indicative of the mainstream sports press' past reactions to scandals in intercollegiate sports. Historian Murray Sperber explains that following the discovery of widespread academic cheating and "point-shaving," an illicit gambling activity, among college basketball players in the early 1950s and again in the early 1960s, most mainstream sports writers were reluctant to scrutinize college sports. The initial scandals were discovered by New York City district attorneys who eventually traced organized gambling ties to more than eighty players at twelve schools across the nation, including past championship teams at City College in New York and Kentucky. Sperber and other observers note that the number of schools and players involved were actually exponentially larger, but the official statistics were limited by the reluctance of authorities in many regions and college towns to investigate for fear of damaging the reputations their local universities and sports heroes. Sperber notes that although most sportswriters were also aware of the pervasiveness of the academic fraud, illegal finances and gambling activities in college athletics, they understood that by publicizing the activities, they would be undermining an established societal rationale for the existence and huge expenditure of college sports in the academy; the myth, which sports writers helped promulgate, that intercollegiate sports cultivated "character" in young men. By sully college sports, they would be participating in the demise of their own livelihoods. Additionally, criticism risked ending valuable cooperation with coaches and athletic departments that enhanced the effectiveness of many sportswriters. Resultantly, rather than attribute the gambling to a culture of financial corruption, academic fraud and lack of institutional control that permeated big-time college athletics, the mainstream press at first assigned the corruption to New York City area schools, and after discovering scandals at other schools, deemed the guilty players as

⁶⁰ MacCambridge, 163.

aberrations and incorrigible, thus absolving coaches and administrators that clearly had knowledge of their student-athletes' gambling activities.⁶¹

As student-athlete protests continue to spread across the nation in the Sixties, the mainstream press and sports establishment would eventually put forward a similar explanation for campus unrest.⁶² However, the mainstream press' initial silence was an attempt to deny or delay the validity of the Olsen's series and the grievances of black athletes, because by participating in their dissemination, the press would be further admitting that a culture of academic, recruiting, financial and moral corruption, which to the disdain of reform-minded academicians, continued to permeate intercollegiate athletics in the Sixties.⁶³ Indeed, a University of Wisconsin professor noted that the exploitation of black athletes reflected the continued detriment of commercialized sports on academia. He advocated that *SI* not "restrict your [investigations] to the black athlete. There are a hell of a lot white boys being exploited, too."⁶⁴

The white-controlled sports establishment, however, worried out loud and in print that the series would have a negative effect on college sports, their school's reputation and their job security. The athletic director at Alleghany Community College in Pittsburgh criticized Olsen for the series' general thesis that discrimination and exploitation were pervasive in intercollegiate athletics. As far as he was concerned, the first article was "a combination of half truths carefully selected from a group of exceptions and woven into a tale that does nothing but misrepresented the actions of college athletics and attempt to destroy the individual athlete, black and white, the individual coach and individual college through the nation." He did acknowledge that there were many "injustices," but asked Olsen to "Let the American

⁶¹ Sperber, 296-328, 459-468.

⁶² As athletic protest continued to spread to disparate campuses and encompassed class, generational and gender issues that garnered the involvement of white student-athletes, establishment representatives, including coaches, journalists and former athletes eventually noted that because sports fostered traditional American values, it, like many institutions was being attacked by hippies, militants and other Communist-inspired subversives who were attempting to destroy the United States; for examples of this argument, see "Militant Groups doing a Great Disservice to Black College Athletes," *NCAA News*, December 1969, 2-3; Max Rafferty, "Intercollegiate Athletics: The Gathering Storm," in *The Athletic Revolution* ed. by Jack Scott, (New York: The Free Press, 1971), 13-22; John Underwood, "The Desperate Coach," *Sports Illustrated*, 25 August 1969; John Underwood, "Concessions and Lies," *Sports Illustrated*, 8 September 1969.

⁶³ Paul H. Giddens, "The Scramble for College Athletes," *Atlantic Monthly*, December 1965, 49-52.

⁶⁴ "19th Hole: The Readers Take Over," *Sports Illustrated*, 22 July 1968, 71.

public know of the injustice and where it has taken place, but do not condemn the whole of collegiate athletics because of the actions of a few.”⁶⁵ He was not alone in his criticism. Years later, another coach remembered that “not all coaches or colleges were guilty but, unhappily, critics were quick to lump the good one with the defenders.”⁶⁶ Perhaps for that reason, several coaches from schools not mentioned in the series wrote in to assure readers that racial discrimination was not occurring in their programs.⁶⁷ Their responses indicated that within the sports establishment, many anticipated that Olsen’s exposé would have negative consequences for intercollegiate athletics.⁶⁸

By refusing to validate the grievances of black protesting athletes, the mainstream media continued to assert that black student-athletes movements were the product of the era’s superficial black militancy and black militant coercion on the historically docile black athlete. Thirty-seven years after participating in both black student-athlete protests and the black drive to boycott the 1968 Olympics, John Carlos hinted, although somewhat inaccurately, at the mainstream media’s power to construe the perception of his and fellow black athletes’ activism. When asked about the “Revolt of the Black Athlete,” the most popular appellation applied to black athlete’s activism in the Sixties, he replied “I think *Sports Illustrated* started that phrase, but I don’t think it was the revolt of the Black athlete at all. It was the revolt of Black men. Athletics was my occupation. I didn’t do what I did as athlete. I raised my

⁶⁵ “19th Hole: The Readers Take Over,” *Sports Illustrated*, 22 July 1968, 71-2.

The respondent apparently ignored or dismissed Olsen’s description of conditions at UTEP and concentrated on the article’s general conclusions. Throughout the series, Olsen highlighted racial discrimination on various campuses such as UTEP, Houston, Kansas and Washington to solidify his theses of that racial discrimination was widespread and institutionalized in the white-controlled sports establishment.

⁶⁶ Hyman and White, 153.

⁶⁷ “19th Hole: The Readers Take Over,” *Sports Illustrated*, 29 July 1968, 62; 2 September 1968, 60; 12 August 1968, 66.

⁶⁸ The concerns were even present within *SI*, the magazine that published the series. Andre Laguerre, the managing editor at *Sports Illustrated* who commissioned the Olsen series, hid the articles from Hedley Donovan, editor in chief of Time-Life, Inc., the parent company, because of anticipated ideological opposition. In the days before 1 July, the publication date of the first article, Laguerre departed for vacation to his native France and both series editor Ray Cave and Olsen left New York as well. Incensed by the article and the ruse, Donovan finally coaxed Cave back to the city to express his concern that the “thesis of the series is all wrong. The reason is that we *all know* that sport is the route up for the black in this society. It’s one of the few ways they have of getting ahead. And what you are saying is almost the opposite.” After asserting that Olsen’s reporting was indeed factual, Cave continued to conceal the remainder of the articles for fear that if Donovan read it before it was published, he “would be truly pissed off” and terminate the series. Perhaps, Donovan worried that by contradicting dominant beliefs about college sports and racial advancement in society, he weakened ideals that bolstered sports as an institution in American society and that helped sell his magazine; MacCambridge, 160-2; *emphasis in text*.

voice in protest as a man.” The phrase was actually introduced by a *Look* article authored by sports writer Dick Schapp and some of *Sports Illustrated’s* coverage, most notably the Olsen’s series, was sympathetic to black activist-athletes in the Sixties. However, his response suggests the mainstream media’s continued influence on the public perception of the OPHR and related black athletes’ protest in the Sixties. Carlos noted that contrary to the mainstream’s suggestion that black militants forced black athletes to join protest movements, he and other black student-athletes in the Sixties, like the Black Students’ and Black Power movements in general, were protesting the inferior quality of black communities; the lack of “education, housing and employment” opportunities that continued to denigrate the quality of black life in the immediate decades following the defeat of legalized racism in the US. He concluded, “That’s why there was a revolt.”⁶⁹

II

Despite the support and legitimacy that the SAOC issue the black student-athlete movements attracted to the OPHR, by June, three months before the opening of the Olympics, Edwards realized that a black boycott of the games was unlikely to occur, primarily because, as he surmised, the majority of likely black Olympians were increasingly under establishment pressure to compete in the games.⁷⁰ The mainstream press, which also reported that the proposal was withering, suggested that a boycott would not manifest because black militant coercion was not sufficient to force black athletes to sacrifice lifelong Olympic dreams and the accompanying adulation and lucrative financial offers.⁷¹ However, establishment repression, as many potential black athletes indicted, also persuaded many of them to distance themselves for the OPHR and the radical black boycott proposal. Olympic hopeful Vincent Matthews remembered that many sympathizing black athletes “feared the possibility of reprisals,” such as the loss of jobs and other lucrative financial opportunities if they endorsed the OPHR. He remembered

⁶⁹ John Carlos, Interview with Dave Zirin, *What’s My Name, Fool?: Sports and Resistance in the United States* (Chicago, IL: Haymarket Press, 2005), 86; Schapp, “Revolt of the Black Athletes,” 72.

⁷⁰ Edwards, *Struggle*, 189.

⁷¹ *New York Times*, 23 June 1968, p. S1; John Underwood, “The Non-Trial Trials,” *Sports Illustrated*, 8 July 1968, 13.

that sprinter Jim Hines, for instance, had been drafted by the NFL's Miami Dolphins and worried that "any unfavorable publicity he received by identifying with militant black causes could drastically affect his bargaining position with the Dolphins."⁷² Such fears were well founded. A year earlier, Ali had been stripped of his heavyweight boxing title and right to box for opposing US involvement in Vietnam and Bob Smith, a star defensive back and spokesman for black activist student-athletes at Berkeley, who was expected to sign a lucrative professional football contract, had gone undrafted and blackballed by the NFL. Matthews noted that fear of establishment repression prevented many blacks, especially those on the US basketball and boxing teams, from ever seriously associating with the OPHR. In fact, years after the movement, several athletes surmised that fear of establishment repression- in the forms of intimidation, coercion, loss of opportunity and athletic awards and publicity- was the foremost militating influence against the Olympic boycott.⁷³ This section will demonstrate that contrary to the mainstream's suggestion that the failure of a black Olympic boycott can be attributed solely to the failure of black militants to coerce black athletes into supporting the movement, establishment retribution and internal OPHR problems also significantly militated against an Olympic boycott.

Much of the historiography echoes the mainstream press of the era by suggesting that the boycott failed because Edwards could not convince black athletes of its necessity, which, again, continues to suggest that the boycott was solely a concoction of Edwards.⁷⁴ However, the OPHR's lack of resources and organization remain a substantial factor unaccounted for in the historiography. From the official announcement of the boycott drive on Thanksgiving 1967, many likely black Olympians who endorsed a boycott were only conditionally supportive of the action. For example, Smith, whose conversations with Edwards spurred the organization of the OPHR, noted that he would only boycott if there was "total agreement or something close to total agreement" among black Olympians. "If my brothers and the majority of the outstanding Negro Olympic prospects cannot concur in this resolution and are not

⁷² Matthews, 169.

⁷³ Edwards, *Revolt*, 81-2; Vincent Matthews with Neil Amdur, *My Race Be Won*, (New York: Charterhouse, 1974), 169-74, 192; Smith, "Why I Raised My Fist," 26; Matthews, 169-74.

⁷⁴ Wiggins, 216; Donald Spivey, "Black Consciousness and the Olympic Protest Movement, 1964-1968" in *Sport in America: New Historical Perspectives* ed. by Donald Spivey, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1985), 250.

prepared to accept such action, then I will go on to fulfill my ambition to become an Olympian.”⁷⁵ Throughout the eleven month drive, several other potential black Olympians, including Otis Burrell, Art Walker and Evans made similar statements.⁷⁶ Other athletes likely to participate in the boycott were not necessarily supportive, but simply unwilling to participate in the Olympics, if the majority of blacks supported a boycott. For instance, Charles Scott, a black basketball player from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and an eventual Olympian, did not believe that a boycott was “the proper means of protest,” but added that “If the boycott does come about and it’s total, well, I’m not going to be the only Negro out there. I’ll go along with them.”⁷⁷ A significant failure of the OPHR was its inability to meet with and directly discuss the boycott proposal with many ideologically and geographically scattered potential Olympians in the early months of the boycott drive. In the absence of direct contact and conversations, the establishment and mainstream press influenced many black Olympians’ opinions. Indeed, Lennox Miller, one of the nine blacks who participated in the NYAC meet in February 1968 suggested he did so because he had not been asked to boycott. He added that he “didn’t like the idea of being told not to compete by somebody who doesn’t know what track is all about,” suggesting he believed the mainstream assertions that Edwards was a militant opportunist, rather than a former track standout with extensive contacts among other potential black Olympians.⁷⁸

Matthews, who attended Johnson C. Smith College (JCSC) in North Carolina, remembered that “One of the first problems in the entire black boycott movement was communications. Since most of the activity and decisions were being made on the West Coast,” athletes distant from Edwards’s office in San Jose, CA

had trouble identifying with what was going on. I’m certain that all of us agreed with the general philosophies that Harry Edwards was talking about- the exploitation of the black athlete by a racist society. But many of us had to settle for secondhand accounts of what

⁷⁵ Tommie Smith, “Why Negroes should Boycott?,” *Sport*, March 1968, 40-1, 68; also see Lee Evans and Tommie Smith, “Tom, Lee Discuss Boycott,” interview by Dick Drake, *Track and Field News*, November 1967, 23; Smith, “Why I Raised My Fist at Uncle Sam,” 26.

⁷⁶ Jonathan Rodgers, “A Step to an Olympic Boycott,” *Sports Illustrated*, 4 December 1967, 31; Dick Drake, “Reaction to the Boycott,” *Track and Field News*, December 1967, 16-7.

⁷⁷ Curry Kilpatrick, “The Team that went over the Hill,” *Sports Illustrated*, 15 April 1968, 15.

⁷⁸ *Los Angeles Times*, 18 February 1968, p. C11.

actually was happening in the early meetings on the West Coast, what was expected of us, who was supporting the movement, how far it spread, what resistance, if any, it was encountering.

Although Matthews received form letters from the OPHR and boycotted the NYAC, he did not meet with Edwards and other organizers of the boycott proposal until June, eight months after the announcement of the boycott proposal. Like Green and long jumper Ralph Boston, who also did not meet Edwards until the summer, Matthews was impressed, noting that Edwards was not at all the subversive that the mainstream media characterized him to be. However, Matthews also recalled that “it was the first taste of what The Olympic Project for Human Rights was all about” and that he and many of the athletes meeting with the OPHR for the first time did not have the “same intensity” of Edwards, Smith and others who had been involved since its inception.⁷⁹ Other black Olympians, like heavyweight boxer George Foreman, would not meet Edwards until September, ten months after the announced proposal and two to three weeks before the games. Foreman felt that Edwards never considered the nine blacks on the US boxing team as “big-name stars” and therefore, did not ardently pursue them.⁸⁰

Contrary to Foreman’s assertion, he and several of the black Olympic boxers were likely not contacted by the OPHR until such a late date because they were not known as potential Olympians until they surprisingly won Olympic qualifying tournaments in the late summer. The difficulty of meeting with other potential Olympians, however, likely occurred because the OPHR, which was almost solely funded by Edwards’s part-time instructor’s salary, could not afford to send representatives to meet with many logistically and ideologically disparate potential black Olympians until the summer of 1968, seven months after the boycott was initially organized. In the interim, the OPHR sent form letters to many blacks, but later learned that in several instances, white coaches had intercepted their mailings. The

⁷⁹ Matthews, 161-2, 167-9; For Green and Boston’s descriptions of Edwards, see Axthelm, “Angry Black Athlete,” 60; and John Underwood, “The Non-Trial Trials,” *Sports Illustrated*, 8 July 1968, 13.

⁸⁰ George Foreman, *By George: The Autobiography of George Foreman* (London: Random House, 1995), 54-5.

OPHR's inability to meet with many athletes in the early months of the drive was an obstacle that Edwards later admitted was ultimately detrimental to the boycott proposal.⁸¹

Although the OPHR encountered external difficulties, the organization and Edwards can be faulted for not purposely consulting with several black Olympians. The OPHR did not query the opinions of black women Olympians concerning the boycott, even though black sprinters and hurdlers were the strength of the US Olympic women's track team.⁸² Historian Amy Bass argues that Edwards believed that black women Olympians would simply follow the decisions of black male athletes.⁸³ Indeed, Edwards told *Muhammad Speaks* "that when the men take a stand, the women will follow."⁸⁴ Although such statements were meant to infer that the OPHR had the unified support of all black Olympians, as often the case among Sixties' Black Liberation groups, the statement also indicates that Edwards and the OCHR reduced the struggle of black women to that of synonymous with that of black males, thus rendering black women's opinions superfluous by assuming they would follow the directions of and solutions provided by black men.⁸⁵ Indeed, throughout the movement, Edwards and several other OCHR male supporters like Matthews noted that the protest was an attempt to reassert the "masculinity" of black males.⁸⁶ Their sexism, however, disappointed several black women athletes like defending 100-meter Olympian champion Wyomia Tyus. Sprinter Jarvis Scott also made it known that she was "most disappointed that our feelings were not brought out." It appeared that "finding out how we feel was only a last minute thing." As a result, black women Olympians never explicitly endorsed the OPHR, although they would eventually sympathize with its intentions.⁸⁷ Decades later, both Edwards and Smith would

⁸¹ Edwards, *Revolt*, 51, 101-2; Lonnie Kashif, "Man Behind the Black Olympic Protest Movement," *Muhammad Speaks*, 9 November 1968, 13.

⁸² *New York Times*, 21 October 1968, p. 60.

⁸³ Amy Bass, *Not the Triumph, but the Struggle: The 1968 Olympics and the Making of the Black Athlete* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 189-90.

⁸⁴ "Professor Harry Edwards Tells: Why Athletes Keep Secret Olympic Boycott Plans," *Muhammad Speaks*, 2 August 1968, p. 27.

⁸⁵ Kimberly Springer, "Black Women Respond to Black Power" in *The Black Power Movement: Rethinking the Civil Rights-Black Power Era* ed. by Peniel E. Joseph, (New York: Routledge, 2006), 105-6.

⁸⁶ Matthews, 168.

⁸⁷ *Daily World*, 12 October 1968, p.12; *Los Angeles Times*, 4 October 1968, p. F9.

admit that their “sexism,” even if “inadvertent,” as Smith suggests, hampered the likelihood of a total black boycott of the US Olympic team.⁸⁸

Edwards also counted a reluctance to work with many whites who supported the boycott proposal among the OPHR’s failures. He noted that “Some of our greatest supporters- the Harvard University crew team, Hal and Olga Connolly, Bill Tooney- were white.” He noted that “Even though the media didn’t want to hear it, and they didn’t because they wanted to paint it as a wild black militant thing, I should have put greater emphasis on the interracial dimensions of what we were trying to accomplish.”⁸⁹ While the OPHR accepted the endorsement of several white Olympians and non-athletes, whites remained outside of the OPHR’s decision making process. This confounded several whites, like decathlete Tom Waddell, but he and others, like the Harvard crew team uncompromisingly defended black athletes’ right to protest.⁹⁰

In early June, a number of black Olympic candidates participated in several collegiate and amateur championship track and field meets on the West Coast. From contacts among these athletes, the mainstream press reported that a significant number of likely black track and field athletes, the largest and most significant group of black Olympians, did not support a boycott.⁹¹ Edwards later suggested that the reports were attempts to stymie the boycott. However, as he and many others close to the boycott knew by the time of the West Coast meets, a total black boycott of the Olympics was unlikely because, as the media reported, many likely black Olympians would not participate in such a protest.⁹² Edwards, however, would endeavor to keep a possible boycott in the nation’s discourse.

On the weekend of 22-23 June at the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) championships in Sacramento, Edwards was finally able to meet with the majority of the black potential Olympic track and

⁸⁸ Harry Edwards, interview with David Leonard, *ColorLines: Race, Culture and Action*, Summer 1998, 21; Kenny Moore, “The Eye of the Storm,” *Sports Illustrated*, 12 August 1991, 72.

⁸⁹ Edwards, interview with David Leonard, 21.

⁹⁰ Tom Waddell, *Gay Olympian: The Life and Death of Tom Waddell* (New York: Knopf, 1996), 107.

⁹¹ *Washington Post*, 27 June 1968, p. 45.

⁹² Edwards, *Struggle*, 190-1; Axthelm, “The Angry Black Athlete,” 56-7; Dick Drake, “Tahoe, Olympics...,” *Track and Field News*, II July 1968, 6.

field candidates. The attendees were unable to reach a consensus concerning the boycott, but agreed to meet again at the Olympic Trials in Los Angeles the following weekend and that if two-thirds or seventy-five percent (press and participant reports vary) of black Olympic qualifiers did not endorse a boycott, then the boycott would be called off. The mainstream press further interpreted the indecision at the AAU as an ominous sign for the boycott proposal.⁹³ Edwards countered by telling reporters that “There is no doubt in my mind that there will be a boycott.” The purported comments, he suggested, were made by athletes on the movement’s fringe or “dreamed up by racist pigs” in attempt to stymie the movement. He later added that “These black cats are together despite the efforts of the honky press to drive a wedge between us.” As Edwards hoped, the sports establishment and press remained wary of a boycott. Several reporters, for instance, began seconding the notion that the USOC force all athletes who won places on the team to sign statements declaring that they would indeed participate in the Olympics.⁹⁴

On 21 June, the night before the trials, twenty-six black male athletes gathered to vote on the boycott proposal. Twelve endorsed it, thirteen were opposed and one was undecided. Far short of the percentage previously agreed on, it was decided to release all supporting athletes from their boycott pledges. Decades later, Evans would note that he and Smith, the most ardent proponents of the boycott among the athletes, were relieved. They voted for the boycott, but as athletes in training for years, they hoped to participate and win medals. Although the athletes could not agree on a boycott, they agreed that a partial boycott would be ineffective. First, the boycotters could easily be replaced by other black athletes, which would negate their sacrifices. Secondly, they believed that the establishment would highlight the discord of the group to further demean the boycotters and undermine the purpose of their protests. Lastly, although the athletes had failed to collectively endorse a boycott, they agreed to participate in some form of a protest at the games. Edwards and Smith believed that to continue to push for a boycott would erode the unity that had evolved among the track athletes and that was necessary to eventually effect a demonstration at the games. Initially, they also agreed that blacks would avoid

⁹³ *Washington Post*, 26 June 1968, p. D4; 27 June 1968, p. 45; *New York Times*, 23 June 1968, p. S1.

⁹⁴ *Los Angeles Times*, 26 June 1968, p. D2; *New York Amsterdam News*, 29 June 1968, p. 32; *Washington Post*, 27 June 1968, p. 45.

participating in the victory stand celebrations at the Olympics, thus refusing to be present when the American flag was flown and the national anthem was played. “In this way,” Edwards later explained, “the athletes could compete and at the same time, demonstrate their solidarity with the black masses at home for whom victories have been few and far between.” They also agreed to begin avoiding the victory stands at the trials and to wear black armbands at the Olympics. The outcome of the vote and the plans for the protests were to remain secret, as the OPHR hoped to use the collective anxiety of the sports establishment to spur further discussion of the inequities that blacks continue to endure.⁹⁵

As expected, black jumpers and sprinters performed well at the trials, capturing the top three finishers in both the 100 and 200 meter sprints and were nearly as dominate in the 400 meters, the long and triple jumps. Despite continued pronouncements in the mainstream press that a black boycott would accomplish little or fail to drastically alter the US’s fortunes in the games, the performance of blacks at the trials, experts noted, demonstrated otherwise.⁹⁶ *Track and Field News*, “the bible of the sport,” reported that blacks would compose approximately thirty percent of the US Olympic team, as they had in 1964. Although less than a third of the team in the previous games, blacks won twelve of the US’ twenty-five medals in track, including nine gold medals. In most of those events, *TFN* reported, if the times of the best white US runners were substituted for black medalists, the US team would not have garnered any of the twelve medals. The magazine implied similar results for the 1968 US team. Presently and historically, blacks dominated the short sprint races and jump events, and in some instances such as the 100 meters, the top ten US times had been turned in by blacks and in the 400 meters, ten of the first eleven were registered by blacks. *TFN* estimated that approximately seventy-nine percent of the top ten US performances in all sprinting and jumping events were turned in by blacks. As a result, the magazine concluded, “when it comes to speculation about a boycott, in nearly half the Olympic events it isn’t a

⁹⁵ Edwards, *Revolt*, 98-9; Edwards, interview with David Leonard, 19; Smith, “Why I Raised My Fist,” 26; Lee Evans, Interview by Dave Zirin, *What’s My Name, Fool?: Sports and Resistance in the United States* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2005), 80.

⁹⁶ *Los Angeles Times*, 26 June 1968, p. D2; *New York Times*, 3 July 1968, p. 44; *Daily World*, 4 July 1968, p. 9.

minority matter. The blacks are working for a position of considerable power.” In their absence, the Soviets were almost certain to outscore the US team.⁹⁷

Following the meeting earlier that weekend, the athletes’ plan to boycott the victory celebrations at the trials leaked to USOC officials. On the second day, the day the sprint trials began, victory stands were removed from the field and the remaining victory celebrations canceled.⁹⁸ The USOC also announced another plan to repress the OPHR. Previously, invitations to the US teams were extended to the first place finishers at the trials, and two or three others who performed exceptionally well in the events throughout the previous year. However, just before the trials, the USOC announced that the top six finishers in each event, plus four alternates, and several injured unable-to-compete athletes at the LA trials, were invited to the USOC’s track and field training facility in South Lake Tahoe, California for a second set of trials to be held from September 9 through the 17. The decision meant that more than 240 athletes would continue to compete for the sixty births on the US’s men’s and women’s track and field team. The USOC’s official reason for the additional trials was Mexico City’s altitude. The site of the XIX games was 7,350 ft. above sea level and the surrounding air contained thirty percent less oxygen, which would have a dramatic lessening impact on the performance of athletes unadjusted to that elevation. South Lake Tahoe was 7,337 ft. above sea level and the USOC suggested that if the leading contenders for the team faltered at the training site, alternates from the other invitees would be selected for the team. However, many observers suggested that the uncertainty surrounding the proposed black boycott was as much as a factor in the staging a second trials. Edwards remarked that the USOC had to invite ten athletes in events like the sprints and jumps to include any whites who would be ready to participate in the games, if blacks did boycott.⁹⁹ It was, as he later characterized it, “an expensive, unwieldy and somewhat embarrassing system of alternates over and above the usual back-up contingent of athletes kept on hand in case of injury or illness.”¹⁰⁰ Comments from several officials and mainstream

⁹⁷ Joe Henderson, “US Blacks’ Strength High,” *Track and Field News*, II July 1968, 3, 11.

⁹⁸ Axthelm, “The Angry Black Athlete,” 56.

⁹⁹ Underwood, “The Non-Trial Trials,” 11-13; *New York Times*, 3 July 1968, p. 44.

¹⁰⁰ Edwards, *Struggle*, 190.

reporters also agreed that establishment fear of a black boycott was at least as pertinent a concern as Mexico City's altitude. Indeed, the press had reported for several weeks prior to the LA trials, that if necessary, the USOC would hold "special" trials to counter the withdrawal of blacks. Even if they were mainly to condition athletes to the high altitude, most reporters, mainstream and otherwise, believed the South Lake Tahoe trials served as the establishment's contingency for a boycott.¹⁰¹

The sudden scheduling of additional trials was not the OPHR's first attempt to repress activist black athletes. Throughout the summer, several blacks complained they were being cheated by angry white track officials. In early June, within a matter of weeks, Carlos, Evans and Smith disputed the results of several races they competed in. Smith and Evans eventually filed complaints and the results of two races were overturned with Carlos and Smith eventually being awarded first place finishes. These incidents, however, were not reported in the mainstream press. In its discussion, *The New York Amsterdam News*, a black weekly, asked "What do these three have in common? They threaten to boycott the 1968 Olympics at Mexico City unless blacks are treated with human dignity." The news, the article noted, "was practically universally repressed, with *Sports Illustrated* being one of the few big enough to carry the [incidents.]"¹⁰² OCHR supporters complained that throughout the summer and into the trials, track officials attempted retribution against them through lane assignments, stacking preliminary races to eliminate them from Olympic contention and refusing to certify world record performances.¹⁰³

Eventually, the results of the vote conducted among potential black athletes' at the LA trials leaked to the mainstream press, which again began reporting that a boycott would not occur. With little other recourse, Edwards cleverly conceived to "manipulate the situation." Edwards later explained that

We asked all athletes firmly within the fold to make as many conflicting statements as possible to the press preferably on the same day. And some athletes didn't have to be

¹⁰¹ *Washington Post*, 26 June 1968, p. D4; 2 July 1968, p. D3; *New York Times*, 23 June 1968, p. S1, 3 July 1968, p. 44; *Christian Science Monitor*, 27 June 1968, p. 18; *Daily World*, 20 August 1968, p. 12; 21 August 1968, p. 12.

¹⁰² Mark Mulvoy, "The boys from Speed City burn up the town," *Sports Illustrated*, 17 June 1968, p. 62; *New York Amsterdam News*, 22 June 1968, p. 22; 29 June 1968, p. 32; *Muhammad Speaks*, 21 June 1968, p. 26.

¹⁰³ Underwood, "The Non-Trial Trials," 13; Moore, "Courageous Stand," 72.

asked to contradict themselves. So while one New York paper was headlining a sports-page story alleging that Lee Evans had bolted the movement, a San Francisco paper and television statement carried a statement by Lee Evans denouncing those athletes who had thus far refused to support the movement.¹⁰⁴

The ploy worked. As Evans and Smith purposely contradicted themselves and other black Olympians issued various replies about the boycott, Edwards's declarations that the boycott was still on were magnified in the press. On 1 July, more than forty journalists and reporters attended an Edwards's called press conference in San Francisco, where they believed he would announce the boycott was off. Instead, he announced that plans for the boycott were moving forward, but the OPHR had decided not to divulge when and where it would begin. He suggested that blacks might boycott the South Lake Tahoe trails or might "Wait until we get in the starting blocks" in Mexico City to begin the boycott. He warned that "Every athlete out there is in the fold, period" and further bluffed that the OPHR had "figured out a way the Tahoe meet can be stopped without my leaving my living room."¹⁰⁵

As Edwards hoped, the subterfuge kept the threat of the boycott alive in the press. An exasperated Arthur Daley, *New York Times*' sports editor, warned beware of the "smart" and "clever," Edwards, who is "adroitly manipulating enough newspaper propaganda to keep his movement alive even though the Olympics are a totally improper vehicle for such a boycott." The boycott threat, he lamented, continued to hang a "black cloud" over America's Olympic fortunes.¹⁰⁶ *Los Angeles Times* sports columnist Charles Maher was disgusted by the threat that blacks might wait until the games to pull out. Edwards, Maher wrote, is "an advocate of treachery." He "found his nation aflame with racial unrest and came running with a pale of gasoline." His recent threat was only further evidence of his destructive militancy. "I couldn't figure out just how Harry hoped to accomplish anything for the black people with the boycott...*But now I have decided Harry probably doesn't expect to accomplish anything...he really wants revenge. He doesn't want to reform America. He wants to punish it.*"¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ Edwards, *Struggle*, 195.

¹⁰⁵ *Washington Post*, 2 July 1968, p. D3; *Los Angeles Times*, 2 July 1968, p. E2, F2.

¹⁰⁶ *New York Times*, 3 July 1968, p. 44.

¹⁰⁷ *Los Angeles Times*, 2 July 1968, p. E2; *emphasis in the text.*

Although the majority of the press would continue to report that a black boycott would not occur because many athletes had not endorsed it, Edwards's tactics to manipulate the situation were effective, because, as he noted, no one, "least of all the opposition," knew "what the true facts of the matter were" concerning the boycott.¹⁰⁸ In early August, after a short period of inactivity, he boldly told reporters, "Our whole strategy now is to create an atmosphere of chaos for the US Olympic Committee. We will make statements, one day, deny them the next." He warned that "if I were you I wouldn't believe everything we say. If you believe me now, that's beautiful, and if you don't that's still beautiful." Despite pronouncements to the contrary, a boycott, Edwards noted, was still likely to occur.¹⁰⁹ Edwards's manipulation managed to keep the movement in the national press in the remaining weeks leading up to the games and critics wary that a black boycott or demonstration could still occur.¹¹⁰ Indeed, on the eve of games, *SI's* Olympic reporter John Underwood counted the probability that blacks "will try something embarrassing once they got to Mexico City," along with the visibility of Mexican peasant and student protest, among the problems "that make the XIX Olympiad the most intriguing of modern Olympic games."¹¹¹

On 31 August, approximately a month before the games opened, Edwards sent a statement to the third National Black Power Conference being held in Philadelphia calling off the boycott. Unable to attend because of a car accident, Edwards likely chose to make such an anticlimactic announcement at the Black Power conference because of the overwhelming support the proposal had received from black progressives and radicals in attendance. Indeed, the 1967 conference had launched the proposal into the nation's consciousness, when delegates passed a resolution urging blacks to boycott the Olympics in protest of the establishment's repression of Ali. Throughout the eleven month OPHR drive, different

¹⁰⁸ Edwards, *Revolt*, 100.

¹⁰⁹ *Daily World*, 9 August 1968, p. 12; *Washington Post*, 1 August 1968, p. F1; 4 August 1968, p. C7.

¹¹⁰ *Chicago Defender*, 10 September 1968, p. 24; *Washington Post*, 2 September 1968, p. D1; *Los Angeles Times*, 22 September 1968, p. A17; *New York Amsterdam News*, 21 September 1968, p. 33.

¹¹¹ John Underwood, "Games in Trouble," *Sports Illustrated*, 30 September 1968, 45-9.

Black Nationalist organizations and activists had aided the movement, especially the boycott of the NYAC, and provided Edwards with various platforms and ideological affirmation.¹¹²

The announcement was an item on the front page of newspapers and sports sections from Los Angeles to New York, with each noting that the boycott was called off because Edwards lacked the support of black Olympians.¹¹³ The mainstream media declined to note, however, that Edwards declared the boycott proposal a success. The omission is noteworthy considering that the establishment (and the historiography since) judged the OPHR a failure because blacks, with the notable exception of Alcindor, did not boycott the US team.¹¹⁴ However, early on in the movement, Edwards defined the OPHR as an attempt to increase public awareness of the continued detrimental impact of “institutionalized racism” on the lives of the black masses and to protest institutionalized anti-black discrimination in the sports establishment. For instance, in November 1967, just before the Thanksgiving workshop, he told a reporter that a boycott would demonstrate back discontent with racial discrimination in American society, which was most noticeably being demonstrated by the riots. By contrast, a boycott would be as demonstrative, but less destructive.¹¹⁵ The following March, he articulated that the purpose of the OPHR was to demonstrate that black athletes were no longer willing to serve as examples of racial democracy in state-sponsored attempts to gain allies among Third World people of color, while the majority of blacks remained ghettoized, in poverty and repressed.¹¹⁶ In his statement to the Black Power conference, Edwards concluded that the OPHR had accomplished both. The boycott drive and its intermediate goals, which included the boycott of the NYAC and supporting the campaign to expel apartheid South Africa from the 1968 Olympics, had “gained international recognition of the plight of black people,” exposed racism in the white-controlled sports establishment, strengthened and opened up communication between black and African liberation movements, “found yet another way of educating Black people to the degree,

¹¹² Harry Edwards, “1968 National Black Power Conference Statement,” in *The Revolt of the Black Athlete* (New York: Free Press, 1969), 180; *Daily World*, 3 September 1968, p. 12.

¹¹³ *Los Angeles Times*, 3 September 1968, p. D1; *New York Times*, 1 September 1968, p. 1, S1.

¹¹⁴ See specifically Spivey, 248-50.

¹¹⁵ Rodgers, 30-1.

¹¹⁶ Harry Edwards, “Why Negroes Should Boycott Whitey’s Olympics,” *Saturday Evening Press*, 9 March 1968, 6, 10.

extent and intensity of racism in the US,” and inferring to the riots, had accomplished as much without violence.¹¹⁷ Indeed, in 1968 alone, the boycott proposal remained in the national press throughout its eleven month drive, attracted the attention of a vast amount of the black masses, progressives and radicals and the international Left to the depths of racism in American society, attracted support and attention to the campaign to expel South Africa from the games, spurred black activist-athletes on more than thirty-five campuses to protest discrimination in sports and join Black Students’ movements and initiated investigative studies that exposed racism in sports. Edwards also made the bolder claim that “We have removed the myth of allegedly how much sports have done for Black People.” That claim, as he later acknowledged, would be challenged by the continued increasing number of blacks participating in sports.¹¹⁸ The latter withstanding, the OCHR’s success, as one sympathetic reporter implied, generally went unacknowledged in the mainstream press and as I have noted, continues to be unacknowledged in the historiography.¹¹⁹ The second-half of the statement triumphantly noted that although the “present phase” of the movement had ended, the black struggle for equality in society and sport continued. He asked for continued support for Ali, black athletes protesting competition against BYU, an institution affiliated with the Mormon Church, which deemed blacks inferior, and other efforts to end the exploitation of blacks in sports.¹²⁰

As Edwards engaged on a speaking tour, hoping to attract support for the boycott, and blacks and other track athletes trained for the South Lake Tahoe meet in mid-September, Brundage, head of the Olympic movement and ostensive head of the US Olympic establishment, gave a speech at the National Press Club in Washington, DC. His exact remarks are unclear, but the implications, according to several black Olympians, were that blacks were expected to perform as athletes and discard any impetus to protest or embarrass the US at the Olympics. Approximately two weeks earlier, they received word that

¹¹⁷ Edwards, “1968 National Black Power Conference Statement,” 178-82; *Daily World*, 3 September 1968, p. 12.

¹¹⁸ Harry Edwards, “The Olympic Project for Human Rights,” *Black Scholar*, 10, 6-7, 1979: 2.

¹¹⁹ Jeremy Larner and David Wolf, “Amid Gold Medals, Raised Black Fists,” *Life*, 1 November 1968, 64C.

¹²⁰ Edwards, “1968 National Black Power Conference Statement,” 178-82.

the USOC would expel any Olympian wearing a black armband, as some blacks had panned, from the remainder of the games. Several athletes had continued to discuss the protest in closed groups and although they had previously agreed, unanimity about the form that protest would take at the games appeared to be dissolving. Brundage's speech and the USOC's decree, however, galvanized blacks, including several who silence to that point suggested they were uncommitted to OPHR. On the 24 September, twenty-one blacks issued a petition declaring that Brundage's "removal...is long overdue and is a necessity before a progressive overhaul of the national and international sports situation can begin." In addition to the signatures of Smith, Carlos and Evans, it was signed by several previously silent athletes, including Hines, Boston, Green and Stan Wright, a black assistant track coach on the US team.¹²¹ Brundage had led the IOC's effort to readmit South Africa to the 1968 games earlier that year. Although the threat of a Third World boycott forced the IOC to retract the invitation, the black press continued to assail Brundage and the IOC for their accommodation of apartheid.¹²² In response to the petition, Brundage argued that his speech had been "distorted" by the press. He had made a "general statement," not directed to anyone in particular, that by rule, protest was not permitted in the games and that any athlete engaging in a demonstration would be expelled. In the day between the break of the story and his response, Brundage phoned Wright, who accepted his explanation and then issued a statement noting that the interpretation of the athletes' petition as demanding Brundage's resignation was inaccurate. Both he and Brundage were conciliatory, saying that the matter was resolved.¹²³

Brundage's remarks and the USOC's threatening letters, however, were pivotal because just as the athlete's unanimity about demonstrations at the Olympics was disintegrating, the letters spurred new discussion on the issue. Evans recalled that Brundage "never should have said that because we started having meetings again." Just days before the games opened, black athletes held impromptu meetings in Denver, Colorado, where they were being outfitted for US uniforms. Having earlier agreed to wear black

¹²¹ *Chicago Defender*, 9 September 1968, p. 26; *Washington Post*, 25 September 1968, p. D1; *Los Angeles Times*, 25 September 1968, p. E2; Moore, "Courageous Stand," 72; for athletes' opinions of Wright, see Matthews, 201-2; Edwards, *Revolt*, 59.

¹²² *Chicago Defender*, 14 September 1968, p. 10.

¹²³ *Washington Post*, 26 September 1968, p. C8.

armbands and spurn the victory stands, several now rejected those ideas because armbands would possibly restrict their circulation, thus inhabiting their performances. After meeting for several hours, all they could agree on was the need for a demonstration. Edwards remembers that “it was left up to the consciousness of each athlete as to what method of protest would be employed.” Just before the meeting ended, however, Smith, sensing the timidity of his teammates, told them he would protest, even if others did not. For a year, he had resolved to speak out for the masses and he planned to honor his word. Afterwards, several went shopping for black berets, “the symbol of the Black Panther Party,” as Evans recalled.¹²⁴ Smith asked his wife to bring a pair of black gloves to the games.¹²⁵ Brundage and the USOC’s attempted repression of the athletes would ultimately serve as the catalysts of their protest.

Throughout the summer, Edwards spoke at different venues across the country attempting to organize mass support for the boycott proposal. He later noted that many of the sites he spoke at were “crawling with agents.” The monitoring was an extension of the repression and state surveillance that had begun shortly after the announcement of the boycott proposal at the Thanksgiving workshop 1967. Edwards, as well as Smith, had been added to the FBI’s “rabble rouser” index. Subsequently, his student and employment records at SJS were accessed and his classes monitored. Harassment and repression accompanied the state’s surveillance. Edwards’s apartment was burglarized, his pets tortured and killed and his car vandalized. He also received death threats and hate mail and believed that his phone was tapped. Over the course of the academic year, he would receive thirteen tickets for traffic violations. Other activist-athletes experienced similar harassment. Smith and Burrell lost jobs because they supported the OPHR. In addition to receiving hate mail and death threats, Smith was forcibly, but honorably discharged from the ROTC, even though, as Edwards noted, it was the height of US troop escalation in Vietnam. OCHR supporters outside of track and field also encountered establishment repression. In addition to receiving hate mail and death threats, Alcindor was lambasted in front of a national television audience for boycotting the US Olympic basketball team. Purportedly invited to the Today show, a

¹²⁴ Evans, Interview with Zirin, 82; Matthews, 82-4, 196; Edwards, *Struggle*, 196.

¹²⁵ Moore, “Courageous Stand,” 72.

national morning program, to discuss Operation Sports Rescue, a New York City summer program for disadvantaged youth, Alcindor was accused of being a subversive and never given the opportunity to respond to the charges or discuss the program.¹²⁶

The state and establishment's fervent opposition convinced Edwards and his advisor, Louis Lomax, that for his safety and that of black Olympians, that when the Olympics opened in mid-October he "should be as far east and north from Mexico City as you can get without going to Canada." They reasoned that if the state had participated in the recent murders of several Black Panthers, as widely believed in the black community, and had not prevented the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Senator Robert F. Kennedy earlier that year, then it was probable that Edwards could be killed at the games. Edwards bucked the advice slightly by delivering a speech at the Black Writer's Conference in Montreal on the eve of the games.¹²⁷

III

As more than 80,000 spectators in the stadium looked on and as many as 400 million witnessed via satellite and television, Tommie Smith put his feet into the sprinter's starting blocks. In his fourteen year track career, he estimated that he had run the 200 meter-sprint competitively hundreds of times and counting practices, thousands more. But this time it would be for an Olympic gold medal, a longtime ambition that he would have only one chance to achieve. Perhaps, routine allowed him to push the complexities of the situation from his mind and summon the "extra calm" he believed necessary to accomplish the task at hand. In a preliminary heat two hours earlier, he pulled a hamstring muscle, but still managed to qualify for the final. He rejected the trainer's suggestion that he receive a shot to relax the muscle and instead elected to ice it, temporarily numbing the pain, but still allowing him complete control of the muscle. He held eleven world sprinting records and his experience and confidence suggested that he was still capable of winning, despite the injury. He had taken a few practice runs in

¹²⁶ Edwards, *Struggle*, 189-203; Abdul-Jabbar, 170-1; *Daily World*, 25 July 1968, p. 8; Moore, "Courageous Stand," 69.

¹²⁷ Edwards, *Struggle*, 192-203.

the interim, but had not tested the leg at full speed in hopes of not aggravating the muscle and so that his competitors, especially Carlos, would believe he was lame. At the command for runners to take their marks, Smith crouched into his starting stance. To his dismay, the muscle was tight.

Another situation was less doubtful. Smith, along with his SJSC classmate Evans, had been the most ardent supporter of the black drive to boycott the 1968 US Olympic team as a means of highlighting the continued effect of institutionalized racism on the black masses. In September 1967, his affirmative comments spurred the organization of the drive and in spite of the establishment's repression of the OPHR, throughout the year, Smith continued to "stand up and be counted" among those who believed that further accommodation would not significantly advance black equality.¹²⁸ He was in Mexico City, however, because a meeting among blacks likely to qualify for the US men's track team in June 1968 had culminated in a decision to call off the boycott. Still Smith vowed that he would find a way to honor the struggle and humanity of the black masses. First, he would have to finish in the top three of the race to secure a spot on the victory dais. At the starter's gun, Smith, hoping to keep pressure off of the hamstring, got off to only a fair start. After the first 100 meters, Carlos held at least a 1 ½ meter lead. Smith kicked in the "jets," a sudden burst of acceleration that he was known for, and surpassed the field to win in 19.83 seconds, a world record. He estimated he would have clocked at 19.6 seconds, had he not stretched his arms wide in triumph with fifteen feet to run. Startled by Smith's burst, Carlos turned his head to watch Smith blow by on his left, which allowed Australian Peter Norman to pass him on the right. Carlos finished third.¹²⁹

As they waited in a tunnel underneath the Olympic stadium for the medal ceremony to begin, Smith and Carlos, who also had been a vocal supporter of the OPHR, prepared themselves to take a stand. Smith slipped off his shoes, rolled up his pants legs to reveal black socks. He took a scarf from his athletic bag and tied it around his neck and then turned to Carlos, who earlier that day agreed that they must do "something significant," and said "You watch me, John, and do what I do." Smith slipped on a

¹²⁸ Smith, "Why Negroes Should Boycott," 291.

¹²⁹ Moore, "Courageous Stand," 62, 75; Smith, "Why I Raised My Hand," 32.

black right handed glove and handed Carlos the left one. Carlos slipped on the glove, took off his shoes and rolled up his trousers, also revealing black socks. According to Smith, Norman, who stood nearby observing, asked “Is there anything I can do? I really sympathize with you guys. If there’s anything at all?” Smith took off his “Olympic Project for Human Rights” button and handed it to the Australian. For the next few minutes the three sat in silence, with both Carlos and Smith contemplating teammate Evans’s dream that they would be shot on the victory stand. Approximately ten minutes later, a Mexican official led them to the victory stand.¹³⁰

The ceremony began and Smith received a framed olive sapling, an ancient symbol of peace, and the three athletes were presented medals by Lord Killian, an IOC vice-president and former Olympic medalist. Smith remembered that the beaming enthusiasm of the Irishman relaxed him and allowed him a respite to mentally gather himself for the completion of the second task. Then, “At the first note of the national anthem,” Smith, who had grown out an Afro and a Malcolm X-like goatee over the summer, remembered, “I extended my right arm skyward and clenched my fist tightly. At the same instant, I bowed my head and closed my eyes.” Carlos’s left hand followed closely, but he scanned the stadium before bowing his head, later explaining that he was certain they would be shot. Smith remembered that as the national anthem muffled in the background, he was initially overcome with joy. Like most Americans, he heard and sung the Star Spangled Banner “many times during my life, but this time it was special. My country’s song was amplifying through the stadium because I had won an Olympic event.” His excitement faded, however, as he reflected on the statement he and Carlos were making through their gestures. “I thought about my mother and father back home and wondered what they were doing at that moment. Were they picking cotton? Was my father irrigating? And my eleven brothers and sisters. What were they thinking?” For much of his life, the Smith family had scraped out a meager existence in the cotton and grape fields of California’s San Joaquin Valley. Poor, but hardworking and proud, Smith hoped his family would understand his actions. He “thought of how my sisters cringed because they didn’t want me to embarrass the family by describing how poor *we* were.” Today, he was protesting the

¹³⁰ Moore, “Courageous Stand,” 75; Smith, “Why I Raised My Hand,” 24.

poverty that they continued to endure. As the anthem ended, Smith and Carlos heard a mixture of cheers and boos. As they walked toward the tunnel to exit the field, the boos intensified and Smith believed he saw several angry white American spectators bare fangs.¹³¹

Smith and Carlos later explained that they intended for their protest to disrupt the state-sponsored Cold War-inspired belief that black athletes were excellent representative examples of a perfecting racial democracy that provided blacks equal opportunity in the US.¹³² The day after the protest, however, a solemn Smith explained that “The right glove that I wore on my right hand signified the power within black America. The left glove my teammate John Carlos wore on his left hand made an arc with my right hand and his left hand also to signify unity. The scarf that was worn around my neck signified blackness. John Carlos and me wore socks, black socks, without shoes, to also signify our poverty.”¹³³ He later added that they bowed their heads in reverence to Malcolm X, Dr. King and others slain in the struggle for black liberation.¹³⁴ Over the next four decades, usually some variation of Smith’s explanation would accompany the familiar photo of the two demonstrating “Black Power” at the games. However, five years later, in his first extensive discussion of the demonstration since the games, Smith explicitly construed their actions as a challenge of the state’s projection of the US as a perfecting racial democracy. He explained that during the protest

The American flag represented the black man who had worked so damned hard all his life and gotten nothing out it but racism and oppression. The Stars and Stripes represented all the black people who had shed their blood for this country and never received equality. It represented all blacks who were thrown onto ships and sold into a life of slavery in the United States. That day in Mexico City represented a white racist America. I hoped my demonstration would represent black America.¹³⁵

Their demonstration articulated continued black dissatisfaction with the conditions forced on blacks in the US. This section will demonstrate that Smith and Carlos’s meaning of the protest, however, had to

¹³¹ Moore, “Courageous Stand,” 62, 72-7; *emphasis in text*; Smith, “Why I Raised My Hand,” 24.

¹³² Smith, “Why Negroes Should Boycott,” 40-1, 68; Edwards, “Why Negroes Should Boycott Whitey’s Olympics,” 6.

¹³³ Quoted in Bass, 240.

¹³⁴ Edwards, *Revolt*, 103-4.

¹³⁵ Smith, “Why I Raised My Hand,” 24.

compete with interpretations by liberal and black moderates, leftists and black radicals, and especially an oppositional Cold War establishment and mainstream that had sought to label black athletes' activism militantly destructive from the outset of the boycott proposal eleven months earlier.

The mainstream's initial reaction to the demonstration ignored Smith's explanation and emphasized what the *Los Angeles Times* termed the black athletes' "bitter tirade at the white social structure." At a post-race conference, Carlos stated that "We feel that white people think we're just animals to do a job. We saw white people in the stands putting thumbs down at us. We want them to know we're not roaches, ants or rats." He added that "If we do a good job, they'll throw us some peanuts or pat us on the back and say 'good boy.'"¹³⁶ Taken out of context, as they were in the mainstream press, the comments were suggested to be an example of the militant pathology that characterized Black Power in the mainstream.¹³⁷ Within the context of the events that occurred, however, Carlos's comments were directed toward Brundage and the USOC, although neither was explicitly mentioned in the mainstream's versions of Carlos's comments. In September, the month prior to the Olympics, Brundage gave a speech suggesting that the activist black athletes were ungrateful and were expected to compete, and as they had in the past, represent the US at the Olympics without incident. Shortly afterwards, several blacks training at the USOC track and field facility in South Lake Tahoe, received letters from the USOC warning that they would be expelled from the games if they engaged in any form of protest. Many black Olympians interpreted the speech and letter to suggest that they, as blacks in other American institutions, were expected to perform and suppress their grievances and agency to that of the dominate white establishment. These tactics and insinuations, as several black Olympians including Smith and Evans would later declare, motivated blacks' demonstrations at the Olympics.¹³⁸ Carlos's reply, as well as the protest, iterated his and Smith's defiance of Brundage and the sports establishments' directive that they

¹³⁶ *Los Angeles Times*, 18 October 1968, p. E1; *New York Times*, 17 October 1968, p. 59.

¹³⁷ John Kieran and Arthur Daley, *The Story of the Olympic Games, 776 BC to 1972* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1973), 430; Van DeBurg, 11-7; Moore, "Eye of the Storm," 64.

¹³⁸ Moore, "Courageous Stand," 72; *Daily World*, 23 October 1968, p. 23; Evans, Interview with Zirin, 82; for a discussion of black agency in white-controlled institutions, see Estes, 1-9.

accommodate the establishment. A radicalized generation of activist Americans and blacks in the Sixties would eventually come to accept this as the meaning of the Smith and Carlos's protest.

Smith's comments at the post-race conference, though more reserved than Carlos's, also articulated their dissent. He objected to questions and comments that contained the appellation "Negro" and explained that he preferred to be called "black." "We are black and we're proud to be black. White America will only give us credit for an Olympic victory. They'll say I'm an American, but if I did something bad, they'd say a Negro. Black America was with us all the way, though."¹³⁹ Their protest was symbolic of a generation rejecting the establishment's discourse of racial democracy and American exceptionalism and embarking on their own independent discourses to achieve these objectives. Edwards agreed, later suggesting that it "symbolized the courage, commitment, and growing political sophistication of an entire generation of young Black people."¹⁴⁰ Years later Smith noted that his defiance of the establishment and independence discourse of black equality made him a "man, not a damned puppet."¹⁴¹ Carlos also later noted "I didn't do what I did as an athlete. I raised my voice in protest as a man."¹⁴²

Carlos and Smith were among several black Olympians who arrived at the games incensed by Brundage's alleged comments and the USOC repressive directives. Days prior to the race, Carlos told reporters that the black Olympians "feel like robots. We perform when they wind us up and they stick us back in the closets when the games are over." Tyus and Scott, two black women Olympians previously unassociated with the OPHR, suggested that blacks as a group were still formulating the forms their protest would take, thus insinuating their support of protesting at the games. At the IOC sessions in Mexico City on 10 October 1968, two days before the games opened, Brundage was reelected the IOC's chief executive. Consequently, blacks' disgust with Brundage transcended to activism. Brundage had

¹³⁹ *Los Angeles Times*, 17 October 1968, p. C1; *New York Times*, 17 October 1968, p. 59; *Daily Worker*, 16 October 1968, p. 1, 12.

¹⁴⁰ Edwards, *Struggle*, 203.

¹⁴¹ Smith, "Why I Raised My Fist," 32.

¹⁴² John Carlos, Interview with Dave Zirin, *What's My Name, Fool? Sports and Resistance in the United States* (Chicago: Haymarket Press, 1996), 86.

been accurately accused of leading support for an apartheid-observant South African team into the 1968 games earlier that year and though defeated, many blacks, Olympians and otherwise, anticipated that he would continue that advocacy in his future presidency. In response to the election results, Mel Pender, a black sprinter who previously distanced himself from the OPHR, suggested that blacks and African Olympians were circulating a petition that asked that Brundage be ousted from the IOC.¹⁴³ Blacks' ire toward Brundage continued to manifest after the games opened. On Tuesday 15 October, Hines and Green, the first and third finishers in the 100-meter sprints respectively, asked who would present their medals. Hines noted "They said president Brundage and we didn't smile." The IOC took the hint and their medals were presented by the Marquess of Exeter. Later that day, Boston, who had also distanced himself from the OPHR, and Smith also suggested that they would refuse to accept medals from Brundage.¹⁴⁴ In an effort to prevent the further outspokenness of black US team members, the next day, 16 October 1968, US track coaches attempted to institute a gag rule banning reporters from interviewing athletes before they completed their competitions and the IOC announced that Brundage had gone to Acapulco to attend the yacht races.¹⁴⁵ The IOC's preemptive initiatives, however, were inept. Although unreported in the mainstream press, Brundage's reelection, following his outspoken support of SAOC and intimation that black protest should be subordinated to US and Olympic interests in the preceding months, served as immediate impetuses for the black protest developing at the Olympics.

Although the Smith-Carlos demonstration initially received significant attention in US dailies, as *New York Times* sports editor Arthur Daley noted, the IOC's reaction turned the protest into "The Incident" and as a result, significantly influenced the historical meaning of the demonstration and the 1968 games.¹⁴⁶ The IOC viewed the demonstration as an interjection of politics into the Olympics, an event that was historically apolitical and as such had helped advance the fellowship of man and the

¹⁴³ *Los Angeles Times*, 4 October 1968, p. F9; *Daily Worker*, 12 October 1968, p. 1, 12.

¹⁴⁴ *Daily Worker*, 17 October 1968, p. 2; *Washington Post*, 17 October 1968, p. C1; *New York Times*, 16 October 1968, p. 52; *Los Angeles Times*, 16 October 1968, p. G1.

¹⁴⁵ *Washington Post*, 17 October 1968, p. C1.

¹⁴⁶ *New York Times*, 20 October 1968, p. S2.

congeniality of nations in a turbulent twentieth century. Brundage's belief in the sanctity of the Olympic movement would later motivate him to attempt to erase the intrusion of protest from the history of the Olympics.¹⁴⁷ However, the IOC's first reaction was to take further steps to prevent other blacks from protesting. Initially, the USOC was undecided on whether to take punitive action against the two athletes, but before the committee could decide on a course of action, USOC President Douglas F. Roby was called before the IOC on Thursday morning at 9 am. He was berated by the nine-man executive committee for lack of control of the US team and was told that if the USOC did not punish Carlos and Smith, the IOC could take "drastic action" against the whole US team. Although Roby later denied it, reporters and other USOC officials speculated that the IOC threatened to suspend the entire US team if another protest occurred. Roby later confided that the IOC believed the suspension of Carlos and Smith would serve as an example that would prevent other blacks from demonstrating. In the wee hours of Friday morning, 2 am, the USOC issued a statement of apology to the IOC, the Mexican Organizing Committee and the people of Mexico condemning Smith and Carlos's "untypical exhibition" and "violation of basic standards of sportsmanship and good manners." The two athletes had their visitors' permits rescinded, thus giving them forty-eight hours to leave Mexico. Carlos and Smith had been expelled from the Olympics.¹⁴⁸

As the news spread through the Olympic village on Friday morning and reporters searched out athletes for comments, rumors circulated that several blacks and a few whites on the US team would boycott the remainder of the games. That, however, never materialized. Emotions, however, did flare. Several athletes, including Boston, Ron Freeman, a black sprinter, Connolly and the Harvard Crew team openly condemned the IOC for the suspending Smith and Carlos and without a hearing.¹⁴⁹ In response to a "Wallace for President" sticker that suddenly appeared on the fourth floor of the US teams' headquarters in the Olympic village, Matthews hung a "Down with Brundage" banner from a seventh

¹⁴⁷ Brundage unsuccessfully requested that the Mexico Organizing Committee cut the protest from the official Olympic film; Guttman, 245; *Washington Post*, 28 October 1968, p. D2.

¹⁴⁸ Kieran and Daley, 433-4; *Los Angeles Times*, 19 October 1968, p. A1.

¹⁴⁹ *New York Times*, 19 October 1968, p. 1, 45.

floor balcony.¹⁵⁰ Evans, a teammate of Smith and Carlos at SJS, was noticeably distraught and retreated to his room where he vowed not to compete. Smith and Carlos, who had checked out of the village, however, reappeared and encouraged black Olympians to “*win and then do their thing, man.*”¹⁵¹ Years later, Foreman also suggested that he vowed not to compete. However, during the games he was quoted as dismissing the Smith-Carlos protest as diminutive of “college kids.”¹⁵²

In contrast to the hardline it was forced to take against Smith and Carlos, the IOC attempted to persuade other blacks, many of whom had yet to compete, not to protest. The day after the Smith and Carlos demonstration, the IOC sent Jesse Owens, whose four gold medals in 1936 wrecked the Nazis’ attempt to use the Berlin games as an Aryan showcase, to meet with the black male track and field athletes. Owens had previously spoken out against the boycott proposal and consequently, several OPHR supporters, like Evans and Matthews, viewed him derisively as a “messenger” for Brundage. Edwards had previously deemed Owens an “Uncle Tom” because of his strenuous advocacy of the traditional belief that athletic accomplishments advanced the struggle of African Americans as a group; Owens’s actions at the meeting solidified that odious reputation among the younger group of blacks. At the beginning of the meeting, Owens asked supporting white Olympians to leave so that he could speak with “my black brothers” alone. Evans and Matthews quickly objected and after Owens began to reiterate the establishment’s threats, he was “shouted down” and eventually, Evans remembered, “we ran him out of there.” Evans and Matthews later noted that Owens commanded little respect among them because he had little relevance to their conceptualization of the black struggle. He had garnered four gold medals, an Olympic feat that would not be surpassed until 1972, but had done little to tangibly advance blacks in US society and other than the medals thirty-two years earlier, had little success to speak of. Almost immediately after the 1936 Olympics, while his accomplishments were being retold patriotically in the American press, Owens had been deserted by Brundage and the US Olympic establishment for refusing to participate without compensation in events that earned the USOC’s coffers coin. He was then quickly

¹⁵⁰ Pete Hamil, “Report from Olympic Village,” *Ramparts*, 30 October 1968, 22-7.

¹⁵¹ Evans, Interview with Zirin, 83; Moore, “Eye of the Storm,” 63-4; *emphasis in text*.

¹⁵² Foreman, 57-8; *New York Times*, 19 October 1968, p. 45.

abandoned by the white boosters who paid his tuition at Ohio State University and with no degree or favor, through the next decade, Owens routinely raced against animals and motorcycles to support his family. Despite his medals and reputation as an American hero, in the thirty-two years between the Berlin and Mexico City, the white-controlled sports establishment never offered Owens an administrative job, as they commonly did former white Olympians. Several of the young black athletes, including Matthews, were astonished that he could so strenuously advocate that their accomplishments and accommodation would have an annulling effect on anti-black discrimination, because despite his continuing fame, as a race representative and black man, Owens seems to have little to no success. As athletes, they continued to admire Owens's athletic accomplishments, but Evans later disclosed that "We felt sorry for him, actually," because he did not realize that he was being exploited by the establishment-again. The meeting with Owens was another example of how Brundage and the USOC's reaction to black protest, further disaffected black athletes. As such, despite Owens's ill-conceived plea, several blacks resolved to protest the white insensitivity and racism that they believed Brundage personified.¹⁵³

Later the evening, as Evans, Freeman and Larry James prepared for the 400-meter finals, Roby appeared to warn them that any protest would result in their suspension. James had to be restrained. The three athletes composed themselves, and Evans won the gold in a time of 43.8 seconds, a world record that would stand for more than twenty years. James finished second and Freeman claimed third in a black sweep of the event. The three wore Black Panther style-berets to the victory stand. At the start of the anthem, however, they removed them and stood at attention. After the anthem, they thrust black fists at their comrades in the stands. Similar Black Power-themed protests followed. After his spectacular and record-shattering long jump, Beamon claimed his gold medal in black socks and Boston, the bronze medalist, went barefoot on the victory stand.¹⁵⁴ Black "solidarity" with Carlos and Smith extended across geographic barriers and into the athletes' section of the Olympic stadium, where blacks from the US, Africa and the Caribbean and supporting friends gathered to cheer on athletes of African descent.

¹⁵³ Matthews, 191-5; Evans, Interview with Zirin, 81-2.

¹⁵⁴ *New York Times*, 19 October 1968, p. 1.

Throughout the track and field events, whenever a black athlete captured a medal, the section applauded and flashed the clinched Black Power fist and several athletes responded in kind. They also set up congas and drums and chanted and danced to celebrate black success and liberation.¹⁵⁵ Two days later, on the 21 October, in another act of solidarity, both the Cuban men's and women's 4 X 400 relay teams, composed primarily of Afro-Cubans, announced they would send their silver medals to Stokely Carmichael. Tyus also announced that she and the other three black women who won the women's 4 x 400 meter relay dedicated their gold medals to their two exiled teammates.¹⁵⁶ Black spokesmen from home also issued their support for Smith and Carlos. Jackie Robinson, Detroit activist and clergyman Albert Cleage, Representative John Conyers of Michigan and the NAACP's Roy Wilkins, who had opposed the OPHR, all condemned the IOC's suspension of the two athletes.¹⁵⁷ A number of white Olympians, including Connolly, Waddell, Ed Burke and the Harvard Crew team also expressed support for the black athletes.¹⁵⁸ The last black demonstration occurred on the 21st. Matthews joined Evans, James and Freeman to capture the men's 4 x 1,600 meter relays and again wore black berets to the victory stands.¹⁵⁹ Despite declarations by several athletes, including Boston and Hines, that they had demonstrated too, the IOC took no action and the media noted that they had not disrupted the games or the American anthem as Smith and Carlos had.¹⁶⁰

Following the close of the games, disparate ideological groups began offering their interpretations of the demonstrations. The mainstream's interpretation of the demonstrations were shaped by the US team's overall Olympic performance. According to most experts, the Russians had outperformed the US at three successive Olympics. In 1968, the US reversed the field and for the first time since 1952, the first post-war games the Russians entered, bested their Cold War foe. Additionally, the Mexico City games provided the best composite of athletic performances in Olympic history; a record sixty-seven world

¹⁵⁵ *Daily World*, 23 October 1968, p. 12; Robin Cochran and Jack Scott, "Report from Section 22," *Ramparts*, 30 November 1968, 6, 10.

¹⁵⁶ *Daily World*, 23 October 1968, p. 12; *Muhammad Speaks*, 1 November 1968, p. 33.

¹⁵⁷ *Chicago Defender*, 23 October 1968, p. 28; *Daily Worker*, 22 October 1968, p. 12.

¹⁵⁸ *Daily World*, 23 October 1968, p. 12; Waddell, 107; Edwards, *Revolt*, 104.

¹⁵⁹ *New York Times*, 21 October 1968, p. 60; *Daily World*, 22 October 1968, p. 12.

¹⁶⁰ *New York Times*, 19 October 1968, p. 1; *Daily Worker*, 23 October 1968, p. 12.

records were established and new Olympic marks were set a record 185 times. Americans, as most of the domestic press highlighted, were responsible for several of the games' most notable performances. Beamon's long jump of 29 ft. 2 in. surpassed the previous record by more than two feet. Al Oerter won his fourth gold medal in the discus throw, an Olympic record in any event. Smith set a world record in the 200-meters, thus reaffirming his claim to the fastest human being ever and American swimmers established world record times in the men's 400-meters freestyle and the women's 400-meters relay. Furthermore, the US dominated several of the international renowned sports including swimming and basketball. In track and field, Americans won fifteen gold, six silver and seven bronze medals, for a total of twenty-eight awards, fifteen more than the Russians and twenty more than the Kenyans, the two other international track and field powers. At the end of the games, the US claimed 107 medals, the most in team history, to best the Soviets' ninety medals. American success was celebrated vaingloriously throughout the domestic mainstream press. *Time* bragged that Americans "kept the band working" throughout the Olympics. "The Star-Spangled Banner was played so often that it began to sound like the Stars and Stripes forever."¹⁶¹ *The Washington Post* gloated that the Soviets were so disappointed by their teams' performance that the Kremlin uncharacteristically allowed Russian newspaper's to criticize the nation's Olympic effort.¹⁶²

Mainstream articles that summarized the Olympics characterized the Carlos-Smith protest as a disruption of the US's victory at the games. Just as Black Power was disrupting college campuses, it had

¹⁶¹ John Underwood, "A High Time for Sprinters- and Kenyans," *Sports Illustrated*, 28 October 1968, 25; "The Olympic in Retrospect," *Ebony*, December 1968, 160; "Records All Around," *Time*, 25 October 1968, 63; *Los Angeles Times*, 27 October 1968, p. F1; *Washington Post*, 28 October 1968, p. D1.

¹⁶² *Washington Post*, 30 October 1968, p. D3.

As expected, blacks performed well and contributed mightily to the US's success. Of the twenty-eight medals the US won in track and field, black men and women won twenty-six. Blacks were also instrumental in the US's success in other notable sports. African Americans won both gold medals the US claimed in boxing, but as important Foreman extended US dominance in the heavyweight division, thus allowing the US to continue to claim a superficial, yet international claim to the world's most virile title. Additionally, Spencer Haywood, a 6'10 black teenage junior college player emerged, to help the US win the gold in basketball. Typically, inexperienced players were not invited to the Olympic basketball trials. However, the absence of several established college stars including Alcindor, Elvin Hayes and Wes Unseld, spurred a desperate search by coach Hank Iba. Behind Haywood's dependable scoring and fierce rebounding and the versatility of Charles Scott and JoJo White, two other black players, the US comfortably beat all comers, including the Russians, to maintain its undefeated streak in Olympic basketball; *Washington Post*, 27 October 1968, p. C5; for a discussion of the world's heavyweight boxing title and manliness, see Bederman, 1-8.

disrupted the Olympics and an American victory, which the mainstream suggested was unpatriotic and destructive. *Time* noted that the “saddest thing about the ruckus raised by Tommie Smith and John Carlos was that it dulled the luster of a superlative track and field meet in which the US once again demonstrated that it is the world’s best.”¹⁶³ *Newsweek* added that it “interrupted a week of some of the most brilliant Olympic feats in the history of the games,” including US athletes establishing world and Olympic records in the 100-meters, the shot put and long jump.¹⁶⁴ *US News and World Report* declared that the “racial issue has invaded that quadrennial show of international goodwill.”¹⁶⁵ Mainstream articles rarely characterized the demonstration as a protest, but as an offense that threaten the US’s geopolitical dominance and therefore, as unpatriotic and damaging to further racial progress. *Time* called it a “public display of petulance” that, although “effective” in attracting international attention to anti-black discrimination in the US, was “petty.” It wryly noted that “East Germans, Russians, even Cubans, all stand at attention when The Star-Spangled Banner or any other national anthem is played.”¹⁶⁶ Smith and Carlos did not, which several commentators suggested made them malcontent troublemakers whose unpatriotic actions would only regress race relations and the nation’s geopolitical dominance. Indeed, a *Los Angeles Times* columnist described it as a “Nazi-like salute.”¹⁶⁷ Brent Musburger, then of the *Chicago American*, labeled them “dark-skinned storm troopers” who intruded on the US’s dominance at the games. Musburger was “a little tired of having the United States run down by athletes who are enjoying themselves at the expense of the country. Protesting and working constructively against racism in the United States is one thing, but airing one’s dirty laundry at a fun-and-games tournament was no more than a juvenile gesture by a couple of athletes who should have known better.”¹⁶⁸ The mainstream

¹⁶³ “Records All Around,” 63.

¹⁶⁴ “The Olympics’ Extra Heat,” *Newsweek*, 28 October 1968, 74.

¹⁶⁵ *US News and World Report*, 28 October 1968, p. 10.

¹⁶⁶ “Black Compliant,” 62.

¹⁶⁷ *Los Angeles Times*, 24 October 1968, p. C6.

¹⁶⁸ Contrary to Musburger’s assertion, the USOC was a private organization and many US sportswriters iterated with pride that American athletes were not subsidized by the state as they were in the Soviet Union; *Chicago American*, 19 October 1968, p. 12.

press spoke for the general white mainstream establishment. In the decades following the protest, the Carlos and Smith families endured economic and social marginalization.¹⁶⁹

Ironically, the establishment's interpretation of the Smith-Carlos protest as a disruption was closer to Smith's interpretation than that of the traditional black establishment and many white liberals. The assertions that Smith and Carlos had acted unpatriotically mitigated explicit support for their protest among white liberals and black moderates. Instead, their commentary condemned the USOC's suspension of Carlos and Smith as an emotional "over-reaction" and further evidence of the establishment's racial insensitivity. An editorial in the *Detroit Free Press* declared the suspension an "indication the [USOC] understands neither the significance nor impact of its act on Black America." Smith and Carlos won medals that were counted in the US's total and then chose to show that "they were not abandoning the struggle of their people for equality." Despite their service and distinction, the USOC "kicked them in the teeth." The editorial concluded that such racial insensitivity would cause blacks to continue to protest the establishment.¹⁷⁰ For that same reason, Joe Henderson, a liberal columnist for *Track and Field News*, suggested that the establishment's "reaction was at times at least as disgusting as they claimed the Carlos-Smith demonstration was."¹⁷¹

The traditional black establishment was also preoccupied with the establishment's assertion that the protest was destructive and unpatriotic. Several black periodicals characterized the protest as "mild." *Ebony* noted that "the protest was strong, but not unreasonable." It was "child's play" when compared to recent "ghetto revolts, school boycotts and impassioned request for a separate state...In a nation where white Vietnam war protestors have flaunted Viet Cong flags, burned and torn American flags and burned draft cards, the Smith-Carlos demonstration appeared as solemn as a church mouse." An editorial in the *New York Amsterdam News* articulated a similar sentiment.¹⁷² *The Pittsburgh Courier* noted that if President Lyndon Johnson found it necessary to chant "We Shall Overcome" before the world via three

¹⁶⁹ Moore, "Eye of the Storm," 65-72.

¹⁷⁰ Quoted in the *Daily Worker*, 22 October 1968, p. 12.

¹⁷¹ Joe Henderson, "US Black Protest," *Track and Field News*, October/November 1968, 5.

¹⁷² "The Olympics in Retrospect," 160; *New York Amsterdam News*, 2 November 1968, p. 19.

television networks in 1965, then “the muted echoing of [that sentiment] with closed fists at the [Olympics] deserved none of the ‘red neck’ response that startled the world.”¹⁷³ *The Chicago Defender* and *Ebony* both lamented that the establishment’s over-reaction and repression would likely cause blacks to boycott the 1972 US Olympic team.¹⁷⁴ Even though the traditional black and liberal white establishments fell short of defending the two activists’ right to free speech or to specifically endorse their protest, unlike most mainstream periodicals, they carried the picture of the “controversial” demonstration of “Black Power” and “pride” with a affirming caption, usually on the front page, even if not they did not provide an article discussing the event.¹⁷⁵ The ambiguity was a product of the historical dilemma of the traditional black press. As in WWII, the traditional black establishment could not condone protest that might disrupt the state’s effort to combat its foes, for fear of being labeled disloyal and subversive (later Communist). The black masses, however, were less accommodating and expressly more belligerent toward the white-dominated state.¹⁷⁶

Leftist and black radical sources countered assertions that the protest was unpatriotic by claiming that the athletes’ suspensions were another establishment attempt to suppress blacks’ struggle for equality and defining Smith and Carlos as martyrs for the cause of black, Third World and working class liberation. Several New Left periodicals, such as the *Daily World* and the *Guardian*, equated the suspensions to tantamount to criminalizing protest of discrimination and demonstrating “black unity.” These papers praised the activist-athletes’ defiance and independence, noting that their manifested dissent of the establishment made them “men.”¹⁷⁷ *The Black Panther*, a Marxist and black liberation periodical, effusively proclaimed that

The oppressed people of the world can take heart for the actions of two black men, Tommie Smith and John Carlos. They proved that not only are they outstanding athletes, but first and foremost- that they are Black men. To raise your fist in a Black Power

¹⁷³ *Pittsburgh Courier*, 26 October 1968, p. 4.

¹⁷⁴ *Chicago Defender*, 21 October 1968, p. 13; “The Olympics in Retrospect,” 160.

¹⁷⁵ *New York Amsterdam News*, 26 October 1968, p. 1; *Ebony*, December 1969, 161.

¹⁷⁶ Lee Finkle, “The Conservative Aims of Militant Rhetoric: Black Protest during World War II,” *Journal of American History*, 60, 3 (December 1973): 692-713; Richard M. Dalfume, “The ‘Forgotten Years’ of the Negro Revolution,” *Journal of American History*, 55, 1 (June 1968): 100-2.

¹⁷⁷ *Guardian*, 26 October 1968, p. 7; *Daily Worker*, 19 October 1968, p. 12.

salute may seem to be a small thing. But when you are confronted with the pressure of the entire racist power structure, it takes ‘GUTS.’ The brothers not only had to defy the pigs such as Avery Brundage, they also had to contend with Toms

in the black community, who argued that athletic participation, accomplishments and accommodation were better means of advancing their communities, than protest. Expecting further establishment repression, the *Panther* warned the “pigs” that the “two brothers...had earned the respect of the Panther. In other words, DON’T EFF WITH THEM! If you do, you must surely face the wrath of armed Black People.”¹⁷⁸ By contrast, radicals often described the actions of Brundage and the USOC as cowardly. *Muhammad Speaks* suggested that Smith and Carlos were suspended because they defied racists, who hypocritically claimed that the Olympics were apolitical, despite the intense rivalry between the West and the Communists. The argument that they interjected politics into the games, the paper concluded, was a dubious excuse to rationalize the suppression of the two blacks.¹⁷⁹ A *Chicago Defender* columnist agreed and projected Avery Brundage as effeminate; “April Brundage.”¹⁸⁰

The black masses rejected mainstream and the traditional black establishment interpretations of the demonstration and issued their own meanings of the protest. In addition to writing rebutting responses to articles in both the mainstream and black press, black responses suggested that the demonstration represented their preferred method of black advancement, protest and direct mass action against discrimination, rather than advances wrought through accommodation, assimilation and gradualism. In response to an article in the December 1968 issue of *Sepia*, a black monthly pictorial, which described the protest as profoundly unpatriotic and damaging to the race’s effort to improve whites’ images of blacks, seven of the eight letters printed in two succeeding issues of the magazine disagreed with the characterization. One writer labeled the author’s thinking “antiquated.” Blacks no longer strove to impress whites as a way of effecting black advancement. The reader thought Mark Winters, the author, must be “trying to misinform or miseducate” blacks. Another argued that Smith and

¹⁷⁸ *Black Panther Party*, 26 October 1968, p. 1; *emphasis in the text*.

¹⁷⁹ *Muhammad Speaks*, 1 November 1968, p. 13.

¹⁸⁰ *Chicago Defender*, 22 October 1968, p. 26.

Carlos demonstrated that blacks were becoming “independent of the values and standards of white America,” which she welcomed as the preferred means to improve the status of blacks. Several readers, in their own words, were “disgusted” by the article and questioned if Winters was white or “paid by the white folks to write this.” Others suggested that the article was an indication that *Sepia* was becoming a subpar and irrelevant magazine.¹⁸¹ Perhaps, the most profound interpretation of Smith and Carlos’s demonstration as the masses’ preferred method of advancement was issued by Gloria A. Lewis. In her response to a *Chicago Defender* editorial that described the demonstration immature and inappropriate, Lewis wrote “So what, if on special occasion,” like the Olympics, “Black men are accorded the respect that is lacking in their everyday homes. How meaningful are the crumbs tossed to us by the fickle White establishment?” History demonstrated that nothing blacks had accomplished significantly annulled discrimination. Therefore, Lewis argued “any occasion, sacrosanct or not, is the proper place to demonstrate our convictions and our desires beyond that which the United States so grudgingly, permits us.” She concluded that their demonstration was recognized “in Harlem, Chicago’s south and west sides, Watts, Mississippi, Alabama and all other places including South Africa, Kenya, Rhodesia, the Congo and Nigeria (just to name only a few)” as symbolic of the changing racial advancement discourse from gradualism and integration to empowering black communities.¹⁸²

Symbolic of a generation’s new discourse of struggle, the masses, especially young blacks, elevated Smith and Carlos to a revered status otherwise reserved for infamous Black Nationalists, such as Carmichael, H. Rap Brown, the Black Panthers and Muhammad Ali, whose ideology, verbiage and actions had similarly antagonized conservative whites and black moderates alike. Less than two weeks after the demonstration, Carlos and Edwards appeared alongside Brown and Carmichael at the homecoming festivities of Howard University, a historically black college in Washington, DC. According to one reporter, as the national anthem played at the football game, the crowd reenacted their Black Power salute. He noted that “nearly 10,000 Black men and women stood in rigid defiance,

¹⁸¹ Mark Winters, “The Olympics and Black Power,” *Sepia*, December 1968, 72-6; “Letters to the Editor,” *Sepia*, February 1969, 6; March 1969, 6.

¹⁸² *Chicago Defender*, 21 October 1968, p. 13; 26 December 1968, p. 17.

showing their support for Carlos and Smith, who had been suspended from the Olympic Games.” He concluded that it was the most significant event on campus since a speech by Ali earlier that year.¹⁸³ Such demonstrations became common in the months following the Olympics. In November, for instance, two brothers in the Yale band garnered national press by raising their Black Power fist in defiance during the national anthem at a Yale-Dartmouth football game.¹⁸⁴

The masses also admonished those that they perceived as having betrayed Smith and Carlos and by extension, the black struggle. Four days after the Smith and Carlos demonstration, Foreman defeated a Russian for the gold in heavyweight boxing. Afterwards, he paraded a miniature American flag around the ring to, as he later insinuated, highlight an American victory over the Russians. His actions drew praise from the mainstream, including Republican presidential nominee Richard Nixon and Democratic presidential nominee Hubert Humphrey alike. Among blacks, however, the incident was interpreted as juxtaposition of Carlos and Smith and back on the block in his native Fifth Ward, a black neighborhood in Houston, Foreman became an “outcast.” “I often ran into [blacks] who shot me strange looks; their faces said I betray the cause.” He later “ran into a ‘friend’ I hadn’t seen since the Olympics” who asked “how could you lift up the flag that way when the brothers were doing their thing?” Foreman later concluded that his friend was only “speaking the words everyone else thought.”¹⁸⁵ Evans had similar experiences. As one of the four members of the victorious 4 x 1600 meter relay team, four days after Smith and Carlos demonstrated, Evans won a second gold medal. As one of the outspoken supporters of the OPHR and Smith’s close friend, he was expected to disrupt the states’ projection of a practiced racial democracy. Instead, Evans, as did his three teammates, removed their berets and stood at attention during the anthem. Upon his return to San Jose, he was condemned by other blacks, including Edwards and Carlos, as a

¹⁸³ *Muhammad Speaks*, 8 November 1968, p. 13-4.

¹⁸⁴ *Jet*, 21 November 1968, 37.

¹⁸⁵ Foreman, 62; Edwards, *Revolt*, 106-7.

coward.¹⁸⁶ In fact, among blacks who supported Smith and Carlos there was general disappointment that all of the other black Olympians did not demonstrate as the pair had.¹⁸⁷

The black masses' defense of Smith and Carlos's demonstration suggested that their actions represented the more aggressive movements and protest ideologies being employed by radical "Black Power" and Sixties activists. The protest corresponded with blacks increasing rejection of gradualism as white resistance, integration as a dissolution of black pride and of the economic and political base necessary to achieve equality, US involvement in Vietnam as a neocolonial war to further subjugate another people of color to white supremacy and the demand for black caucuses to ensure that black voices for the redress of their grievances. Black Power activists typically argued that improving whites' image of blacks had wrought little advancement in the recognition of black rights and humanity because most whites were too recalcitrant. Therefore, as Gloria Lewis argued above, blacks should protest racial injustices indiscriminately and despite white objections. Willie Brown, a young black California state representative, articulated this sentiment precisely when he voiced his defense of Smith and Carlos, two of his constituents, shortly after their protest: "They will be known forever as the two niggers who upset the 1968 Olympic Games. I'd rather have them known for that, than as two niggers who won medals."¹⁸⁸

In the four decades past, the radical and masses' interpretation of the event predominated. Prior to the Olympics, the clenched fist, as used by the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense and OPHR posters, was already a black radical symbol of protest in the US. It most often symbolized political, economic and cultural resistance to the totality of white supremacy.¹⁸⁹ The Mexico City demonstration popularized the gesture. In the wake of the games, the gesture was adopted by international labor, leftists and Third World liberation struggles. Leftist periodicals, for instance, often used pictures of workers and protestors giving the salute on their cover and in pictures accompanying struggles for civil rights, national liberation and worker's rights. As a result, the photo of Smith and Carlos and/or the Panthers giving the

¹⁸⁶ David Wolf, "Lee Evans Grim Education" in *The Best of Sport, 1946-1971* ed. by Al Silverman (New York: Viking, 1971), 439-440; originally published in *Sport* magazine in 1969; Zirin, interview with Evans, 84.

¹⁸⁷ *Chicago Defender*, 26 December 1968, p. 17; *Muhammad Speaks*, 1 November 1968, p. 13.

¹⁸⁸ James Richardson, *Willie Brown: A Biography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 161.

¹⁸⁹ Van DeBurg, 103-4.

salute generally accompanies discussions of Black Power and/or the Sixties in text books.¹⁹⁰ The protest also became widely recognized because, like other symbols of liberation, political and cultural struggles, it was commoditized.¹⁹¹ Indeed, just two months after the Olympics, *Muhammad Speaks* advertised a special commemorative medal of the protest.¹⁹² In the forty years since, Smith and Carlos's raised fists continue to appear on t-shirts and posters. Most importantly, however, was that the gesture continued to indicate solidarity and optimistic struggle. In 1972, for instance, as Angela Y. Davis, a black female activist, emerged from jail on bail for charges related to the attempted escape of prisoners, she raised her fist as a signal to those who gathered to wish her well. They applauded and returned the Black Power gesture.¹⁹³

The Black Power interpretation has also continued to predominate because of the advocacy of Harry Edwards, the twenty-four year old graduate student and former student-athlete who organized the OPHR. Over the proceeding four decades, Edwards, who earned a doctorate in sociology, would be the only intimate boycott participant to consistently publicly discuss the black drive to boycott the 1968 Olympic team. In 1969, the year following the Olympics, he published *The Revolt of the Black Athlete*, a movement memoir that was the only significant account of the movement for approximately forty years. In the work and subsequent others, Edwards connected the black drive to boycott the 1968 US Olympic team to the larger Black Power struggle to challenge institutional racism. Edwards also continues to proclaim that the OPHR was a success, because although it did not produce a complete boycott, the year long drive and the resulting Black Power demonstration at the games attracted international attention to the racial inequality and discrimination continuing to exist in the US. However, Edwards has remained concerned about the alarming racial disparities that continue to exist in sport and society. Black student-athletes' graduation rates continue to lag drastically behind those of whites and even at the turn-of-the

¹⁹⁰ Mary Beth Norton et al, *A People and a Nation*, 7th edition, (New York: Houghton Mifflin, Co., 2005), 848; Terry Anderson, *The Sixties* (New York: Longman, 1999), 125-6.

¹⁹¹ Robin D. G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2002), 14.

¹⁹² *Muhammad Speaks*, 27 December 1968, p. 36.

¹⁹³ *New York Times*, 27 February 1968, p. E5.

twenty-first century, stereotypes, “stacking” and “quotas” continue to limit opportunities for blacks in sports. Through writings and speeches, Edwards has continued the revolt that he orchestrated as a young black athlete in the mid-1960s.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹⁴ Edwards, “Olympic Project for Human Rights,” 2-7; Edwards, Interview with David Leonard, 16-23.

POSTSCRIPT: A Miscarriage of Glory

In 2007, Walt Disney Pictures released *Glory Road*, the based on a true story movie of an interracial basketball team from a once-segregated southern university, Texas Western, that captured the 1966 NCAA basketball championship. The film is set in the context of the Sixties, and although the activism of the period lends meaning to the film, much of the student and minority subtext of the era is absent from *Glory Road*. With the exception of references to Malcolm X and a distant civil rights movement occurring in the Deep South, the story of these black student-athletes appears remote from the protests of the period. *Glory Road* would have us believe that while their student and working class contemporaries across the globe organized to challenge discrimination, *loco parentis* and establishmentarianism, all the black kids at Texas Western wanted to do was play basketball. And by doing so, they accomplished much of what their more militant contemporaries were attempting by marching in the streets and taking over campuses and classrooms.

Such an outcome seems plausible because of the film's liberal projection of racial discrimination, which is the compelling issue of the movie and, of course, is one of the compelling issues of "the Sixties." *Glory Road* suggests that with the exception of minor arguments with white teammates and the assault of a black player by several uncouth whites during a southern road trip, Texas Western's black players did not encounter much tangible racial discrimination. The film also subtly suggests that they are taught to overcome the racism they do encounter by abandoning "street" basketball and assimilating the "organized" basketball as taught by their coach, Don Haskins. Subsequently, Haskins, who is white, chooses to start and use only black players for the first time in the history of the NCAA championship game to illustrate that blacks are capable of the same accomplishments of whites. Through Haskins' foresight and altruism, Texas Western's seven black players, much like Jackie Robinson's entrance into white-controlled institutional baseball in 1947, make a significant contribution to society by challenging the prevailing racist perception that blacks are inferior to whites.

The truth of the Texas Western championship is far different, however. *Glory Road* is “based on a true story,” which in this case means that the events surrounding the Texas Western team have been condensed for an 1 hour and 58 minute feature film, but the essence of the story remains factual. Thus, Texas Western did not win the title in Haskins' first year, but his fifth, and the seven blacks he recruited were not the first to enroll at the university; blacks had attended the school on football and basketball scholarships since the mid-1950s. These deviations, as well as some others, are understandable, because they seem to be peripheral to the morals of the story, which are summed up at the film's conclusion. The victorious team arrives at the El Paso airport and is greeted by enthusiastic fans befitting the return of any champion. Clearly, their achievement enlightened whites, including a once-reluctant campus community, regarding the capabilities of blacks and destroyed the rational of anti-black racism.

However, several of the black players remember their return differently. Two years after the game, cerebral and feisty point guard Willie Worsley told a reporter that after the airport reception, a parade and a banquet, “that was about the end of it. We were never campus heroes. We were never invited to mixers or anything like that.” Before and after that game, the predominately white university community, including the coaches and administration, made it clear to the black players that they were there to play basketball and garner the little known school athletic prestige and revenue, but to do little else. Worsley complained that he and the other black players continued to be treated like “animals” by their white coaches, teammates and others at the school. “You play basketball and that's it. When the game's over, they want you to come back to the dormitory and stay out of sight.”¹ The racial discrimination that black student-athletes experienced on campus at Texas Western, however, is absent from *Glory Road*.

In 1968, Worsley and teammates David Latin and Willie Cager were among a number of black student-athletes at the school who revealed to *Sports Illustrated* a litany of racial prejudices condoned by the athletic department and university. For instance, they continued to be segregated during road trips and

¹ The Worsley interview and the discussion of the racism at Texas Western are contained in Jack Olsen, *The Black Athlete: A Shameful Story, The Myth of Integration in American Sport* (New York, 1969), 7-26; and Jack Olsen, “In an Alien World” *Sports Illustrated*, 15 July 1968, 28-43.

in on-campus housing, found it difficult to secure housing in neighborhoods surrounding the campus and were denied the routine and extralegal financial and summer job assistance doled out to their white teammates. Additionally, they were harassed by white students and threatened with the loss of scholarships by coaches, including Haskins, if they dated white co-eds. They also complained that several members of the administration, including athletic director George McCartney, openly referred to them as “niggers” and made them the butt of racial jokes.² In the film, however, McCartney is portrayed as a liberal ally of the basketball program, because he approved the school’s recruitment of black athletes.

As telling, none of the seven black members of the championship team graduated with their class. Several of them indicated that the athletic department did not believe that blacks possessed the sufficient intellectual aptitude to pass core college classes, so blacks were enrolled in “Mickey Mouse” elective courses that kept them eligible to participate in sports, but did not earn them credits toward graduation. As a result, two years after the championship, most had completed their athletic eligibility, but none had earned a college degree. After speaking with several coaches, administrators and athletes at the school, reporter Jack Olsen concluded that Texas Western had “done little more than hire out Hessians for four years, or long enough to bring a [national] championship” to the school.³

The discrimination that Worsley and the other blacks experienced at Texas Western was as palpable as the socioeconomic discrimination that blacks endured in the Jim Crow rural south and inner-city America and by 1967, it had worn on the black student-athletes. That fall semester, black football players at the school staged a sit-in of the athletic dorms and pledged to boycott practice and games until blacks received the same financial assistance as whites and the administration agreed to end housing segregation. The protest ended after the athletic department made several promises, but black students claimed they were never kept. Racial tensions continued to simmer over the following months and then exploded the next April with the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. A white track coach disregarded several blacks’ need to grieve the loss of a hero and required them to compete in a meet the

² Olsen, “In an Alien World,” 30-5.

³ Olsen, *Black Athlete*, 11.

following weekend. The next week, several of those athletes refused to travel to a meet at Brigham Young University in Utah, citing the school's affiliation with the Mormon Church, which taught that blacks were an inferior race. Subsequently, several were dismissed from the track team and lost their scholarships. The following semester, several black football players quit in protest.⁴

The turmoil at Texas Western was not unusual. Beginning in 1967, black student-athletes at more than a 100 predominately white colleges and several high schools protested the racial discrimination they experienced at the hands of white teammates, athletic departments and campus communities.⁵ As the dissertation demonstrates, Tommie Smith and John Carlos, the two black champion sprinters who protested at the 1968 Mexico Olympics, had participated in the black students' movement at San Jose State (CA) College earlier that year. Beginning in the immediate post-WWII period, schools with inconspicuous sports traditions like Texas Western and San Jose began recruiting blacks to bolster their athletic teams because they could not lure the same quality of white athletes as prominent flagship universities such as Southern Cal and Texas. While blacks have made up roughly half of the nation's best football and basketball rosters for more than three decades now, in the 1950s and 1960s, they were first recruited to and led second-tier schools like San Francisco, Loyola of Chicago and Michigan State to NCAA championships and athletic fame and fortune. In the 1970s and 1980s, their recruitment instantly made once-segregated regional universities like Louisville and Georgetown into national basketball powers. In the 1970s, Florida State and Miami (FL) took similar routes to national football prominence. Along the way, these universities reaped the increased spectator and media revenue that had traditionally gone to athletic giants like Notre Dame, the Big Ten and Southeastern Conference and Negro athletes reaped the *glory* that came with athletic accomplishments and demonstrating that their race was as capable as whites. Texas Western was one of the first formerly white colleges to capitalize on that trend

⁴ Edwards, *Revolt*, 84-7; Olsen, "In an Alien World," 35-43.

⁵ Jack Scott, *The Athletic Revolution* (New York: Free Press, 1971), v-vi.

and because of the 1966 NCAA championship, the school, like college athletics in general, acquired the misnomer of avant-garde in racial advancement.⁶

The success of *Glory Road*, which grossed over \$50 million in its first two months of release, suggest the currency that the belief that the accomplishments of blacks in white-controlled athletics advanced the black struggle for equality, or the “myth of the black athlete” as some skeptics have termed it, continues to have in American society. Indeed, in the immediate years after the release of *Glory Road*, several films that project sports as a tool by which blacks have gained the acceptance of whites, such as *Pride* and *Midnight Express*, followed. However, as the dissertation has attempted to demonstrate, the widespread participation of black athletes in several social movements of the period complicates the myth. Like other Black Power and Black Student activists, black athletes’ activism articulated that integration or their entrance into white-controlled institutions did not by itself constitute equality; they continued to struggle for the same rights and dignities as those of whites in those institutions.⁷ While this perspective is also absent from *Glory Road*, a popular film, its notable absence from the scholarship on black athletes’ activism in the Sixties, this dissertation has argued, is further indicative of the continued hegemony the myth of the black athlete continues to have on society, as well as the continued distortion and misunderstanding of Black Power and like Sixties movements in contemporary society.

Stokely Carmichael, a prime Black Power intellectual, warned that the mainstream press’s “distortion” of racial and class struggles in the Sixties would alter how their rational and purpose are understood in the future. He noted that discrimination often occurs in two phrases; “first, it occurs in fact

⁶ Adolph H. Grundman, “The Image of Intercollegiate Sports and the Civil Rights Movement: An Historian’s View,” *AREANA Review*, 3 (1979): 17-24; for two examples of the ascendancy of prominent college athletic programs and black athletes see Bruce Feldman, *Cane Mutiny: How the Miami Hurricane overturned the Football Establishment* (New York: New American Library, 2004); and Beth J. Shapiro, “John Hannah and the Growth of Big-Time Intercollegiate Athletics at Michigan State University,” *Journal of Sports History*, 10, 3 (Winter 1983), 33-4.

⁷ Steve Estes’ book *I am a Man* argues that blacks within integrated or white-controlled institutions were often not permitted the same agency as whites, even in civil rights organizations and forums. This dissertation has attempted to argue that obtaining the recognition of blacks’ agency within integrated institutions, including athletics, was one of the primary emphasis of Black Power; the Olympic Project for Human Rights and black student athletes’ protest in the Sixties being formative examples; Steve Estes, *I Am a Man: Race, Manhood and the Civil Rights Movement* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2005), 1-9; Edwards, *Revolt*, 65.

and deed, then – and this is equally sinister – in the official recordings of these facts.”⁸ Unfortunately, *Glory Road* continues such a process by suggesting that Texas Western’s 1966 championship was a momentous achievement in the nation’s ongoing process to eradicate racism, but omitting the harshest forms of racial discrimination that the black players continued to experience in its aftermath. Therefore, the factual essence of story, the fact that these black men achieved their momentous goal in spite of the demeaning racism that enveloped their being at Texas Western, is missing from *Glory Road*. The same continues to be true of the scholarship on the Olympic Project for Human Rights.

⁸ Stokely Carmichael, “Towards Black Liberation” in *Black Fire: An Anthology of Anthology Writing* ed. by Leroi Jones and Larry Neal (New York: William Morrow & Co., 1968), 121-2.

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