Black Athletic Sporting Experiences in the United States
CRITICAL RACE THEORY AND AMERICAN SPORT

This collection of papers by critical race scholars in the United States emphasizes the potential of Critical Race Theory (CRT) in revealing and dismantling the negative racial dynamics embedded in society. Sport is a paradox of a phenomenon that at the same time as being trivial and seemingly benign, its place in reproducing and resisting social relations makes it incredibly serious and important. As the editors state, ‘race matters’; hence where philosophies of merit and equity are sacrosanct in sport, its radicalized dysfunctions retain grave implications for the rest of society. Where these radicalized fractures exist in sport, they are likely to be worse elsewhere, revealing a house of cards. A house that cannot be dismantled by the ‘master’s tools’¹ but by tools like CRT that can fashion something that we all believe in and can live with. For many, CRT offers a pragmatic intellectual standpoint on ‘race’ and racism reflective of the lived realities of racialised actors and their allies in society.

There are few institutions in any society like college sport where racial micro-aggressions play out in such a public fashion and are perpetuated relatively unfettered. Myths of racial superiority and inferiority are constructed, defended and resisted by the proliferation of Black athletes and those that do not reflect this burgeoning group in administrative and leadership roles. Stereotypes prevail about the propensity of Black and ‘minoritised’ ethnic athletes’ physical abilities (strengths) and their intellectual/leadership (weaknesses). Such is the public abhorrence of racism and the significance of ‘race’ in society that it is often discrete and institutionalised

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behaviours that reinforce these practices rather than overt speech acts. Sport, and collegiate sport at that, can therefore be viewed as a racial formation, the result of racial processes that subjugate, subordinate and exclude some while simultaneously empowering and privileging others.

This collection demonstrates that racial processes are complex, dynamic, hegemonic, gendered and classed, the salience of each shifting in ambiguous and variegated ways. Yet one thing that remains consistent and central in these complex problematics is the centrality of ‘race’. As readers explore this volume, they will see the local, national and international relevance of this collection by Hawkins, Carter-Francique and Cooper. CRT is reaching a new generation of activist scholars requiring of all of us to rethink how we see sport in its many social contexts. The dissemination of this work facilitates critical stories of ‘race’, racism and under-theorised counter-stories that require serious consideration. Regardless of one’s status, if readers are in positions to effect changes in their approach to racialised sporting problematics, as advocated in Critical Race Theory and American Sport, they should embrace the opportunity.

Critical Race Theory and American Sport is especially important at the end of the second term of the first Black President of the United States. Despite various claims in his first term, few really believe that we have a post-racial, colourblind America/world because though change begins with one, others must follow. In this edited collection, it is clear that vested interests, personal and institutional politics lead to changes being much less straightforward and predictable than some might suggest. There are many in sport and society who require more than a single symbolic shift to transform ignorance or bigotry. ‘Race’ and sport matter, and Critical Race Theory and American Sport are likely to persuade readers that in the morass of ‘race’ and racism in sport activist scholars are working terrifically hard to articulate and finesse the challenges to understand and transform their impact.

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