

Culture

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A Message from the Chair

Barry Schwartz
University of Georgia

The Two Meanings of Collective Memory*

Barry Schwartz
Howard Schuman

The term "Collective Memory" is used in varied ways by both sociologists and historians. It has even become part of popular language, as in a New York Historical Society brochure proclaiming that the Society serves "as the collective memory of New York, accumulating vast collections in American painting, sculpture, books, manuscripts, decorative art, architectural material, prints, photographs, and ephemera." The meaning of "collective memory" to sociologists, historians, or the larger public--is, however, far from clear. The Historical Society's reference to its own collection of records from the past is paralleled in all of society's archived material, such as all books in all American libraries--including books that are seldom if ever read and thus in no one's memory except the author's.

The percentage of people reading a particular history book, seeing a particular painting or statue, or visiting a particular museum is necessarily small. Yet, commemorative patterns are redundant: most adults, for example, have read something about the Civil War, seen a few paintings of war scenes, or visited one or two museums displaying Civil War objects. Redundancy, which makes commemorative patterns familiar to all, is possible because historical accounts and commemorative symbols cumulate, are stored in social institutions, transmitted across generations, and sustained outside the mind of the individual.

To discern the actual content of a population's memories, one can ask a sample of people to tell what they

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Race, Culture, and the Case of Sport

Douglas Hartmann
University of Minnesota

In recent years scholars from disciplines and departments across the academy have produced a large and very impressive body of work exploring the connections between race and culture in contemporary American society. I am referring here to the work of scholars such as Robin D.G. Kelley, David Roediger, and George Lipsitz (history), David Theo Goldberg and Cornell West (philosophy), Kimberle Crenshaw, Patricia Williams and Neil Gotanda (law), and Lisa Lowe, Toni Morrison, and Wahneema Lubiano (literature). Yet, despite the substantial analytical power, intellectual sophistication and profound social significance of this body of work, it has had surprisingly little impact on or even visibility in either of the relevant sociological sub-fields of race and culture (not to mention in the discipline itself). The reasons for this are obviously complicated. Many of them have to do with the usual problems of interdisciplinary scholarship. Most of this work is rooted in the humanities and thus begins from a different set of questions and concerns, has a different vocabulary and rhetori-

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Academic Venture Capitalism:

Self-Publishing
Judith Huggins Balfe
CUNY

As a sociologist of culture, I have deliberately violated one of the strongest norms of the academic culture in which I practice my trade, that of peer review. Mea culpa: I have published my own book. To be sure, as I am a tenured full professor, this will not hurt my career, but I am also department chair at the College of Staten Island branch of CUNY. As such, I must be a staunch and public advocate of the importance of peer review in all personnel decisions of reappointment, tenure and promotion. Indeed, I share the view that self-publishing is frequently motivated by vanity. It also violates another strong norm of academic culture: the absence of economic motivation. We are sup-

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Lincoln as a war president facing difficult challenges or distinguished by concrete leadership abilities and achievements--neither of which appears among Peterson's themes. On these pragmatic matters, historians have written extensively, but creators of commemorative symbolism (for reasons too numerous to be discussed here) ignore them.

Although individual conceptions of Lincoln correspond only partly to the collective pattern that Peterson describes (16 percent fail to correspond to this pattern at all), they do not deny that pattern's reality, any more than the latter denies the reality of the former. The meaning of historiographic documents, or their symbolic equivalents--hagiographies, icons, monuments and shrines, place-names and rituals, etc.--results from being discovered or selected and then interpreted by individuals, while individual conceptions such as those we found in our survey, are shaped by historical and commemorative images. Collective and individual ideas about Lincoln thus exist at separate but interdependent levels.

We cannot describe let alone analyze innumerable individuals writing the histories and making the commemorative symbols that eventually crystallize into an emergent collective memory (any more than biologists can reproduce the processes of innumerable cells combining to form self-conscious life), but there is in principle nothing mysterious about images of the past being stored in social institutions and individual minds at the same time, for collective memory is a process of individual interpretations collectively accumulated and reinterpreted. Emphasizing this dynamic, circular process prevents either of the two levels from becoming reified or treated in isolation from the other.

Collective memory has two meanings: an emergent

meaning transcending individual understandings, and individual understandings that exist independently of their transcendent significance. Jeffrey Olick (1999) has recently formulated this dual aspect of collective memory in terms of its (emergent) "collective" and "collected" (individual) aspects; our approach incorporates Olick's but moves in a different direction by assessing the content of this dualism empirically. Whether one sees collective memory as a pattern of individual ideas or a pattern of impersonal symbols depends on which aspect one wishes to emphasize for a specific purpose. Whether the content of these two levels converges and how their sources differ are, however, empirical questions--questions applicable to every aspect of cultural analysis.

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* Howard Schuman's collective memory studies have contributed greatly to the sociology of culture. I am grateful to him for accepting my invitation to co-author this "Message from the Chair."

Hartmann: Race, Culture and the Case of Sport, continued

cal style, and employs different analytical tools and techniques. However, I believe that there is another, more fundamental reason why this body of work has not received more attention in sociology. It has to do with the unspoken theoretical presuppositions that dominate sociological theory and practice. More specifically, I mean to suggest that deeply ingrained individualist and materialist assumptions make it difficult for sociologists to grasp the full meaning and import of a collective and thoroughly culturally constructed category such as race.

The absence of a deep appreciation of culture is particularly noticeable in the conventional sociology of race. In this literature "culture" is typically rendered in terms that are ultimately if not explicitly individualist (prejudice or culture of poverty are the most familiar concepts) and set in opposition to "structural" approaches. An instructive example is Eduardo Bonilla-Silva's otherwise provocative 1996 *ASR* piece on racism which reduces all cultural approaches

to "purely ideological" prejudice theories and then roundly rejects them in favor of a strictly structuralist reinterpretation. In recent years, more culturally-oriented sociologists have tried to bring cultural phenomena and culturalist insights to the study of race in the United States. Michele Lamont and the contributors to her recently released edited volume *The Cultural Territories of Race* are some of the notables. But as much as these scholars have done to elucidate the concrete experience and symbolic boundaries of racial formations in specific social settings, they have not yet, in my view, spoken to the full significance and complexity of race in contemporary, post-Civil Rights United States. Taken as a whole (and there are some obvious exceptions), this work does not capture the complicated and contradictory nature of racial attitudes and ideologies (especially for whites), the importance of mass-media sites and popular cultural practices for the reproduction of race and, most importantly, the deep, structuring significance of race

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and racism in American culture broadly conceived.

Obviously, I cannot fully defend these broad and presumably controversial claims in the brief space of the present essay. What I want to do instead is simply suggest that sport — an area still often ignored or dismissed by scholars, even those otherwise appreciative of the power and import of popular cultural forms and practices — presents an interesting and exciting empirical site from which to illustrate and explore some of them.

Sport and Race in the U.S.¹ There are three main reasons that explain why sport is a potentially fruitful empirical site from which to explore the relationships between race and culture in contemporary American society. The first two are essentially social facts about the racial form and function of sport. One has to do with the unparalleled prowess and prominence of African American athletes in sport and, in turn, in mainstream American culture. This is certainly one of the most striking features of a society otherwise marked by persistent racial inequalities and injustices. In a very basic and undeniable way, the unique racial composition of sport and social status of sport itself calls our attention to the indispensable role that mass-mediated, popular cultural sites play with respect to the ongoing constitution of racial meanings and practices in the U.S. Even more than this, because of the ostensibly positive, progressive images of blackness presented therein, the case of sport obligates us to consider the complicated and often contradictory nature of racial meanings and practices in contemporary American culture.

Equally important, in my view, is the racial ideology that surrounds sport: namely, that sport is seen by most Americans as a positive and progressive racial force — an avenue of assimilation and upward mobility, an arena of racial harmony, a leader in racial progress if not a literal “model” of and for race relations in the United States. This ideology is important not just because it provides Americans with a way to make sense of the incongruity of African American athletic success. This popular ideology is also important because it is based in a very particular normative vision of racial justice, one which emphasizes abstract procedural fairness (equality under the rules) and individual meritocracy. The parallels between this ideology and broader color-blind, assimilationist ideals about racial harmony and justice in the U.S. are not incidental. Indeed, this popular sport-as-positive-racial-force ideology is not only empowered by but actually predicated on its close, homologous connections with this dominant liberal-democratic way of thinking about race and racial justice. In terms of broader issues of race and culture, then, the cultural ideals and norms embedded in the popular, sport-as-positive-racial force ideology remind us of the broad, normative issues embedded in racialized social formations and suggest the need to explicitly incorporate a critical, comprehensive theoretical perspective into our analyses of race.

This brings us, conveniently, to the third and final argument about sport's utility for thinking about the relationships between race and culture because the bulk of the scholarly literature on race and sport can be best understood as a critique of the popular ideology itself. A fuller discussion of these critiques and their ultimate limitations will help us to gain a better appreciation of the racial forms and functions of sport and the implications of the sport case for understanding the power, complexity and contradiction of racial meanings and practices in American culture more generally.

Scholarly Critiques: The major thrust and objective of the scholarly work on the relationships between race and sport in the U.S. has been to argue that racial inequalities and injustices are not so much challenged and overcome in sport as they are reproduced and reinforced there. Two very different strands of research and writing contribute to this critique, one which focuses on the racial structure of sport as an institution (what I will call the institutional approach), the other which explores sport's role as an institutional symbol of and for race relations in American culture in general (the symbolic approach). I will begin with the institutional approach since it was first to emerge (in the 1970s, in the aftermath of the so-called “revolt of the black athlete”) and is still the dominant approach in the area.

The institutional approach focuses on racial inequalities, injustices and exploitation in the world of sport. Its primary task and preoccupation has been to demonstrate persistent patterns of racialization and racial discrimination in sport. This case has been made convincingly, although unfortunately the work has not gone a great deal further. It has been rather narrowly focused on sport itself and thus failed to develop its broader theoretical implications or to situate sport's particular racial order in the context of the racial order of the society taken as a whole. In fact, I have yet to see any serious comparisons between the racial composition of sport and other social institutions. Nevertheless, exposing the continued racialized character of sport has implications far beyond the world of sport. Though rarely stated, these findings imply a powerful and much broader critique of race and its place in American culture. The critique is closely connected with the popular ideology that sport is a model of and institutional symbol for race relations in the United States. It can be simply stated in the form of a question: If even sport doesn't live up to these ideals, what does this suggest about their limits as defining standards for racial progress and justice?

Again, let me emphasize that this critique is implied far more often than explicitly articulated. Nonetheless, when formulated as such it calls our attention to the difficulty of overcoming racial inequalities, ideologies and injustices — phenomenon which are both group-based and structurally embedded — within the framework of liberal democratic ideals. In this context it is worth mentioning that one of the most important and controversial claims of the recent interdisciplinary scholarship on race and culture is that lib-

eral democratic political ideologies are themselves inherently racialized owing to the inevitable social limitations (or contradictions) of their claims to abstract, universal citizenship. Racial categories, in short, are built into the cultural structure of Western nationalism and liberal democracy. I wouldn't necessarily go this far. But my own work on the 1968 African American Olympic protest movement — the movement most widely associated with Tommie Smith and John Carlos's dramatic, clenched-fist salute on the Olympic victory stand in Mexico City in 1968 — has been directly influenced by such critical thinking. Indeed, I follow anthropologist John MacAloon in arguing that Smith and Carlos were received as villains, extremists and traitors to the American cause for doing little more than calling attention to their own blackness precisely because race was not an identity (as their individuality and nationality was) allowed by time-honored Olympic ritual, which itself is posited on very traditional, Western understanding of the relationship between individuals, nations and humanity taken as a whole. They were treated this way, in other words, because simply calling attention to race exposed and threatened to disrupt the otherwise comfortable homologies among sport culture, Olympic symbolism and liberal democratic ideology. The point here is that the color-blind, assimilationist values at the root of liberal democratic ideology make it difficult to even recognize racial categories, much less provide mechanisms to address the structural inequalities that so typically go along with them.

The second variation on the scholarly critique of sport attends specifically to the symbolic role that sport plays in American culture with respect to race. This symbolic critique, which has emerged only in the last decade or so but already has some impressive proponents (David Andrews and Cheryl Cole among them), begins from the undeniable and unparalleled success of African Americans in sport and sport's own widespread public recognition and power. But rather than seeing these social facts as a progressive racial force (as the popular ideology would have it), these scholars hold that the powerful presence of African American athletes in American culture may actually perpetuate and reinforce the racial status quo. This claim derives from a deep critical conception of the role of mass-mediated, market-based cultural forms such as sport in generating contemporary racial images and ideologies. At the core of this conception is the enormous gap in the case of sport between the racial experiences of highly visible and often highly paid African American athletes and those of the vast majority of African Americans — and the fact that many mainstream, middle-class Americans are unwilling or unable to realize this disjuncture. In this context, African American athletes come to serve as what Andrews, borrowing from Derrida, calls a "floating racial signifier:" dynamic, complex and contradictory, they can be interpreted in virtually any ways an audience wants.

Given the persistence of race and racism in American culture (a crucial point, of course), the prominence of African American athletes in American culture thus tends to serve

one of three racial functions. One is that attention to African American athletic success can deflect attention away from, obscure or distort the more general problems of racial inequality and racism. Secondly and even worse, the cultural prominence of African American athletes can be used to legitimate existing racial inequalities by making it seem as if there are no racial barriers standing in the way of African American mobility and assimilation. If in sport, the logic goes, why not in other social spheres? The third point has to do with the claim that images of African American athletes are thoroughly racialized, indelibly linked with the racial stereotypes that permeate the culture no matter what other symbolic function(s) they may serve.

What is complicated about this last point is that it runs counter to many of our usual social and sociological assumptions about racism and prejudice. We tend to think of racism and prejudice negatively, in terms of beliefs and behaviors that exclude and privilege one racial group over another. Yet the images of African Americans in sport appear to be quite positive, even flattering and celebratory. The critical point for sport scholars, however, is that what seems to be positive about these images tends to be exaggerated and one-dimensional, thus stripping African American athletes of agency and working to reinforce imagined racial traits and characteristics. One fairly familiar strain of this argument focuses on the inherent physicality of sporting practices. The claim here, articulated most recently and controversially in John Hoberman's *Darwin's Athletes*, is that the athletic success of African Americans doesn't discredit racial assumptions about inherent African American inferiority but rather, because of sport's *de facto* association with bodies and the mind/body dualisms at the core of Western culture, serves to reinforce racist stereotypes by grounding them in essentialized, biological terms where athletic prowess is believed to be inversely associated with intellectual and/or moral depravity. Cheryl Cole and her associates develop this argument in a somewhat different fashion by examining how media portrayals and the cultural commodification of African American athletes typically exaggerate their social differences, on the one hand, and how quickly the celebration of racial differences can turn into a condemnation of social deviance, on the other. In one of her most provocative papers, in fact, Cole argues that there is a prevailing cultural logic that links, albeit by inversion, racial images in sport with racial images about crime. In any case, the point is clear: that racism is a complicated cultural system which often ironically finds expression in the celebration and consumption of racial difference itself.

Summation, Extension and Conclusion: Taken as a whole, these race-based scholarly critiques of sport make several key contributions. In a very general way, they demonstrate (again, by force of example rather than by systematic argumentation or comparison) the power and import of popular culture forms and practices such as sport in the construction of contemporary American racial images, identities and

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ideologies. Secondly, they provide a much-needed criticism and deconstruction of the hegemony of the sport-as-positive-racial-force ideology — a vision which, if extended, becomes a much broader critique of the color-blind, assimilationist ideals underlying so much of American social (and sociological) thinking on questions of race. Finally and perhaps most uniquely, these critiques productively complicate our understanding of racism itself by show that it is not simply a set of a stratifying, exclusionary beliefs and practices but in fact also has a great deal to do with the romance, celebration, and commodification of social differences associated with race.

As powerful and important as these formulations have been, however, I think they are lacking in one particular respect. The problem has to do with the fact that the scholarly critiques of sport's racial impacts have made their points only by exchanging one totalization (that sport is a positive force for racial change) for the other (that it is a negative, impeding one). Deconstruction, to put it even stronger, is virtually all these critics have done. And in failing to do more than deconstruct the popular ideology, these critiques have become (or at least threaten to become) a one-sided ideology of their own. What is lost in this approach is an understanding of the unique possibilities for racial resistance, agency and change presented in and through sport. The notion that sport is — or at least can be — a positive and progressive racial force, in other words, cannot be completely ignored or dismissed.

It is not just for misguided or purely personal reasons (as sport scholars often charge, Hoberman being the most recent example) that so many African American politicians, preachers, business leaders, activists and academics proudly and very publicly acknowledge their own personal debt to and belief in sport as an arena of racial progress. Sport is highly integrated institution (only the military or the entertainment industry can be compared to it on this count) and offers concrete opportunities for creativity, meaning, advancement and success in a thoroughly racialized society where few such opportunities exist. As Nelson George has famously described in the case of basketball, sport has become a crucial social space for the development and public display of an African American identity and aesthetic. Sport, as scholars such as Robin Kelley and Loic Wacquant have shown, continues to inspire productive, creative labor among African American young people living in otherwise alienating and disabling circumstances. Perhaps more importantly though less empirically explored, sport provides a powerful form of "symbolic capital" through which larger struggles against race and racism can be advanced. (It is not because sport is one of the most racist institutions in America, nor even for any great love of sport that activist organizations like the NAACP or Jessie Jackson's Operation Push target sport for racial protests.)

This is not to say that we must now return to the popular belief that sport is a pure and perfect arena of racial

harmony and progress. Rather, it is to suggest that we must understand the ways in which sport can enable and effect positive racial impacts and change, if only in limited ways, in certain social contexts, or given certain cultural concepts of racial justice. At the root of what I want to suggest here is that sport is a kind of "double-edged sword," or what I would call, borrowing from Stuart Hall, a "contested racial terrain." This way of thinking about sport's racial impacts does not just suggest an abstract balancing act of competing racial forms and forces, much less a simple calculation of "positive" and "negative" outcomes. Rather, it requires that sport be understood as a site — a very prominent and symbolically important site — where racial meanings and practices are constantly mobilized, utilized and struggled over.

A full discussion of the broader theoretical and practical implications of this approach is obviously beyond the scope of a final paragraph. So let me close simply by suggesting some of the ways it extends the contributions that I have already argued the study of sport can make to the sociological literature on race and culture. The first has to do with the importance of popular cultural practices such as sport in the ongoing construction of race. The point here is that such practices are not only sites in and through which racial formations are constructed and reproduced but also sites where racialized structures can be acted on, utilized or even struggled against. What is important about this formulation is that it focuses our attention on the social processes and struggles by which racial meanings and practices are reproduced and transformed as well as on the social agents and actors who drive these dynamic processes, and in doing so helps avoid the overly deterministic, totalizing vision that can so easily result when the world is viewed through a the lens of a racialized cultural system. Of course, a broad, comprehensive understanding of the place of cultural processes such as these in the larger structure and history of the racial order is nevertheless crucial if we are to understand their broader public and symbolic significance. Here let me offer one final thought: that what is revealed in thinking of sport this way is not only the deep structuring significance of race in American culture, but also the paradoxical fact that many of the most significant racial struggles are often waged on, within and against spheres of social life such as sport which are thoroughly racialized.

Notes

¹ I should note that my remarks will focus entirely on the African American athletic experience. Not only is this the case I know best, it is the one from which, for better or worse, most theories of sport and race interactions derive and depart. In this respect, the sociology of sport's theories of race parallel those of the vast majority of the conventional sociology of race and race relations.