

Carroll, John M., *Fritz Pollard: Pioneer in Racial Advancement*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992. Pp. xi, 298. Illustrations, notes, index. \$32.95.

Biography has been the dominant scholarly trend for historians of the African-American sporting experience. Most historians of race and sport have internalized the traditional paradigm introduced a generation ago by John Hope Franklin and August Meier which interprets the relations between races in a linear, evolutionary fashion, and showcases the contributions of important African-Americans to the national culture. Working within this tradition, John Carroll has chronicled the life of a heretofore under-recognized great African-American athlete. Carroll's story enhances our knowledge of the most successful pre-World War II black athlete and sports statesman, but unlike Rob Ruck's study of Pittsburgh blacks' involvement in sport as social process, Carroll's study breaks no new conceptual ground in exploring the range, diversity, and complexity of the race issue in American sport history.

The first half of the book covers Pollard's life prior to his professional football career. Despite the considerable length devoted to his early years, very little is presented to suggest that the young Pollard confronted rampant racism or articulated strong views against it—even as it applied to the racial integration of sport. This might have been a result of Pollard's solidly middle-class upbringing in a predominately white, upwardly-mobile neighborhood. Although Carroll

attempts to highlight the national historical context, the effort usually founders since Jim Crowism, racial terrorism, and segregation appeared to have been of marginal concern or insignificant obstacles to Pollard as an emerging professional athlete. In short, beyond the numerous and often tedious game summaries and collegiate academic travail throughout the first one hundred and thirty pages, we acquire no clear sense that Pollard, as a privileged black who attended a prestigious university, sympathized with either the plight of his less fortunate brothers and sisters or the cause of racial advancement in general.

The second half of the biography deals with Pollard's career as a professional football player and coach. Academic deficiencies disqualified Pollard from collegiate football the year after being named All-American, whereupon he embarked on a professional career. Carroll provides some valuable insights into the early days of professional football when it was a mere sideshow to the collegiate game. The substantive issue of African-Americans' cautious receptivity to professional football is briefly noted: "as a rule, black fans, like white fans, did not have as much faith in professional football as they did in the college game," but never seriously analyzed. The potentially interesting story about Pollard coaching an all-black high school football team while playing in the Pennsylvania Coal Region League, never developed due to Pollard's lack of commitment and responsibility to mentoring young black athletes. Instead, Pollard chose to devote his spare time to expensive cars, the finest cigars and suits, and lived a "fast-paced lifestyle." After retirement, Pollard organized an all-black south side Chicago football team which played white teams and proved to many people that inter-racial football was possible, but was a casualty of the Depression. However, the experiment's larger significance to both Pollard and Carroll appears vague and underdeveloped.

Pollard's employment pursuits during the 1940s and 1950s turned more explicitly toward "racial advancement." The book's most interesting chapters, "New Beginnings" and "Another War and Peace," trace Pollard's founding of a weekly African-American newspaper, wherein he wrote stories about black athletes (while simultaneously publishing editorials advising his Democratic black readers to vote Republican and defeat Roosevelt); the days when he coached the Brown Bombers black professional football team and served as vice president of the Negro Baseball League; and his work as a booking agent for a African-American talent agency. However, after over two hundred pages of often trivial biographical details, dozens of game summaries, and the seemingly endless occupational changes outside Pollard's sports career, these hints of some racial solidarity work appear too little too late. This shortcoming is dramatically exacerbated by the near total neglect of the Civil Rights movement, and Pollard's relationship to it. Other than a brief suggestion that many middle-class whites lauded blacks like Pollard for their moderate views on the civil rights struggle, both the story and accompanying endnotes ignore the most important watershed in the twentieth-century history of "racial advancement," as well as the recent historiography on black cultural struggle and resistance. Evidently the reader is left to interpolate that since Pollard spent his

time campaigning for Dwight Eisenhower, Nelson Rockefeller and Richard Nixon, he was necessarily distracted from the Civil Rights Movement—a conclusion which raises many questions about Pollard's resolve in advancing African-American interests.

Carroll's impressive research and cautious documentation combine to further our knowledge of several important episodes in American sport history through the life of a great black athlete, coach, businessman, and sports statesman. Had Carroll broached the current historiographical debates on memory and race, his biography of Pollard might have explicated much more on the dynamics of racial injustice and its significance to our limited understanding of the African-American sporting experience. Despite the numerous interviews conducted during his later years, Fritz Pollard does not forcefully emerge from the story. Pollard's recollections of racism and discrimination in organized sport became harsher and more pointed than in earlier recollections. The issue of veracity is important for anyone interested in analyzing oral expressions of memory in historical research. Obviously, memories are limited, and a complete reconstruction of the past through memory is impossible. Carroll attributes the discrepancy between Pollard's past and present views on racial discrimination in sport to his failing memory in the 1970s. Such a conclusion, however, eliminates the need to more carefully question what people actually remember about their past. John Bodnar, David Thelan, and others have recently maintained, that people both search for common memories to meet present needs and refashion the past to please the people with whom they discuss and interpret it. Thus, questions about the construction of memory illuminate how individuals, ethnic and racial groups, and cultures establish their own identities and how they connect with larger-scale historical processes.

Any such exploration of the African-American experience must, however, transcend a singular reliance on race as analytically sufficient. Rather than merely chronicling the contributions of extraordinary black men and women, historians must begin to think about how various socially constructed categories have influenced the black experience. To accomplish this, more inclusive concepts need to be utilized to explore the class, gender, and color dimensions of racial inequality. Future studies that engage these issues and concepts will illuminate how sport as both metaphorical activity and class drama simultaneously reveals and obscures the complex cultural relations among individuals and groups in American history.

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