

his name, believed that sport could help a kid get to college and learn valuable life skills. In other words, sport was a means to a more positive and glorious end, not a glorious end in itself. Perhaps the Rucker and the school administrators are relics from another era, but, as George contends, larger forces simply overwhelmed them.

Sport is part of popular culture, and as such is susceptible to cultural trends. If a black aesthetic continues to dominate basketball, it is partly because our communities are still segregated, the lives of blacks and whites measurably different. Current white players, such as Jason Williams, have adapted their play to the black aesthetic, proving that the aesthetic is not so much based on race as it is on athletic performance. In every sport, from track and field to figure skating, athletes mimic each other in an honest attempt to play the game more successfully. The black aesthetic in basketball, perhaps the ruling aesthetic, testifies to both African Americans' dominance of the sport and the continued structure of our society.

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ENTINE, JON. *Taboo: Why Black Athletes Dominate Sports and Why We Are Afraid to Talk About It*. New York: Public Affairs Press, 2000. Pp. ix + 387. Notes, index. \$25.00 cb.

Who has watched the Summer Olympics, a track meet, or a professional basketball game and not wondered, "Why are so many of the best athletes black?" Could it be that they are genetically better suited to athletics than whites or Asians? Jon Entine dares to ask such questions, and has traveled much of the world in search of answers. He is a clever reporter and a vivid writer. The tales he tells—whether firsthand reports of conversations with distance runners training in the Kenyan highlands or stories about Jack Johnson gleaned from history books—make the reader feel that he or she has been there. Alas, though the stories are good ones, in the end *Taboo* is a muddle-headed book. Entine offers a pile of sport stories, interspersed with oddly arranged fragments from the scholarly world. The whole does not amount to a sustained or convincing argument.

Entine's central contention is that the weight of scientific evidence suggests that blacks have superior genetic material for athletic activity. Entine pursues this idea by focusing on track and field. He contends that track requires less equipment than other sports, hence it provides the best field in which to test athletes' native abilities unencumbered by cultural predispositions or social barriers. He notes that lots of top-level track and field athletes are Africans or descendants of Africans. He contends, more or less, that such dominance results from those athletes sharing a common genetic pool that athletes from other places don't share. Maybe that's true—but one cannot determine it from Entine's account. I kept waiting for him to get to the scientific evidence, but he never does. He never establishes that his African-derived athletes possess a common gene pool, much less that that gene pool is what causes athletic performance.

Entine makes a bundle of mistakes along the way. He errs in relying on pseudoscientists to make scientific judgments. The key "scientific" authorities whom he quotes (albeit in scattered fashion) are mainly individuals like J. Philippe Rushton, who is widely regarded

in professional biological circles as a racist crank. Entine would have done far better had he consulted biologists, anthropologists, and historians who actually know some things about race. He would hardly have framed the issues as he does in *Taboo* if he had read and heeded Stephen Jay Gould's *The Mismeasure of Man* (1996), Jonathan Marks's *Human Biodiversity: Genes, Race, and History* (1995), or William H. Tucker's *The Science and Politics of Racial Research* (1994). For an understanding of race and sport, Entine could have saved himself a lot of trouble by reading the pages of the *Journal of Sport History* (see, e.g., Patrick B. Miller, "The Anatomy of Scientific Racism: Racialist Responses to Black Athletic Achievement," in the Spring 1998 issue).

Entine dismisses out of hand the social and cultural explanations of black athletic achievement that abound in serious analyses of race and sport—such as hard work, racist barriers to other forms of achievement, and a dearth of non-sport role models in the black community. He makes much of the currently dominant position of Kenyans in distance running and wants to find its source in their genes. Yet the world's best miler today, Hicham el-Guerrouj, is not Kenyan but Moroccan. "What athletic-oriented genes does he share in common with the Kenyans who follow him to the tape? Surely not much. They do have in common a hellish training regimen conducted at high altitude. And each comes from an emerging nation that has staked a large portion of its limited resources on achieving international prominence through track and field. In addition, el-Guerrouj, like his Kenyan counterparts, grew up with few alternatives available; for both the Kenyan distance runners and Moroccans like el-Guerrouj and 5000-meter champion Said Aouita before him, distance running was the only way open to achievement.

Entine is also guilty of invective directed against those with whom he disagrees. For example, he dismisses the distinguished scientific writing of Richard Lewontin and others as "religious," "dogmatic," and "polemical," without a shred of evidence for such charges. Meanwhile, he postures himself as an advocate of science, again without foundation.

The heart of Entine's problem is that he is looking for racial differences without a clear definition of "race." Who are these black people he contends are coded genetically as superior for athletic performance? He never tells us. He lumps together as black anyone who has dark skin or ancestors from the continent of Africa. At various times he treats Moroccans, Kenyans, Americans of West African ancestry, and Australian aborigines all as "black athletes." Ate such people descended from common ancestors? Do they look alike? Do they have common body shapes, muscle densities, or other features that set them apart from other human populations? Do they even share a common skin color? The answer to all these questions is no. No serious biologist or anthropologist would put up with such foolishness. These populations are far too disparate to be treated as a single racial population.

Precisely what is it that Kip Keino and Shaquille O'Neal are supposed to have in common phenotypically or genetically that caused them to be top achievers in distance running and basketball respectively? Entine never tells us. Was it Dan O'Brien's black ancestry or his white ancestry that made him the world's best decathlete for much of the 1990s? To Entine, he is just a black athlete. Is Tiger Woods the world's greatest golfer because he has African genes, or is it his Chinese and Thai ancestry? Or maybe, just maybe, part of his success is due to intelligence, an incredible Confucian work ethic, huge amounts of paternal pushing, and nerves of steel. Such athletes as these have very little in

common genetically. Their body types and ancestries are very different. What they do have in common is that each has a body that generally fits his chosen sport (O'Neal may be an exception), each was marked early for participation in that sport and given few other options, and each has an incredible drive to achieve. Although virtually everyone has rejected *The Bell Curve's* assertion that intelligence has a clear racial basis, Entine fails to appreciate that success in athletic competition depends as much upon mental as upon physical factors.

In an earlier era, I recall sport publications explaining why blacks were physiologically incapable of running long distances; that was before Kenyans joined Koreans, Japanese, and North Africans at the elite level in distance running. I have also heard (Entine asserts it on page 272) that "white men can't jump." I have a 1961 picture of Russian track star Valerie Brumel kicking a basketball hoop. I am a 5' 11" white guy; at 50 I can't jump or run fast anymore, but at 18 I could stuff a basketball and run 100 yards in 9.9 seconds. My point is not that white guys can jump as well as black guys or run as fast, on the average. It is just that there is so much variation within the populations we call "races" that it is impossible to say that a person's performance is based on his or her race, or that "races" are predisposed to achievement in any particular physical activity.

I will not contend that there is no genetic element in athletic performance; surely there is. Different individuals' bodies are differently suited to different physical activities. Does genetic fitness for a particular sport follow what some people call "racial" lines? It might, in some small degree, although there are so many counter-examples to any rule that one can hardly place much faith in such an interpretation. Does Jon Entine know what that genetic element might be or how it might work? Neither he nor anyone else has a clue.

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BROOKS, DANA, AND RONALD ALTHOUSE, EDs. *Racism In College Athletics: The African American Athlete's Experience*, 2d ed. Morgantown, WV: Fitness Information Technology, 2000. Pp. xx + 323. Illustrated. Notes, index. \$41.00 cb.

Racism in College Athletics is a revised and expanded version of an important textbook that first appeared in 1993. The anthology contains fifteen essays that explore various aspects of the African American athlete's experiences with racism in intercollegiate sport. The overriding theme is that racism still persists. Generally, equal opportunity to participate in college sports has been achieved in the second half of the twentieth century, but equal access to head coaching and administrative positions has been denied. The editors have divided the essays into four thematic categories: a historical review of racism; recruitment, retention, and life after college; gender and college athletics; and analysis of racism and prospects for the future. Each essay begins with an abstract of the topic at hand and concludes with a list of study questions and references.

As a historian, I was drawn to the articles that featured the efforts of black male and female athletes who broke down racial barriers in college and professional sports. The essays on females who had to overcome both racism and sexism were especially enlightening and a significant contribution to the field of sport studies. But the major thrust of the