

# From Plantation to Playing Field: Historical Writings On the Black Athlete in American Sport

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A significant development in the field of American history within the last few years has been the marked increase in the number of scholarly publications dealing with sport. One group that has received an increasing amount of attention from academicians are black athletes. No one familiar with the literature can fail to notice the expanded coverage given black athletes in the historical surveys on American sport or the growing number of articles about these athletes in various publications. The recent upsurge in the number of historical writings can be attributed primarily to the phenomenal increase in the number of blacks participating in contemporary sport and the vital part that they played in the athletic revolution. Academicians realize that to understand the history of sport in this country it is imperative that the role played by the black athlete also be examined. It is necessary not simply because of the tremendous athletic achievements made by blacks, but because people like James J. Corbett, Avery Brundage, and Branch Rickey lived in a world affected by them. Tellingly, the majority of writings on black athletes have been completed by white historians. For whatever reasons, black academicians have yet to concentrate their efforts on black athletes and their various contributions to American sport.

This paper reviews the published material pertaining to the history of black athletes in American sport. Considering the number of studies now being done it is time to take a critical look at the historian's treatment of the black athlete. The paper is not comprehensive, focusing instead on the most influential books and articles. In a few cases, important doctoral dissertations have been included in the review. The material is divided into two areas: (1) historical surveys, and (2) articles, and monographs. Within the latter category, the material is further divided into pioneering works, popular literature of the 1960's, and studies dealing with the following: black baseball, biographies of black athletes, black involvement in intercollegiate sport, the part played by the black press in American sport, the role of sport in the black community, and the portrayal of black athletes from other disciplinary perspectives. The paper concludes with recommendations for further studies.