

Nobody Knows My Name: Utilizing Works by Black Scholars of the 1960s to Understand the Participation of Black Athletes During the Civil Rights Movement

Maureen Smith

California State University, Sacramento

Prior to the turn of the century, various ethnic groups used sport as a means to gain full rights of citizenship as Americans. However, African-Americans were virtually excluded from organized sport in America until the mid-1940s. Even after color barriers were broken in baseball and football in the 1940s, African-American athletes faced discrimination, unequal treatment, and prejudice within the organized sport system; including discrimination by owners, managers and coaches, teammates, the press, and spectators. Because of their race, they were denied the "America citizenship" that for many ethnic groups was gained through sport participation.

This paper uses W.E.B. DuBois's classic, *Souls of Black Folk* (1903), to lay a foundation for the discussion of American citizenship, and it examines the written works and speeches of Black scholars and leaders during the Civil Rights Movement to contextualize the participation of Black athletes in sport during the 1960s. The writers analysed in this study include: James Baldwin, Claude Brown, Malcolm X, Martin Luther King Jr., Stockely Carmichael, and Eldridge Cleaver. While most of the writings examined do not refer specifically to sport, they critically analyse and explain the significance of national identity for the acquisition of full participation as an

American citizen in a country which is divided by race. These works thus add tremendously to any discussion on race and sport.

The writings lay a foundation for a more thorough comprehension of the political implications of the participation of Black athletes in the sport arena and as "American citizens" in the ever-changing political arena. These duelling roles led to a variety of protests and actions on the part of Black athletes, indicating their awareness of their own identity as a Black athlete within the Black community and within the sporting community. Through these protests many Black athletes exhibit some sense of increasing racial consciousness, which is the focus of the writings; gaining and exhibiting an increased awareness of one's role in the larger struggle.