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Sport and Racial Formation in the United States

Even the most cynical of us can acknowledge sport's capacity to give joy and even empower culturally diverse people in the United States and internationally. Moreover, sport has inspired people to cross cultural borders and share, if only for too brief a time,

a wonderful experience of playing and following a game with others defined in different racial, ethnic, national, gender, and class terms. When Jackie Robinson joined the Brooklyn Dodgers, he and his millions of African and non-African American supporters confounded those who vigilantly guarded baseball's racial borders. Nevertheless, the borders remained. They had been designed to last and sports such as baseball had helped in the design.

This paper examines the role of sport in constructing race and racial borders and power relations in the United States. It is inspired by the work of scholars such as Michael Omi and Howard Winant, David Roediger, Barbara Fields, and David Theo Goldberg. These scholars assert that the concept of race had been, and remains, a social construction, dependent upon ideology far more than biology. Consequently, and because of sport's cultural importance in the United States, we need to examine carefully how, and to what extent, it has aided the process of racial formation. To do this will help combat an uncritical faith in sport as a generally democratic and egalitarian force in American life. But, just as important, it will help us see sport more clearly as, to quote Pierre Bourdieu, a "field of power," on which race has been used to sustain, amend, and contest existing power relations. Doing this requires following the lead of Patricia Limerick and Sucheng Chan and expanding the geographic focus from the playing fields and arenas of New York City and Chicago, to Salt Lake City, San Francisco, and Honolulu. It also requires attending more than previously to how racial formation affects people of Asian and Pacific Islander ancestry, and their experiences with sport.

The paper focuses first on a critical examination of how sport scholars have conceived of race and ethnicity in America. Attention then shifts to comparing the racial formation and experiences of diverse Hawaiian and Filipino athletes to illustrate how sport has played a role in the formation of race in America. Late nineteenth- and twentieth-century newspapers including the *Sporting Life*, *Sporting News*, *Los Angeles Times*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, and *Honolulu Star Bulletin* are the primary source materials upon which this analysis is based.