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Biological Determinism: The Crutch (MYTHS) Supporting the Attitudes of the Socially Privileged in Our Society

The myths and stereotypes that arose from scientific literature attempting to explain the great success of African American male athletes reflect a deeply rooted social hysteria. Whites appear to be threatened by black success in sports and this is manifested in their preoccupation with racially linked genetic differences between black and white athletes. Television programming and a bio scientific discourse both work to rationalize and sustain injustices and to condone white privilege and minority deprivation. The effects of the misinformation flowing from these and other sources are much more damaging than those who disseminate it will ever admit. Harry Edwards (1973) contends that black society, as well as white society, teaches its members to strive for that which is defined as the most desirable among potentially achievable goals. When impressionable youths internalize these stereotypes, they absorb a poison more damaging than any drug they can buy on the streets.

The deconstruction and remodeling of the image of the African American male athlete has become a volatile issue for the African American community. A better rounded, balanced, and formidable ideal of masculinity built around the notion of survival of the wisest, as opposed to that of the survival of the fittest, is a central concern. Acknowledging the historical accomplishments of the most successful members of any group provides a sense of pride that lifts and strengthens the self-confidence of that whole people. However, fully understanding our respective places in society today requires a careful examination of a system that is predicated on victimization and oppression. The devices used to maintain and manipulate such a system are subtle, covert, and passive weapons that don't appear to be very destructive. Functionally speaking, the victims of such a system, have to act as a group that respects and supports activity in all areas—economics, education, entertainment, labor, law, politics, religion, sex, and war. Despite the specific conditions of systemic domination and oppression, submission to and cooperation with victimization and oppression are signs and forms of individual and group self-negation.

We are not likely to convince students, faculty, staff, or the community at large that prevailing social prejudices are wrong if we teach them only about the biological factors affecting athletic performance and ignore cultural contributions. A multidisciplinary or bio-social approach transcends the traditionally trained physiological inquiry into the myth of the natural black athlete. This approach comes closer than do others to helping settle this historical scholarly debate. Young adults need good information about the contemporary problems they face in an increasingly complex world, information that can help them distinguish between fact and fiction and prevent them from adopting risky and unhealthy habits. By identifying the many undetected barriers to success, this information

will motivate young people to develop responsible attitudes and behaviors and help them toward high level achievement, whatever their chosen endeavors.