

C. Keith Harrison
University of Michigan

*The African American Female Athlete
in Media Advertising:*
The Nexus of Racism and Sexism

The purpose of this paper is to chronicle the historical representation of African American sportswomen in mass media advertising. I argue that sport advertisement with African Americans in general channels the “mind-sets” of black youth. While some academic attention has been directed to black male athletes, there has been minimal work on black women in this context. The Women’s National Basketball Association is the contemporary site and text of women’s sport analyzed here, but it is set in a historical perspective.

Historically, black women have been denied space in regards to media attention within both sport and society. The culturally constructed images of “sambo,” “coon,” “mammie,” “sapphire” and others connect to popular depictions of black male and female athletes today. This paper demonstrates, further, how these images are twisted as sport icons and are forms of covert racism, stereotypes and ideological manifestations of the status quo. In the final analysis, it argues that capitalism and mainstream privileged ideologies drive the production of images of black women in sport and the media. These images are also linked to black men, in that they show a limited reality for black youth in terms of social and economic transformation.