

ON RACE AND RACISM

C. Keith Harrison
University of Michigan

Examining the History of Whiteness in Sport: Gender, Race, Class and Image

In recent years, a burgeoning number of publications, articles, and courses has been devoted to the study of whiteness. This scholarship continues to increase but often neglects to examine sport. The purpose of this paper is to ask how whiteness operates within societal conventions of race, class, gender and image construction that shape sport. Specific questions pertaining to white athletic identity include: How has Babe Ruth's legacy been preserved? What impact have Avery Brundage and Judge Kennesaw Mountain Landis had on preserving cultural hegemonic order and resisting threats from the margins of gender and race? How have the mass media reproduced white males as the status quo and enabled racist power structures to uphold their ideologies and manifestations?

The paper is informed by critical race theory as developed by scholars such as Richard Delgado, Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman. Critical race theory originates from the struggles of Martin Luther King, W.E.B. DuBois, Rosa Parks, Cesar Chavez, Malcolm X, Paul Robeson and many other activists. These voices and critical race theory challenge racial oppression and the status quo by storytelling, analyzing myths, presuppositions and received wisdoms that make up the common culture about race. At the start of the millennium sport, culture and race need to be examined from an interdisciplinary and much more creative perspective to illuminate the realities of race, class and gender. Interrogating white male privilege in sport exposes the racial and gender ideologies inherent in American institutions, thus allowing a deeper understanding of racism in society and the bleeding and blending of racism in sport.

In the final analysis, popular films such as *American History X* (1998), reveal that mainstream individuals and groups (whites) are experiencing dissonance in terms of opportunity and access to sport spaces. Legislation such as propositions 187,209 and the dismantling of Affirmative Action reveal a trend towards the preservation of whiteness. Recent data show a decline in participation by whites in the sports of football and basketball, indicating the significance of representation of African Americans and other ethnic groups. With the new millennium, theories of race and sport must include an analysis beyond the black/white binary, as well as expose the privileges of white existence in the organization of sport.