

# AFRICAN AMERICAN VISSITUDES

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## **Stereotype, Style, and Image: The Black Athletic Experience Created, Edited, and Rejected?**

Defined in dictionary definitions, the terms stereotype, style, and image invokes thoughts and pictures of greatness and beauty. When these same terms are applied to the black American Athlete, the visual and mental display driven into the public mindset is one of negativity. From the late 1800s, when Peter Jackson and Jack Johnson came upon the world's stage with visions of grandeur in the sporting world, remarks of their race grouping, their physical appearance, and their public persona, always overshadowed the athletic skills they displayed. Pugilism

(boxing) is considered by many segments of society to be an unsavory enterprise, so the importance of race is ruled insignificant.

This work will focus on the notion that regardless of the venue, when black athletes were/are involved, the notion of style and image reverts to stereotypes and negativity. Recent unpublished works by Gerald Gems, "Sport, Black Style, and the Roots of Cultural Resistance," and Manque Winters, "How Good Do We Have To Be? Rising Above Rejection," clearly layout the patterns of continued assassination of African-American creativity. Gems' accounts of past and present black athletes and Winters' personal endeavors give credence to the rejection of black athletic style and self molded image. The parameters of image and style are constructed to fit the norms deemed acceptable by white society.

Often academics and the general public alike espouse the lyrics "it's a class or economic issue, not a race issue." With the works of sport historians, such as: Gems, Winters, Keith Harrison, and David Wiggins, the class and economics notions are shown to be illusionary illuminated factors. In other words, these are factors brought to light and given credibility to mask the most prevalent factor of race. The issues of class and economics are clouded even more so by the growing African-American academic community seemingly buying into this rhetoric. thus diminishing racial factors.

Academics and society view most issues from a big picture perspective, leaving the more obvious local examples of black athletic stereotype, style, and image for someone else to give vision. The late 1950s and early 1960s were the first time that the many obvious differences in black and white athletic ventures came to a personal light for this author. The stereotypes, styles, and images were not limited to the athletes, but included the events themselves on many occasions. This notion, and those lifted from Wiley H. Bates, Jr., Sr. High School, Annapolis Senior High School, black colleges and universities, of the East Coast, and white colleges and universities, will be used to help shed further light upon disguises used to cover likes and dislikes of racial styles and images, creating stereotypes.

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