

**Sports: Unifier or Divider? A study of the response of the  
white and black media to the integration of African-American  
athletes into mainstream sports from 1936 to 1968**

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*For Grandma, Mom, Dad, and Adam*

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## INTRODUCTION

“Don’t worry about it, it is just a game.” This cliché has been heard millions of times at the end of millions of sports competitions when participants find less than favorable results on the scoreboard. However, this cliché does not always express the intended disregard for the outcome. There are numerous cases which show that sports is in fact something more than “just a game.” One need only think of the four gold medals won by the African-American athlete Jesse Owens at the 1936 Olympics in Berlin, Germany, which utterly obliterated Adolf Hitler’s supposed myth of Aryan racial superiority.

There are of course other points in history where sport becomes more than just an athletic competition between competing opponents. Media outlets are usually one of the first to note this larger importance, but they do not always agree on what exactly that larger importance is and whether it is good or not. The focus of this thesis will be analyzing how the white and black medias decided to frame black athletes slowly breaking into the previously white sporting arena and the growing political awareness and activism of the black athlete from the 1936 to 1968.

Before going any further, it is necessary to define what exactly the white and black media are for the purposes of this paper. While there are countless publications that can be considered “white” media, when used in this paper white media will refer to the mainstream media (mainstream will also be used to refer to this group of media outlets). Publications that will be used and considered white media include the *New York Times*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Life*, and *Sports Illustrated*. These publications

were chosen because they had a regular morning circulation of 635,619 papers in 1967.<sup>1</sup>

The black media will be some of the more famous publications such as *Chicago Daily Defender*, *Pittsburgh Courier*, *Los Angeles Sentinel*, and *New York Amsterdam News*.

These were chosen because they had a circulation of at least 39,545 papers in 1967.<sup>2</sup>

The two events that bookend the time frame of this study are Jesse Owens winning four gold medals at the 1936 Berlin Games and Tommie Smith and John Carlos giving the Black Power salute at the 1968 Summer Olympic games in Mexico City. The intervening history is an extremely eventful period in athletic history in the United States. This thirty-two year period saw the emergence of the black athlete as a continual presence among the upper-most echelon of sports figures. These would include, but are not limited to Jackie Robinson, Muhammad Ali, Althea Gibson, and Bill Russell.

Not everyone in the United States was entirely happy with these steps toward apparent equality. The white and black media usually had very divergent perspectives on anything even loosely related to race. However both medias had the same fundamental problem: how to frame black athletes entering into the previously all white sporting arena and their growing political awareness and activism ranging from the 1936 Jesse Owens model of silently accepting inequality and being the best on the field to the 1968 Tommie Smith and John Carlos model of being the best on the field and making statements about the inequality that they experienced. Even though the black and white media had the same fundamental problem, the causes of this problem were quite different. The white media had to decide how to report and analyze these athletes who now occupied positions that could potentially make them into American heroes. The white media had to

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<sup>1</sup> Oxbridge Publishing Co., *Standard Periodical Directory* Vol. 2, (New York: Oxbridge Publishing Co, 1966), 351, 650, 652 & 654

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 641, 642 & 645

determine how to portray someone who was winning accolades for a specific team or the United States but would not be judged equal by some of the white readers or sportswriters to the white sportswriters who covered them or segments of American society.

The black media on the other hand, had other issues, such as having to decide whether to frame the black athletes as civil rights figures and use their sporting accomplishments as evidence in the battle for civil rights or to focus solely on the athletes' sporting success. Another issue the media had was the fact that these athletes became ambassadors to the rest of the United States since many white Americans did not have any real experience with African-Americans. This problem would be exacerbated as the athletes became more political and began to express controversial opinions, such as the black power salute that Smith and Carlos gave during the national anthem at the 1968 Summer Olympics.

The internal conflict that was present in both the white and black media was important because the media had an enormous amount of power when it came to shaping public opinion.<sup>3</sup> This is true today, but to a lesser extent because there are so many alternative methods to shaping public image. A key contributor to the plethora of avenues is the Internet. These alternative methods allow for people other than the professional journalists to create a public persona for an athlete, thereby taking away this power from the media.<sup>4</sup> However in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the options were severely limited so the power of the press was much greater.

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<sup>3</sup> John V. Pavlik, *Media in The Digital Age* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 197.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 198

The idea of Jackie Robinson playing for the Brooklyn Dodgers or Tommie Smith and John Carlos giving a black power salute after winning Olympic medals would have been inconceivable to most African-Americans in 1936 or earlier because of the lack of rights and the clear delineation between white and black society. Thus to fully understand the politicization of the African-American athlete, it is necessary to understand the evolution of the Civil Rights Movement, from President Truman's executive order to integrate the military to the struggles for equality led by Reverend Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, and many other brave individuals. This evolution can be seen in the African-American athletes themselves and their developing political activism. The period from 1936 to 1968 was probably the most active in the history of the Civil Rights Movement. During this time numerous historic Supreme Court cases were decided, laws were passed, and numerous people fought for these freedoms, some even giving their lives to the cause. This was the era of the 1954 Supreme Court case *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* which declared that the idea of separate but equal schools was unconstitutional; the era of the 1955-56 Montgomery Bus Boycott which was started by Rosa Parks' arrest for refusing to give up her seat to a white man; the era of Civil Rights Act of 1964 which outlawed discrimination based on race, color, religion, or national origin; and of course the era of civil rights activists such as Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X.<sup>5</sup>

Given the popularity of sports in the United States, the place these athletes occupy in American consciousness, and the explosive changes to American society in the mid-twentieth century, it is somewhat surprising that there has been no study that focuses on

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<sup>5</sup> *Encyclopedia Britannica*, "Civil Rights Movement," <http://search.eb.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/eb/article-9082763>

the white media's nor the black media's response to the increased role of African-American athletes in mainstream sports nor their increased politicization. There are scholars who cite both medias' responses to aid their own research like Amy Bass's investigation into how the 1968 Olympics helped create a new construction of the black athlete in American cultural life.<sup>6</sup> Thankfully, there has been research into the role of the African-American athlete in American culture including the role that African-American athlete activists had in the black sports culture. The continuum of opinions that comprises the research on the African-American athlete and his or her place in and benefit to society is very wide; there is the commonly believed idea of the dominance of meritocracy where the best player played regardless of personal prejudice. There is also the idea that success for black athletes was and still is a "self-destructive trap" because success further cements stereotypes about "natural" physical talents of African-Americans, thereby demonstrating that there are real meaningful "biological" differences between whites and blacks.<sup>7</sup> Other research focuses more on the 1960s African-American athlete because of the increased political awareness that was seen in many athletes of this decade. This research focuses more on the reasoning behind the growth of this political awareness, claiming that the people who did decide to become activists like Muhammad Ali, Tommie Smith, and John Carlos did it "not for money or fame but for justice and their beliefs."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Amy Bass, *Not the Triumph but the Struggle: The 1968 Olympics and the Making of the Black Athlete* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002),XVI

<sup>7</sup> John Bloom and Michael Nevin Willard, eds., *Sports Matters Race, Recreation, and Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2002), 3.

<sup>8</sup> Shaun Powell, *Souled Out? How Blacks Are Winning and Losing in Sports* (Champaign: Human Kinetics, 2008), 26



The subjects that fall within the scope of this study were all part of a much longer history of African-American athletes who entered mainstream athletics such as the boxers Jack Johnson and Joe Louis. These men's contributions to African-American culture and history were great. The fact that they will not be focused on in this paper is by no means an indication that their contributions are somehow less important than the athletes who will be studied more extensively. This thesis will analyze several individual cases in chronological order and at times comparing the individuals' situations to gain a better understanding their roles in a period of broader social change. Because of time limitations there will unfortunately be several African-American athletes who played a significant part in breaking the "color line" in their respective sports who will not be covered. This is not meant to imply that their contributions to society are any less than the men who will be analyzed in-depth. Other athletes, like Muhammad Ali, are not included since this thesis focuses on athletes who made political statements in the sporting arena. Most of, if not all of Ali's political statements occurred outside the boxing ring. Another major figure who, unfortunately will not be discussed on is the tennis star Althea Gibson, who broke the color line in women's tennis and dominated it in the late 1950s. Though a groundbreaking athlete, she was a woman and this presents a whole other set of complexities when relating with the white and black media, such as traditional gender roles and the ideal woman.

The thesis will focus on the white and black medias' responses to the African-American athletes who rose to prominence from 1936 to 1968. The first athlete to be analyzed will be Jesse Owens the first American to win three individual medals at the Olympics. He not only accomplished this rare feat, but he was also participating in a

politically charged climate. Although the start of World War Two was still three years away, it is clear upon examination of contemporary media sources that many of the journalists did not favor Hitler or the Nazi regime. The press had to decide whether to portray Owens and the other African-American athletes as Americans or as blacks. If they portrayed them as Americans it would help to distinguish America from the intolerance of Nazi Germany.

The next subject is Jackie Robinson, the first to break the color line in Major League Baseball. When he first entered the league, he had to take all of the racist abuse that was directed towards him by opposing teams and fans without responding in any way. If he did respond to any of these provocations, he would have greatly endangered race relations. The analysis will continue through his playing career and look at his development with regards to these racist attitudes.

Just as the Civil Rights Movement was becoming more vocal, militant, and confident in the 1960s so too were the athletes. This shift in attitude is embodied in the two other athletes who will be the subjects of the final study: Tommie Smith and John Carlos. They will be considered together, since they gave the black power salute at the same time at the 1968 Summer Olympics in Mexico City. As activists, these two men were in the same mold as Muhammad Ali. They were much more blatant and obvious with their opinions and not willing to silently accept racism, especially the kind that Jesse Owens and Jackie Robinson had faced. As a part of the analysis of these two men, the movement to boycott the Olympics by African-American athletes will be analyzed to provide background understanding.

To tell these stories accurately a wide array of both primary and secondary sources will be utilized. The main primary sources that will be used are articles from various mainstream media outlets such as the *New York Times*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Los Angeles* and *Sports Illustrated* and the likes of *Chicago Defender*, *New York Amsterdam News*, and the *Pittsburgh Courier* for the black media perspective. Though this is by no means an exhaustive collection of white and black press outlets, these numerous different papers will provide a fair cross-section. It is hoped that these numerous different papers will provide a fair cross section of their respective media groups. The articles will be useful not only for what they say but what they do not say. Any type of undertone will be exposed, especially a racial one. To be clear this study of the white and black media's response to the increased role of African-American athletes in mainstream sports and the evolving political activism of these athletes is by no means an attempt to ascertain the perspective of white nor black society on these two issues. It is an analysis of the attempts by two different segments of the media to answer these questions.

Another type of primary source that will be relied upon is biographies and autobiographies of the selected athletes, which will be extremely useful because they will provide a glimpse into the minds of these athletes thereby providing a clearer understanding of their individual situations. Of course in addition to these primary sources, numerous secondary sources will be utilized to gain a better understanding of the media, primarily scholarly sources that focus on race in sports and athlete activism.

This thesis will provide the reader with a much clearer and deeper understanding of how the white and black media responded to the changing sports culture of America in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. By obtaining this new understanding the reader will gain

new insights into how these athletes were perceived by their contemporaries and the significance the athletes held for issues of race in America.

## CHAPTER ONE: Jesse Owens

Any time someone wins four gold medals at the Olympics, it is hailed as an incredible feat of athletic prowess. But when Jesse Owens won gold medals in the 100 m, 200 m, broad jump, and 4 x 100m relay at the 1936 Berlin games he not only did this but changed history because he was black. Most of the previous black superstars who transcended the racial barrier into mainstream sports were boxers. Jesse Owens was the first black athlete outside of boxing to become a national hero. The two black boxers who either preceded or were contemporaries of Jesse Owens were Jack Johnson in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and Joe Louis in the 1930s and 40s. Several common myths about Owens are that he was the first African-American to represent the United States at the Olympics and that he was the first African-American to win a gold medal. Both of these myths are not true. In 1908 John B. Taylor became the first black U.S. Olympic athlete, and in 1932 Ed Tolan won two gold medals at the Los Angeles Olympic games.<sup>1</sup>

Jesse Owens was born September 12, 1913 to Henry and Emma Owens, he was their tenth child. The family moved from Lawrence County, Alabama to Cleveland, Ohio when he was nine. This move to Ohio would prove crucial because it would lead to Owens attending Ohio State University where he would hone his craft before participating in the 1936 Olympics. These Olympics were probably one of the most important in Olympic history for several reasons, one of the most important being Jesse Owens himself and his remarkable accomplishments. Another was it gave Hitler an international stage to showcase the Nazi regime and the “superiority” of the Aryan race.

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<sup>1</sup> Ira F. Lewis, “A.A.U. Which Gives Race Lads A Chance, Lauded by Ira Lewis,” *The Pittsburgh Courier* (1911-1950), July 18, 1936  
<http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/pqdweb?index=0&did=1113642912&SrchMode=1&sid=1&Fmt=10&VInst=PROD&VType=PQD&RQT=309&VName=HNP&TS=1261885753&clientId=1782>

This racial theory lost credibility when in addition to Owens winning four gold medals, several other African-Americans also won medals throughout the Olympics.

Jesse Owens's success posed a new issue for both the white and the black media: how to frame and discuss his success? This problem was especially true for the white/mainstream press because a large percentage of white Americans at the time still had racist views and did not think blacks were equal to whites. But the white journalists had to decide whom they liked less—black people or the Nazis. How did the white media decide to address the issue of race when reporting on Jesse Owens and other African-Americans during the 1936 Olympics? This question was especially important because Jesse Owens became the number one star of the entire Olympics, so much so that Leni Riefenstahl strongly considered making him the center of her propaganda piece/documentary for the Third Reich.<sup>2</sup> To answer this question several white newspapers will be analyzed to provide an idea of their responses to this question. The selected papers are the *New York Times*, *Chicago Tribune*, and the *Los Angeles Times*.

Although the black media also had a difficult time framing Owens's success, the issues within this effort were quite different. Should his success be viewed primarily as the race's success or the country's success? This was an important question to answer because the black media's decision would shape the conversation within the African-American community. One of the main reasons that the black media had such power over the public discourse was that unlike today it had a national audience in addition to the mainstream/white press. The black newspapers that will be used in this chapter include (in no particular order) the *New York Amsterdam News*, *Chicago Daily Defender*, and the

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<sup>2</sup> Jeremy Schaap, *Triumph: The Untold Story of Jesse Owens and Hitler's Olympics* (New York: Mariner Books 2008), 228.

*Pittsburgh Courier*. These black papers that were analyzed were weeklies instead of dailies like the white newspapers.

This chapter is divided into two main sections, before the Olympics (one month before the Games) and the Olympics itself. After analyzing each division it becomes clear that each media arm had their own unique and somewhat surprising answers to the questions mentioned above. Throughout the pre-Olympics and Olympics coverage, the white media were pretty uniform in mentioning Owens's race somewhat off-handedly. They constantly framed Jesse Owens as an American sports hero winning medals for America. Although there were some pictures and most Americans probably knew that Owens was black, the newspapers largely ignored his skin color. One probable reason is that if his race was mentioned, America's racial inequalities and the troubling comparisons between American segregation and Germany's racial superiority rhetoric and laws would have to be acknowledged and addressed. It would be difficult to discuss why someone who not only represented their country but did it better than anyone else was not allowed to live in specific neighborhoods, found it very difficult to vote in certain parts of the country, and possibly feared for his life in most of those same areas.

The black media on the other hand constantly mentioned Owens's race throughout both phases of the Olympic coverage. The main difference within the black media was the different approaches the papers took, some were more explicit in reminding their readers of the apparent contradiction between Owens simultaneously being a national hero and a second-class citizen in his own country. They also compared the inequalities in America and Germany. The fact that there were numerous mentions of his race shows that the papers saw an opportunity to advance the cause of equality.

## Pre-Olympic Coverage

Although much has changed since 1936, one thing that has not changed greatly is the basic schedule for the United States Track and Field team. In 1936 it held its final trials 2½ weeks before the 1936 Berlin Games<sup>3</sup> and in 2008, it announced its Olympic roster 3½ weeks before the 2008 Beijing Games.<sup>4</sup> One thing that has changed is the importance placed on the track and field team. In 2008 track and field events, were extremely important to all involved and viewed by many people, they were eclipsed in importance by Men's Basketball and Michael Phelps's quest for eight gold medals. In the mid-1930s however, "track and field was still a sport of the masses — the top runners and jumpers and throwers were on the same plane as the biggest stars from baseball, football, and boxing."<sup>5</sup> Owens easily qualified in the 100m sprint, 200m sprint, and broad jump over the two-day trials (July 11-12).<sup>6</sup> These victories set in motion a series of events that would culminate with him becoming the most popular athlete at the games and winning four gold medals.

The white media had the advantage of publishing dailies for the most part, which allowed them to print their reactions almost immediately. Within the white media, the major frame that emerged was that Jesse Owens and the other black athletes were great athletes who will contribute to a very strong United States national team with the focus being on the team as a whole. The papers that have been studied are generally respectful of the athletes. It is probable that this was not true for all of the white newspapers in the

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<sup>3</sup> Lewis, "A.A.U. Which Gives Race Lads A Chance, Lauded by Ira Lewis," *The Pittsburgh Courier* (1911 1950)<http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/pqdweb?index=0&did=1113642912&SrchMode=1&sid=1&Fmt=10&VInst=PROD&VType=PQD&RQT=309&VName=HNP&TS=1261885753&clientId=1782>

<sup>4</sup> United States Track and Field, "Potent Team USA roster set for Beijing," [http://www.usatf.org/news/view.aspx?DUID=USATF\\_2008\\_07\\_14\\_09\\_52\\_13](http://www.usatf.org/news/view.aspx?DUID=USATF_2008_07_14_09_52_13)

<sup>5</sup> Jeremy Schaap, *Triumph: The Untold Story of Jesse Owens and Hitler's Olympics* (New York: Mariner Books 2008), 4.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 129.



country. Although the papers were generally respectful, a “Dick Tracy” cartoon from the Chicago Tribune titled “Memphis Speaks” shows a black man speaking terrible English such as “Mista Tracy is trying to locate Mimi-and- I jes’ told him – I thinks I knows where she is!”<sup>7</sup> This racist depiction of a black man in one of the leading white newspapers is one indication that there were still racist views and gives the reader a small idea of what race relations were like at the time.

As we will see when we reach the black media, the Olympic trials were extremely important as indicated by the coverage. However, when analyzing papers such as the *Chicago Tribune*, it appears that the trials were not as important to the white media. A notable indicator of this was the domination of a map and an article about a national poll to select “the All-American football squad [college football all-stars] to meet the Detroit Lions at Soldiers’ field”<sup>8</sup> of the July 12<sup>th</sup> *Tribune* sports section. The dominance of the first sports page by this article and map is clear indication that the *Tribune* thought there were more important stories than the first day of the final trials for arguably the most popular Olympic sport.

When the white papers did decide to cover and discuss the final trials their coverage was much more focused on the team as a whole. On those occasions when they did discuss Owens they heaped praise on him and analyzed how he would help the American team achieve Olympic greatness. The *Tribune*’s coverage was very team centered, even when the “great colored athlete” Owens won in the 100m and broad jump

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<sup>7</sup> “Dick Tracy- Memphis Speaks” *Chicago Tribune (1872-1963)*, July 15, 1936  
<http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/pqdweb?did=460162702&Fmt=10&clientId=17822&RQT=309&VName=HNP>

<sup>8</sup> Wilfred Smith, “National Voting Starts in Poll to Pick College All-Star Team,” *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1963)*, July 12, 1936  
<http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/pqdweb?RQT=309&Fmt=10&VType=PQD&VName=HNP&VInst=PROD&did=483046062&SrchMode=1&index=3&sid=1>

on the first day, this news merely led the article, which reported on all of events of the day.<sup>9</sup> On the second day when he broke the 200m-world record, it was reported as just one of several records broken during the trials. The *Tribune* saw it as America issuing her challenge to the rest of the world and a demonstration of the strength of the Track and Field team as a whole.<sup>10</sup> The *Tribune* saw Owens as a great athlete who would help the United States win the overall track competition. At no point did any of the journalists examine the hypocrisy or implications of the fact that the biggest superstar as well as a sizable number of realistic medal hopefuls (athletes who had a reasonable chance at winning a medal) were black.

The *New York Times* coverage was very similar to the *Tribune*'s but more opinion was injected into the articles. A few of them actually addressed the race issue. The *Times*'s reporting on Owens also attempted to place him into a national context and ignore the racial aspect. One example of this was an article that appeared on July 6<sup>th</sup>, which analyzed where the most likely Olympians came from focusing on the fact that Middle West would probably send the most Olympians.<sup>11</sup> An article by Arthur Daley was very interesting because of the language used. In this article Daley asserted that "Owens is in a class by himself" and that the only way someone can hope to beat him in the broad

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<sup>9</sup> Associated Press, "Owens Captures Two Events In Olympic Finals" *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1963)*, July 12, 1936  
<http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/pqdweb?did=483046072&Fmt=10&clientId=17822&RQT=309&VName=HNP>

<sup>10</sup> "Albritton and Johnson Jump 6 Ft. 9 3-4 In. at Olympic Trials" *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1963)*, July 13, 1936  
<http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/pqdweb?did=460157332&Fmt=10&clientId=17822&RQT=309&VName=HNP>

<sup>11</sup> Associated Press "Middle West Best In Record Assault," *New York Times (1857-Current file)* July 6, 1936,  
<http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/pqdweb?did=87957398&Fmt=10&clientId=17822&RQT=309&VName=HNP>

jump would be for them to use “either a pogo stick or a catapult.”<sup>12</sup> Even though Owens was so great, Daley spent the second half of his column on someone else and who the United States needed to beat in certain events. This lack of focus on Owens is surprising given that he was the only member to qualify in multiple events, especially when considering the coverage of Michael Phelps or Usain Bolt in the 2008 Olympics.

Perhaps the most interesting article published by the *New York Times* before the Olympics was an editorial addressing the fact that Owens and all of the other African-American athletes who were representing the United States in the 1936 games could not even eat in many restaurants, let alone vote in almost half the country. In this article, the author notes that the black athletes won numerous events. He then goes on to address the race issue, by admitting that blacks are segregated against and that this is not fair, but he claims,

Very few decent Americans are proud about it and still fewer literate Americans have made a philosophy of the thing. When we deny certain opportunities and claims to the Negro in this country we do it in the good, old, thick-headed, prejudiced, irrational human fashion. We do not base it on eternal truths. We do not reach into the laws of science and history and yank out an alibi for our hates and election requirements.<sup>13</sup>

This explanation is very interesting because it provides the reader with an insight into how “decent Americans” rationalized living in the land of the free and equal while many of the country’s citizens were treated as second-class citizens. It also begs the question why not fight the “thick-headed prejudice?” While the journalist made clear that he

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<sup>12</sup> Arthur J. Daley “Owens Rated in Class by Himself For Olympic Broad-Jump Laurels,” *New York Times (1857-Current file)* July 10, 1936  
<http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/pqdweb?did=87961422&Fmt=10&clientId=17822&RQT=309&VName=HNP>

<sup>13</sup> “Topics of the Times” *New York Times (1857-Current file)*, July 14, 1936  
<http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/pqdweb?did=93523910&Fmt=10&clientId=17822&RQT=309&VName=HNP>

thought that prejudice was wrong, he appeared to say that there is nothing that anyone can do about it.

While the white media was able to publish and comment on the results of the final trials the day after, the black media had almost an entire week until their next national publication to focus on the accomplishments of not only Owens but all of the black athletes. When they were finally able to publish two different frames emerged. The first was how the successful athletes became “our boys.” The second was how the African-American athletes’ accomplishments became evidence in the great struggle for equality. These trends were apparent in all of the studied papers to one degree or another. One possible explanation for this variance is some of the papers were more secure and did not need to fear angering any whites.

Before the final trials, there was already an apparent excitement in the black media as evidenced by several experts predicting “America [is] pinning its hopes of sprint supremacy on the Negro aces.”<sup>14</sup> After the trials were finished, the tone of the articles changed in small perceptible ways. Before the trials when referring to the black athletes the papers usually used “American Negroes”<sup>15</sup> or some similar term. However after the black athletes claimed 25% of the places on the Men’s Track and Field team, they suddenly became “our boys.”<sup>16</sup> Many of the papers were rightfully proud of the athletes and the total number who were able to qualify. The journalists seemed to be saying that the athletes belong first to the African-American community and then to

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<sup>14</sup> “Lame, Peacock’s Eyes Still Kept on Berlin” *The New York Amsterdam News (1922-1938)*, July 4, 1936, <http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/pqdweb?index=0&did=1088156512&SrchMode=1&sid=1&Fmt=10&VInst=PROD&VType=PQD&RQT=309&VName=HNP&TS=1261895163&clientId=17822>

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> “Figures Show That 6.5% of Race Athletes in Olympic Finals Won 25% of Team Honors” *The Pittsburgh Courier (1911-1950)*, July 18, 1936. <http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/pqdweb?index=0&did=1113642962&SrchMode=1&sid=3&Fmt=10&VInst=PROD&VType=PQD&RQT=309&VName=HNP&TS=1261914538&clientId=17822>

America as a whole. One example of this is from a *Pittsburgh Courier* article by Ira Lewis,

Our boys will give an account of themselves at Berlin, the Berlin of Hitler and the Nazi dynasty. It will be a great thing to as a black boy 'winging it' down the cinderpath to victory with the Nazi youth stringing along in the dust. And then to see the Stars and Stripes run to the top of the victory mast in token of this black boy's speed and skill.<sup>17</sup>

It is important to note that in this quote, Lewis first mentions "our boys," black boy, and finally at the end of the quote the Stars and Stripes, a symbol that ties the athlete to America. Later in the article Lewis clearly stated "the Negro athlete, by his achievements of the past few weeks, has brought acclaim and honor to the group he represents."<sup>18</sup>

Without a doubt this exemplifies the view that was held by many in the press that the black athletes were not just representing themselves or America but every African-American. The majority of times an African-American athlete like Jesse Owens was mentioned it is preceded by some variation of the words colored athlete, as if the authors want to ensure that no one forgets their skin color.

One of the most likely reasons that the journalists began to claim the athletes was they felt that the athletes would provide further evidence of the equality between men. The athletes were able to contribute more evidence because any time they won a medal or set a new record, they demonstrated that the race as a whole was capable of excellence, while at the same time proving that they were proud Americans and loved the country. It also showed that even though the athletes were obviously extraordinary individuals, they

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<sup>17</sup> Ira F. Lewis, "A.A.U. Which Gives Race Lads A Chance, Lauded by Ira Lewis," *The Pittsburgh Courier* (1911-1950).

<http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/pqdweb?index=0&did=1113642912&SrchMode=1&sid=1&Fmt=10&VInst=PROD&VType=PQD&RQT=309&VName=HNP&TS=1261885753&clientId=1782>

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

were still a part of a larger community that shared many of their characteristics. While this desire to frame the athletes' successes can be seen in numerous articles, one article analyzes the number of black athletes (18) in the entire field at the final trials (275), and determines that even though the black hopefuls were only 6.5% of the field, they won 25% of the team honors.<sup>19</sup> The journalist used this success to demonstrate that when given a chance the black athlete/person can perform at least as well if not better than a white candidate.

While this article is a news report and hopes to subtly convey its message subtly the opinion pieces found in the *New York Amsterdam News* are much more transparent in their goal of framing the successes of the black athletes in the fight for equality. In an editorial cartoon that appeared the week after the final qualifying round finished, there were two pictures that depicted two starkly different realities. The first one with South at the bottom of the panel, showed a group of angry white men walking along a path with a short newspaper headline to their right that reads "Mob Forming In ALA. to Lynch Negro." The second with North at the bottom of the panel, showed a black runner running ahead of a white runner with a short headline in front of them that reads "Negro Athletes Star In Olympic Finals" (Finals in this case mean the final round of qualifying for the American team).<sup>20</sup> Instead of solely focusing on the reality that "Negro Athletes are starring in the Olympic Finals," the cartoonist also felt the need to remind the readers

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<sup>19</sup> "Figures Show That 6.5% of Race Athletes in Olympic Finals Won 25% of Team Honors," *The Pittsburgh Courier (1911-1950)*, July 18, 1936  
<http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/pqdweb?index=0&did=1113642962&SrchMode=1&sid=3&Fmt=10&VInst=PROD&VType=PQD&RQT=309&VName=HNP&TS=1261914538&clientId=17822>

<sup>20</sup> "Editorial Cartoon 1 – No Title," *The New York Amsterdam News (1922-1938)* July 18, 1936  
<http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/pqdweb?did=1080224382-&Fmt=1-&clientId=17822-&RQT=309-&VName=HNP>

that this did not mean that the struggle for equality was over, only that progress had been made.

The other opinion piece focused solely on the issue of inequality but does so in a very unique way: a combination of sarcasm and pride. In this article, Clayton Powell Jr. attacked the very idea of inferiority by noting that the blacks “outran, outjumped, and outmaneuvered the super Nordic race”<sup>21</sup> at the finals. He did not stop there, he went on to attack journalists who wrote uninformed articles in an attempt to explain the success of the black athletes. He not only attacked their ideas but also the journalists personally, such as the one from the New York Sun whom he mentioned specifically. He called this man an “unpolished nitwit and intellectual Lilliputian” as well as compared his writing ability to the “kids in his block who chalk their stuff on the backyard fence.”<sup>22</sup> This piece used sarcasm to point out that the belief that blacks are inferior to whites is pretty ridiculous and that people who advocate such beliefs are not very smart. He barely mentioned Owens or any of the other athletes, he mainly used them as pieces of evidence and followed that up with several diatribes refuting several racist rationalizations that were made in an attempt to explain the success of these athletes.

### **Olympic Coverage**

Over the course of seven days Jesse Owens entered Olympic history by winning four gold medals: 100m, 200m, broad jump, and the 4x400m relay. Most people expected him to win three medals, but the fourth was a surprise to many, not because they thought

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<sup>21</sup> A. Clayton Powell Jr. “The Soapbox: Superiority Gets Kick Owen & Co. Do It Sportswriters’ Stuff Page Prof Boas.” *The New York Amsterdam News (1922-1938)* July 18, 1936  
<http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/pqdweb?index=null&did=1080224292&SrchMode=5&Fmt=10&retrieveGroup=0&VInst=PROD&VType=PQD&RQT=309&VName=HNP&TS=1256111920&clientId=17822>

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

that he lacked the skill to win it but because the men who raced in the 100m sprint did not usually run in relay (thus allowing more people a chance to win a medal). His last minute addition along with Ralph Metcalfe at the expense of Sam Stoller and Marty Glickman would cause controversy because of later claims that Stoller and Glickman were not given the chance to win gold medals because of they were both Jewish or Coach Robertson wanted his USC boys to win the medals instead.

The white media continued its practice of attempting to discuss Owens in the context of his contributions to the United States track team. At the beginning of almost every article about Owens had track team standings. A clear example of this attempt to not focus on Owens but on the United States can be seen in the article titled, “Owens U.S. Captures 3 More Events; Increases Lead Helen Stephens and Woodruff Triumph” from the *Chicago Tribune* which mentions that Owens “shattered” two world records en route to his second and third gold medals and briefly describes how he fared during each heat. Instead of focusing on these rare feats of athletic accomplishment, the article then goes on to discuss the American track team’s commanding lead in the team competition and the other American winners of the day.<sup>23</sup> He became the fourth (and first black) American to win three individual medals and was the first athlete to do so since Paavo Nurmi who won three individual gold medals at the 1924 games.<sup>24</sup> Given all of this, Jesse Owens somehow did not warrant an entire article in the white press devoted solely to him. He always was mentioned as a part of the United States track team even though he

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<sup>23</sup> Associated Press, “Owens U.S. Captures 3 More Events; Increases Lead Helen Stephens and Woodruff Triumph” *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1963)* August 5, 1936, <http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/pqdweb?did=460211262&Fmt=10&clientId=17822&RQT=309&VName=HNP>

<sup>24</sup> Jeremy Schaap, *Triumph: The Untold Story of Jesse Owens and Hitler’s Olympics* (New York: Mariner Books 2008), 130.



won more gold medals than some countries. Although the white press continued to attempt to use this reporting style, several cracks emerged because of the debate whether Owens and the other black gold medalists were snubbed by Hitler and the crowds' reaction to Owens sheer brilliance.

Today everyone knows how evil Hitler was and how much he hated non-Aryans. In 1936 people knew that he was racist because of his propaganda and laws that he implemented, such as the 1935 Nuremburg Laws. Before the games many people wondered if Hitler would actually congratulate the black athletes if they won a medal since several of them were favorites to win gold (including Owens in all three of his events). Even though Hitler was able to meet with several of the winners he always had an excuse to not meet with any of the black winners, but he did "exchange hand waves" with Owens after he won the 100m.<sup>25</sup> The fact that Hitler was not able to meet any of the black athletes did not go unnoticed and a debate erupted within the white press; some felt that he was purposefully avoiding the black athletes while others thought that he simply had other matters to attend to as the head of state. The portrayal of Owens and Hitler "exchanging hand waves" mentioned above showed that the *Chicago Tribune* leaned towards the latter belief where as Arthur Daley of the *New York Times* was certainly in the former group as expressed by this quote

The Fuehrer apparently played no favorites. He did not publicly receive the winning Germans, nor did he greet the decidedly non-Aryan American Negroes, Owens and Metcalfe. ... In the seclusion of his quarters under the stands the

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<sup>25</sup> Associated Press, "Owens Ties Record to Win Olympic Dash" *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1872-1963) August 4, 1936, <http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/pqdweb?did=460208692&Fmt=10&clientId=17822&RQT=309&VName=HNP>

Reich's dictator did congratulate Hein and Blask [two German medalists], the hammer throwers. Perhaps two and two do make four, after all.<sup>26</sup>

Further reporting by the *Times* seemed to confirm Daley's opinion that Hitler was in fact avoiding the black champions because he met in private with the German broad jumper Lutz Long after he came in second to Owens before he left the stadium. Hitler did not just meet with Long but waited until his officials were able to separate Lutz from walking around the stadium with Owens.<sup>27</sup> Some might argue that Hitler made an exception for his countrymen such as Hein, Blask, and Long but a report the following day mentioned that the American sprinter Helen Stephens (white), the women's 100m gold medalist, met with Hitler as well.<sup>28</sup> This was only a minor debate and none of the researched papers made a huge deal out of Hitler's apparent snubs.

Given the intense nationalist fervor that the Germans displayed during World War Two and the racism of the Holocaust many people probably think that the German public was especially hostile to Owens and the other black athletes. But that belief is surprisingly wrong. It appears that the German public recognized greatness when they saw it because Owens competed in front of more than 300,000 spectators while winning his three individual medals and rewarded him with "terrific applause."<sup>29</sup> These two facts

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<sup>26</sup> Arthur J. Daley, "Owens Captures Olympic Title, Equals World 100-Meter Record" *New York Times (1857-Current File)* August 4, 1936  
<http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/pqdweb?did=88685050&Fmt=10&clientId=17822&RQT=309&VName=HNP>

<sup>27</sup> Arthur J. Daley "U.S. Captures 4 Events; Owens Sets Jump Record" *New York Times (1857-Current file)* August 5, 1936  
<http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/pqdweb?did=87969683&Fmt=10&clientId=17822&RQT=309&VName=HNP>

<sup>28</sup> Frederick T. Birchall, "Luck of Nazis With the Weather Failing During the Olympic Games" *New York Times (1857-Current file)* August 6, 1936  
<http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/pqdweb?did=87970555&Fmt=10&clientId=17822&RQT=309&VName=HNP>

<sup>29</sup> "Owens U.S. Captures 3 More Events; Increases Lead Helen Stephens and Woodruff Triumph" *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1963)* August 5, 1936,

made it difficult for the journalists in the white media to make Owens just another member of the team. The journalists had a responsibility to report what was happening to their readers back home since there obviously was no TV. It is possible that the journalists might have reasoned that since the Germans were still cheering for an American it was all right to single out that specific athlete.

The framing and focus of the black media was very different from the white media just like in the pre-Olympic coverage. The main differences were the focus on Hitler snubbing the black athletes, the focus on the crowds' reactions to Owens, and his place in Olympic history. A minor difference that should be mentioned was the black media's lack of coverage of the controversy that resulted from Owens and Metcalfe replacing Marty Glickman and Sam Stoller (the two Jews on the track team) on the 4x100m relay team at the last minute because of Coach Robertson's fear that the Germans and Netherlands each had teams that were running a 40.5 seconds.<sup>30</sup> The white media covered this briefly but it was not a major story because most of the journalists accepted the coach's reasoning. Daley flatly stated, "the Semitism of the two American sprinters had nothing to do with their being shunted to the side-lines"<sup>31</sup> to head off any charges of anti-Semitism.

One of the biggest themes in parts of the black media throughout the Olympics was the constant snubbing of the black athletes by Hitler. This is in contrast to the white media, some of which did report the snubs but only as a minor story. There were stories

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<http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/pqdweb?did=460211262&Fmt=10&clientId=17822&RQT=309&VName=HNP>

<sup>30</sup> Arthur J. Daley "U.S. Makes Grand Slam," *New York Times (1851-2006)* August 9, 1936

<http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/pqdweb?did=85415698&Fmt=10&clientId=17822&RQT=309&VName=HNP>

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

about Hitler avoiding the black athletes in both the opinion and report articles. One example from the *Amsterdam News*, “Our own Jesse Owens whose achievements is the most outstanding of the entire games thus far, got only a half-hearted and wholly un-Nazi salute from the Chancellor.”<sup>32</sup> The *Chicago Defender* incorporated the wave but in a way that made it sound almost as bad as completely ignoring Owens,

Twice Owens has been led toward Hitler’s private box, hoping against fate that the ruler would receive him. His attempt has failed however, for Hitler was usually on the eve of making his departure as King Owens approached. He did find time and convenience to raise his hand in salute to the little bronze Ohio boy after the world’s record run of Monday, however.<sup>33</sup>

This quote makes it sound as if Hitler was not only ignoring Owens but also condescending to him with the wave.

As has been the case before, the black media was not uniform in their portrayal of Owens and Hitler’s relationship. The *Pittsburgh Courier’s* opinion differed from the black newspapers mentioned above of whether Hitler avoided Owens. Robert Vann, the *Courier’s* editor who was in Germany to cover the games described the interaction between Hitler and Owens not as a wave but as a salute, and to make sure that his readers were in the right frame of mind he described an amazing scene of seeing, “Owens greeted by the Grand Chancellor of this country as a brilliant sun peeped out through the clouds. I saw a vast crowd of some 85,000 or 90,000 people stand up and cheer him to the echo.”<sup>34</sup> With imagery like this it would be very hard to view this interaction negatively.

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<sup>32</sup> “Unhappy Hitler” *New York Amsterdam News (1922-1938)* August 8, 1936, <http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/pqdweb?did=1082105772&Fmt=10&clientId=17822&RQT=309&VName=HNP>

<sup>33</sup> Defender Foreign Press Service Correspondence, “Owens ‘Takes’ Olympics,” *Chicago Defender (National edition) (1921-1967)* August 8, 1936, <http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/pqdweb?did=745338802&Fmt=10&clientId=17822&RQT=309&VName=HNP>

<sup>34</sup> Robert L. Vann, “Hitler Salutes Jesse Owens,” *Pittsburgh Courier (1911-1950)* August 8, 1936, <http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/pqdweb?did=1114849832&Fmt=10&clientId=17822&RQT=309&VName=HNP>

However, several problems emerge upon a closer look, the first being that Vann does not mention any of the other black athletes receiving even a salute from Hitler after they won gold medals. The other is that Vann only mentions Hitler acknowledging Owens after his first gold medal, there is no mention of Hitler doing anything after his other three medals.

The other major theme was the effort to place Owens in a class by himself. The most common tactic was to describe the crowds' reaction to Owens's accomplishments. Vann in the same article mentioned above notes that he saw around 100,000 go "literally crazy" when they saw Owens in action.<sup>35</sup> Another tactic was to claim that Owens was the world's greatest athlete, even greater than Paavo Nurmi (the last man to win three gold medals in 1924). Many people had compared Owens to Nurmi because of his successful attempt to win three individual gold medals. However, Randy Taylor from the *Amsterdam News* claimed that Owens was in fact better than Nurmi because he was the first to successfully combine both track and field activities, whereas Nurmi won all three of his gold medals on the track.

### **Conclusion**

Owens's four gold medals would gain significance over time to the point that today most American children today know that Owens "beat" Hitler at his own Olympics. When one actually analyzes the media coverage in both the white and black media during the month before the Olympics and the Olympics itself it becomes clear that this view had not taken hold yet. Many people recognized that Owens was truly great but they did not provide any real indication that they understood the historical importance of his accomplishments. The dichotomy between the white and black media's coverage is very

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

interesting and important because it provides the reader with a foundation for the analysis that will occur in the next two chapters.

## CHAPTER TWO: Jackie Robinson

42. This number in and of itself is not significant, but when it is put on a Brooklyn Dodgers jersey it immediately invokes images of Jackie Robinson. He was the man who broke the color line that prohibited African-American athletes from playing in Major League Baseball (MLB). Although many people believe that he is the first black player to ever play in the MLB, he is in actuality the first black player in the modern era of baseball. The last black player to play in the majors was actually “Moses Fleetwood Walker who caught for Toledo of the American Association (it had major league classification at this time) in 1884.”<sup>1</sup> To commemorate Robinson’s role as a trailblazer and acknowledge his contributions to baseball and society, every team in the MLB retired his number, 42, on April 15, 1997, even teams that were started after his unfortunate death in 1972.<sup>2</sup> No other athlete has ever received such an honor in any American professional sports league. This vital contribution and extremely productive career led to him being selected for induction into the Baseball Hall of Fame in 1962.

When discussing Robinson’s place in history, he is usually included with such renowned athletes as Jesse Owens and Joe Louis, but there are several key differences between Robinson and these two accomplished athletes. The most obvious is that Owens and Louis appeared on the national scene at least a decade before Robinson; both of them had achieved fame and had won their sports’ top awards before World War Two. Even though Robinson was well known on the West coast for his athletic accomplishments at

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<sup>1</sup> Louis Effrat, “Royals’ Star Signs With Brooks Today,” *New York Times* (1923-Current file) April 11, 1947  
<http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/pqdweb?did=87730428&Fmt=10&clientId=17822&RQT=309&VName=HNP>

<sup>2</sup> Arnold Rampersad, *Jackie Robinson: A Biography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. 1997), 464.

University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), he was not nationally recognized. While at UCLA he became the only athlete in its storied athletic tradition to letter<sup>3</sup> in four sports (football, basketball, track, and baseball)<sup>4</sup>. The most important distinction between Jesse Owens, Joe Louis, and even Jack Johnson for that matter was that Jackie Robinson was in the national spotlight for the majority of the year, from the start of spring training in March through October (if the Dodgers went to the World Series). Unlike track or boxing, baseball has games almost daily. For example in Robinson's first season in 1947 he played in 151 regular season games and through the rest of his career never played in less than 105.<sup>5</sup> This meant that he was constantly in the newspaper and had many more opportunities to either improve or harm his reputation among the sportswriters and fans.

Jack "Jackie" Roosevelt Robinson was born January 31, 1919 somewhere near Cairo, Georgia. He was the fifth child of Jerry and Mallie Robinson. Like Jesse Owens, Robinson's family moved from the South in the hope of discovering a better life. Unlike Owens, Robinson's mother moved the family (without her husband) to Pasadena, California in 1920. Unlike Jesse Owens, Robinson's life up to his MLB breakthrough was extremely important because it helped shape him into the man that would break the color barrier. The move to Pasadena allowed Robinson to have a racially diverse group of friends, in spite of the festering Jim Crow laws.<sup>6</sup> It also made it much easier for him to obtain the attention of the coaches at UCLA. Although some schools in UCLA's conference did not accept blacks or only took "token blacks," UCLA was willing to

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<sup>3</sup> To letter means to play on the varsity team

<sup>4</sup> Dave Greenwald, "Alumnus Jackie Robinson honored by Congress," UCLA Spotlight <http://www.spotlight.ucla.edu/alumni/jackie-robinson/>

<sup>5</sup> "Jackie Robinson Career Statistics," *Major League Baseball*, [http://mlb.mlb.com/stats/historical/individual\\_stats\\_player.jsp?c\\_id=mlb&playerID=121314&HS=True](http://mlb.mlb.com/stats/historical/individual_stats_player.jsp?c_id=mlb&playerID=121314&HS=True)

<sup>6</sup> Arnold Rampersad, *Jackie Robinson: A Biography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. 1997), 33.



accept any black athlete that would help improve its athletic reputation.<sup>7</sup> This experience of growing up in a racially diverse neighborhood and attending an integrated college allowed him to not only interact with many white people, but also helped prepare him for playing mostly with and against whites. This included both the positive experiences of getting to know the other players and the negatives of racism. If he had not had this initiation into the white world before he entered the majors it is fair to say that he would not have performed as well and may not have succeeded at all. After Pearl Harbor, he was drafted and joined the army and served honorably until he was ““honorably relieved from active duty in the U.S. Army ‘by reason of physical disqualification’” on November 28, 1944. The physical disqualification was his right ankle, which after being X-rayed showed a large amount of bone chips floating in the ankle joint.<sup>8</sup>

After his service in the army, he embarked on a journey that on April 15, 1947 led to him breaking the color barrier in the MLB. This breakthrough renewed issues that were investigated in the first chapter and created some new ones for the white media. The most pronounced similarity was the decision of how to frame Robinson. Should race be included in the discussion or should it simply be focused on his talents and efforts to secure his place in the major leagues? This question was very timely because Robinson’s career in the majors started right before the civil rights movement really took off. The largest issue that the white media had to address, which it did not have to with Owens, was how to cover the racism and bigotry that Robinson faced from other Americans. The investigation of these questions will utilize several white/mainstream papers: the *New York Times*, *Chicago Tribune*, and *Los Angeles Times*.

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 58-59

<sup>8</sup> Arnold Rampersad, *Jackie Robinson: A Biography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. 1997), 98

Robinson's historic achievement also raised questions for the black media. The most obvious was how to frame Robinson's entrance into and success in the majors. The issue was the same one facing the white journalists. The black media had to decide whether it wanted to use Robinson and his success in baseball in the civil rights movement or just analyze him as a baseball player. They also had to decide how they would report the racism he faced on the baseball diamond. The papers that will be used to attempt to answer these questions are the *New York Amsterdam News*, *Chicago Daily Defender*, *Pittsburgh Courier*, and the *Los Angeles Sentinel*.

This chapter will focus on Robinson's entrance into the league (roughly his first month). After a careful analysis of the articles, several trends become apparent. The entire white media discussed the historic nature of Robinson's success, but some went into more detail than others. The different mainstream papers responded in different ways to the acts of racism that he faced from other players and teams. Some papers reported and wrote editorials, while others completely ignored them. The black media responded very differently. The largest difference between the white and black media was the black media's constant pleas to the black fans to behave. The black media consistently urged their readers to not use Robinson as a symbol for the civil rights movement.

### **Major League Call Up**

When the Brooklyn Dodgers opened their 1947 season on April 15<sup>th</sup> one player stood out not only from the rest of his team, but the entire league. Jackie Robinson was the first black player to make it to the majors. This did not surprise anyone because Branch Rickey, the Dodgers General Manager, had purchased Robinson's contract from

the Montreal Royals, a Dodger minor league affiliate, on April 10<sup>th</sup><sup>9</sup>. This was not Joe Louis winning a fight then training for several months before fighting again but someone who would be on the national stage for a majority of the year. While boxing and track and field were important to American sports fans, they were not “America’s pastime.” White journalists had to determine how to frame Robinson and his accomplishments. Not surprisingly different papers used different frames. Some decided to analyze him mostly as a prospect whose race was of minor importance. Others took a more holistic approach but did not tie him to the civil rights movement. Many of the journalists realized that the issue was as “easy to handle as a fistful of fish-hooks.”<sup>10</sup>

Although it was a difficult issue to address, some journalists attempted to anyway. One journalist, Arthur Daley of the *New York Times* articulated these feelings on April 9<sup>th</sup>, the day before Robinson was officially transferred to the Dodgers. He felt that if Robinson was an “ordinary” person then his potential call up would be of little significance but because he was black he had “unfortunately become a symbol as the first acknowledged Negro to enter organized ball in modern times.”<sup>11</sup> Several points of this quote are indicative of trends that emerge in the coverage of Robinson in his first month in the majors. One of the most striking is Daley’s use of the word ordinary to describe white people. Even though Daley’s description of the added pressure of becoming a symbol as unfortunate would seem to indicate that Daley supported Robinson, an underlying racism still existed. A clearer example of this type of racism can be found in another article from Daley published the day after Opening Day in which he described

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<sup>9</sup> Arnold Rampersad, *Jackie Robinson: A Biography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. 1997), 167.

<sup>10</sup> Arthur Daley “Sports of the Times” *New York Times (1923-Current file)* April 9, 1947  
<http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/pqdweb?did=88116842&Fmt=10&clientId=17822&RQT=309&VName=HNP>

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

Robinson as a, “muscular Negro who minds his own business and shrewdly makes no effort to push himself. He speaks quietly and intelligently when spoken to.”<sup>12</sup> This description conjures images of the black person who knows his place in the world and does not try to push beyond it. Another journalist who did not ignore the issue completely was Arch Ward of the *Chicago Tribune*. In his column “In the Wake of the News,” he mentions in passing, “His rise to big league status brings into the open one of the most controversial topics in the game”<sup>13</sup> but instead of actually addressing this “controversial topic,” he goes on to discuss the immense amount of pressure that Robinson will be under.<sup>14</sup> Although he did not actively engage the issue, he at least did not ignore it and pretend that it was not there like many others.

While some journalists devoted an inordinate amount of words to Robinson, his chances of success, and his role as a pioneer, other papers found other issues more pressing. No one outrightly ignored the important event of a black player breaking into major league baseball; some papers discussed it briefly then moved on. A perfect example of this is the *Los Angeles Times* who split the article announcing the purchase of his contract by the Dodgers with the Dodger-Yankee feud.<sup>15</sup> At the beginning of the 1947 season, the Dodgers manager, Leo Durocher was suspended for one season because he claimed that the Yankees President, Larry MacPhail had sat with alleged gamblers at a

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<sup>12</sup> Arthur Daley “Sports of the Times” *New York Times (1923-Current file)* April 16, 1947  
<http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/pqdweb?did=87737218&Fmt=10&clientId=17822&RQT=309&VName=HNP>

<sup>13</sup> Arch Ward, “In the Wake of the News” *Chicago Tribune (1923-1963)*, April 18, 1947  
<http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/pqdweb?did=473837142&Fmt=10&clientId=17822&RQT=309&VName=HNP>

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>15</sup> Associated Press “Jackie Robinson Becomes Dodger,” *Los Angeles Times (1923-Current file)* April 11, 1947  
<http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/pqdweb?did=419682741&Fmt=10&clientId=17822&RQT=309&VName=HNP>

Yankees exhibition game in Cuba.<sup>16</sup> While this was an important issue, the first black player in the modern era certainly takes precedence, especially if the black player spent most of his life in the Los Angeles area. This focus on the manager situation instead of Robinson was not only limited to the *Los Angeles Times* but can also be seen in the *Chicago Tribune*. In an article published April 14<sup>th</sup>, the *Tribune* mentioned that Robinson will be “unveiled” tomorrow and that he will play first base while the rest of the article focused on what the Dodgers will do without Durocher as their manager.<sup>17</sup>

Once the season started the mainstream media began to separate into the editorials and game reports. These reports were unbiased accountings of the games and only referred to Robinson in order to further the narrative of the game. A perfect example of this is, “Jackie Robinson scored the only run of the game in the eighth inning. The Negro infielder popped a single back of second, stole second and moved to third on Catcher Andy Seminick’s overthrow.”<sup>18</sup> When the reports needed to describe either a good or bad play they seem to be even handed. This can be seen in an article from the *New York Times* from April 23<sup>rd</sup>, which blamed Robinson for an error but also recognized and complemented him on his “good judgment.”<sup>19</sup>

Unfortunately, Robinson could not focus only on the game like some of the white journalists because he had to deal with people who did not want him in the majors. These

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<sup>16</sup> Arnold Rampersad, *Jackie Robinson: A Biography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. 1997), 167.

<sup>17</sup> Associated Press “Expect Record Major League Opening Crowds” *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* April 15, 1947

<http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/pqdweb?did=473826892&Fmt=10&clientId=17822&RQT=309&VName=HNP>

<sup>18</sup> Associated Press “Ennis Gets Double” *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* April 23, 1947

<http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/pqdweb?did=473851072&Fmt=10&clientId=17822&RQT=309&VName=HNP>

<sup>19</sup> Roscoe McGowen, “Brooklyn Defeats Leonard in 8<sup>th</sup>, 1-0,” *New York Times (1923-Current file)*, April 23, 1947

<http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/pqdweb?did=87519247&Fmt=10&clientId=17822&RQT=309&VName=HNP>

opponents of Robinson and integration of baseball were not concentrated among one group of people but included everyone: fans, players, managers, and team owners. Both Robinson and Rickey did not expect everyone to be happy with Robinson receiving a chance in the majors. Before he signed Robinson to a contract in 1946, Rickey wanted to ensure that Robinson could handle the racial bigotry that he was sure to face so he met with Robinson and threw countless baseball and non-baseball situations at him. These ranged from Rickey pretending to be a “vengeful base runner, sliding into Jacks black flesh — ‘How do you like that, nigger boy?’”<sup>20</sup> To “a white hotel clerk rudely refusing Jack accommodations.”<sup>21</sup> At the end of this unusual test, Rickey demanded that Robinson could never fight back if their “experiment” would be likely to succeed.<sup>22</sup>

When Robinson faced the Philadelphia Phillies in Brooklyn on April 22<sup>nd</sup> for the first time he was greeted with some of the vulgarities that Rickey had thrown at him in 1946. These insults did not come from the fans, but from the Phillies’s dugout. They were not mild insults either, they included such pleasantries as,

Hey, nigger, why don’t you go back to the cotton field where you belong?  
They’re waiting for you in the jungles, black boy! Hey, snowflakes, which one of those white boys’ wives are you dating tonight? We don’t want you here, nigger, and Go back to the bushes!<sup>23</sup>

These insults were not the act of individual players but an order from their manager Ben Chapman to try to unnerve Robinson.<sup>24</sup> Robinson could not do a thing because of the promise that he made to Rickey. What is even more striking than Robinson’s self-restraint is the complete lack of coverage by the white newspapers for around two weeks.

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<sup>20</sup> Arnold Rampersad, *Jackie Robinson: A Biography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. 1997), 127.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>23</sup> Jackie Robinson, *I Never Had It Made An Autobiography* (Hopewell: The Ecco Press, 1995), 59.

<sup>24</sup> Rampersad, *Jackie Robinson*, 173.

For the following two weeks the *New York Times*, *Chicago Tribune*, and *Los Angeles Times* did not file a single report about this racial abuse. They could not make the excuse that they did not know about the abuse because other journalists such as Walter Winchell not only knew about it, but also condemned it.<sup>25</sup> The first mention of this abuse by any of these major papers was not until bigotry reared its ugly head again.

This time the St. Louis Cardinals players debated going on strike instead of playing Robinson, but their owner was able to convince them to play.<sup>26</sup> This was not enough for the National league president, Ford Frick, who stated,

I thought it would be a very foolish thing for the players to do and if they had followed thru, there would have been only one recourse—indefinite suspension. As far as the National league is concerned we stand firmly behind Robinson. Any such action as reportedly was contemplated would be sheer madness.

Although both the owner and manager denied that any plans for a strike were being considered, the president stood by his statement.<sup>27</sup> In the same article, the racial abuse of the Phillies was finally mentioned two weeks after the fact because President Frick warned Chapman that the language used was unacceptable.<sup>28</sup> However, the article did not specify what type of language was used. It simply stated that the Phillies were warned for inundating Robinson with “abusive language from the bench.”<sup>29</sup> Yet again the mainstream papers completely avoided the issue of race because of the plethora of other issues that would spring from an in-depth discussion of this one. Another article that ran

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Associated Press, “Frick Claims Cards Plotted to Shun Negro,” *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)*, May 9, 1947  
<http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/pqdweb?did=473899962&Fmt=10&clientId=17822&RQT=309&VName=HNP>

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

the same day in the *Tribune* was a denial by Chapman of any prejudice.<sup>30</sup> He claimed that they were not making a target of Robinson,<sup>31</sup> but from the accounts in Robinson's autobiography, biography and President Frick's remarks it sounds like that was exactly what they did. None of the major papers went into any investigative detail to attempt to determine who was telling the truth or what the "abusive language was." This indicates that the papers were not comfortable discussing racial topics and would only write about the most vague and minimal way possible when it was absolutely necessary.

Similar to the 1936 Olympics, the black newspapers in 1947 were weeklies and not dailies (like the mainstream papers), which put them at minor disadvantage because they were not able to report on issues right away. This also appears to have affected the coverage of Robinson. There is little to no coverage of the day-to-day games like the mainstream media. The black papers however would mention when he was doing particularly well, or they discussed his week and how he fared in series. A perfect example of this is a review of his first week in the majors by Wendell Smith of the *Pittsburgh Courier*. In it Smith notes that Robinson hit .429 in his first week and provides statistics for Robinson's series against the Boston Braves and the New York Giants.<sup>32</sup> Because of this inability to report on the daily events, many of the articles were editorials.

Unlike the mainstream media, the black papers were not afraid to discuss racial issues, in fact many of them pleaded with their readers to "let Jackie play baseball and

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<sup>30</sup> "Chapman Denies Prejudice," *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1923-1963), May 9, 1947  
<http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/pqdweb?did=473899982&Fmt=10&clientId=17822&RQT=309&VName=HNP>

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Wendell Smith, "Jackie Robinson Bats .429 in First Week in Majors," *The Pittsburgh Courier* (1911-1950), April 26, 1947  
<http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/pqdweb?did=1110800182&Fmt=10&clientId=17822&RQT=309&VName=HNP>



stop trying to solve the race problem at his expense”<sup>33</sup> because all of the added pressure would not be helpful. This is interesting because many of the papers themselves did not listen to their own advice. The most explicit example of this blending of civil rights and sports is another article by Wendell Smith that discussed Rickey’s plea for fans to leave Robinson alone and let him play baseball. The most interesting part of this article is that it ends with a little blurb that says “End Jim Crow In Washington” in bold letters.<sup>34</sup> The *Courier* ended several articles with this slogan, showing a complete disregard for their advice to just let Robinson play. A slightly subtler example is an article by Roy W. Wilkins of the *Los Angeles Sentinel*, which appeared two days after Robinson broke into the majors. In this article Wilkins constantly used Robinson to portray the plight of black people in general by noting, “if you give our folks a fair chance some of them will always make it. All they ask is a fair chance.”<sup>35</sup> And “Robby still had to take a lot of stuff and fight his own way through. That is an old story to Negroes.”<sup>36</sup> This article appeared on the same page as an article written by Dean Gordon B. Hancock in which he admonished the black press and fans for putting too much pressure on Robinson and not letting him focus on succeeding in baseball.<sup>37</sup> Another factor that contradicted the black press’s general plea for everyone to just let Robinson play baseball is that the two previous

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<sup>33</sup> “Let Him Play Ball,” *Los Angeles Sentinel* (1934-2005), May 22, 1947  
<http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/pqdweb?did=1106622142&Fmt=10&clientId=17822&RQT=309&VName=HNP>

<sup>34</sup> Wendell Smith, “Fans Swamp Jackie; Public Affairs Out,” April 26, 1947 *The Pittsburgh Courier* (1911-1950)  
<http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/pqdweb?did=1110798262&Fmt=10&clientId=17822&RQT=309&VName=HNP>

<sup>35</sup> Roy W. Wilkins, “The Watchtower,” *Los Angeles Sentinel* (1934-2005), April 17, 1947  
<http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/pqdweb?did=1104931382&Fmt=10&clientId=17822&RQT=309&VName=HNP>

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>37</sup> Dean Gordon B. Hancock, “Between the Lines,” *Los Angeles Sentinel* (1934-2005), April 17, 1947  
[http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/pqdweb?RQT=309&Fmt=10&VType=PQD&VName=HNP&VInst=PROD&did=1104931442&SrchMode=\\$context.getRequest\(\).getValue\(\\$app.N\\_SEARCH\\_MODE\).toString\(\).replaceAll\('%3C',](http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/pqdweb?RQT=309&Fmt=10&VType=PQD&VName=HNP&VInst=PROD&did=1104931442&SrchMode=$context.getRequest().getValue($app.N_SEARCH_MODE).toString().replaceAll('%3C',)

articles did not appear in the sports section, but the editorial section. They appeared next to articles that for example suggested that more black veterans take advantage of the GI bill.<sup>38</sup> The editorial “Timely Topics” by Earl Brown from the *New York Amsterdam News (1943-1961)* which blatantly mixed sports and civil rights demonstrates that it was not only the *Sentinel*’s editorial staff who were taking notice of Robinson. His quote

The big point to all this is, until it ceases to be news when colored Americans are expected in positions from which they have been hereto barred with out so much ballyhoo, it cannot be said that America has become of age and is accepting the colored man or woman on merit.<sup>39</sup>

Clearly analyzed not only Robinson’s situation and the surrounding media circus but also the commotion that is caused whenever an African-American achieves something not usually expected of them. The existence of this contradiction implies that journalists were actually attempting to relieve some of the pressure that Robinson was feeling because they knew that in reality his success would greatly help the civil rights cause. They also understood that “if Robinson fails to make the grade, it will be many years before a Negro makes the grade. ... If Jackie Robinson is turned down this week, then you can look for another period of years before the question arises officially again.”<sup>40</sup>

A corollary of this was the numerous articles that appeared in the black media that attempted to tell the readers how to behave at a MLB game. The main reasons for this were that if the black fans behaved poorly or booed one of Robinson’s teammates, it

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<sup>38</sup> “Education for the Asking,” *Los Angeles Sentinel (1934-2005)*, April 17, 1947  
[http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/pqdweb?RQT=309&Fmt=10&VType=PQD&VName=HNP&VInst=PROD&did=1104931362&SrchMode=\\$context.getRequest\(\).getValue\(\\$app.N\\_SEARCH\\_MODE\).toString\(\).replaceAll\('%3C',](http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/pqdweb?RQT=309&Fmt=10&VType=PQD&VName=HNP&VInst=PROD&did=1104931362&SrchMode=$context.getRequest().getValue($app.N_SEARCH_MODE).toString().replaceAll('%3C',)

<sup>39</sup> Earl Brown, “Timely Topics,” *New York Amsterdam News (1943-1961)*, April 19, 1947  
<http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/pqdweb?did=1080688762&Fmt=10&clientId=17822&RQT=309&VName=HNP>

<sup>40</sup> Wendell Smith, “The Sports Beat,” *The Pittsburgh Courier (1911-1950)*, April 12, 1947  
<http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/pqdweb?did=1112233582&Fmt=10&clientId=17822&RQT=309&VName=HNP>

would reflect badly on not only Robinson but also the entire African-American population and it also would cause more stress for Robinson. After telling the fans "...the conduct of the Negro fans. Drinking is out in all National League parks. Profane language, if you have to use it, reserve it for your home where your wife can 'brain' you"<sup>41</sup> journalists such as Fay Young from the *Chicago Defender* went on to claim "Robinson will not be on trial as much as the Negro fan. The Negro fan has been the 'hot potato' dodged by managers who would have taken a chance by signing a Negro player. The unruly Negro has and can set us back 25 years."<sup>42</sup> Journalists were not the only ones demanding that the black fans behave themselves, Rev. Dr. B. C. Robeson, pastor of Mother A. M. E. Zion Church in one of his Sunday morning sermons reminded his congregants that they should not be holding Robinson back by their conduct at his games.<sup>43</sup> This focus on the behavior of the fans shows that the papers wanted to ensure that Robinson was able to focus entirely on baseball. However at the same time, they were using this opportunity to try to aid the civil rights movement.

Although the black papers did not devote much coverage to the games themselves the two incidences of racism that were mentioned earlier (the Phillies's racist taunts and the Cardinals proposed strike) did receive a fair amount of coverage. In fact because of when these events became public knowledge, both appeared in the same issue of the black papers. According to the *Pittsburgh Courier*, its Philadelphia office first reported the racial taunting, and they quote Chapman as saying to his players, "they should call

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<sup>41</sup> Fay Young, "Through the Years," *The Chicago Defender (National edition) (1921-1967)*, April 19, 1947 <http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/pqdweb?did=741929422&Fmt=10&clientId=17822&RQT=309&VName=HNP>

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>43</sup> "Tells Negroes to Behave At Games," *New York Amsterdam News (1943-1961)*, April 26, 1947 <http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/pqdweb?did=1092670272&Fmt=10&clientId=17822&RQT=309&VName=HNP>

Robinson everything and anything they wanted to. He assured them that they had his unswerving support.”<sup>44</sup> This contradicted what he told the mainstream media.<sup>45</sup> One possible explanation is that he did not realize that Commissioner Chandler would be so angry about the racial abuse or he was playing to different bases. The black media also focused on the potential Cardinals’ strike and praised President Frick for his “refusal to ‘kill’ the story.”<sup>46</sup> One difference between the mainstream and black media was the type of language used when describing the denials of the Cardinals manager and president. One example of this is the mention by the *Chicago Defender* of a sizable amount of derogatory conversations about Robinson by the club’s Klan members.<sup>47</sup> In no mainstream paper that has been investigated was there even mention of Klan members. A possible explanation for this is that mentioning the Klan would most likely lead to a conversation about race which the mainstream media clearly did not want to have. Whereas the mainstream media’s reports on the fallout of these two events were focused on objectively providing the facts, the black media added their own analysis and interpretations to the facts. For example, Wendell Smith claimed that the actions of Chandler, Frick, and others demonstrated that Robinson has “some real friends in the

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<sup>44</sup> Wendell Smith, “Stop Race Baiting’-Chandler,” *The Pittsburgh Courier (1911-1950)*, May 10, 1947  
<http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/pqdweb?did=1110623662&Fmt=10&clientId=17822&RQT=309&VName=HNP>

<sup>45</sup> “Chapman Denies Prejudice,” *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)*, May 9, 1947  
<http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/pqdweb?did=473899982&Fmt=10&clientId=17822&RQT=309&VName=HNP>

<sup>46</sup> “Name Guilty In Robinson Strike Move,” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition) (1921-1967)*, May 17, 1947  
<http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/pqdweb?did=741939742&Fmt=10&clientId=17822&RQT=309&VName=HNP>

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

baseball world” and that Frick’s actions are more significant because of his quick endorsement of Robinson.<sup>48</sup>

By the end of the season, Robinson had not only solidified his place on the Dodgers team, but he was also named the Rookie of the Year.<sup>49</sup> He went on to have a Hall of Fame career. Even though he did not make any grand public gestures like Muhammad Ali or Tommie Smith and John Carlos, Robinson is credited with helping accelerate the civil rights movement. As his biographer, Arnold Rampersad says, “... he had revolutionized the image of black Americans in the eyes of many whites ... he had utterly complicated their sense of the nature of black people, how they thought and felt, their dignity and their courage in the face of adversity.”<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Wendell Smith, “Bigwigs of Baseball Support Jackie Robinson,” *The Pittsburgh Courier* (1911-1950), May 17, 1947  
<http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/pqdweb?did=1110628712&Fmt=10&clientId=17822&RQT=309&VName=HNP>

<sup>49</sup> Arnold Rampersad, *Jackie Robinson: A Biography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. 1997), 185.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*, 186

## CHAPTER THREE: Tommie Smith and John Carlos

### Chapter III

“I think they have been discredited *by* the flag more often than they have discredited it. Our image is so bad it can’t get any worse... Maybe this will help.”<sup>1</sup>

–Tom Waddell 1968

### Introduction

The previous quote is Olympian Tom Waddell’s attempt at defending sprinters Tommie Smith and John Carlos after their black power<sup>2</sup> salute during the playing of the national anthem after they won gold and bronze in the 200m sprint on October 16, 1968 at the Mexico City Summer Olympics. This would become one of the most iconic images in Olympic, possibly civil rights, history. It can be seen everywhere today, from posters to T-shirts. In fact, in 2008 (forty years later) they were awarded the ESPN Arthur Ashe Courage Award for this symbolic gesture of protest.

When the subject of Tommie Smith and John Carlos is brought up, it is usually in a different manner from the two other subjects of this thesis, even though they all contributed to the civil rights movement. One reason for this is Jesse Owens and Jackie Robinson’s main contributions to the movement were through their athletic achievements, Owens’s four gold medals at the 1936 Berlin Games and Robinson’s breaking the Major League Baseball color barrier. While Smith and Carlos were world-class athletes, blacks winning medals in the Olympics was nothing new. Their main contribution was their protest on the Olympic stand. This was by far the most controversial of the three actions, but just as the other two events can be seen as symbols

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<sup>1</sup> Amy Bass, *Not the Triumph but the Struggle: The 1968 Olympics and the Making of the Black Athlete* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 250

<sup>2</sup> Although there has been some debate about whether the salute was a black power salute or a civil rights salute, in this paper it will be referred to as a black power salute

of their time, the podium protest is a perfect symbol for 1968 and the state of race relations.

In between Robinson breaking the color barrier in 1947 and the Mexico City Olympics in 1968 there had been numerous protests against the racial inequality that persisted in the United States. Some of these were the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* Supreme Court case (that declared separate but equal schools illegal), the 1955 Montgomery Bus Boycotts (that led to a US Supreme Court decision that declared Montgomery laws requiring segregated buses unconstitutional)<sup>3</sup>, and the 1963 March on Washington (where Martin Luther King gave his famous “I Have A Dream” Speech and is credited with helping pass the 1964 Civil Rights Act).<sup>4</sup> Another event that affected the national mood was the assassination of John F. Kennedy in 1963 in Dallas, Texas. 1968 was a very tumultuous year itself, with the Tet offensive starting on January 31<sup>st</sup>, Martin Luther King’s assassination on April 4<sup>th</sup> which led to riots in over “sixty cities that culminated in over forty deaths and twenty thousand arrests,”<sup>5</sup> Robert Kennedy’s assassination on June 6<sup>th</sup>, the riots at the Democratic Convention in Chicago, and the Tlatelolco Massacre (where the police and military killed more than 100 student protesters in Mexico City several days before the beginning of the Olympics).<sup>6</sup>

None of these events dealt directly with sports but there were a number of significant events that must be addressed to properly contextualize Smith and Carlos’s actions at the Olympics. One dynamic shift that occurred in 1968 was the first serious

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<sup>3</sup> *Encyclopedia Britannica*, “Parks, Rosa,” <http://search.eb.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/eb/article-9001689>

<sup>4</sup> *Encyclopedia Britannica*, “March on Washington,” <http://search.eb.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/eb/article-9471029>

<sup>5</sup> *Encyclopedia Britannica*, “Vietnam War,” <http://search.eb.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/eb/article-234636>

<sup>6</sup> Todd Boyd, “Smith and Carlos were Products of their times,” ESPN.com, July 21, 2008 <http://sports.espn.go.com/espn/page2/story?page=boyd/080721>

attempt of mainstream/white journalists and media at trying to understand the black athlete instead of making general assumptions such as, “In general, the nigger athlete is a little hungrier.”<sup>7</sup> A great example of this is Jack Olson’s five part series “The Black Athlete- a Shameful Story” which appeared in *Sports Illustrated* on July 1<sup>st</sup>, 1968, with its first part, The Cruel Deception. The article’s opening paragraph acknowledges that sports are perceived both from spectators and participants to have helped improve race relations.<sup>8</sup> But instead of accepting this prevailing wisdom Olson turned his focus to the black athletes who believe that the status quo is not acceptable and ends the first page with, “Black collegiate athletes say they are dehumanized, exploited and discarded, and some say they were happier back in the ghetto.”<sup>9</sup> The rest of the article is an exposé on how the black athletes are used to help universities win championships but are not given the necessary support they need to graduate once their eligibility has expired.<sup>10</sup> *Sports Illustrated* was so conscious of the potential repercussions from its parent company, Time, Incorporated, that they did not preview the article in their “Next Week” teaser section of the previous issue and everyone related to the series went on summer vacation a few days before the publication of “The Cruel Deception.”<sup>11</sup>

One reason the writers and editors of *Sports Illustrated* went on summer vacation was their concern about the reaction to their condemnation of the majority of white college coaches and administrators (portraying them as men who are focused only on winning and not helping the black athlete succeed in school academically) and maybe

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<sup>7</sup> Jack Olson, “The Black Athlete — a Shameful Story pt. 1 The Cruel Deception,” *Sports Illustrated*, July 1, 1968, 1 <http://sportsillustrated.cnn.com/vault/article/magazine/MAG1081325/index.htm>

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Olson, “The Black Athlete,” 2

<sup>11</sup> Bass, *Not the Triumph but the Struggle*, 213



more importantly their agreement with San Jose State sociology professor Harry Edwards that “Blacks are brought in to perform. Any education they get is incidental to their main job, which is playing sports. In most cases, their college lives are educational blanks.”<sup>12</sup> This was so inflammatory because Edwards was the leader and founder of the Olympic Project for Human Rights (OPHR) whose main purpose was to engineer a boycott of the 1968 Mexico City games in protest of the racial inequalities.<sup>13</sup> Both Edwards and OPHR influenced Smith and Carlos (they both went to San Jose State and were members of the OPHR). Although an Olympic boycott was their main goal, by the time of the publication of Olson’s article, the OPHR had also led a successful boycott on February 16, 1968 of the prestigious New York Athletic Club (NYAC) collegiate track meet.<sup>14</sup> The fact that they were able to stage a successful boycott demonstrated to the United States Olympic committee (USOC) that OPHR had a definite chance of making the boycott a reality. Unfortunately for Edwards, except for the top basketball players such as Lew Alcindor, Mike Warren, Bob Lanier, Elvin Hayes, and several others,<sup>15</sup> most of the black athletes would not give up the opportunity they had worked so hard for and their chance at Olympic gold. By the middle of September Edwards declared the boycott movement dead but that the athletes would still protest in some manner.<sup>16</sup> This set the stage for Smith and Carlos’s iconic demonstration.

This protest and its aftermath (about 2 weeks total) will be the main focus of the chapter. As in the previous chapters, the mainstream and black media’s efforts to frame

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<sup>12</sup> Olson, “The Black Athlete,” 2

<sup>13</sup> Harry Edwards, *The Revolt of the Black Athlete* (New York: Free Press, 1969), 41-44

<sup>14</sup> Bass, *Not the Triumph but the Struggle*, 155

<sup>15</sup> Bass, *Not the Triumph but the Struggle*, 186

<sup>16</sup> “Athletes Ending Olympic Boycott,” *New Pittsburgh Courier (1966-1981)*, Sept. 14, 1968

<http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/pqdweb?index=0&did=1352262672&SrchMode=1&sid=3&Fmt=10&VInst=PROD&VType=PQD&RQT=309&VName=HNP&TS=1268065248&clientId=17822>

and response to the protest will be analyzed. The sample of publications that has been selected to provide a fairly accurate representation of the mainstream media includes *Chicago Tribune*, *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, and *Sports Illustrated* while the black media be represented by *Chicago Defender*, *Pittsburgh Courier*, and *New York Amsterdam News*. As in the previous two chapters, the difference in distribution cycles affected the content of the two media arms. In addition to needing to fill print space and being able to cover the daily results of sports events, the daily distribution of the mainstream/white media permitted the journalists to react to the previous days events. One could see the writer's opinion forming on the pages as his writing evolved. After a careful analysis it becomes apparent that the mainstream media is uniform in its condemnation and with a few exceptions does not even try to understand why Smith and Carlos decided to protest. Some of the articles were angry with them while others thought it was a trivial matter. This led to some authors agreeing with Smith and Carlos's expulsion from the Olympics while others thought that it gave them way too much attention.

The black media's weekly distribution prohibited the publications from focusing on individual results and instead on the themes and big events of the previous week. A key difference in coverage between the mainstream and black media's was that because of their weekly distribution system, the protest and suspension of Smith and Carlos occurred in the same news cycle so they were in the same paper. This meant that the black papers on a weekly schedule had the entire story before they started writing unlike the white media which had to write their articles as the story was unfolding. If one expected the black media to uniformly praise or condemn Smith and Carlos, they would

be incorrect. Different reactions were seen not only between the different papers but also within the papers themselves. While some of the papers were proud of and congratulated Smith and Carlos, others thought that it was an inappropriate gesture because the Olympics should remain free of politics.

### **Protest**

The iconic image of Smith and Carlos, head bowed and arms reaching toward the sky, almost never happened. Before Smith and Carlos could make any sort of demonstration on the podium, they had to get there. Even though both were considered gold medal favorites<sup>17</sup>, it was easier said than done. During the qualifying heats, Smith and Australian Peter Norman took turns breaking the Olympic record for the 200m sprint with Carlos and Smith setting a new record in the semifinals.<sup>18</sup> If that was not enough, in the same semifinal that Smith set the new Olympic record of 20.1 seconds, he also pulled an adductor muscle in his groin less than two hours before the final.<sup>19</sup> In the end however, this proved a non issue because Smith not only won the gold medal, but set a new world record of 19.83 seconds with Norman finishing second and Carlos placing third.<sup>20</sup>

With their victories, Smith and Carlos were now able to focus on creating a much more provocative demonstration than wearing black dress socks (which were the only kind of black socks available)<sup>21</sup> while they were racing. In the 20 minutes between the end of the race and the award ceremonies, they inventoried the items they had brought with them and decided upon a course of action once they got to the podium. When they

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<sup>17</sup> Bass, *Not the Triumph but the Struggle*, 238

<sup>18</sup> Richard Hoffer, *Something In the Air: American Passion and Defiance In the 1968 Mexico City Olympics*, (New York: Free Press, 2009) 157.

<sup>19</sup> Bass, *Not the Triumph but the Struggle*, 238

<sup>20</sup> Hoffer, *Something In the Air*, 159

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

reached the podium, they were both wearing their OPHR buttons, black dress socks with no shoes, Carlos had a string of beads and a black glove on his left hand, and Smith had a black scarf and a black glove on his right hand.<sup>22</sup> After they were awarded their medals, they along with Norman who was also wearing an OPHR button faced the flag and when the “Star-Spangled Banner” began playing, Smith and Carlos bowed their heads and simultaneously reached their gloved fists into the air.<sup>23</sup>

Smith explained the protest quite clearly to Howard Cosell during a television interview the next day as:

The right glove that I wore on my right hand signified the power within black America. The left glove my teammate John Carlos wore on his left hand made an arc with my right hand and his left hand also to signify black unity. The scarf that was worn around my neck signified blackness. John Carlos and me wore socks, black socks, without shoes to also signify our poverty.<sup>24</sup>

Despite this explanation, many members of the white media had a difficult time framing this event. It was very hard for the journalists to ignore this demonstration because it was broadcast on TV with millions of people watching, forcing them to address it in some way. While they took different approaches the vast majority of the mainstream journalists dismissed the protest in some way, either with anger at disrupting this “politically free event” or as a largely trivial event that received too much attention. Some of the papers even tried to ignore the protest at first. Regardless of their method of dismissal, the majority of the journalists did not try to seriously understand or investigate the motivation behind Smith and Carlos’s protest.

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Bass, *Not the Triumph but the Struggle*, 240

<sup>24</sup> Olympic coverage, ANC archives, Oct. 17, 1968, tape 16, 8:39-8:44

Regardless of their form of rejection the majority of the white journalists ignored or gave cursory acknowledgement to Smith's explanation. This exemplified a major trend of not taking the black athlete seriously. As mentioned earlier several exceptions were beginning to emerge, like two of the most respected American sports journalists Jack Olson at *Sports Illustrated* and Pete Axthelm at *Newsweek*.<sup>25</sup>

Unfortunately the majority of the writers did not follow Olson and Axthelm's lead. They instead chose one of several ways to attempt to diminish and delegitimize the protest.

One method that was employed by a paper as prestigious as the *Chicago Tribune* was to give only minimal amounts of attention to the event. While the *Tribune* did have a small picture of the protest with a small caption titled "In Silent Protest" it merely described who was in the picture in the summary of the day's events in the sports section.<sup>26</sup> The article focused on the success of the American track team with a special interest in the Bob Seagren, gold medal winner in the pole vault.<sup>27</sup> The article mentioned Smith's record setting time and triumph over injury, but it did not feel that the protest was a major development. The *Tribune* did acknowledge "A somewhat discordant note was thrown in the gala day of achievement when Smith and John Carlos of San Jose State appeared on the victors' stand wearing the medals of the Olympic movement for civil liberties...." The rest of the paragraph described the protest but did not investigate the motivations or reasoning behind it.<sup>28</sup> After examination, the *Tribune's* efforts to make this a non-story become clear. The language used is one clue. By using phrases such as "a

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<sup>25</sup> Bass, *Not the Triumph but the Struggle*, 210

<sup>26</sup> George Strickler, "Smith and Seagren Win Gold Medals," *Chicago Tribune (1963-Current file)*, Oct. 17, 1968  
<http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/pqdweb?RQT=309&Fmt=10&VType=PQD&VName=HNP&VInst=PROD&did=608635042&SrchMode=1&index=3&sid=1>

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

somewhat discordant note,” the writer, Strickler ensured that his readers could not grasp a true sense of the moment. Another indication of the frame that Strickler attempted to create for his audience was the identification of Smith and John Carlos as from San Jose State and not American. The third and final piece of evidence that Strickler was the fact that he said their medals were from the “Olympic movement for civil liberties” while they were actually for the Olympic Project for Human Rights and the buttons said OPHR.

Other newspapers were not as ambivalent; they decided to address the protest. Although most of the journalists did not explicitly condemn the action, some of the other publications did subtly express their disapproval with the two sprinters. One such publication was the *Los Angeles Times* whose journalists conveyed their negative interpretations of the protest in several different ways. One surprising way this was accomplished was through the use of humor. Two days after the protest, Jim Murray wrote an article entitled “Excuse My Glove.” In his first two sentences, he set the tone for the entire section on Smith and Carlos’s protest: “If this comes to you garbled, don’t blame the transmission. I’m wearing my black glove.”<sup>29</sup> Although he acknowledged that the Olympics did not really live up to its stated goal of “fostering international goodwill and fellowship among men,”<sup>30</sup> the rest of the section demonstrated that he believed that the protest was pointless. He notes, “Well, now our secret is out: we got race problems in our country. This will come as a great astonishment to the reading public of the world, I am sure.”<sup>31</sup> He proved that the protest was pointless by asking someone in the Olympic

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<sup>29</sup> Jim Murray, “Excuse My Glove,” *Los Angeles Times Los Angeles Times (1923-Current File)* Oct. 18, 1968

<http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/pqdweb?index=10&did=513490002&SrchMode=1&sid=1&Fmt=10&VInst=PROD&VType=PQD&RQT=309&VName=HNP&TS=1267466574&clientId=17822>

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

Village who was wearing a Bulgarian track team sweat suit if he understood the meaning of the demonstration and the interviewee responded, “Tommie Smith’s mother is a political prisoner in America.”<sup>32</sup> He spent the rest of the article discussing and analyzing Dick Fosbury’s innovative approach to the high jump.

Although it may at first appear that Murray made a solid argument, a consideration of the wider context shows. The first flaw was that the United States did in fact send prominent black athletes abroad to demonstrate that America was a “racially sound and harmonious country.”<sup>33</sup> When the State Department sent Jesse Owens to India in 1955, *Life* proclaimed him “a practically perfect envoy in a country which has violently exaggerated ideas about the treatment of Negroes in the U.S.”<sup>34</sup> The other apparent flaw is his belief that Smith and Carlos’s desired audience was international, but he fails to consider that Smith and Carlos were also focusing on Americans. This is seen in a segment of their explanation after the protest, “We are black and we’re proud to be black. White America will only give us credit for an Olympic victory. They’ll say I’m an American, but if I did something bad, they’d say a Negro. Black America was with us all the way, though.”<sup>35</sup> This segment suggests that Smith and Carlos were at least partially focusing on America because of their focus on how white and black America will respond. These oversights combined with his sarcastic tone imply that Murray was intentionally attempting to delegitimize the protest.

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Bass, *Not the Triumph but the Struggle*, 6

<sup>34</sup> “A Famous Black Athlete’s Diplomatic Debut,” *Life*, Oct. 31, 1955, 49.

<sup>35</sup> “2 Accept Medals Wearing Black Gloves,” *New York Times (1923-Current file)* Oct. 17, 1968 <http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/pqdweb?index=0&did=76893789&SrchMode=1&sid=2&Fmt=10&VInst=PROD&VType=PQD&RQT=309&VName=HNP&TS=1268009868&clientId=17822>

Another way the *Los Angeles Times* reporters expressed its displeasure with the protest was by praising Peter Norman, the silver medalist. These compliments clearly implied that Smith and Carlos did something wrong. The description of the protest by Shirley Povich is a good example of this subtle condemnation of Smith and Carlos, “While the second-place medalist, Peter Norman of Australia, stood in respectful attention at the playing of the ‘Star Spangled Banner,’ both Smith and Carlos raised a black-gloved hand in a closed-fist gesture.”<sup>36</sup> There are three main parts of this quote that exemplify the writer’s unhappiness with the protest. The first is the inclusion of Norman himself. The second is, in this description Povich does not mention that Norman also participated in the protest by wearing an OPHR button in solidarity with Smith and Carlos as previously noted. The exclusion of this fact is problematic because in the pictures that appeared in papers such as the *Chicago Tribune* and *New York Times* it is very clear that he is wearing some sort of button on his warm-up jacket. The final piece of this quote, and perhaps the most important is that he stood “in respectful attention” during the American national anthem. This description implies that Smith and Carlos were not respectful because they gave their salute, but they did not move or talk while the “Star Spangled Banner” was playing.

While Povich and Murray condemned Smith and Carlos subtly, another *Los Angeles Times* writer openly condemned them. In “It Takes All Kinds” John Hall expressed his disgust with Smith and Carlos. He was “sick of their whining, mealy-mouth, shallow view of the world, apologizing and saying they are trying to improve

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<sup>36</sup> Shirley Povich, “‘Black Power’ on Victory Stand,” *Los Angeles Times (1923-Current File)* Oct. 17. 1968 <http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/pqdweb?index=0&did=513480532&SrchMode=1&sid=1&Fmt=10&VInst=PROD&VType=PQD&RQT=309&VName=HNP&TS=1267465194&clientId=17822>



things and that they have a right to take their best shot.”<sup>37</sup> He followed this challenge with, “their best shot is a blank”<sup>38</sup> with the implication that Smith and Carlos were wrong about the plight of African-Americans. His evidence was the \$250,000 house Wilt Chamberlain was going to buy, white baseball players who admired and asked questions about O.J. Simpson (a black running back who was playing at the University of Southern California in 1968), and the fact that his first idol as a child was Jackie Robinson.<sup>39</sup> By belittling Smith and Carlos’s protest and only citing examples from sports, Hall missed the point that Smith and Carlos were not protesting for black athletes but for equality for all Americans. Ironically he ended his column with “Tommie Smith and John Carlos do a disservice to their race—the human race.”<sup>40</sup> He did not realize that Smith and Carlos were protesting because to a sizeable amount of Americans, Smith and Carlos were not a part of the human race and were not considered equals.

The *New York Times* also did not support the protest, but it appears that it did give Smith and Carlos a modicum more respect than the previous two newspapers. Of the three articles that mentioned Smith and Carlos that appeared the following day (October 17<sup>th</sup>), one was written after the semi-finals and focused on Jesse Owens, another summarized the previous day’s events and the last focused on the protest. All three of the articles appeared in the sports section with the summary being featured on the main page. The surprising part of the summary is the complete lack of mention of the protest; it only

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<sup>37</sup> John Hall, “It Takes All Kinds,” *Los Angeles Times (1923-Current File)*, Oct. 18, 1968  
[http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/pqdweb?index=15&did=513490112&SrchMode=1&sid=1&F](http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/pqdweb?index=15&did=513490112&SrchMode=1&sid=1&Fmt=10&VInst=PROD&VType=PQD&RQT=309&VName=HNP&TS=1269794980&clientId=17822)

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

described the previous days races.<sup>41</sup> While an in-depth analysis of the protest would not be expected in a summary of the previous day's events, it is surprising that there is not even a brief mention of this newsworthy event. It is true that there was a separate article that described the event, but to ignore it entirely demonstrates an attempt to lessen the impact of the protest by the journalist who wrote the article. His decision to not include even a cursory mention of the protest kept the reader from the full story of the previous day.

The article that actually addressed the protest was on the following page. Accompanying this article was a picture of the protest and a slightly larger picture of Smith and Carlos crossing the finish line. In the article, Smith and Carlos were described as the “most militant black members of the United States track and field squad.”<sup>42</sup> Although this description sounds vaguely similar to previous ones and the content in the beginning half of the article is similar to the previously mentioned articles (describing the protest and victory) the *New York Times* differed in reporting what Smith and Carlos said at their press conference. Their statements could be viewed as controversial because they attacked White America as only valuing Smith and Carlos because they won. If he had lost, Smith believed White America would call him a Negro while Carlos said “If we do a good job they’ll [white people] throw us some peanuts or pat us on the back and say,

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<sup>41</sup> Joseph M. Sheehan, “Smith Takes Olympic 200 Meteres and Seagran Captures Pole Vault for U.S.” *New York Times (1923-Current file)* Oct. 17, 1968  
<http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/pqdweb?index=2&srchmode=1&sid=1&vinst=PROD&fmt=10&startpage=58&vname=HNP&did=76893777&scaling=FULL&pmid=43896&vtype=PQD&fileinfoindex=%2Fshare4%2Fpqimage%2Fhnirs102%2F20100326064257667%2F29882%2Fout.pdf&source=%24source&rq=309&TS=1269600178&clientId=17822>

<sup>42</sup> “2 Accept Medals Wearing Black Gloves,” *New York Times (1923-Current file)* Oct. 17, 1968 pg .59  
<http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/pqdweb?index=0&did=76893789&SrchMode=1&sid=2&Fmt=10&VInst=PROD&VType=PQD&RQT=309&VName=HNP&TS=1268009868&clientId=17822>

‘Good boy.’”<sup>43</sup> Carlos also stated on the record that “white people think we’re just animals to do a job. We saw white people in the stands putting thumbs down at us. We want them to know we’re not roaches, ants or rats.”<sup>44</sup> That the *New York Times* was the only one of the three papers to report these quotes demonstrates that it was slightly less biased than the others, but it still attempted to separate the demonstration from the sports arena by not reporting it in the summary of the previous day.

Another example of the *New York Times* being slightly less biased is an article that was published in its sports section October 18<sup>th</sup>. The article reported the USOC’s apology to the IOC and Mexican Organizing Committee for the “discourtesy displayed by two of its athletes.”<sup>45</sup> The article goes on to report reactions from other athletes, not surprisingly there is a condemnation but the article ends with a show of support from John Wetton (a white man who ran the 1,500m for Great Britain) who said, “We all thought it was a bloody good show. It’s bully that these blokes had nerve enough to express their feelings.”<sup>46</sup> This balance should not be taken for granted.

Since the *Chicago Daily Defender* was the only black newspaper whose publication cycle allowed it to print articles focusing solely on the protest and not on the protest and its repercussions, the *Defender* will be the only paper covered in this section. The most notable difference between the *Defender* and the white newspapers was the placement of the articles about the protest. In the white newspapers the protest was firmly encased in the sports section but in the *Defender*, the protest was on the front page with

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Associated Press, “U.S. Leaders Warn of Penalties for Further Black Power Acts,” *New York Times* (1923-Current file) Oct. 18, 1968  
<http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/pqdweb?index=4&did=76971274&SrchMode=1&sid=1&Fmt=10&VInst=PROD&VType=PQD&RQT=309&VName=HNP&TS=1268019671&clientId=17822>

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

other articles whose headlines were “Student Revolt Gets More Backing,” “Westside Unit Protests Panic Peddling,” and several other similar headlines.<sup>47</sup> The protest being on the front page of the *Defender* with articles like these indicates that the *Defender* felt that the protest was extremely important and possibly part of the civil rights movement. Another glaring difference was the lack of a picture of the protest. The picture that accompanied the front-page article instead showed Smith and Carlos with their wives after winning their respective medals and before their demonstration.<sup>48</sup> This presented a more human side, readers could dream of someday representing their country at the Olympics but most of them had significant others.

The article itself contained many attributes that were not present in the white newspapers. John G. Griffin, the author of the article, immediately addressed the racial issue; indeed his first words were “the racial issue.”<sup>49</sup> Writers in the white press did not do this; they started with America’s accomplishments (the medals) then addressed the demonstration. Griffin then proclaimed Smith and Carlos “two of America’s greatest runners,” and that “a new and dramatic page in Olympic history was written Wednesday night.”<sup>50</sup> This heroic language was not present in any of the white newspapers. His description was much more detailed than the white press’s. Griffin also reported that the “U.S. Olympic officials knew of the pair’s plans before the ceremony, an American

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<sup>47</sup> Front Page *Chicago Daily Defender (Big Weekend Edition) (1966-1973)* Oct. 19, 1968  
<http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/pqdweb?index=2&srchmode=1&sid=2&vinst=PROD&fmt=1&startpage=-1&vname=HNP&did=712417652&scaling=FULL&pmid=68421&vtype=PQD&fileinfoindex=%2Fshare4%2Fpqimage%2Fhnirs101%2F20100326073525908%2F12220%2Fout.pdf&source=%24source&rq=309&TS=1269603326&clientId=17822>

<sup>48</sup> John G. Griffin, “Black Power Bows At The Olympics,” *Chicago Daily Defender (Big Weekend Edition) (1966-1973)*, Oct. 19, 1968,  
<http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/pqdweb?index=2&did=712417652&SrchMode=1&sid=2&Fmt=10&VInst=PROD&VType=PQD&RQT=309&VName=HNP&TS=1269603694&clientId=17822>

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

Olympic press officer said. ... The officials chose not to interfere and were not expected to take any action.”<sup>51</sup> This information did not necessarily demonstrate approval of their actions by the U.S. Olympic officials but permission for Smith and Carlos to proceed. It also attempted to show that Smith and Carlos did not try to deceive the USOC but gave them warning. The USOC might not have been able to stop their demonstration but their reported lack of plans for punishment shows that the officials did not view the protest as controversial.

In another *Defender* article from the same day, there is another claim that Smith and Carlos alerted USOC officials before the protest and that the officials planned no action.<sup>52</sup> This article was a summary similar to the summary in the *New York Times* except that it mostly focused on the accomplishments of the black athletes and not the entire American team. It also contained several quotes from Carlos from their press conference. While including several of his quotes reported in the *New York Times* it also contained Carlos’s threat that the ’72 Olympic games were going to be much worse.<sup>53</sup>

### **Suspension**

Unfortunately, the *Defender* was proven wrong in its claim that no official response would occur. At first the USOC simply reprimanded Smith and Carlos and issued an official apology, a piece of which said

The discourtesy displayed by two men who departed from tradition during a victory ceremony at Olympic stadium Oct. 16. The untypical exhibition of these athletes also violates basic standards of sportsmanship and good manners highly regarded in the United States. The committee does not believe that this immature

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> “Hines, Tyus, Smith Set World, Olympic Marks” *Chicago Daily Defender (Big Weekend Edition) (1966-1973)* Oct. 19, 1968

<http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/pqdweb?index=3&did=712419102&SrchMode=1&sid=1&Fmt=10&VInst=PROD&VType=PQD&RQT=309&VName=HNP&TS=1269605755&clientId=17822>

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

behavior by the two members of the United States team warrants any formal action at this time. If further investigation over subsequent events do not bear this out, the entire matter will be reevaluated.<sup>54</sup>

However, this did not satisfy Avery Brundage's (the head of the IOC) desire for punishment. His committee released a statement after the USOC's apology stating the IOC's displeasure. One piece of the statement that bears mentioning is, "One of the basic principles of the Olympic games is that politics play no part whatsoever in them. This principle has always been accepted with enthusiasm by all, of course including the competitors."<sup>55</sup> This piece is important because of its blatant hypocrisy, since 1908 (with some exceptions) the United States flag bearer did not dip the American flag when passing the host nation's reviewing stand as all of the other countries' flag bearers did.<sup>56</sup> This demonstration had obvious political implications, but the United States was never openly condemned for it. It is interesting to note, there was only one mention of this contradiction in all of the researched papers and it was in the *Los Angeles Times*. Given IOC's displeasure and Brundage's threat to remove the entire U.S. delegation from the games, the USOC reconvened and decided to take away Smith and Carlos's Olympic Village credentials and sent them home.<sup>57</sup>

This suspension greatly altered the entire dynamic for the press. If they were not already doing so, the press (especially the white press) now had to report the protest and the suspension since suspensions were so rare. In fact, the last suspension of an American champion for non-drug related issues occurred in 1936 when Eleanor Holm was kicked

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<sup>54</sup> Associated Press, "U.S. Apologizes for Protest by Blacks" *Chicago Tribune (1963-Current file)* Oct. 18, 1968

<http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/pqdweb?index=4&did=704807132&SrchMode=1&sid=1&Fmt=10&VInst=PROD&VType=PQD&RQT=309&VName=HNP&TS=1267999050&clientId=17822>

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Hoffer, *Something In the Air*, 123

<sup>57</sup> Hoffer, *Something In the Air*, 178

off the swim team because she had consumed alcohol while on the boat transporting the U.S. Olympic team to Berlin.<sup>58</sup> The white press threw away much of its pretense and openly condemned and insulted Smith and Carlos. The main differences among the publications was whether they publication openly supported the USOC and IOC or whether they condemned them as well. The black press on the other hand had a more diverse approach. There were certainly several newspapers that supported Smith and Carlos and condemned Brundage and the USOC but there were also some journalists who sided with the USOC.

The *Chicago Tribune*'s coverage of the affair was certainly altered. The most apparent change was the addition of coverage on the front and editorial pages, as well as the continued presence in the sports section. It now occupied the same page as headlines like "Await Hanoi Bomb Reply," "Orthodox Rites Set for Jackie; Date Indefinite," and "Police Name Four Who Stir Up Pupils."<sup>59</sup> The *Tribune*'s first article about the suspension tried to remain unbiased but did not completely succeed. The journalist reported Douglas Roby's (the president of the USOC) main motivation for suspending Smith and Carlos was the IOC threat to remove the entire US team from the Olympics.<sup>60</sup> At no point did the journalist attempt to defend Smith and Carlos, nor did he use any

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<sup>58</sup> Bass, *Not the Triumph but the Struggle*, 270

<sup>59</sup> Front Page *Chicago Tribune (1963-Current file)* Oct. 19, 1968

<http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/pqdweb?index=7&sid=1&srchmode=1&vinst=PROD&fmt=1&startpage=-1&vname=HNP&did=608638342&scaling=FULL&pmid=53855&vtype=PQD&fileinfoindex=%2Fshare3%2Fpqimage%2Fhnirs102%2F20100327055358729%2F21188%2Fout.pdf&rqt=309&source=%24source&TS=1269683639&clientId=17822>

<sup>60</sup> "Suspend 2 Negro Olympians" *Chicago Tribune (1963-Current file)* Oct. 19, 1968

<http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/pqdweb?RQT=309&Fmt=10&VType=PQD&VName=HNP&VInst=PROD&did=608638342&SrchMode=1&index=7&sid=1>

quotes from any of the other athletes that were supportive of Smith and Carlos. Instead, he simply talked about other much milder forms of protest from other black athletes.<sup>61</sup>

While the article failed at its apparent attempt to remain unbiased, the editorial that appeared on October 19<sup>th</sup> was anything but unbiased. In “The Natural Right of Being a Slob,” the editorial board of the *Tribune* unequivocally condemned Smith and Carlos for putting on “an act contemptuous of the United States.”<sup>62</sup> The editorial staff did not try to discern the motivation behind their protest, simply noting, “They ran wearing black stockings emblematic of something and wearing buttons implying that ‘human rights’ were denied black Americans.”<sup>63</sup> The staff made no effort to understand the symbolism of any part of the protest. It would not have been difficult for the writers to discover the meanings. All they had to do was watch Smith’s interview with Cosell or look at the transcript from the post awards ceremony press conference. The staff unconditionally supported the USOC’s characterization of their behavior as “‘exhibitionism, ‘immaturity,’ a violation of the standards of sportsmanship and good manners, and an unwarranted intrusion of domestic politics into international competition.”<sup>64</sup> At no point did the staff attempt to discover what caused the athletes to commit all of these gross violations of the Olympic spirit.

There are also several problems with the characterizations mentioned above. The first being that the courage and fortitude required to undertake such a demonstration prohibits immaturity from presenting itself. The more interesting mischaracterization is

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> “The Natural Right of Being A Slob,” *Chicago Tribune (1963-Current file)* Oct. 19, 1968 pg. A10 <http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/pqdweb?index=2&did=608640382&SrchMode=1&sid=3&Fmt=10&VInst=PROD&VType=PQD&RQT=309&VName=HNP&TS=1267541396&clientId=17822>

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.



the “unwarranted intrusion of domestic politics into international competition” because it begs the question if the American civil rights movement in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century could not produce a warranted intrusion what would? At a time when people, like Reverend Martin Luther King and Medgar Evers, were being killed because of their belief and participation in the civil rights movement and the racial tension was high in America, there was definitely a warrant for some sort of intrusion.

Two days after the suspension the *Tribune* had moved on to new competitions and athletes but still mentioned Smith and Carlos in passing, usually when describing another black athlete’s political stance. The only other article focused on Smith and Carlos was a small blurb that was not in the sports section. This little blurb reported Roy Wilkins’s, executive director of the NAACP, belief that, “the punishment leveled against two Negro athletes by Olympic games officials in Mexico City was ‘shameful.’ ... The United States Olympic committee acted ‘all out of proportion’ to what the athletes, Tommie Smith and John Carlos, did.”<sup>65</sup> This was the only article in the entire paper that supported the two sprinters. This fact combined with the scathing editorial clearly indicated a bias against Smith and Carlos and a lack of desire to understand their demonstration in any way.

The *New York Times* and *Los Angeles Times*’s approaches to the suspension of Smith and Carlos were slightly more diverse than the *Tribune*’s. While both papers did have fairly negative articles written about Smith and Carlos, there were others that simply reported the facts or actually defended Smith and Carlos. Some of the articles even were published on the front page or in the editorial section of the paper. In the *New York*

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<sup>65</sup> United Press International, “Wilkins Rips Punishment of Pair At Games,” *Chicago Tribune* (1963-*Current file*) Oct. 20, 1968  
<http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/pqdweb?index=11&did=608648272&SrchMode=1&sid=1&Fmt=10&VInst=PROD&VType=PQD&RQT=309&VName=HNP&TS=1268006096&clientId=17822>

*Times*, “2 Black Power Advocates Ousted From Olympics” by Joseph Sheehan appeared on the front page October 19<sup>th</sup>. This article detailed the events leading up to the suspension and portrayed the IOC as the bad guy by mentioning that IOC might prohibit the rest of the US team from participating. It also mentioned that white and black officials and athletes had mixed reactions to the demonstration, which the *Tribune* did not necessarily acknowledge. Sheehan believed that the event, which did not receive a lot of attention in the Olympic Stadium, began receiving increased attention from the press because of “the vigorous I.O.C. reaction and the U.S.O.C.’s rather reluctant compliance with the order to discipline the offenders.”<sup>66</sup> In this article Sheehan, reported the facts, attempted to shift the majority of the responsibility for the suspension to the I.O.C., and did not insult or attack Smith or Carlos.

Another article that supported Smith and Carlos was, “Confusion, Shock Grip U.S. Squad After Pair Ousted,” from the *Los Angeles Times*. This article gauged the reactions of U.S. team members after they learned of Smith and Carlos’s expulsion. Surprisingly the majority of the athletes who the *Los Angeles Times* polled were angered by the expulsion, although the article did include condemnations from several U.S. water polo players.<sup>67</sup> This was the only article found that mentioned the policy of not dipping the American flag when passing the host country’s review stand, but explained that it is “against government regulations to dip the American flag under any circumstances. Flag

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<sup>66</sup> Joseph M. Sheehan, “2 Black Power Advocates Ousted From Olympics,” *New York Times (1923-Current file)* Oct. 19, 1968

<http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/pqdweb?RQT=309&Fmt=10&VType=PQD&VName=HNP&VInst=PROD&did=76894077&SrchMode=1&index=6&sid=1>

<sup>67</sup> Associated Press, “Confusion, Shock Grip U.S. Squad After Pair Ousted,” *Los Angeles Times (1923-Current file)*, Oct. 19, 1968

[http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/pqdweb?RQT=309&Fmt=10&VType=PQD&VName=HNP&VInst=PROD&did=513494582&SrchMode=5&index=7&sid=\\$context.getRequest\(\).getValue\(\\$app.N\\_SE ARCH\\_ID\).toString\(\).replaceAll\('%3C',](http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/pqdweb?RQT=309&Fmt=10&VType=PQD&VName=HNP&VInst=PROD&did=513494582&SrchMode=5&index=7&sid=$context.getRequest().getValue($app.N_SE ARCH_ID).toString().replaceAll('%3C',)

bearers have always followed Army and Navy protocol in this respect.”<sup>68</sup> This explanation is problematic because as previously mentioned this practice did not begin till 1908 but the Army and Navy and their regulations existed long before 1908. Despite this inconsistency, the majority of the article featured both white and black athletes defending Smith and Carlos.

The article that was by far the most supportive from either paper was “Sports of The Times Closing the Rings” by Robert Lipsyte of the *New York Times*. He felt,

Morally, it is impossible to criticize rationally their [Smith and Carlos] act of individualism in a festival devoted to individual effort. Dramatically, their demonstration and their discussion of it afterward seemed a little weak when compared to the clarity, the force and the brilliance of their organization, Harry Edwards’s Olympic Project for Human Rights.<sup>69</sup>

The fact that the only criticism of Smith and Carlos was for their lack of eloquence and force is surprising. This show of support did not stop there, he then detailed the reasons the USOC was a group of “fools.”<sup>70</sup> The two main reasons according to Lipsyte were the threatened suspension of the entire team by the I.O.C. and the rumor that “three black athletes had accepted bribes.”<sup>71</sup> He thought these two instances proved the foolishness of the USOC because the IOC threat was not real because the IOC would never “suspend its main meal ticket for ‘exhibitionism’” and the USOC had started the rumor because it had either a weak case or no case at all.<sup>72</sup> This uncompromising support was rare in the white papers but it demonstrated that at least some of the white papers were more tolerant of different opinions within their publication and country.

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Robert Lipsyte, “Sports of The Times Closing the Rings,” *New York Times (1923-Current file)*, Oct. 28, 1968

<http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/pqdweb?RQT=309&Fmt=10&VType=PQD&VName=HNP&VInst=PROD&did=76897080&SrchMode=1&index=4&sid=2>

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

Everyone at the *New York Times* did not share Lipsyte's view of Smith and Carlos. Although Arthur Daley does not blatantly express his opinion, the tone and issues discussed make it clear that he did not think very highly of Smith and Carlos. He mentioned that the protest received a mixed reception, "some thought it was legitimate to drag a protest movement onto a global stage, but a majority condemned it as disgraceful, insulting and embarrassing."<sup>73</sup> Even when Daley is presenting the opinion that supports Smith and Carlos he used words like thought and drag to describe the demonstration. The phrase "drag a protest movement" has a negative connotation because it implies that the protest movement did not want to be there when one of OPHR's main goals was to boycott the Olympics. Also there were no adjectives like the ones he used to describe the condemnation. Thought is nowhere near as powerful as felt or believed and uses much stronger language than thought when describing the people who condemned the protest. To be fair he does blame the IOC for some of the tension because their forcing the USOC to respond "blew it [the protest] onto the front pages of almost every newspaper in the world."<sup>74</sup>

After the suspension was announced Jim Murray from the *Los Angeles Times* continued his condemnation of Smith and Carlos in his article "The Olympic Games --- No Place for a Sportswriter." He classified Smith and Carlos as "alternates in the men's 400-meter relay,"<sup>75</sup> which although, was technically true did not change the fact that Smith and Carlos had won a gold and bronze medal, respectively, for the United States.

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<sup>73</sup> Arthur Daley, "Sports of The Times," *New York Times (1923-Current file)*, Oct. 20, 1968 pg. S2 <http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/pqdweb?index=9&did=1364535282&SrchMode=1&sid=1&Fmt=10&VInst=PROD&VType=PQD&RQT=309&VName=HNP&TS=1268024603&clientId=17822>

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Jim Murray, "The Olympic Games--- No Place for a Sportswriter," *Los Angeles Times (1923-Current File)*, Oct. 20, 1968 <http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/pqdweb?index=31&did=513502492&SrchMode=1&sid=1&Fmt=10&VInst=PROD&VType=PQD&RQT=309&VName=HNP&TS=1269796809&clientId=17822>

He also claimed that Carlos's post race comments about the race relations in America were partly influenced by Norman beating him.<sup>76</sup> By doing this, Murray downgraded Carlos's comments from honest opinion on the state of race in America to an unhappy sprinter who was lashing out because he lost. This downgrading allowed Murray to not become engaged in a serious discussion about race. This clearly biased article did not try to hide its condemnation in any way.

When the issue finally jumped from the *Los Angeles Times's* sports section to its editorial section, the condemnation and lack of understanding became even stronger. In the editorial, "Racial Display at the Olympics," the editorial staff forgave Smith and Carlos in a patronizing tone because

They are intense, young men, acutely aware of the injustices that have accrued to their race over the generations. And they have been subjected to a tremendous barrage of anti-white, anti-United States nonsense by their senior black indoctrinators.<sup>77</sup>

The insulting implication that they were brainwashed and that no true good American could have ever felt the way Smith and Carlos did was just the beginning of an article that claimed if they really wanted to protest, they should have made their statement by boycotting because no one would have been able to justifiably censor them.<sup>78</sup> Although the editorial staff felt this strongly and believed that the two sprinters "denigrated their homeland,"<sup>79</sup> at no point did the staff call for them to return their medals and have them stricken from the United States' medal count.

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> "Racial Display at the Olympics," *Los Angeles Times (1923-Current File)* Oct. 24, 1968  
<http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/pqdweb?index=36&did=513533802&SrchMode=1&sid=3&Fmt=10&VInst=PROD&VType=PQD&RQT=309&VName=HNP&TS=1269799845&clientId=17822>

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

Overall, the black press was much more supportive of Smith and Carlos. The press continued to have the sprinters' story on the front page of their papers. An example of this was the picture of the protest in the top center of the front page of the *New York Amsterdam News*.<sup>80</sup> The black press not only supported Smith and Carlos but also attacked the USOC and IOC and blamed them for Smith and Carlos's expulsion, which was the opposite of most of the white journalists who blamed Smith and Carlos. Some like Ric Roberts of the *New Pittsburgh Courier* openly accused the US Olympic leaders of racism and a "red neck response."<sup>81</sup> Roberts claimed that Smith and Carlos "dramatized determination to overcome U.S. racism" and that their visual protest was an expression of a black militancy theme song- "We Shall Overcome" which was sung by President Johnson in 1965 on national television.<sup>82</sup> His point being that if President Johnson can give voice to the hope of overcoming racism, two young sprinters should be able to do the same without being branded troublemakers.

While the Roberts article's evidence was examples like President Johnson singing "We Shall Overcome" and appealing to decency, the *Defender* used several different approaches. One approach was to condemn the IOC and Avery Brundage. A good example of this is "Sports Ledger" by Larry Casey who wrote an open letter to April Blunderage (real name was Avery Brundage) with the name change establishing the tone

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<sup>80</sup> Front Page, *New York Amsterdam News* (1962-1993) Oct. 26, 1968  
<http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/pqdweb?RQT=309&Fmt=10&VType=PQD&VName=HNP&VInst=PROD&did=1040793352&SrchMode=1&index=1&sid=1>

<sup>81</sup> Ric Roberts, "Expulsions Prove It," *New Pittsburgh Courier* (1966-81) Oct. 26, 1968  
<http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/pqdweb?index=0&did=1352271332&SrchMode=1&sid=1&Fmt=10&VInst=PROD&VType=PQD&RQT=309&VName=HNP&TS=1267463535&clientId=17822>

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

for the rest of the article.<sup>83</sup> Casey wrote that Brundage and his “holier-than-thou followers” through their “dastardly actions” demonstrated how bigoted they all were and in the process “made first class hams of yourselves.”<sup>84</sup> While some of the white journalists had negative reactions to the demonstration, Casey thought it “wasn’t disrespectful to the American flag or The Star-Spangled Banner” and that it was “beautiful.”<sup>85</sup>

Another approach the *Defender* utilized was to condemn African-Americans who did not support Smith and Carlos. One article that used this approach was “Take Ten” by John A. Helem. In this article he attacked the “pompous, do-nothing, stuff shirt” black people who were constantly trying to please white leaders and as a result condemned Smith and Carlos.<sup>86</sup> Helem could not understand why the “stuff shirts” could not see that champions were the most effective spokesmen, and correctly pointed out “what under normal circumstances would have been of little import became an international controversy (sic).”<sup>87</sup> This directly contradicted the view of the *Los Angeles Times* editorial staff who, as noted above, felt that Smith and Carlos should have stayed home if they wanted to make a political statement. Helem felt that through their “courageous act” they showed the world that even if they were the best in the world, they were not accepted as equals at home.<sup>88</sup> To end the section on Smith and Carlos, Helem

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<sup>83</sup> Larry Casey, “Sports Ledger,” *Chicago Daily Defender (Daily Edition) (1960-1973)* Oct. 22, 1968, <http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/pqdweb?index=7&did=883859872&SrchMode=1&sid=1&Fmt=10&VInst=PROD&VType=PQD&RQT=309&VName=HNP&TS=1269693047&clientId=17822>

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>86</sup> John A. Helem. “Take Ten,” *Chicago Daily Defender (Big Weekend Edition) (1966-1973)*, Oct. 26, 1968 <http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/pqdweb?index=13&did=712022262&SrchMode=1&sid=2&Fmt=10&VInst=PROD&VType=PQD&RQT=309&VName=HNP&TS=1269799379&clientId=17822>

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

asks “may God gives us more Tommie Smiths and John Carloses ..... AMEN.”<sup>89</sup> This entire section was a clear demonstration that members of the black press truly valued and understood Smith and Carlos’s motivation for their demonstration and had wanted to place them in the civil rights movement.

Another article that appeared in the *Defender* that supported Smith and Carlos was “Carlos, Smith Feel ‘Beautiful.’” This article detailed how the sprinters “felt beautiful inside” about the demonstration because according to Carlos “once you do something for your people, you feel beautiful inside.”<sup>90</sup> This article and the last three analyzed articles exemplified the differences between the white and black medias. Overall the black media was much more supportive of Smith and Carlos, the journalists were much more attuned to Smith and Carlos’s motivations for protesting, and willing to discuss the civil rights implications of the protest.

However, the black media was not united in its unconditional praise for Smith and Carlos. In an opinion piece that appeared in the *Defender*, the editorial staff could “find no rational basis beyond an infantile resolve” for the protest.<sup>91</sup> The staff thought the Olympic ceremonies were no place for “circus stunts or childish exhibitionism” because they were “sacrosanct.”<sup>92</sup> What is somewhat surprising is that because the staff felt that the black athletes were treated well at the Olympics, they could not determine what Smith

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> United Press International, “Carlos, Smith Feel ‘Beautiful,’” *Chicago Daily Defender (Daily Edition) (1960-1973)*, Oct. 24, 1968  
<http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/pqdweb?index=9&did=883828292&SrchMode=1&sid=2&Fmt=10&VInst=PROD&VType=PQD&RQT=309&VName=HNP&TS=1269799442&clientId=17822>

<sup>91</sup> “Olympic Black Power,” *Chicago Daily Defender (Daily Edition) (1960-1973)*, Oct. 21 1968,  
<http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/pqdweb?RQT=309&Fmt=10&VType=PQD&VName=HNP&VInst=PROD&did=883826042&SrchMode=1&index=0&sid=1>

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.



and Carlos hoped to gain through their protest.<sup>93</sup> But even with this condemnation of Smith and Carlos, the staff still believed that the suspension “exceeded the nature and extent of the violation.”<sup>94</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Smith and Carlos had to suffer for many years because of their protest. However as more people became open-minded, Smith and Carlos began to receive the recognition that they deserved. Two of the most powerful examples of the recognition they received are the Arthur Ashe award they won in 2008 and the statue of their protest that was placed on the San Jose State campus. At the age when many people do not know what they are going to do with their lives, these two men decided to make a stand for equality with fully understanding that there would probably be serious repercussions. This stand produced fierce emotions within the white and black press both supporting and condemning them. The white press at first tried to delegitimize the protest by underreporting it but when that did not work they usually condemned Smith and Carlos. The black press maintained their support throughout. It portrayed Smith and Carlos as brave heroes standing up for equality. In the end, history sided with the black media.

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

## CONCLUSION

Between 1936 and 1968 mainstream sports experienced countless changes but perhaps the largest was integration. Integration caused a whole new set of problems to emerge for the white and black media. They had to decide how to address these new issues without alienating their readers. For the white media the largest issues were how to address race, how to report on black people who could not be treated as equals in their own country but won medals or awards for their country or team, and how to deal with the growing politicization of the athletes. While the black media had to decide whether to turn the athletes and sporting accomplishments into civil rights figures, and whether to make these athletes into ambassadors for their race. This latter problem would prove vitally important because many white people did not have any substantial interactions with black people. This question would become even more difficult as the athletes became more politicized.

After a careful examination of the primary sources several trends became apparent. The most notable is the almost refusal to discuss race in any real terms in the white media. In 1936 the journalists briefly touched on it but only to compare America to Nazi Germany. The implication being that the African-Americans had a pretty good life in America. In 1947 the journalists would briefly touch on the subject but their desire to not discuss race caused them to take several weeks to “uncover” the racist abuses that Robinson was facing. By 1968, race was such a large issue that it became more difficult to completely avoid it so the journalists who chose to continue their opposition to conversations about race had to delegitimize and belittle athletes like Tommie Smith and John Carlos who decided to force the issue by staging a protest on primetime television.

However by this time, there was a growing trend toward at least a more neutral if not more open stance when reporting on race in sports. This growing trend could be seen in journalists like Robert Lipsyte.

Another trend in the white media was the lack of understanding of the obstacles and issues that African-Americans had to deal with on a daily basis. In 1936 it was best exemplified by the editorial arguing that African-Americans had a pretty good life in America because most “decent Americans” were not proud of segregation and the segregation they faced was “irrational.” The fact that someone wrote that article arguing a somewhat dubious claim in hopes of making African-Americans give thanks for their situation demonstrates a complete lack of understanding of the African-American culture. With Robinson the journalists could not possibly comprehend what it took for a proud man to have his manhood questioned, race insulted, and not be able to respond in any way, because if he did he might set race relations back years. Perhaps the most misunderstood of the subjects were Tommie Smith and John Carlos. Most of the white media labeled them militants and dismissed or tried to diminish their protest without ever really trying to understand them. Again there were several journalists who did try to learn more about the black athletes beyond sports related information like whether they shot left-handed or right-handed. Some of these journalists were Jack Olson, Pete Axthelm, and Robert Lipsyte.

The trends in the black media were very different but equally as important. The first was the consistent use of the black athlete and his athletic accomplishments in the battle for civil rights. After the Olympic qualifiers the *New York Amsterdam News* did not just print an editorial cartoon depicting a black man beating a white man in a foot race

but also a lynch mob on the hunt for a victim. During Robinson's rookie year, several journalists cited him as an example of what can happen when black people are given an opportunity. Another example from Robinson's era was the *Pittsburgh Courier* ending some of its sports articles with "End Jim Crow In Washington" in bold letters. Smith and Carlos's demonstration created its own slice of history in the civil rights movement and did not need any journalists' help. However some of the black journalists still did their best, Ric Roberts of the *Pittsburgh Courier* thought that their gesture was a visual representation of "We Shall Overcome" which, was coincidentally sung by President Lyndon Johnson.

The other major trend that emerged during these thirty-two years was that the black media did try to make the athletes into ambassadors. After Owens and the other black Olympians from the 1936 team made the team and started winning medals, they became "our boys." To try to help Robinson succeed, stay in the majors, and continue to ease white people's minds, the black media actually gave instructions to its readers on how to behave in a major league baseball stadium so as not to add more pressure to Robinson or harm the reputation of African-Americans. Journalists like John Helem explicitly called for Smith and Carlos to be spokesmen for their race because of their bravery.

Both of these trends were key components in the biggest difference between the white and black medias. The white media was uncomfortable discussing race, even in 1968 (with a few exceptions) whereas the black media focused on race. This difference influenced reporting for both groups in demonstrable ways. These four athletes were all amazing athletes and also influenced the civil rights movement in some way as well.

As this type of research is still relatively unexplored there are countless avenues for new research. The most closely related to this project would be to study the same athletes with an increase in the number of newspapers studied to obtain a more representative picture. Another approach would be to study athletes like Muhammad Ali, athletes who were considered one of the best in their sport and were politically active off of the court. This would present a new dynamic since all of the athletes studied in this paper were Olympians or professionals who were important to the civil rights movement because of what they did on the field. Other subjects that would present new dynamics would be Althea Gibson because of her gender and the resulting gender stereotypes that she had to overcome and the 1966 Texas Western basketball team because they broke their own color line when they won the 1966 NCAA championship with the first all black starting-five.

Although mainstream media has much more of a market share and black media is much weaker today, race is still intrinsically connected to sports and still influences sports reporting. It is still difficult to discuss, perhaps even more so because of political correctness. Hopefully this paper has shown how past journalists dealt with the delicate subject of race and will provide ideas for more productive discussions of race.

All four of these incredible men deserve to continue to be recognized for not only their vast athletic achievements but also for their important contributions to the civil rights movement.

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