

Race representation
in american sport
culture in the films:
remember the titans
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Issues of race and sport in the United States are certainly still prevailing and obvious; many would rather have these issues not be addressed.

Some people may choose to ignore them, perhaps stemming from a belief that if we single out the black athletes for discussion, we only heighten stereotypes. As a result, American culture urges us to see through two lenses -a lens that insists that we see the black athlete as someone “different” and a lens that sees the black athlete as athletically superior but academically inferior . But maybe, these perceived ideas exist simply because race in general is such a powerful societal force-the struggle to understand those that are “different”. In this essay, I would be exploring the representation of race within the American sport culture for the films remembers the titans (2000) and glory road (2006)Hollywood has latched onto race and sport partially because it could be argued to be an area of contemporary American culture which is rich for exploration. The films glory road and remember the titans depict not only the black athlete’s experience, but also the overall ideological belief of how the game doesn’t care about ones colour. What seem to matter are collective hard work, passion and setting to achieve common goal and trust.

Glory road is the story of Haskins, head coach of tiny Texas western university in El Paso, Texas. Set in the 1960’s, a time in which college basketball in the south was segregated, Haskins made history by starting five Americans in the 1966 national championship game against national power Kentucky’s team that did not have one black athlete. Haskins decision was not a reflection of his desire to be a racial pioneer, he’d later say, but simply to put the five men on the court that he believed would give Kentucky

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the most difficulty. And they did-Haskins team upended Kentucky 72-65, shocking the college basketball nation .

At this time, racial unrest in the United States was at a high . Most college coaches were unwilling to have a black majority on the court at any one time, due to their own prejudice or fear that their program would become the target of public scrutiny that could probably hurt recruiting efforts . Starting five black players simply wasn't done, especially not on college basketball's grandest stage. In comparison, remember the titan's is the story of high school football in Alexandria, Virginia.

Set during the 1971 T. C Williams high school season, several race -oriented issues arose, heightened during training camp when black and white players clash in racially-motivated conflict. The films protagonist, head coach Herman Boone, is a black man hired to head the football team in place of bill yeast, a white man that stays on board to fill an assistant coach capacity. Boone not only has his work cut out for him to coach and rally a football team, but also to convey to his team that a winning attitude stems from intolerance and embracing each other, not racial intolerance.

The titans went on to win the Virginia high state school championship, a testament to the athlete's willingness to celebrate diversity. Glory road and remember the titans are films made as Hollywood feel -good success stories; they are not about winning but the winning process. They both are structured linearly, where there is initial discomfort with racial differences. As the story progress, characters become more comfortable with one another and understand that the sport they engage in is their common bond.

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The second scene in *Remember the Titans* shows Boone encouraging racial integration on the bus ride to camp by requiring that a black player sit next to a white player and learn details about one another.

Players did not warm up to this idea, which carried onto to the field; blacks didn't block for whites and vice-versa and nowhere was togetherness found. Boone brought the team to the battle site of Gettysburg, where he proclaimed that "if we don't come together, we too will be destroyed". The team began to joke with each other, sing to one another and dance. They began to play football as a team and left the camp possessing the same vision-to represent what it means to be a titan, as said by Boone on opening night:" in Greek mythology, the titans were greater even than the Gods.

They ruled their universe with absolute power! Well that football field out there tonight, that's our universe. Let's rule it like the titans" Conversely, in *Glory Road*, Haskins instils a toughness-at-all-cost philosophy. He conveys to his team that basketball and pride are synonymous, that winning comes from a result of hard work despite what race you come from. Basketball-or any sport-can be an escape from hardship and a glimpse into a better life, but also a trap that perpetuates the same initial adversity.

However, to many blacks in the inner city in America, basketball is much more than a sport; it is a form of education and expression. African-American culture from the city has brought a much more graceful, speed-oriented, physical, all-around skill aspect to basketball. Basketball, especially in these areas, teaches social skills, rights of passage, creativity and cultural identity." It also became a way of ritualizing racial achievement against

social barriers to cultural performance.” , (Dyson 1993)What about talent? Why is it that we can comfortably say that blacks have God-given talent? The danger in suggesting this is that we may imply that blacks are lazy, that their talent somehow allows them to avoid the course of life.

Stereotypically having talent, is the “ easy way out”. Their talent as suggested is not pure and achieved, but “ lucky”. On the surface, it may appear that blacks are more talented in the sense that a majority of NBA stars are African American, but taken a step further, talent stems from repetition. No one was born an NBA player; rather, many blacks aspire (although) few reach to be NBA stars, with the hope that basketball can provide an outlet to a better living as an individual.

These two films involve either basketball or football and African Americans. This shouldn't come as a surprise because blacks are disproportionately represented in basketball and football (as well as track and boxing), very few blacks participate in, soccer, golf and hockey, among others, and this may be due to a white preconceived fear that they simply can't compete with blacks in basketball or football. Although as stated by Michael Novack “ Basketball was originally invented as a white man's game” (1992)Maybe that is why; in remember the titans, whites and blacks were in constant conflict at the beginning of the season. The representation of being “ white” is living a life of privilege. “ Whiteness” in Hollywood is shown to encourage prestige and entitlement.

During the conflict in the film, the white players as represented felt entitled to playing time. They saw blacks as an obstacle to being a superstar. Before

they knew each other, they didn't know that they enjoyed the same music; they didn't know that they could relate to their own hometown and they didn't know how to be shaped by their biggest bond-football. Sports are about filling roles, putting together the pieces of a puzzle that fit into a greater system, towards a larger goal and the T. C Williams Titans and the Texas western miners embraced racial differences to transform the sports setting of the time.

Representation of ethnicity has become more acknowledged in contemporary society, theorists such as len Ang have demonstrated that due to globalisation; people are more interconnected hence allowing for understanding of different cultures and individual differences. However, it could be argued that even with more black stars on our screens they often conform to the old stereotypes, for example Eddie Murphy, audiences have been saturated in this for a long time and now it's what we would expect and as a matter of fact, its branded as funny. Bogle (1992) established the idea of mythic types that have been used in mainstream U. S.

films to depict black people, and which are easily mistaken as being aspects of real black experience. For example Bucks, constitute the brutal black man out to cause havoc. Often the savage and violent character is also over-sexed and eager to get more than his hands on white women. This just shows that we haven't really got beyond old and shameful ideas, and this book makes you stop and think about how easy it is for stereotyping to continue even if they are dressed-up in more accessible forms.

In addition to this, it came to my attention that an experiment was conducted to demonstrate the perceptual confirmation of racial stereotypes about black and white athletes. Basic and applied psychology states that in a 2 x 2 design, target race (black vs. white) and target athleticism (perceived athletic vs. unathletic) were manipulated by providing participants with a photograph of male basketball player. Participants then listened to a college basketball game and were asked to evaluate the target's athletic abilities, individual performance and contribution to his team's performance.

Multivariate analyses showed only a main effect for target race on the measures of ability and team performance. Whereas the black targets were rated as exhibiting significantly more played a better game, white targets were rated as exhibiting significantly more basketball intelligence and hustle . the results suggest that participant relied on a stereotype of black and white athletes to guide their evaluations of the targets abilities and performance. Similarly in the film glory road and remember the titans, the basketball players who were unaware that they all shared the same dream and were on the court for the same reason, they had a pre-conceived stereotype of each racial integrated team, this negative stereotype has latched on to their minds for so long that it creates a barrier for the players to show forth their abilities and skills and this is what was prevalent on the court. All two movies suggest what American sport cultures are about -facing adversity and responding to it constructively, setting collective goals and working to achieve them as a team and embracing a collective passion of a particular sport. The movies remember the titans and glory road explore several key issues in race and sport, from the black athletic journey to the

racial tension could be argued to have influenced and currently influences what sport means to the black culture.

While some argue that we don't have the race and sport discussion, we must in order fully appreciate how diversity to our games brings a heightened dimension to the sports we love. What we'll realize is that there really is little difference between the black athlete and the white athlete except their history. They are on the field for the same reason, not for any reason but a simple love and determination to succeed, to play hard and to achieve that which is needed -praise.