

Race Tactics: The Racialised Athletic Body

In the eighteenth century the noble savage played his ennobling role as a therapeutic image. In the nineteenth century, the savage was an instance of the primordial primitive, a living fossil signifying past imperfection healed by time in the emerging evolution. In the twentieth century, the savage was no longer even primitive. She was only data and evidence.

In the twenty-first century, the savage Other is still an allegorical figure that represents what the civilised Self is not. However, in mainstream Western culture at least, racism no longer has the overt brutality of its predecessor, the twentieth century. Today racism tends to be veiled within positively framed cultural clichés that enable a global Western culture, which preaches freedom for all, to maintain its façade. One of the most significant sites where this neo-racism exists is in images of the racialised athletic body. The image of the coloured body soaring above adversity into the echelons of sporting success is a powerful symbol of freedom and hope, but ironically, it shackles people of colour to the physical realm and prevents them from being self-determining.

We should question those ‘terminal truths’ that make it natural for people to think of the person of colour as inherently good at sport. This article employs poststructuralism to deconstruct the bodies of athletes of colour, which are viewed as genealogical representations of power that have their roots in eighteenth and nineteenth century bio-racist discourses. The central premise of this article is that over time, the body of the athlete of colour has consistently corresponded with the dominant discourse on race by transformation or mutation, enabling it to provide an allegorical juxtaposition for the transitory Self.

I begin by describing the debate regarding the predominant success of athletes of colour as largely apolitical, situated within the tenets of modernism and, hence, from a poststructural perspective, merely a buttress for the subjugation of people of colour. I then reframe the debate within a political and poststructural paradigm, suggesting that the racialised athletic body functions to Otherise people of colour. The discussion that follows describes a discursive genealogical representation of the coloured body as inherently physical and one that is steeped

in Social Darwinism. Sport is then shown to be a contemporary conduit of this genealogical representation. The constructed body of the athlete of colour is depicted as a neo-racist representation because it is an optimistic portrayal of empowerment that ironically serves to further limit people of colour to their embodied physicality and limited intelligence.

SPORT, RACE AND POSTSTRUCTURALISM

Discourse is not simply that which translates struggles or systems of domination, but is the thing for which and by which there is struggle.¹

Foucault developed and applied Nietzsche's method of genealogy to explain how dominant discourses were normalised. He saw language as "the politics of communication" and in *The Order of Things*² asked how a particular language or discourse came to be accepted as a system and structure of representation. Foucault set about to uncover the archaeology of language that underpinned certain phenomena such as madness, sexuality, discipline and punishment, medicine, and the body. In essence, Foucault disclosed how assumptions came to be thought of as natural or truthful and, in so doing, he questioned the permanency of societal truths. For Foucault knowledge was a production of the temporal reality, and of the limits of the reader and the text. The French bourgeoisie, for instance, needed and defined the 'madness' of the Other to contrast and regulate what was to be considered 'normal' behaviour of the general populace.³ In a Foucauldian optic, the 'common-sense' discourse that surrounds the racialised athletic body too is determined by a socio-historical genealogical construction, and perpetuated by a language that falsely claims permanency.

THE COMMON-SENSE DISCOURSE

*Renounce the convenience of terminal truths.*⁴

Poststructuralism provokes a deconstruction of dominant truths by unmasking representations of the Other as seemingly scientific, objective or authentic, whilst challenging the assumed primacy and authority of the Self; essentially it asks what knowledge is being produced and why.⁵ We should not take solace, then, in sport being "an unparalleled institutional site of accomplishment" for people of colour.⁶ On the contrary, we should question whether or not images of the inherently physical body of the athlete of colour serve to reinforce common-sense racist beliefs.

Cheryl Cole found that during the 1980s dominant media constructions positioned sport and gangs as the "corporeal predispositions of African American youth."⁷ Here, the dominant discourse located sport as the transposed alternative to gang-life. At the same time, Laurel Davis identified a white preoccupation with race-related performance differences.⁸ Much of the later discourse centred around two modernistic speculations that simultaneously deny the effects of power relations. One speculation derives its argument from bio-racism, suggesting that athletes of colour are disproportionately successful because their bodies are genetically advantaged. The other speculation puts forward the humanist and structuralist argument that all people have stable 'deep structures' and thus the skewed success of athletes

of colour occurs because of environmental variance. These theories are racist in themselves; by arguing that people of colour are genetically or culturally more suited to the physical world, both theories inherently suggest that the 'failure' of people of colour in other societal realms is due to either a physiological or cultural flaw.

The biological discourse justifies its racist argument via modernist science's supposed objectivity. Davis points out that the biological argument is founded on the "commonsense belief that scientists are objective," which implicitly denies "socio-political responsibility."⁹ The well-known quasi-theory that accounts for the superiority of the African American body in sports is based on the Social Darwinian "survival of the fittest" concept. The hardship of slavery is said to have subsequently led to a physically superior body.¹⁰ This flawed argument is now becoming part of a global dominant discourse. In the South Pacific, for example, quasi-Social Darwinism is currently being used to explain the dominance of the Polynesian body in physically robust sports such as rugby union and rugby league:

The ancestors of today's Jonah Lomus and Tana Umagas [two current Polynesian All Blacks – New Zealand's national rugby team] voyaged into the Pacific thousands of years ago. It wasn't an easy trip, so the survivors who made landfall in Samoa and Tonga . . . were tough . . . The process of natural selection left the strongest and fittest ones alive to start this new race . . . to actually live there and survive off the land required strength and adaptability and toughness . . . which added to our modern day physique.¹¹

Such quasi-theory is commonly augmented by scientific discourse. For example, in the United States, Burfoot found that a multitude of studies comparing the bodies of African Americans of West African heritage and white Americans represented African Americans as having "less body fat, narrower hips, thicker thighs, longer legs, and lighter calves."¹² This plays out in New Zealand as well, where New Zealand rugby trainer Jim Blair used a scientific language to portray Polynesians as an innately large people suited to sports by describing them as "mesomorphic... big-boned, muscular, of average height, wide shoulder[ed], thin waist[ed], [and having] a higher proportion of fast twitch muscle fiber."¹³ Among sport scientists such findings lead to the 'objective' conclusion that "if all else is equal... ethnicity [must] confer advantages in physical performance."¹⁴ Such arguments are rarely extended to Caucasians. The current success of Australian sporting teams, for example, world champions in rugby, rugby league and cricket is never attributed to their ancestors' durability in surviving an arduous sea-voyage from England as convicts. These arguments are thus selectively applied.

The environmentalist position masks the abilities of the powerful to construct the Other by addressing the issue under the guise of a universal humanity, independent of human agency: "...in scratching the history of men a little, the relativity of their institutions or the superficial diversity of their skins... one very quickly reaches the solid rock of a universal human nature."¹⁵ Essentially, humanism suggests that all bodies are created equal and, implicitly, the universal human nature allows an equal opportunity to succeed, while variations in the cultural environment cause variations in personality and behaviour. Cultures themselves, rather than power relations between cultures, are held responsible for failures and successes. Michael Jordan is, therefore, the embodiment of "transformative possibility and an effective sign of

unity and utopic possibilities.”¹⁶ Sport “reaffirms our national commonsense: individuals who work hard and possess the right stuff will always prevail... [it is] a parable of achievement and reward earned through struggle.”¹⁷

From the outset, entering this debate means an acceptance of the modernistic ideal of a ‘normal’ population, which suggests sporting elites are randomly selected from an unbiased world and, consequently, that people of colour have bodies disproportionately suited to sport performance. That is, both arguments accept the naturalness of the successful coloured athletic body. This is a ‘truth’ of the natural and accepted world of the dominant group, reinforced daily through a common-sense language. In contrast, a poststructural perspective contends that a ‘normal population’ is a construction in itself, and that common-sense language provides for only fleeting truths. The issue shifts, then, from what causes disproportionate representation, to why sport is a successful site for the racialised athletic body.

GENEALOGY AND THE ATHLETE OF COLOUR

Representations of black bodies remain inscribed with the fantasies and anxieties of our racist histories . . . biology it has been assumed accounts not only for physical variations like skin colour, but also qualities like intelligence, behavior and ability . . . there remains vestiges of its assumptions – for example . . . sporting or muscular ability among blacks due to ‘natural rhythm.’¹⁸

Foucault’s *Counter-history of Ideas* or genealogy can be applied to understand the changing interface between discourses on race and the racialised athletic body. A central premise of Foucauldian thought is that power and knowledge are inseparable. Foucault contests that power’s ultimate authority is not monolithic, rather it disciplines through construction. Foucault heavily influenced the ideas of Edward Said, whose notions of Orientalism described the racialised “Other” as an imagined allegorical body. In essence, Westerners spoke about the Other in order to speak about themselves.¹⁹ As Nandy points out in his book *The Intimate Enemy*, those traits supplanted onto the body of the Other are often anti-behaviours of modernism, that is, those qualities not wedded to intellectual achievement and productivity, for example, femininity, fickleness, physicality and primitivism.²⁰

From such an analysis, the racialised athletic body is viewed as part of an allegorical discourse that reproduces power through a historically located and regulated language tied to representations of the ideal Self’s antithesis. The reproduction of meaning evoked by the athlete of colour comes from the reader and the text’s acquiescence to a genealogy of racism. The following sections demonstrate the genealogical deconstruction of the racialised athletic body.

CIVILISED INTELLIGENCE VERSUS PHYSICALITY

Representing the racialised athletic body as inherently suited to sport has an allegorical effect of reinforcing the intellectual superiority of the Self. As an example, Dave Andrews deconstructs the spectacle that is Michael Jordan via

a genealogical analysis. He describes how the eighteenth century slavery discourse helped create the bipolar distinction between the African American as Other and the European American as Self, arguing that Michael Jordan's "blackness" incorporates "a common assumption of the innate physicality of the black body, a racist discourse whose genealogy can be traced back to at least the era of systemic slavery."²¹

The embodiment of people of colour as physical beings, as opposed to intellectual and self-actualised beings, was initiated in the grand colonising era of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The eighteenth-century notion of the primitive Other was based upon the idea of the "Great Chain of Being", the belief that God had created all living things and organised them into a hierarchy of existence with white men at the top.²² As the nineteenth century approached, modernist theories of the progress of humankind, and corresponding evolutionary theories, abounded throughout Europe. Evolution theory supported the fragmentation of the universal human body into a hierarchy of racialised bodies.²³ Science validated arbitrary differences between the body of the European and that of the Other by providing 'objective' evidence that races were real and based on "primarily biological and natural difference[s] which w[ere] inherent and unalterable."²⁴ Bio-racism was founded on the Self's imagined fears of the irrational passion of their savage past where the racialised body remained in an un-evolved primordial state, of myth-bound bodies of the Dark-Ages; of bodies who belonged prior to Descartes where unfettered passion ruled supreme; of a time where "the savage danger of madness [was] related to the danger of the passions and to their fatal concatenation."²⁵ To assuage these fears, the savage Other had to be tamed, controlled, civilised.

Descartes' claim that the soul, including morals and intelligence, was somehow divorced from the extended material or mechanics of the body, underpinned the modernistic thought.²⁶ That is, the faith in 'ideas' of 'modern man' was set in contrast to the animal-like over-reliance on physicality of the coloured body, which had little intellectual gumption, and a child-like morality.²⁷ The mind of the civilised Self was progressively reasoned; and through the centuries it had evolved as the fittest survivor by divorcing itself from the body. Westerners "were the authors and agents of civilised advancement, the chosen people of evolution and the cutting edge of millennial progress."²⁸

The cultural philosophies of people of colour were located somewhere on a continuum between the thought of the civilised Self and the ape – delusional, unconscious and without self-determination. According to Ernesto Laclau, people of colour were essentially history-less because they were incapable of universal thought.²⁹ Eighteenth and nineteenth century translators circulated indigenous mythology in the West, describing it as "irrational fairytales produced by unconscious history, meant for savages and children."³⁰ European philosophers such as Hegel described the primitive Other as generically possessing a "character of spirit in a state of dream," as incapable of action and therefore "pre-historical," and thus facing the necessary fate of European subjection.³¹

The depiction of people of colour as atheoretical and, correspondingly, as unable to control their environment and, in turn, unable to be self-realising, justified modernist aspirations of constructing a world morally ruled, dominated and owned by whites. Depictions of the amoral and physical Other allowed Westerners to usurp people and resources under the pretext of civilising and saving lost souls. Essentially, by pronouncing people of colour as unconscious savages, Europeans were given moral authority to free people of colour from their heathen state, culture, language and, most importantly, lands and resources. For instance, the *terra nullus* construct, conceptualised by John Locke, suggested that if land was not under ‘human’ control, that is not cultivated or being employed for commercial profit, then it was ‘empty’ or uninhabited land and, therefore, free to be usurped. The Other resided within an unconscious body and, therefore, did not have the same rights as ‘thinking’ citizens and, thus, was open to be exploited along with the virgin physical environment. Indeed, the Other was ‘lucky’ to be civilised by a far more advanced race.

The Māori people in New Zealand are characterised in this manner. The holistic relationship Māori³² had/have with the natural world led many observers to describe Māori as the link between the ape and civilised human beings. In 1877, referring to the raised pole seen in *morere* (swing), Wade describes the people in juvenile and primitive terms, disregarding the cultural significance of their activities: “...boys and girls, stark naked, and the women with only a rough garment around the loins, run[ning] up the pole as readily as monkeys.”³³ Similarly, in 1845 Wakefield believed the Māori passion for storytelling had all the sensibility of a primate: “Nothing can remind one more forcibly of the monkey who has seen the world, than a Māori thus relating news.”³⁴ Maning likened the *haka*³⁵ to a “dance and capper” performed by “mad-monkeys.”³⁶

CHANGING RACE TACTICS

Representing the racialised body as unchanging and immutable is a tactical discourse that constructs the Other as forever tied to their primitive biological roots, yet sardonically, representations of the Other, because they are tactics of power, necessitate fluidity to enable representations to vary with the changing context. Like the chameleon, the images of the coloured body mutate to reflect the changing landscape.

ROMANTICISING, HUMANISING AND ASSIMILATING THE OTHER

Athleticising the body of the Other added to the grand narrative of the Enlightenment project. A significant minority of commentators, such as Rousseau, believed the savage Other to be of moral superiority because of the natural and guileless connectedness to the physical realm.³⁷ Many early travellers, then, romanticised the savage Other as part of a “natural world” filled with “innocence and purity,” in opposition to the “corruption and decay” of the modern world.³⁸ Accordingly, positive representations of the Other’s athletic body presented the possibility of humanism. They provided a bridge for Westerners to recognise good in their darker brethren. In New Zealand Māori were assimilated into society through physical pursuits, whether that was through contribution to war effort, physical labour or sport. Māori were

endeared to the general public because they had “rhythm”. As Phillip Smithells, Dean of the School of Physical Education at the University of Otago wrote:

By countless years of experience, trial and error these rhythmic activities have been evolved with the purpose of giving quickness of hand and eye, rhythm, anticipation, and the strengthening of certain muscle groups. Besides the direct physical effects of greater motor control, there is the joy and exhilaration that comes from such control and from the body moving rhythmically.³⁹

Unlike animals, people of colour had some worthwhile human qualities that, if nurtured, could allow them to function in a civilised world. The athletic body was the “cultural equivalent of a universal currency.”⁴⁰

By representing the extraordinary athletic body of the noble savage, Western representations of the Other offered a humanistic account of a naïve, simple and mystical life prior to the reasoned life imbued by the scientific revolution. An early traveller to New Zealand, for example, relates an invigorating tale of the ‘bronzed Māori’ competing in a long lost primordial battle against nature:

The canoe was now rushing through the tide... its expert helmsman, as rigid as one cast in bronze... The most lasting impression made on my mind in this surfing incident, was that of the poise and skill of Te Rangi Tuataka Takere, the high born Ranagatira [sic], as he sat statue like, steering-paddle firmly grasped, his fine muscular figure and clean cut tattooed features, reproducing, with the general surroundings, a grand picture of pure Maoridom as it had been for centuries prior to AD 1884. Alas! That we were to witness such a scene never again.⁴¹

Similarly, the African Masai were imagined as fantastic runners. Of a Masai shepherd it was observed: “...his gait, as he strides, is an example of what human carriage is at its best.”⁴² Tales of African athletic feats provided fantasies of the primordial human in an unfettered and natural state: “...a number of untutored, bare-footed natives... could jump between six feet and six feet five inches with the greatest of ease.”⁴³

The coloured athletic body also enabled definition of the Other via the modernistic rationality of Western science. The athleticisation of the nineteenth-century body, including the coloured body, “was part of a larger movement of material secularisation in which science and medicine displaced theology as the most authoritative accounts of the cosmos.”⁴⁴ The quantification and competitive nature of sport epitomised the enlightenment project, as it reflected the shift in belief from a

pregiven, mysterious, and immaterial world of God and spirit, to the man-made, knowable, and material world of human endeavour and the body. In providing a symbolic cosmology of quantifiable, perfectible, physical achievement, sport brilliantly animated the values of maturing capitalism . . . [it] succeeded in making numinous the mundane, material, and monetary values that were replacing traditional religious ones⁴⁵

Early representations of the coloured athletic body became an inherent part of the Othering process. For example, with reference to the colonial descriptions of African runners and walkers, John Bale believes “the African’s body was as much an object of examination, commentary and valorisation as the landscape. Such quantification was part of the longer-term European project of the systematisation of nature.”⁴⁶ By quantifying feats of the athletic Other, Western writers absorbed the culture of the Other into Western definability, conterminously minimising “cultural differences through the unifying power of Western cultural institutions such as the Olympic Games and the sports record.”⁴⁷

Moreover, and in colonised societies in particular, the uptake of Western sports by the indigenous population signified a certain degree of acculturation into dominant society. Essentially, sportisation of the savage demonstrated imperialisation, in that sport was discerned as one method of creating normal civilised behaviour. Māori sportspeople were the greatest trophies of colonisation in New Zealand because they symbolised the success of British assimilation. The Māori sportsperson was the disciplined brute; his/her aggression and savagery confined to the sporting arena. New Zealanders felt the actions of the 1888-9 Native Rugby Team could “make or break the wider reputation of the young colony,” and it was with satisfaction that New Zealanders heard of their own colonising successes. The *Daily Telegraph* (London) reported: “The Maoris have certainly progressed since Captain James Cook... found the finely painted and neatly tattooed ancestors of our visitors eating each other in the bush,”⁴⁸ while *The Times* (London) offered: “It is a tribute to our colonizing faculty. The colonizing race that can imbue the aboriginal inhabitants of the colonized countries with a love for its national games ... Wherever the Englishman goes he carries the bat and the goal posts.”⁴⁹

The colonised athlete of colour became part of a framework of meaning surrounded by a regulated language that confined them to imperialised definitions. Such a discourse reinforced and reproduced the normality of the usurpers’ right to rule by demonstrating the power of the colonial system to imbue its indigenes with the civility of sporting codes. The colonised athlete of colour would not have existed had such a discourse not reproduced the inevitability of the coloniser’s right to rule: “...rugby and cricket, famously described as ‘Britain’s gift to the World,’ marked out the contours of Empire. Sport became seen as essential preparation both for character and service in Empire.”⁵⁰

THE WHITE MAN’S BURDEN

Early representations of the Other’s body were strategic tactics that upheld the desires, aspirations and policies of the Westerner. White men constructed a knowledge of the physicality of people of colour in order to legitimate their own actions. Civilisation wove power and race together to form a “progressive, millennial tale of human history.”⁵¹ That is, the dominant discourse presented a tale of pioneering hardship, underscored by the self-predicating “white man’s burden” – to conquer the world, civilise it and then to provide enlightened leadership into the twentieth century.

In contrast to the positive noble savage representations of the coloured body, when people of colour began to be pitted against whites within the twentieth-century sporting arena, many commentators up until as late as the 1930s adhered to the racist belief that people of colour lacked the mental and physical resolve to compete with white people. Boxing is a case in point. Prior to Jack Johnson winning the heavyweight title in 1908, many commentators based their lack of belief in Johnson's ability to conquer the white Jim Jeffries on quasi-Social Darwinism. For example, Jeffries was portrayed as the "hope of the white race." *Collier's Magazine* asserted that Jeffries would beat Johnson because "manly white civilisation had long been evolving toward millennial perfection . . . The white man has thirty centuries of traditions behind him – all the supreme efforts, the inventions and the conquests."⁵² *The San Francisco Examiner* agreed, predicting that the "spirit of Caesar in Jeffries ought to whip the Barbarian."⁵³ Note, that much of the language here infers superiority based on the rights of past conquests constituted as natural and justified because the Other (Johnson and his race) had previously been conquered and, therefore, was bound to failure. The construction of Jeffries' body was based around representations that displayed pioneering, colonial and positivist progress including images of Jeffries sawing through huge tree-trunks in the wilderness.

Such language may seem incredible to the contemporary reader not only for its arrogance but, more importantly, because it has become 'natural' to think of big black bodies as winning heavy-weight boxing titles. The language surrounding the Johnson/Jeffries bout is a clear example of how the creation of reality often has little basis within reality itself and resides instead within the discourse of its time. Even so, an unbridled challenge to such a discourse can have tumultuous repercussions. The beating of the white body by the black body (i.e., Jeffries by Johnson) challenged the white male's natural superiority, virility and, consequently, the unquestioned right to rule. The fissure between reality and the surrounding discourse led to "the worst racial violence of that decade as white Americans avenged [Johnson's] triumph."⁵⁴ Johnson came to symbolise the African-American challenge to the inherent naturalness of white superiority.

REASSERTING RACIAL DOMINANCE

The increasing success of coloured athletic bodies in the twentieth century forced the despotic discourse of racial superiority to be reinvigorated so that whites could remain safe-keepers of civilised intelligence. The Cartesian dualism that provided the foundations of the racial allegory described above was easily reconfigured to explain the sporting successes of the coloured body and, to a large extent, the discourse that developed remains to this day. Whether those who create the text or those who read them are cognisant of its genealogical links to the racist notions that developed out of the modernistic discourses of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries or not, notions of the unconscious coloured body nevertheless still infuse the general language that surrounds the successful athlete of colour.

The obvious path for a white public endeavouring to hold their position of racial superiority was to create an allegorical discourse steeped in mind/body dualism. In the 1932 Los Angeles

Olympics, where African Americans began to dominate sprinting events, these successes were explained not in terms of what the Other possessed but rather what s/he lacked. Essentially, athletes of colour lacked the psychology of a white person, which in turn allowed them a natural and animal-like ease; they were viewed as running or jumping organisms that were without an individual ego. A sports writer for the Los Angeles *Sunday Times* argued that the coloured body “has the ease and grace and natural ability without the White man’s besetting sin - tension. No coloured man is ever beaten because he ties up.”⁵⁵ Paul Callico of the *New York Daily Times* said Joe Louis was successful because he was a “magnificent animal.” Louis, like the animal and the physical body, was soulless: “I see in this coloured man something so cold, so hard, so cruel that I wonder as to his bravery. Courage in the animal is desperation. Courage in the human is something incalculable and divine.”⁵⁶ The point here need not be laboured, for there are countless instances where the successes of white athletes have been attributed to hard work, a stoic morality and intelligence, while the successes of athletes of colour have been credited to the physicality of their body.⁵⁷

The layperson has difficulty seeing the racism of this discourse because of the ‘positive’ nature of such accounts. Foucault argues, however, that subjugation of another has to be positive at times: “...if power was never anything but repressive, if it never did anything but say no, do you really believe that we should manage to obey it.”⁵⁸ The racialised athletic body is, therefore, a case of what Jim McKay calls “enlightened racism.”⁵⁹ The successful athlete of colour unwittingly reaps rewards while perpetuating the subjugation of his/her people.

CONTEMPORARY IMAGES

Imbued with a belief that our principal avenue to fame and profit is through sport... far too many black kids treat basketball courts and football fields as if they were classrooms in an alternative school system. “O.k., I flunked English,” a young athlete will say. “But I got an A plus in slam-dunking.”⁶⁰

The discourse surrounding the racialised athletic body, initiated to curb the racial implications of successful athletes of colour, has not abated. While athletes of colour at least provide positive role models, their visibility is harmful to people of colour in general if it encourages the youth of colour into attempts at “making it.”⁶¹ Images of the successful coloured athletic body are highlighted by the dominant discourse to provide examples of the ‘truth’ – people of colour are best suited to achievement within the physical realm. Images of the body of the coloured sport-star are not dangerous because they are false representations of a given reality; they are dangerous because they stem from a racist genealogy of representation that arrest and fixate people of colour into roles acceptable to a social narrative of normalcy.⁶²

The body of the sport-star of colour can be understood as, what Foucault and other poststructuralists consider, the “exhibitionary regime of truth.” Sport has been such an integral part of positivistic endeavours to create a world defined, bettered and ruled by the civilised white, that the sport-star of colour’s body unmistakably abets the dominant meta-narrative. For example, Andrews argues that Michael Jordan embodied “Reaganite American virtue.”

Jordan's success along with his "...self-evident wholesome humility, inner drive, and personal responsibility . . . [provided] a living, breathing, and dunking vindication of the mythological American meritocracy,"⁶³ living proof of "...an open class structure, racial tolerance, economic mobility, the sanctity of individualism, and the availability of the American dream for black Americans."⁶⁴ The dominant group's construction of American meritocracy needs the spectacle that is Michael Jordan, it needs successful sport-stars of colour to enable people to maintain the belief that Western culture is democratic, is liberal, is meritocratic and is just for all. The image of the successful athlete of colour is absolutely important to this imagined democratic state and the reproduction of power, for revolutions can be kept at bay by constant reifications of hopeless dreams. Furthermore, sport stardom does not offer a particularly effective means for social mobility; focusing on the person of colour as predestined for physical feats denies him or her other avenues which are far more likely to offer improved social and political status.

CONCLUSION

Globalisation is not conceptually different from the grand colonising era of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Westerners reside within a postindustrial society, yet the ideals of industrialism's positive exploitation of human and environmental resources in the name of human progress varies little from the ideals of the knowledge-based society that, for example, exploits indigenous cultures to benefit global sporting companies such as Nike and Adidas. The colonising project is still alive and well, it just has different tools; the image and the internet have replaced the gun and the boat; and the United States has largely replaced Europe as the major usurper. Likewise, the overtly racist discourses that surrounded the coloured body have been replaced by positively veiled racist representations, which continue to shackle people of colour to static non-intellectual roles while espousing the occident as liberal and meritocratic. Today the representation of the coloured body is a more discreet seducer.

In the past, people such as Jack Johnson were able to provide the conception of an alternative reality because the discourse then was one of all-encompassing racism. Today, the athlete of colour will never provide evidence of an alternative reality for their people because that reality is an imagined and false dream that has been co-opted as part of the power/knowledge nexus to further subjugate people of colour. While sport may act as a site of resistance for events or people such as the Black Power salute at the 1968 Mexico Olympics, Kathy Freeman, Mohamed Ali, and Denis Rodman, these moments of resistance are ultimately framed by a mainstream media and discarded by various means. Although the Black Power salute has come to symbolise African American revolt, at the time, the athletes' (Tommie Smith and John Carlos) resistance was quashed by the United States Olympic Committee by immediately expelling them from the team. The carrying of the Aboriginal flag as a moment of resistance by Kathy Freeman was retroactively silenced by the Australian Olympic Committee by appointing her as the flame-bearer at the Sydney Olympics, a decision that placed Freeman and her protest under an un-aggrieved banner of 'one' Australia. Similarly, the recent movie *Ali*

represented the political protest by Mohamed Ali as largely invisible. In Denis Rodman's case, his defiance and departure from the "black phenotype" and his embodiment as the "black malaise" is disregarded as unseemly behaviour from a deviant.⁶⁵

The central question here is how can sport offer the public of colour resistance and change, when representations of coloured athletic bodies are inherently linked to a genealogy of racist discourse? How can the consuming public reconfigure their biases through images of soaring coloured bodies, when a media owned and governed by the dominant group frames those images? How can resistance be effective when the very people being resisted against control the representations of that resistance? Under a poststructural lens, dominant representations of the Other are seen as tactics of power that work to retain power, therefore, representations controlled by mainstream media will never provide effective forms of resistance. As Audre Lorde poignantly points out: "...the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house."⁶⁶

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- 4 Foucault, *Madness*, xi.
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- 9 Ibid., 181.
- 10 J Hoberman, *Darwin's Athletes: How Sport has Damaged Black America and Preserved the Myth of Race* (New York: Mariner Books, 1997).
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- 13 Cited T Hyde, "White Men Can't Jump: The Polynesianisation of Sport," *Metro* (1993): 69.
- 14 Lyndsey Carter cited in Burfoot, *African Speed*, 57.
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