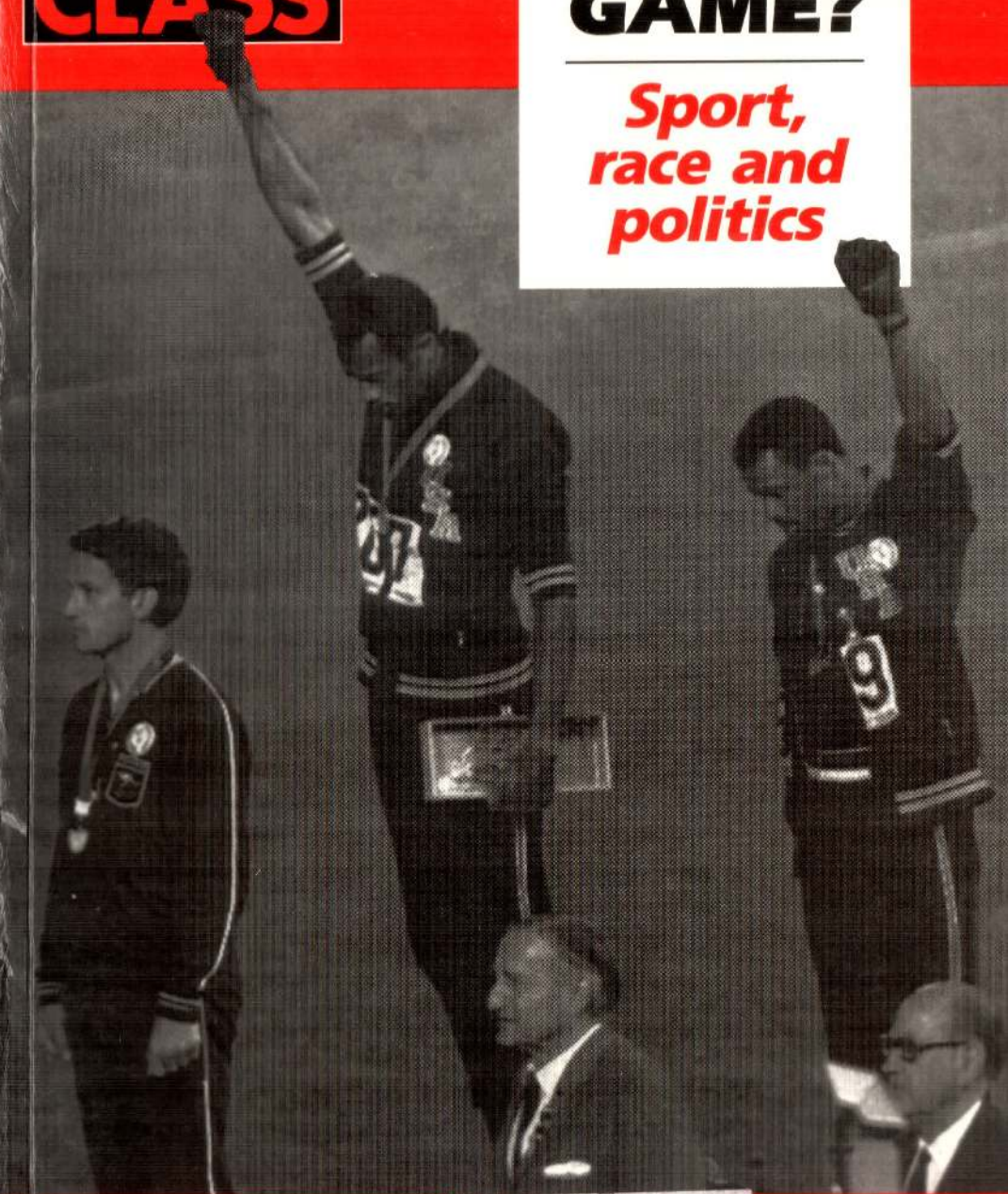


RACE & CLASS

ALL IN THE GAME?

*Sport,
race and
politics*



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Sport and stereotype: from role model to Muhammad Ali

Noam Chomsky, a man always prepared to speak truth to power, confessed he was driven to despair by the addiction of working-class people to a popular phone-in sports programme on local radio. How could they waste so much passion and knowledge on something so trivial?

Chomsky's frustration is in keeping with a long tradition of left-wing hostility to commercial spectator sport. Many have dismissed it as a mere palliative for the oppressed, an opiate of the people. Some Marxists in the 1960s and '70s went further. For them, modern sport was 'a prison of measured time', a model of capitalist alienation. Sport, they argued, is not an escape from exploitation, however fleeting, but a reproduction of it.

For many on the Left, boxing exemplifies all that is iniquitous in modern sport. What could more accurately embody the cruelty of the capitalist order, not to speak of the destructive aggression of patriarchal individualism, than boxing? Could there be a more degrading spectacle than two human beings paid to inflict physical punishment on each other?

And yet, even in these depths, resistance can stir, as a look back at the career of Muhammad Ali will confirm.

Sport, modernity and race

Modern, secular, spectator sport – in the forms of boxing, horse-racing

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and cricket – first emerged from the womb of parochial ritual and folk pastime in mid-eighteenth century England. Its midwives were rapid urbanisation, the spread of market relations and an ambitious elite with both time and money to squander. Rules for boxing were first codified in 1743. Soon after, national champions were recognised. Newspapers advertised the prize fights and employed the world's first sports writers to cover them. Bouts sometimes drew crowds of 10-20,000. They were usually staged under the aegis of aristocrats, who wagered huge stakes on the results. For the elite, the main purpose of modern sport was gambling: the venture capital that fuelled the industrial revolution also fuelled modern sport. Prize-fighting became a pioneer enterprise in the commercialisation of leisure, a trend which has grown to huge dimensions in our own time.

Like cricket and horse-racing (and sumo, an ancient ritual re-invented for popular consumption in the late eighteenth century), boxing remains among the least modern of modern sports. Even on satellite TV, it is easy to see in any boxing match traces of the pre-modern societies out of which it was born. The ancient gladiatorial contests, the village fair slugfests, the tavern brawls: boxing is a modern, regulated descendant of these. It is sometimes argued that sport is a means whereby we keep alive and display in modern societies the physical skills and attributes which industrialisation has made redundant: running, jumping, throwing, etc. In boxing, hand-to-hand combat lives on in a society which otherwise dispenses with it, even in warfare. Despite the Marquis of Queensbury's attempt to recodify the sport as 'a noble art' in keeping with the Victorian ethos, it remains today a rare example (apart from warfare itself) of the resolution of a contest by the overt use of physical violence.

The aristocrats, under whose aegis the world's first sports revolution was wrought, never themselves entered the prize-fighting ring (unlike the cricket pitch). Professional boxers from the beginning were plebeians, performing at the behest of their social superiors. Such was the gulf between patrons and participants that it seemed natural for slave-owners to enter their property into the competition. The first modern black sportsmen were slaves or ex-slaves, trained and groomed by their masters in the same way that they trained and groomed horses.

From the beginning, boxing was a honey-pot for criminals, not least because it was relatively easy to fix the fights. During the nineteenth century, the English aristocrats were replaced in the United States by politicians and newspaper proprietors, succeeded in this century by businessmen, public relations entrepreneurs and satellite and cable television moguls. But the gangsters have been ever-present, expropriating fighters, fans and punters alike. The persistence of gambling and criminality in boxing, despite periodic purges, indicates

that capitalist modernisation, far from being an antidote to criminality, can act as a stimulant for it.

In boxing, slavery's ownership of the human body was transmuted with relative ease into a capitalist commodification of it. Boxing today appears highly individualistic but the individuals involved, the boxers, have less power over their bodies and careers than almost any other sports people. Even successful boxers, with few exceptions, are bound like serfs to promoters, managers and satellite TV companies. If they wish to advance towards a title, they must placate a variety of forces behind the scene. Merit is never enough in itself. If they are disabled in action, they are reliant on charity.

No one knows this better than the generations of black boxers who have sustained the fight game at all levels. For a tiny minority of slaves, boxing was a ticket to individual freedom, just as it is for a tiny minority of black working-class people today. This long history has given boxing a special place in black communities. The triumphs and tragedies of black boxers, dependent on elite white power-brokers to make a living in the ring, expected to subordinate themselves to elite white norms outside the ring, have made black boxing a rich, complex, living tradition. If the strangest fact about boxing is that it has not gone the way of cockfighting or bear-baiting, and has somehow managed to survive under the glare of the electronic media, then the next strangest is that it owes its survival in no small measure to the brilliance of black boxers, the people most exploited and brutalised by it.

The level playing field

Jack Johnson became the first black heavyweight champion in 1908. He won the title in Sydney, Australia, because no American city would stage the fight. A white former champion, Jim Jeffries, who had previously refused to fight black boxers and had abandoned the ring rather than face Johnson, now came out of retirement, vowing to put the black man back in his place. Their Independence Day bout was, at the time, the most widely publicised sporting contest in US history, and Johnson's victory was celebrated by black communities across America. White gangs then launched reprisal attacks in the worst racial violence of the decade.

Johnson was the white man's nightmare come alive. Not only did he beat up white heroes in the ring (always sporting his famous grin), he then went off to dally with white women – and made no secret of it. Hated and hounded by the white press, he was ultimately forced into exile to escape a 'morals' conviction trumped up by the federal government. He was without doubt the most famous black person in America at the time and the black masses followed his adventures closely. However, his antics made the tiny black middle class uneasy.

Booker T. Washington denounced him and his wretched sport, agreeing with the *New York Times* that Johnson was a disgrace to his race. In contrast, Marcus Garvey celebrated him and W.E.B. DuBois argued that Johnson's persecution was not the result of his allegedly lax morals but of his 'unforgivable blackness'. In 1915, a weary and demoralised Johnson fought the latest white hope, Jess Willard, in Havana and lost the heavyweight title to him (or, some say, gave it up in a fix) in the twenty-seventh round.

In his recently published autobiography, Nelson Mandela recalls his time as a boxer. In the 1950s, Mandela (a heavyweight) trained regularly at a black boxing club in Orlando, a township north of Johannesburg. The club manager, Skipper Molotsi, would regale his penniless, ill-equipped, passionately dedicated boxers with a round-by-round account of Johnson's defeat in Havana.

'I did not enjoy the violence of boxing so much as the science of it,' Mandela explains. 'I was intrigued by how one moved one's body to protect oneself, how one used a strategy both to attack and retreat, how one paced oneself over a match.' Here, boxing appears as an ideal preparation for long-term political struggle. But, for Mandela, the sport's main attraction resided at a deeper level. 'Boxing is egalitarian. In the ring, rank, age, colour and wealth are irrelevant. When you are circling your opponent, probing his strengths and weaknesses, you are not thinking about his colour or social status.'

Mandela here invokes one of the defining shibboleths of modern sport: the level playing field. Sports lose their meaning for the spectator – and therefore their place in the market – unless everyone plays under the same rules, shoots at the same size goalposts, is timed with the same stopwatch. The level playing field is far more than a moral or ideological cover for a competitive activity. It is the autonomous logic of modern sport. For a contest to be seen as satisfactory, its rules, conditions and conduct must ensure that the result is determined only by the relative and pertinent strengths and weaknesses of the competitors, not by extraneous factors. The objectivity of sporting contests is like the objectivity of a scientific experiment. To the extent that the extraneous is excluded, the test is regarded as valid.

In boxing, the level playing field acquires particular importance. This raw, elemental contest pits one man's strength, stamina and agility against another's – of the same weight. It was recognised early on that a fight between a heavyweight and flyweight was meaningless as a spectacle or a test of individual prowess.

The logic of the level playing field gives sport an egalitarian premise. This is undoubtedly one of the reasons for its enduring appeal to the masses, and especially the most dispossessed among them. The major cliché about race in sport is that sport offers black people opportunities

denied them in other spheres. In the autonomous realm of sport, equality reigns.

Of course, the level playing field is enclosed within a society which is anything but level. Access to the level playing field has always been unequal, as has treatment on it, as black boxers have long understood. In 1805, Tom Molineaux, a black American ex-slave, was on the brink of taking the heavyweight title from the legendary English fighter-promoter, Tom Cribb. It was the twenty-sixth round and Cribb was on the floor. The English referee shouted at him: 'Get up, Tom, don't let the Nigger win.' Given four extra minutes to recover, Cribb went on to win the fight. For Molineaux as for Jack Johnson, boxing's level playing field proved an illusion.

It is well to remember that modern sport is a huge commercial enterprise. The level playing field is owned by a capitalist elite and is indeed one of that elite's favourite metaphors. The purpose of the Maastricht Treaty, NAFTA and GATT, we are told, is to create an economic level playing field, to ensure 'fair play' among various nation-states. In reality, these agreements rig global competition in favour of multinational capital and institutionalise the power of the north over the south. There is nothing new in this. By its very nature, the market nourishes and thrives on inequalities. The metaphor of the level playing field is, in fact, a lie about the market, as it is a lie about society as a whole.

But there is a sting in the tail. On sport's level playing field, it is possible to challenge and overturn the dominant hierarchies of nation, race and class. The reversal may be limited and transient, but it is nonetheless real. It is, therefore, wrong to see black sporting achievement merely as an index of oppression; it is equally an index of creativity and resistance, collective and individual. The level playing field can be either a prison or a platform for liberation.

'Uncle Toms' and 'bad Niggers'

No black fighter was given a shot at the heavyweight title for twenty-five years after Johnson lost it. Jack Dempsey, one of the great American sports heroes of the 1920s, refused to meet black challengers. When Joe Louis came along in the 1930s, his handlers and sponsors (black businessmen from Detroit) were determined not to repeat Johnson's experience. Louis was given lessons in table manners and elocution; he was told to go for a knock-out rather than risk the whims of racist judges; he was told never to smile when he beat a white man and, above all, never to be caught alone with a white woman. Louis was groomed to be the ideal role model for black America.

The symbolic burdens that this would involve became apparent in his first fight in New York City, against Primo Carnera, in 1935. At the

time, Mussolini was engaged in highly public preparations for his invasion of Ethiopia. Although neither Louis nor Carnera had said anything about the issue, they were seen by many as representatives of Africa and Italy respectively. Fears that rioting might break out among the fans led to a pre-fight announcement urging all concerned to view the bout solely as a contest between two individuals and nothing more – surely one of the most futile injunctions in the history of sport. Louis finished off the hard-hitting, mafia-backed Carnera in the sixth round.

It was not only Louis's demure behaviour that made him acceptable to the white establishment; it was also the peculiar politics of the times. He won the heavyweight crown in Chicago in 1937, in front of a crowd of 45,000, half of whom were black. But the year before, he had been beaten by a German, Max Schmeling, in a fight that had been hailed by Nazi ideologists as a triumph of Aryan supremacy. The rematch at Yankee Stadium in 1938 was probably at the time the most widely followed sporting contest in history and a huge event in the life of America's black communities. Louis was made aware by the press, the churches, the president and the Communist Party that knocking Schmeling's block off was his duty to America, the cause of anti-fascism and 'the Negro'. Any remaining doubts were removed when Nazis picketed his training camp. Louis demolished Schmeling in two minutes of the first round.

This time blacks could celebrate without fear of reprisals. Louis may have whipped a white man, but he was a German, and, what's more, a symbol of the Nazi regime. Louis was fighting *for America*, or at least for the liberal America of the New Deal. For once, 'Americanism' and anti-racialism were congruent. Louis was praised everywhere as 'a credit to his race' – not because he had excelled in the ring but because he had vindicated 'the American way' at a critical time. For the American elite, Louis was a means to rally popular support for a war against Germany and Japan. For American Communists, the Schmeling-Louis bout was a classic contest between 'fascism' and 'democracy'. On the night of the fight, Communists organised 'Joe Louis radio parties' in black communities. Both the Communists and the elite emphasised the 'dignity' with which Louis represented his people and with which he had uplifted the sport of boxing, which both had hitherto despised.

The symbolism was not, however, completely arbitrary. It arose from the nature of the sporting contest itself. Here, modern sport's level playing field offered laboratory-like conditions in which to test the theory of Aryan supremacy. Louis's victory, like Jesse Owens's at the Berlin Olympics in 1936, was a 'scientific' repudiation of that theory and was seen as such by millions. The symbolism was intelligible to all, because it emerged from the egalitarian presuppositions of modern sport.

This made Louis the spearhead of a popular front, but it was one within which blacks remained subordinate. Louis did everything the white establishment asked of him and still ended up broke and humiliated. He gave the entire proceeds of one fight to the Navy Relief Fund, even though the navy was widely known as the most racist branch of the services. He enlisted in the army for three years and, though denied permission to defend his title, fought ninety-six exhibition bouts for US troops around the world (all of them still in segregated units) for nothing more than his ordinary soldier's pay. That did not stop the US government from stinging him for back taxes and, at one point, he had to take to the wrestling ring to drum up the cash. He ended hobbling around Las Vegas, paid by casino owners to greet the high rollers.

The spectres of these two black champions, Johnson and Louis, haunted the black fighters to come. There seemed only these two equally tragic role models: the 'bad Nigger' and the 'Uncle Tom', as they became known in the 1960s. After Louis, boxing was increasingly dominated by black fighters, especially in the upper divisions, but the sport itself was in the grip of white money-men and officials. Sonny Liston and Floyd Patterson, the two heavyweight champions who preceded Cassius Clay, conformed to the old polarity.

Like Mike Tyson, Floyd Patterson came out of the slums of Brooklyn and, like Tyson, he was trained and guided out of juvenile delinquency by Cus D'Amato, a white Svengali who tried to keep both fighters out of the clutches of the crooks. Unlike Tyson, the studiously inoffensive, frugal and churchgoing Patterson became a hero to white America. Having become the youngest man ever to win the heavyweight title, he was invited to the White House, married a white woman, bought a house in a white neighbourhood, and became a symbol of the integrationist ideal. For several years, D'Amato shielded Patterson from Sonny Liston, widely recognised as the number one contender and the toughest heavyweight on the circuit. D'Amato could get away with this because absolutely nobody wanted Sonny Liston to be the heavyweight champ.

Liston was the most disliked black sports star since Jack Johnson. He was introduced to boxing at the age of 18 in the Missouri State Penitentiary and turned professional soon after his release. In between his early bouts, he provided debt-collecting muscle for local hoodlums. In 1956, he was arrested for assaulting a police officer, following a row outside his house, and was sentenced to nine months in an Illinois workhouse. This not only made it extremely difficult for him to get fights (which, in turn, made him more dependent on the mob), it also made him a marked man for every white cop in the country. By 1962, he had a record of nineteen arrests.

In his new home of Philadelphia, Liston, by now recognised as the

leading heavyweight contender, was continually roused by police, who charged him with a wide array of petty offences, including impersonating a police officer (apparently a woman whom he had approached in his car at night thought for a moment that it was a police vehicle). When he left the city for a new home in Denver, he told the press, 'I'd rather be a lamp post in Denver than the mayor of Philadelphia.'

Sonny was illiterate but quick-witted, and more than prepared to stand his ground against bullies in uniform. Despite his police record and his mob connections, used again and again to deny him a title shot, he was generous and sensitive, as well as prickly and wary. His biographer, Rob Steen, was right to observe: 'All Sonny ever got were cheap shots.' One of the most persistent concerned his date of birth, which was shrouded in mystery. For the press, Liston's inability to produce a bona fide birth certificate was evidence of criminality. In fact, Liston was born among impoverished rural workers, with the aid of a midwife, not a doctor – and he was his father's twenty-fourth child. Not surprisingly, his birth went unrecorded. Liston hailed from America's anonymous lower depths – and he was punished for it. Depicted as sullen, violent, ignorant and menacing, Liston was fair game for journalists, boxing authorities and politicians. Black leaders froze him out. This street-brawler simply did not fit in with their clean-cut, moderate, non-violent image. The NAACP urged Patterson not to give him a title shot.

In the end, however, Liston got his chance, partly because Patterson was embarrassed by the allegations that he was dodging Sonny, but mainly because the promoters and authorities knew that excluding Liston would discredit the heavyweight title even more than giving it to him. The public backed Patterson, but it wanted his supremacy confirmed in the ring.

Thus the scene was set for a fight with almost as many symbolic overtones as Louis-Schmeling. *Sports Illustrated* invoked the Cold War: 'In this day and age we cannot afford an American heavyweight champion with Liston's unsavoury record.' The president of the National Boxing Association made no effort to disguise his bias: 'In my opinion, Patterson is a fine representative of his race, and I believe the heavyweight champion of the world should be the kind of man our children could look up to.' Patterson also received messages of support from liberal icons like JFK, Ralph Bunche and Eleanor Roosevelt. Percy Sutton, then president of the Manhattan NAACP and later a New York Democratic kingpin and millionaire, declared: 'I'm for Patterson because he represents us better than Liston ever could or would.'

In fact, everyone spurned Liston except Malcolm X, who said he hoped Liston would 'shake Patterson up'. Malcolm was angry at

remarks Patterson had made about the Nation of Islam and saw him, and indeed all black boxers, as slaves to white money-men. Later, his encounter with Cassius Clay was to change his mind.

As for Liston himself, he seemed resigned to play his assigned role. 'A prize fight is like a cowboy movie,' he said. 'There has to be a good guy and a bad guy. People pays their money to see me lose. Only in my cowboy movie, the bad guy always wins.' Sure enough, Liston knocked out Patterson in the first round. In the rematch six months later, he did it again. The press now declared him 'invincible' – but they still thought someone else should be champion.

What role? Whose models?

The origins of the role model lie in the Victorian ideology of amateur sport. The Victorians paid tribute to the level playing field ('fair play', 'may the best man win', etc.) at the same time that they justified the domination of sport by a social and economic elite. Sport's egalitarian autonomy was thus overlaid with the prevailing hierarchies. Competitors were now to be judged by criteria extraneous to sport. Winning under the rules was not enough; one also had to uphold certain social and moral standards.

The role model was and is a means of taming the democracy of sport, of neutralising its sublime indifference to the high and mighty in other realms. The level playing field allowed blacks to become successful at sport; that success had to be confined and modified so that it carried messages approved by the white establishment. Black sports heroes were therefore asked, by both the white and black elite, to act as role models for the rest of the black population. They were required to set an example of proper behaviour – as defined by the elite – on and off the playing field. In this way, the elite ensured that, despite its apparent anarchy, the level playing field mirrored their ideas about the world, including their ideas about race.

Ever since the late nineteenth century, the 'gentlemen's code' deriving from amateur sport has been used to qualify or denigrate black success. West Indian fast-bowlers and Pakistani swing bowlers have both been abused, not for breaking the rules, but for playing the game in a different manner from that established by their former colonial masters. In football, the aggressive and immodest black player, Ian Wright, is compared, unfavourably, to the mealy-mouthed (white) Gary Lineker, though both won fame and lucre by doing more or less the same thing.

Because it is shaped from above, the black role model contains a fundamental contradiction. The purpose of the role model is to provide an example to black people of personal success achieved within the laws and customs of the realm. Yet all but a tiny minority of blacks have no

hope of achieving such success within those laws and customs. What is more, the black role models offered are mostly male (in the case of boxing, exclusively so). The female black population is assigned a purely passive role; they are not asked to emulate but merely to admire the role model. In reality, they share this impotence with the vast majority of black males.

The more black sports stars remind people of the oppressive realities of black life (like Sonny Liston), the less they are accepted as a role model for it. More often than not, the duties of the role model have estranged black sports stars from their popular constituency. By radically redefining his duties as a role model, Muhammad Ali changed all that. His evolving politics enabled him to embrace his fans in a new way. Transcending the old stereotypical duality – the ‘Uncle Tom’ and the ‘bad Nigger’ – he resolved, however fleetingly, the contradiction of the black role model.

Cassius Clay, Muhammad Ali and Malcolm X

It is hard to believe now, but at first Cassius Clay appeared to many Liston-haters as a ‘great white hope’. Certainly he was happy enough in the beginning to join in the conventional role-play. At ringside for the Liston-Patterson fight, he shook Patterson’s hand, then looked towards Liston, threw his hands up in mock terror and fled.

Cassius Clay enjoyed a more comfortable and stable upbringing than Liston, Patterson or, indeed, any of the black opponents he was to face in the future. At the 1960 Olympics in Rome, asked by a Soviet reporter about the condition of blacks in the USA, Clay had answered ‘To me, the USA is still the best country in the world, counting yours.’ In those days he was proud of his Christian name: ‘Don’t you think it’s a beautiful name? Makes you think of the Coliseum and those Roman gladiators.’ But when he returned home he complained: ‘With my gold medal actually hanging around my neck I couldn’t get a cheeseburger served to me in a downtown Louisville restaurant.’ Nonetheless, he was sponsored by a consortium of white Louisville businessmen and, thanks to his big mouth and showbiz acumen, quickly became the most publicised fighter in the business. Regarded by many as a vaudeville turn, he was still, broadly, thought to be good for boxing. No one in those days thought this crass comedian would one day become a world-wide symbol of black dignity. Indeed, the very idea that he might do this without losing his sense of fun and his love of performing violated all the known sports stereotypes. A year before his title fight with Liston, he asked reporters:

Where do you think I’d be next week, if I didn’t know how to shout and holler and make the public take notice? I’d be poor and I’d

probably be down in my home town, washing windows or running an elevator and saying, 'yes suh' and 'no suh' and knowing my place. Instead, I'm one of the highest paid athletes in the world. Think about that. A southern coloured boy has made one million dollars.

In other words, the clowning was a way of breaking out of the racist stranglehold. Clay first heard Elijah Muhammad speak in 1959 when he was in Chicago for a Golden Gloves tournament. From the beginning, it was Clay who sought out the Nation of Islam; the Muslims never pursued him. Indeed, only gradually did they realise what a prize had dropped in their laps. The black magazine, *Ebony*, was the first to report the real significance of the emerging Clay story:

Cassius Marcellus Clay – and this fact has evaded the sports-writing fraternity – is a blast furnace of racial pride. His is a pride that would never mask itself with skin lighteners and processed hair, a pride scorched with memories of millions of little burns.

Nonetheless, it was Liston, not Clay, whose contract barred segregated movie theatres from showing their bout on closed circuit television. And, despite his 'racial pride', Clay was happy to deploy the dehumanising language of the oppressors in the build-up to the fight with the man he called 'that big ugly bear':

Sonny Liston is nothing. The man can't talk. The man can't fight. The man needs talking lessons. The man needs boxing lessons. And since he's gonna fight me, he needs falling lessons ... After I whup Sonny Liston, I'm gonna whup those little green men from Jupiter and Mars. And looking at them won't scare me none because they can't be no uglier than Sonny Liston ... I'm gonna give him to the local zoo after I whup him ... I'm young, I'm handsome, I'm fast, I can't be beaten ... He's too ugly to be the world champ. The world champ should be pretty like me.

Clay here echoed the worst racist stereotype of the black boxer as an uneducated animal, but he did so with a panache quite foreign to the ethos of boxing's traditional black role models. Clay had already dispensed with the modest self-effacement which all professional sports people, especially black ones, were expected to affect and because of this many in the media wanted him put in his place, even by Sonny Liston. Then, weeks before the bout, Clay and Malcolm X were photographed together in New York. The *New York Herald Tribune* demanded to know if the heavyweight challenger was 'a card-carrying Muslim'. Clay was quick to spot the potential for a role swap and told Liston: 'I make you great. The fans love you because I'm the villain.' Clay may have been amused, but his publicist, Harold Conrad, despaired: 'The whole sales pitch for the fight had been Clay against

Liston, white hat against black hat, and now it looked like there'd be two black hats fighting.'

Malcolm's brief encounter with Ali was left out of the Spike Lee film, despite the impact it had on both men's lives. Elijah Muhammad instructed his followers against all sports, especially degrading spectacles like boxing. Malcolm had never even heard of Clay when they were introduced in Detroit in 1962. But he was impressed by the young fighter's seriousness about the Nation of Islam. After all, Clay stood to gain nothing from any association with the Muslims. In his *Autobiography*, Malcolm recalled:

I liked him. Some contagious quality about him made him one of the few people I ever invited to my home. Betty liked him. Our children were crazy about him. Cassius was simply a likeable, friendly, clean-cut, down-to-earth youngster. I noticed how alert he was even in little details. I suspected there was a plan in his public clowning.

As the Liston fight approached, Malcolm was in rapid evolution – en route to a new revolutionary internationalism and early martyrdom. In his *Autobiography*, he depicts his time in Clay's camp as one of distress and isolation. He had been suspended by Elijah Muhammad for ninety days, following his 'chickens coming home to roost' crack about the JFK assassination. As Clay prepared for his moment of glory, Malcolm was coming to grips with Elijah Muhammad's cult of personality and the danger that his apostasy would place him in.

Elijah Muhammad and his coterie were opposed to Malcolm's presence in Clay's camp. They were as convinced as the white sports writers that Clay, the eight-to-one underdog, would lose and feared that their association with him would be damaging. But Malcolm stayed close to Clay because 'it was Allah's intent for me to help Cassius prove Islam's superiority before the world – through proving that mind can win over brawn'. He fortified Clay to face Liston by talking about David and Goliath. For Malcolm, Liston's whole life and career was proof that the struggle for integration was futile and debilitating. Clay, he felt, could represent something different. 'Clay ... is the finest Negro athlete I have ever known, the man who will mean more to his people than Jackie Robinson, because Robinson is the white man's hero.' Malcolm saw Clay's symbolic power more clearly than anyone else at the time, and he helped Clay realise that power in the ring:

'This fight is the truth,' I told Cassius. 'It's the Cross and the Crescent fighting in a prize ring – for the first time. It's a modern crusades – a Christian and a Muslim facing each other with television to beam it off Telstar for the whole world to see what happens!' I told Cassius, 'Do you think Allah has brought about all this, intending for you to leave the ring as anything but the champion?'

Attendance at the fight itself was small but over one million people watched it on closed circuit TV. The *New York Times* reported: 'The general support for Clay seemed to transcend any betting considerations and even the normal empathy for an underdog.' The *Times*' puzzlement brings to mind the lyric written by Bob Dylan at about the same time: 'Something is happening here/But you don't know what it is/Do you, Mister Jones?'

In Miami, Clay danced his way around a lumbering Liston, his speed, footwork and amazing 360 degree ring-vision nullifying the champion's advantages in power and reach. When a bewildered and dejected Liston failed to come out for the seventh round, Clay was jubilant. 'I want everyone to bear witness,' he shouted. 'I am the greatest! I shook up the world!' Nonetheless, many sports writers continued to regard his victory as a fluke. Malcolm was more perceptive: 'The secret of one of fight history's greatest upsets was that, months before that night, Clay had out-thought Liston.' Because of his rejection of the prevailing stereotypes of black sportsmen, Malcolm was able to see in Clay what the sports writers refused to see: a supremely intelligent and inventive boxer inspired by more than just a lust for money.

After the fight, a quiet Clay met privately with Malcolm and Jim Brown, the great Cleveland Browns running back and an early champion of black rights in sport. The next morning, after breakfast with Malcolm, he held a press conference at which he announced:

I believe in Allah and in peace. I don't try to move into white neighbourhoods. I don't want to marry a white woman. I was baptised when I was twelve, but I didn't know what I was doing. I'm not a Christian any more. I know where I'm going and I know the truth, and I don't have to be what you want me to be. I'm free to be what I want.

No boxing champion, and no black sports person, had ever issued such a ringing declaration of independence. The next day, Clay amplified his views. In place of his usual ingratiating bravado, there was now a steely and even exultant defiance:

Black Muslims is a press word. The real name is Islam. That means peace. Islam is a religion and there are 750 million people all over the world who believe in it, and I'm one of them. I ain't no Christian. I can't be when I see all the colored people fighting for forced integration get blowed up. They get hit by stones and chewed by dogs and they blow up a Negro church and don't find the killers ... I'm the heavyweight champion, but right now there are some neighbourhoods I can't move into. I know how to dodge boobytraps and dogs. I dodge them by staying in my own neighbourhood. I'm

no trouble-maker ... I'm a good boy. I never have done anything wrong. I have never been to jail. I have never been in court. I don't join any integration marches. I don't pay any attention to all those white women who wink at me. I don't carry signs ... A rooster crows only when it sees the light. Put him in the dark and he'll never crow. I have seen the light and I'm crowing.

As Robert Lipsyte observed, Clay was challenging the white establishment's fundamental injunction to all black American sports stars: 'keep our stereotypes in order'. Notice how Clay argued his case. In telling the press that he had never been to jail or court, he was saying, 'I'm no Sonny Liston.' In forswearing white women, he was saying, 'I'm no Jack Johnson.' In denouncing integration, he was saying, 'I'm no Floyd Patterson.' In a bizarre fashion, he was adhering to the contours of the role model favoured by the white press. Therefore, he seemed to be arguing, there was no reason they should be threatened by him. Yet the content of the model was utterly transformed – and that posed a major threat to all the white press held sacred, in and out of sport.

Clay undermined his own attempt to paint his conversion as purely religious by his constant references to American racism. Perusing Clay's statements of the time, it is clear he saw the Nation of Islam as a means of black survival in a hostile racist world. This may have looked like a religious act, but its wellsprings were political. 'I don't believe Muhammad's conversion was a religious experience,' said the born-again Christian, George Foreman, years later. 'I'll believe until the day I die that it was a social awakening ... It was something he needed at the time, something the whole country needed...'

A week after the fight, Clay journeyed to Harlem and checked into the Hotel Theresa, where Malcolm had an office. Later, the two men toured the UN and were photographed together meeting African delegates. On 6 March, Elijah Muhammad announced that the world heavyweight champion was changing his name. 'Muhammad Ali is what I will give him for as long as he believes in Allah and follows me.'

As Ali himself was quick to point out, name changes were commonplace in American sports and entertainment. Joe Louis and Sugar Ray Robinson had done it; so had Edward G. Robinson and John Garfield. But this was different. This was a black man signalling by his name change, not a desire to ingratiate himself with mainstream America, but a comprehensive rejection of it. It was to be many years before he won his battle to force the media to adopt his new name. The *New York Times* persisted in calling him 'Cassius Clay' throughout the 1960s.

In changing his name, Ali was demonstrating what he meant when he said: '*I don't have to be what you want me to be.*' For the first time, here was a black American sports hero who would not allow himself to

be defined according to white racist categories. He was seizing back his persona. Johnson and Louis, Patterson and Liston had been endowed with their public identities by the white press; Clay was going to create his own identity and shove it down their throats.

Of course, the only way he could have ever hoped to succeed in this, given the forces he was up against, was with the wind of a great movement at his back. Clay tried to make a virtue out of the Muslims' abstention from active participation in the civil rights movement. But if he chose the Nation of Islam as a means of escaping confrontations with white racism, he was to be sadly disappointed. In the end, Clay would fight all the battles he sought to avoid, and on a grand scale. He would 'carry a sign' by becoming a sign – a living symbol of black resistance to white racism.

Clay's renunciation of the old stereotypes infuriated the establishment, white and black. 'Most of the writers, particularly the older ones, felt more comfortable with the mob figures around Liston than with the Muslims around Clay,' said Robert Lipsyte. Boxing pundit Jimmy Cannon called Ali's ties to the Nation of Islam 'the dirtiest in American sports since the Nazis were shilling for Max Schmeling as representative of their vile theories of blood'. Louisville black churchmen pronounced Ali 'a disservice to his race, nation and the world'. Joe Louis joined in:

Clay will earn the public's hatred because of his connections with the Black Muslims. The things they preach are just the opposite of what we believe. The heavyweight champion should be the champion of all the people. He has responsibilities to all people.

Acting on a suggestion Malcolm had made before the Miami fight, Ali made a trip to Africa in May 1964. He met Nkrumah in Ghana and Nasser in Egypt. Everywhere he was greeted by huge crowds, who chanted his new name with gusto. On this trip, Cassius Clay was buried and Muhammad Ali superseded him. By now, Malcolm's break with Elijah Muhammad had become public. On his way to Mecca, at a hotel in Accra, he ran into Ali, who snubbed him. 'Nobody listens to Malcolm anymore,' the champ told reporters. According to Alex Haley, 'that hurt Malcolm more than any other person turning away from him'. Ironically, Malcolm was to find that his acquaintance with Ali stood him in good stead on his pilgrimage. In Saudi Arabia, he was often mistaken for Ali ('the Muslim from America'), whose fame was now huge in the Muslim world. For months, the Clay-Liston fight was shown at packed cinemas throughout the Middle East. Ali was becoming a global figure, with tens of millions of supporters outside his native land.

After the Miami fight, Floyd Patterson had declared that, 'as a Catholic', he felt he had a duty to 'reclaim the title for America' from the Muslim Ali. Three weeks later, he was forced to sell his \$140,000

house in Yonkers (only a few miles from my own home town) for a \$20,000 loss. White neighbours had rejected his attempt at integration, subjecting his family to racist abuse. Nonetheless, Patterson insisted: 'The image of a Black Muslim as the world heavyweight champion disgraces the sport and the nation. Cassius Clay must be beaten and the Black Muslims' scourge removed from boxing.'

Patterson may have initiated the battle of the role models, but Ali met the challenge head on, subjecting Patterson to weeks of verbal abuse.

Patterson says he's gonna bring the title back to America. If you don't believe the title already is in America, just see who I pay taxes to. I'm American. But he's a deaf dumb so-called Negro who needs a spanking. I plan to punish him for the things he said; cause him pain ... The little old pork-chop eater don't have a chance.

According to Arthur Ashe, 'No black athlete had ever publicly spoken so disparagingly to another black athlete.' Ali's doggerel was cruel:

I'm going to put him flat on his back,
so that he will start acting Black,
because when he was champ he didn't do as he should,
he tried to force his way into an all-white neighbourhood.

At the fight itself, Patterson was hopelessly outclassed. Heedless of the outrage of ringside commentators, Ali dragged the fight out to the twelfth round, punishing Patterson with his fists, then stepping back and allowing him time to recover while taunting him, 'Come on America! Come on white America!'

Over the next three years, Ali's attacks on 'Uncle Toms' and their white sponsors became ever sharper. 'People are always telling me what a good example I could be if I just wasn't a Muslim,' Ali observed. 'I've heard it over and over, how come I couldn't be like Joe Louis and Sugar Ray. Well, they're gone now, and the black man's condition is just the same, ain't it? We're still catching hell.'

Did Ali regret not having Malcolm at his side during these difficult years? According to Jim Brown, even before the Liston fight in Miami, Ali knew he would have to reject Malcolm for Elijah. Perhaps he wanted to prove his loyalty, perhaps he also sensed that Malcolm would place too many demands on him and expose him to too many dangers. Perhaps he was aware that abandoning Elijah could be even more dangerous than embracing Malcolm.

'When Malcolm broke with Elijah, I stayed with Elijah,' Ali explained many years later. 'I believed that Malcolm was wrong and Elijah was God's messenger. I was in Miami, training, when I heard Malcolm had been shot to death ... It was a pity and a disgrace he died like that, because what Malcolm saw was right, and after he left us, we

went his way anyway. Colour didn't make a man a devil. It's the heart, soul and mind that counts.'

Ali was openly delighted when the Nation of Islam abandoned anti-white rhetoric for Muslim orthodoxy in the 1970s. He had always had white friends and associates, and his travels had made him aware that oppression comes in many forms on this earth. In the end, Ali came to stand for more than mere black self-assertion; his Muslim allegiance and embryonic pan-Africanism gradually led him, like Malcolm, towards a broader, more inclusive vision of his role.

'I don't have to be what you want me to be'

Ali's refusal to fight in Vietnam made him into a hero in places where boxing was unknown. In reply to those Americans who demanded he 'serve his country like Joe Louis', he asserted a higher loyalty and a broader solidarity. In the process, he became an icon of internationalism.

Initially, Ali was excluded from the draft because he scored so poorly in IQ tests – proof that whatever these tests may measure, it certainly isn't intelligence. But as the US escalated the war, the Pentagon's standards were lowered and, in February 1966, Ali was reclassified 1-A, eligible and likely to be called for military service. When told the news, Ali blurted out, 'I ain't got no quarrel with them Vietcong.' It was a spur-of-the-moment remark, but it became Ali's theme in his long battle with the US government.

Keep asking me, no matter how long
on the war in Vietnam, I sing this song
I ain't got no quarrel with the Vietcong.

Reaction from the political and boxing establishments was swift and hostile. The Kentucky legislature, which had honoured him when he won a gold medal, now condemned him for bringing discredit to 'all loyal Kentuckians'. The state of Illinois banned his scheduled title defence against Ernie Terrell. Miami and Pittsburgh followed suit. Sports writers, including Arthur Daley of the *New York Times*, urged a boycott of Ali's fights, a call taken up by right-wing politicians like Congressman Frank Clark of Pennsylvania:

The heavyweight champion has been a complete and total disgrace. I urge the citizens of the nation as a whole to boycott any of his performances. To leave these theatre seats empty would be the finest tribute possible to that boy whose hearse may pass by the open doors of the theatre on Main Street, USA.

Within days of Ali's remark, 300 theatres across the country pulled out of closed-circuit coverage. The Terrell bout was cancelled. Ali was

forced to defend his title abroad. But he would not recant. Instead, he became more vocal and more explicit in his rejection of the war:

Why should they ask me to put on a uniform and go ten thousand miles from home and drop bombs and bullets on brown people in Vietnam while so-called Negro people in Louisville are treated like dogs? ... I have nothing to lose by standing up and following my beliefs. So I'll go to jail. We've been in jail for four hundred years.

When he finally fought Terrell, in Houston in 1967, his ferocity shocked the pundits. Terrell, a powerful hitter considered Ali's most dangerous opponent since Liston, had made the mistake of calling him 'Clay' during a pre-fight press conference. 'What's my name?' Ali roared again and again as he showered Terrell with punches. 'Uncle Tom! What's my name?' The New York *Daily News* called the fight 'a disgusting exhibition of calculating cruelty, an open defiance of decency, sportsmanship and all the tenets of right versus wrong'. Arthur Daley called Ali 'a mean and malicious man whose facade has crumbled as he gets deeper into the Black Muslim movement'. Another veteran boxing correspondent, Milton Gross, confessed: 'One almost yearns for the return of Frankie Carbo and his mobster ilk.'

Rarely has the hideous hierarchy of boxing's values been so naked. Ali's violence in the ring (and within the rules) was declared reprehensible by the very people who condemned him for not engaging in much more deadly violence in Vietnam. Even the violence of organised crime was considered less discrediting to the sport of boxing than Ali's crime of conscience.

And a crime of conscience it was. The government made it clear that Ali would not be exposed to combat. Like Joe Louis before him, he could box exhibitions and address troops and, in Ali's words, spend his tour 'living the easy life and not having to get out in the mud and fight and shoot'. But he refused all the soft options, including exile abroad.

It has to be remembered that, at this time, opposition to the war, though mounting, was still anything but fashionable. It was to be another year before Bobby Kennedy and the 'liberal' wing of the Democratic Party broke with Johnson. The mainstream civil rights leaders steered clear of the issue. Until the late 1960s, the received wisdom in the white establishment and among many black leaders was that black people would make advances by showing themselves to be 'good Americans'. If they were loyal to their country, their country would be grateful. 'Patriotic blacks', like Joe Louis or Floyd Patterson, were the best blacks. In both politics and sport, the ground rules of Cold War liberalism still applied: if they sought legitimacy, blacks, like trade unions, had to be unequivocally 'on America's side'.

Robeson and DuBois had placed their loyalty to the oppressed of the world before any loyalty to the US government. As a consequence,

they were driven out of American public life and ultimately into exile. Now, Muhammad Ali was committing the same heresy for which they had been punished. In 1966, he was one of only a handful of black voices publicly opposing the war. Within weeks of making his 'I ain't got no quarrel' crack, Ali was placed under surveillance by the FBI, which complained, in an internal memorandum, that he had 'utilised his position as a nationally known figure in the sports world to promote through appearances at various gatherings an ideology completely foreign to the basic American ideals of equality and justice for all, love of god and country'.

In fact, Ali was ahead of the established civil rights leaders and more in tune with feeling in the ghettos, where the real price of the war was being paid. On 29 March 1967, Martin Luther King met privately with Ali in Louisville and then publicly lauded his stand. On 4 April 1967, after much soul-searching, King came out against the war in a major speech in Riverside church in New York City. Three weeks later, Ali reported for induction in Houston. Three times he refused to answer the sergeant's call for 'Cassius Clay'. Then he signed a statement formally refusing induction on religious grounds. Afterwards, he told the press:

I am proud of the title 'World Heavyweight Champion' which I won in the ring in Miami on February 25, 1964. The holder of it should at all times have the courage of his convictions and carry out those convictions, not only in the ring but in all phases of his life.

Clearly, Ali had radically redefined his duties as a role model. The boxing authorities could not tolerate it. Without waiting for charges to be filed, no less a full trial, they stripped Ali of his title. *Ring* magazine declined to designate a fighter of the year because 'Cassius Clay', the obvious candidate for the award, 'is most emphatically not to be held up as an example to the youngsters of the United States'.

In June, Herbert Muhammad, Elijah's son and Ali's manager, brought together a number of black sports stars for a private meeting with Ali. Some observers were convinced that Herbert wanted the stars to persuade Ali to take the army's deal. If that was so, Herbert had seriously underestimated his fighter's determination. The stars, including football players Jim Brown and Willie Davis and basketball heroes Bill Russell and Lew Alcindor (who later changed his name to Kareem Abdul Jabbar), left the meeting deeply moved by Ali's sincerity and courage. They were also impressed by his ability to break the boundaries within which sports heroes were supposed to act. 'He gave so many people courage to test the system,' said Jabbar, 'a lot of us didn't think he could do it, but he did and succeeded every time.' For Russell, Ali was 'a man accepting special responsibilities'. He told the press:

I'm not worried about Muhammad Ali. He is better equipped than anyone I know to withstand the trials in store for him. What I'm worried about is the rest of us.

Ali was sentenced to five years in prison and a \$10,000 fine. He posted bail and began the three-year process of appeal, which was to take his case ultimately to the Supreme Court. In the meantime, he was forced out of boxing. To make a living, he gave lectures at colleges around the country, winning passionate support among student radicals, despite their disagreements with his homilies on the evils of integration, drugs and sex. 'Damn the money. Damn the heavyweight championship,' Ali told the students. 'I will die before I sell out my people for the white man's money.' Who could resist a pitch like that?

Symbolism and resistance

Besides inspiring thousands to resist the draft, Ali ignited a wave of protest among black sports stars. During the 1967-8 academic year, black athletes at thirty-seven white-dominated colleges and universities raised demands for more black coaches, facilities, cheerleaders and trainers. Bob Beamon, the future long jump record-setter, was dropped by his university coach for refusing to compete against the Mormon-run Brigham Young University (the Mormon doctrine at the time was explicitly racist). That year, black sports people came together to form the Olympic Project for Human Rights (OPHR), whose first demand was 'the restoration of Muhammad Ali's titles' (second was the removal of the racist Avery Brundage as head of the United States Olympic Committee and third was the exclusion of South Africa and Rhodesia from international competition).

Initially, OPHR advocated a black boycott of the Olympics but, when South Africa was banned, the focus turned to subverting the event from within. The potent symbolism of the Olympic podium – a celebration of individual excellence at the service of the nation-state – was diametrically opposed to the tenets of 'black consciousness' then spreading rapidly among black American sports people. It had to be challenged.

On 16 October 1968, at Mexico City, a supporter of OPHR, Tommie Smith, the 24-year-old son of a migrant labourer, captured the 200 metres Olympic Gold with a world record-breaking run. In third place was another OPHR supporter, John Carlos, a 23-year-old Harlemit. On the winners' podium, they bowed their heads and raised clenched fists during the US national anthem. Tommie Smith explained their gesture:

I wore a black right-hand glove and Carlos wore the left-hand glove of the same pair. My raised right hand stood for the power in black

America. Carlos' raised left-hand stood for the unity of black America. Together they formed an arch of unity and power. The black scarf around my neck stood for black pride. The black socks with no shoes stood for black poverty in racist America. The totality of our effort was the regaining of black dignity.

The need to overthrow the old role models had driven Smith and Carlos to invent a complex new symbolism. The rhetoric of individual victory and national glory was replaced by a language of solidarity that amounted to repudiation of the United States and all its works. Thousands of blacks had been lynched for less.

Smith and Carlos were ejected from the Olympic village, banned from the games and vilified at home. The problem for the authorities was that, as far as the public was concerned, Smith and Carlos were the world's number one and number three 200 metres men, just as Ali was the World Heavyweight Champion. They had won these distinctions in open and fair competition. Ali's support grew not only because the tide of opinion swung against the war, but because he could appeal to sport's egalitarian autonomy. Ali was the champ, according to the common understanding of the rules of the game and regardless of what the authorities said. When they staged elimination bouts for his 'vacant' title, Ali warned: 'Everyone knows I'm the champion. My ghost will haunt all the arenas. I'll be there, wearing a sheet and whispering, "Ali-e-e-e-! Ali-c-c-e-!"'

Ali was 25 years old when stripped of his crown and he spent twenty-nine months – when he was probably at the height of his powers – out of the ring. In June 1970, the Supreme Court reversed his earlier conviction because the FBI had, it transpired, illegally tapped his phone. By this time, many within the establishment had clearly become reluctant to send Ali to jail, but it was a close run thing. Had it been left to the president, Ali would have served his time. According to Jackie Robinson, a Republican confidante, 'Cassius Clay is Nixon's pet peeve'.

Throughout his ordeal, Ali received little assistance from the Nation of Islam. In 1969, Elijah Muhammad suspended Ali for nine months for saying on television that he would like to fight again. 'Mr. Muhammad Ali has sporting blood. Mr. Muhammad Ali desires to do that which the Holy Qur'an teaches him against. Mr. Muhammad Ali wants a place in the sports world.' And the final insult: 'We will call him Cassius Clay.'

Vindication

Readmitted to the ring, Ali lost to Joe Frazier in March 1971. Officially, Frazier was the champion and Ali the challenger; in reality,

as Frazier himself acknowledged, he would not be recognised as the true title-holder until he beat Ali. It was a brutal battle, the first of three they would contest over the next four years.

By now, Ali had mastered both the rhetoric of race and the symbolic power of the ring. He knew better than anyone how to combine the two to mobilise popular support (and sell tickets).

Frazier's no real champion. Nobody wants to talk to him. Oh, maybe Nixon will call him if he wins. I don't think he'll call me. But 98% of my people are for me. They identify with my struggle. Same one they're fighting every day in the streets. If I win, they win. I lose, they lose. Anybody black who thinks Frazier can whup me is an Uncle Tom.

The irony was that Frazier, who had grown up among the poorest of the black poor in South Carolina, had more genuine street cred than Ali, who treated him with disdain. He called Frazier 'an ignorant gorilla', language which, had it come from a white fighter, would have provoked a bitter reaction among black people.

Joe Frazier is too ugly to be champ. Joe Frazier is too dumb to be champ. The heavyweight champion should be smart and pretty, like me. Ask Joe Frazier, 'How do you feel, champ?'. He'll say, 'Duh, duh, duh.'

Frazier resented being cast by Ali as another Liston and, these days, is one of the very few people willing to say anything uncomplimentary about Ali in public.

Calling me an Uncle Tom; calling me the white man's champion. All that was phoneyess to turn people against me. He was helping himself, not black people. Ali wasn't no leader of black people ... A lot of people went to the fight that night to see Clay's head knocked off and I did my best to oblige them...

But this was precisely Joe Frazier's dilemma; the people who wanted him to beat Ali were the die-hard racists and the old-guard boxing establishment, both of whom had always resented Ali's uppityness. Frazier was a magnificent athlete whose tragedy was that he came along at a time when his only public profile was as a foil to Ali. His bitter complaint against Ali – that the latter stole his blackness from him – reveals how much had changed since the days of Liston and Patterson, not to mention Joe Louis and Jack Johnson. Blackness had become a positive attribute: a selling point for professional sports figures, a key to success on and off the level playing field. It was a tremendous achievement, and one that belonged in no small measure to Muhammad Ali.

The crown of that achievement was the Ali-Foreman fight in Zaire

in October 1974. After losing to Frazier, Ali had been written off, by enemies and friends alike, as a spent force. But his extraordinary resilience enabled him to come back, against the odds, to beat Frazier in another epic, exhausting contest in January 1974. He thus earned a title shot against the new heavyweight champion, George Foreman, widely thought to be the most formidable puncher in decades. Ten years after the Liston fight, at the age of 32, Ali once again found himself a no-hope underdog against a supposedly unstoppable powerhouse.

This man is supposed to annihilate me, but ten years ago they said the same thing about Sonny Liston. George Foreman don't stand a chance. The world is gonna bow down to me, because the stage is set...

Kinshasa was chosen as the venue for Africa's first heavyweight title fight. It became a self-consciously African affair, in keeping with the Africanism then fashionable among the black American middle class. It was also Don King's first venture into heavyweight boxing promotion. The ex-numbers' runner and mafia lackey had capitalised on his blackness to interpose himself between the fighters and the Mobutu government in Zaire. Ali loathed King and, a few years later, Muslim members of his entourage treated the crook to a richly deserved beating. But it was the Zaire fight which gave King his entrée to heavyweight promotion, a market he was able to corner after Ali's retirement.

Mobutu's purpose in staging the fight was, first, to strengthen his own grip over the country and, second, to promote it as a modern, go-ahead society that welcomed foreign capital. Pre-fight publicity emphasised the city's gleaming new skyscrapers, government buildings and boulevards, as well as the country's mineral wealth (diamonds and copper) and bright economic prospects. David Frost, hired by King to MC the closed circuit TV coverage, invoked the dynamism of technological advance by breathlessly repeating at every opportunity that the broadcast was coming *'live via satellite from Zaire, Africa'*.

Fifteen thousand people turned up just to watch the weigh-in, where Foreman tried to steal Ali's thunder by entering in an African robe. The fight itself was preceded by a lengthy exhibition of state-sponsored 'tribal' dancing. The Mobutu regime presented this as an affirmation of African tradition on the new global media stage; but it was also, like the fight that followed it, a commercial display of black bodies for the entertainment of a largely white television audience. The Zaire fight was one of the pioneer events in the creation of today's global telecommunications-based sports industry. It helped integrate Africa (just as Ali's later bout against Frazier in Manila helped integrate Asia) into the world system of modern sport, but, of course, it was integration as a subordinate. Looking back on the propaganda surrounding

the fight, its optimism about the new, post-colonial Africa taking a proud and independent place in the world market seems to belong to another world.

As an Ali fan, I saw the 'rumble in the jungle' (as Ali dubbed it) as a last, probably forlorn, attempt by my hero to recapture past glory. Subsequently, I learned that my feelings were not unique; the fight meant a great deal to many people on the Left. One friend of mine, an Asian community activist with no interest in boxing, came into central London to watch the fight at a cinema because Ali, to him, embodied a 'political concept of blackness'; another friend, a Jewish Trotskyist, did the same – because Ali and Khrushchev had been his boyhood heroes. Reading the sports pages in my furnished flat in Notting Hill Gate, I realised that only the most dedicated wishful thinkers gave the ageing ex-champ and '60s martyr any chance against Foreman. Ali, as always, was quick to exploit the lack of expectations:

You think the world was shocked when Nixon resigned?
Wait till I whup George Foreman's behind!

And so it came to pass. A 62,000 crowd (mostly Zaireans) watched Ali come out attacking in round one. After that, he spent most of his time leaning against the ropes – the 'rope-a-dope', he called it later – and covering his face as Foreman punched away at his body to little effect. Between rounds, Ali led the crowd in its simple deafening chant: 'Ali! Ali! Ali!' Taunting and gabbing to Foreman throughout, soaking up punishment that would have finished off almost anyone else, Ali blunted Foreman's offensive.

It was an astonishing display of total ring awareness. Ali hardly danced at all after the first round, but somehow he managed to lead the ever-advancing Foreman round and round. Even as ringside critics puzzled over his tactics, he was in complete control. At one point, as he took a fearsome pummelling in the ribs, Ali winked at the TV camera. Never was his supreme gamesmanship – holding, clinching, pushing, tying up and frustrating Foreman, while always staying just the right side of the law – better displayed. His blows were fewer than Foreman's, but they counted for more. The punches were swift, economical and accurate. One might almost call them delicate were it not for the telltale swellings on Foreman's face.

With thirty seconds left in round eight, Ali moved out from the ropes and suddenly nailed the tiring Foreman with a perfectly executed left-right combination that sent the champion tumbling to the floor. For a moment, Ali stood over him, bouncing on his toes, fists cocked to deliver more punishment if needed, snarling and supreme, his eyes afire with victory. David Frost was beside himself: 'The most joyous scene in the history of boxing! Muhammad Ali has won! Muhammad Ali has won!'

In Zaire, Ali lived up to and beyond every boast he had ever made. As sports writer Mike Katz said, it was 'the ultimate sports fantasy of all time'. Ali explained its appeal: 'People like to see miracles. People like to see underdogs that do it. People like to be there when history is made.' But there was more to it than that. This was a triumph of intelligence and sheer intensity of personality over impersonal brawn. It was also a triumph for principle and solidarity over expedience and selfishness. Because of that, all over the world, people felt Ali's triumph as their triumph.

In the wake of the Zaire fight, even Ali's old enemies had to admit he was truly 'the greatest'. *Ring* magazine finally named him 'fighter of the year'. *Sports Illustrated* declared him 'Sportsman of the Year'. He was invited to the White House to meet president Gerald Ford in what was widely seen as a symbol of post-Vietnam, post-Watergate national reconciliation. As the wave of protest receded and the black liberation movement stuttered to a halt, Ali seemed a less threatening figure. After Zaire, he became, according to Jim Brown, a 'darling of the media' and 'part of the establishment'.

In 1975, at the Frankfurt Book Fair, I finally saw Ali in the flesh. He was by no means the only celebrity to turn up at the fair to promote a book, but he attracted more attention than the rest of them combined. The publishing crowd does not form one of boxing's traditional constituencies, but they swarmed around the heavyweight champ like star-struck teeny-boppers. This is one of the few times in my life I have queued for an autograph. Like most of the others who surrounded Ali that day, the autograph was only an excuse to get close to the man, a chance to pay him homage. This was just as well, because the next day the autograph itself was pinched from my hotel room.

As I drew closer to Ali, I marvelled at the hugeness of his neck and shoulders. In the midst of what had rapidly become a mob scene, he sat quite still, scribbling his name over and over again. I realised that this must happen to him everywhere. At the time, he was probably the most famous human being on earth, adulated nearly everywhere as 'the Greatest'. Yet he seemed a modest man, bored but patient, accepting the duties of celebrity with good grace. Could it be that the most notorious boaster in the history of sport was, at the bottom of it all, a humble man? Certainly, that is what many of his closest friends have always insisted.

Boxing damned

Ali's last years in the ring were tragic. Some said he kept fighting for so long to make up for the time lost because of his opposition to the war in Vietnam. Others that his ego would not let him recognise the truth: that he was long past his best and could only tarnish his image.

However, no one can doubt that one of the main reasons Ali stayed in the fight game through the late '70s was that he needed the money. He had earned millions, but he had also given away millions. Ali was the original soft touch.

At one point, he even condescended to take part in a gimmick match against a Japanese wrestler. This was primarily a money-spinner, but it was also one of Ali's many efforts to make the 'world' in World Champion mean more than the 'world' in baseball's World Series. It proved an undignified spectacle, a humiliating falling-off from the rigour of true sporting competition. Ironically, here was Muhammad Ali, the man who had remade the image of the black sports hero, reduced to the depths of Joe Louis's wrestling exhibitions or Jesse Owens's races against horses. When Ali was subsequently vanquished by the inarticulate, inelegant Leon Spinks, it was clearly time to end the saga before it turned to farce. Instead, Ali returned to defeat an under-trained, coked-out Spinks in a fight that embarrassed all who saw it. His later come-back bout against Larry Holmes was even worse, not least for Holmes, an Ali devotee who tried his best to keep the 38-year-old former champion going through eleven rounds.

With the rollback of the social movements that had made Ali what he was in the 1960s, his politics lacked focus and became ever more confused. In 1980, president Carter sent him on a mission to Africa to drum up support for the US boycott of the Moscow Olympics. African politicians informed Ali, in no uncertain terms, that they regarded the US position as so much Cold War hypocrisy. Ali came back perplexed and embarrassed. In 1984, he backed Ronald Reagan for president, but was photographed with Jesse Jackson in 1988. In November 1990, he visited Iraq and persuaded Saddam Hussain to release fifteen of the US hostages he was holding in the build-up to the Gulf War. Over the years, Ali's Islam became more conventional and more devout.

Ali now suffers from Parkinson's syndrome, a motor disability which affects his speech and movement (but not, it is said, his intellectual capacities). This is a result of damage inflicted on the brain stem in the ring. If boxing is redeemed by having given us Muhammad Ali, then it must be damned by what it has done to him.

Ali's secret power

Racial, hierarchical symbolism has always been overlaid on sporting contests, especially boxing. This symbolism is imposed on the contestants from outside, by the same elite forces which shape public perceptions in other areas. As we have seen, Ali turned the process upside down. He became the master, rather than the servant, of boxing's symbolism and he did this by seeing himself as the servant of a greater cause.

In 1978, journalist Hunter S. Thompson suggested that Ali take on a white South African heavyweight in South Africa. Ali considered the proposal, thinking aloud before rejecting it. His reasoning was revealing. Yes, he would like to undertake the fight, provided that 'on that day there'd be equality in the arena' (i.e., he would not fight in front of a segregated crowd). Then he added another rider. 'If the masses of the country and the world were against it, I wouldn't go.' He was intrigued by, but also wary of, the symbolic dimensions of such a fight. 'What worries me is getting whupped by a white man in South Africa ... That's what the world needs ... me getting whupped by a white man in South Africa.' On the other hand, 'If I beat him too bad and then leave the country, they might beat up some of the brothers.' He concluded: 'I wouldn't fool with it. I'm a representative of black people ... It's too touchy – it's more than a sport when I get involved.'

This insight was the key to Ali's achievements. The politics were not an afterthought. They informed Ali's approach to his fights and ultimately his performance in the ring. According to Gary Smith of *Sports Illustrated*:

Ali understood that in order to be great you need something outside of yourself to flow into ... If you fight for yourself, maybe it's you against the world and that gives you fuel, but it will never give you the strength Ali had. Muhammad was fighting for more than himself. He fought for God; his mission was huge. And that's why, in places like Manila, he was able to prevail when other men would have lost.

Here is the source of the intense drama of Ali's fights. His whole personality was engaged and, through it, many of the great historical forces of the age made themselves felt in the ring.

The decline of the black sports star

Surveying contemporary black celebrities, Jim Brown, Ali's old ally, cannot disguise his contempt:

Take a look at black superstars today – Michael Jackson, Richard Pryor, Eddie Murphy – and look at them hiding behind the bushes with all the power they have. Watch them twist their mouths and make money and pretend, yet do virtually nothing but pay tokenism to black freedom. If Ali was Michael Jackson or Richard Pryor or Eddie Murphy, he'd risk everything for black people.

As for sport, it does indeed seem a steep decline from the days of Ali, Brown and Kareem Abdul Jabbar to those of Mike Tyson, Charles Barkley and Carl Lewis, from the black Olympians of 1968 to the elitist millionaires of the 'Dream Team' at Barcelona in 1992.

One reason for this decline has been the continuing growth of sports as big business and with it the escalation of financial rewards. This has placed an ever greater distance between the black masses and their heroes. Black stars have continued to make advances in sport, while the black community as a whole has suffered one reverse after another. Instead of acting as the cutting edge in the struggle for equality, the disproportionate black presence in major American sports merely reflects the increasing marginalisation of black people in the US economy. In 1992, an NCAA survey revealed that 40 per cent of college football players and 60 per cent of college basketball players were black. However, only 6 per cent of all students were black and 20 per cent of these were enrolled as athletes.

In the USA today, a young black male is murdered every fifty-five minutes. One in three black men aged 14-35 is in prison, on probation or waiting trial. Black communities are gripped by ever-deepening economic and social crisis. At the same time, explicitly racist ideology has returned amid an orgy of victim-bashing. The 1960s have been repudiated and caricatured. In this context, both the white establishment and black 'identity' politicians of various stripes have called on black male sports to perform, once again, as patriarchal role models. Accordingly, the heroes of the '90s wrap themselves in the flag and declare their Christian faith, while selling themselves to the highest bidder, Nike or Reebok. Nothing matters but the quest to win. There is no gospel but that of individual success.

Over the years, many black sport stars have emulated Ali's manner, but very few share his mission. We have the shadow of Ali's magnificent arrogance, without the substance of his inspirational rage. Take the black British fighter, Chris Eubank. In his vanity and play-acting, he seems the disciple of Ali, but his insistence that boxing is only a way to make money, and a nasty, unpleasant way at that, has made him something else, a kind of anti-boxer. By declaring openly that he will only fight really dangerous opponents if the price is right, he devalues his own title. In thus exposing boxing for what it is, he may be doing a service, but his message to the black communities is ambiguous. He poses as an English gentleman and the only goal in life he recognises is the acquisition of wealth. Where Ali was generous, Eubank is miserly; where Ali identified himself with the black poor, Eubank wants to be seen as having risen above his racial and class origins. Confronted in a television studio by a number of black youths from Moss Side, Eubank told them the secret of success was to 'be good'. One of the youths replied, 'I can't box. So I can be as "good" as anyone else and still not have a job and still get harassed by police.' Eubank, for once, was silent.

Recently, at what appeared to be a well-rehearsed, pre-fight press conference, the Irish boxer, Steven Collins, accused Eubank of ignoring

his roots. Eubank retorted by charging Collins with racism and threatening a 'fight to the death' – an unfortunate choice of words given the brain damage Eubank inflicted on Michael Watson. Eubank may or may not have been trying to rebuild his bridges to the black population, but he was certainly trying to boost interest in the Sky TV-sponsored bout with Collins by invoking the spectre of racial conflict. The stereotypes and role models that Ali shattered and reconstructed have become mere playthings for the likes of Eubank, no different from his monocle and cravat.

Today, boxing is sliding back into the second rank of modern sports. A bewildering variety of title-conferring authorities have stripped any meaning from the designation 'World Champion'. Fights are made for the convenience of promoters and media executives and their quality is often poor. Fighters still run the risk of death and disability. The most important black person in boxing is Don King, a role model embodying the morals of a ghetto crack lord. But it is important to remember that the rapist Mike Tyson, King's prize possession, is as much the creation of those two white gentlemen of the ring, Cus D'Amato and Jim Jacobs, who discovered and trained him, as of the Brooklyn ghetto or Don King himself. As Barbara Koppel's film on Tyson makes clear, his perception of women as commodities, as objects purely for his pleasure, was a product of boxing's big money culture and its glamorisation of individual, male power.

Modern sport liberated physical play from the chains of ritual and religion, but ultimately encased it in another prison, of money and status and the global market-place. If modern sport is not to descend into mere post-modern spectacle, in which a Chris Eubank fight is much the same as an episode of 'Gladiators', then perhaps we need a second liberation, in which the egalitarian premise of modern sport is truly fulfilled. In the struggle for that second liberation, I am sure that much inspiration will be drawn, in the years to come, from the story of Muhammad Ali.

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Africa in the World **The 1945 Pan-African Congress and its aftermath**

The Manchester Civic Celebration **13 to 15 October 1995**

The Fifth Pan-African Congress, held in Manchester in 1945, inspired many African and Caribbean leaders in their struggles for independence and became a pacemaker for decolonisation in Africa and the West Indies. An international civic celebration marking the fiftieth anniversary of that Congress will include performances of African plays and music, arts exhibitions and a wide range of cultural and educational activities and distinguished public lectures.

Pan-African Directions, an international conference to be held at the Manchester Town Hall from 13 to 15 October 1995, will take stock of current debate on some of the Fifth Congress's themes. Planned sessions include:

Imperialism and Racism Fifty Years On
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Black Women and Struggle
Trade Unions
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Pan-Africanism and the Diaspora
Post-colonial or Neo-colonial Experience and the Pan-African Promise

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To take part in **Pan-African Directions**, present a paper, lead a workshop, promote any other relevant activity, or simply to attend, contact the Coordinator:

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CHRIS SEARLE

Lara's innings: a Caribbean moment

I tole him over an' over
agen: *watch de ball, man*, watch
de ball like it hook to you eye

when you first goes in an' you doan know de pitch.
Uh doan mean to *poke*
but you jes got to *watch what you doin*;

this isn't no time for playin'
the fool nor makin' no sport; this is cricket!
Edward Brathwaite: *Islands*¹

On 18 April 1994 at St John's, Antigua, Brian Lara, a young Trinidadian cricketer, knelt and kissed its Caribbean earth, and his people rejoiced.

He had gone beyond the furthest boundary, scoring 375, more runs in a single innings of an international match than any previous player, with a powerful one-footed pull that crashed the ball against the legside boundary fence. The man whose score he had surpassed, the Barbadian Gary Sobers, walked out to the centre of the ground and embraced him. Antiguan and other Caribbean people watching the drama engulfed and feted him and his young Indo-Guyanese batting partner, Shivnarine Chanderpaul. The Antiguan police, called out to control

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them, guarded Lara like a 'national treasure',² while joining in the celebrations of a scattered nation finding its centre. For this nation, Lara's kneeling to the earth was more than an act of patriotism: it was a sacred moment. The team of the old colonial power, defeated by Lara's strength, creativity and epic concentration, stood around the Antiguan field and beheld.

The team of the Caribbean, watching from their pavilion, marvelled and celebrated: from Jamaica and Guyana, from Barbados, Antigua and Trinidad. Also, there was wicket-keeper Junior Murray, the first Grenadian to be part of a West Indies test side. In the midst of this joy, the words of Lara's late countryman, C.L.R. James, from *Beyond a Boundary* blew in the sea breezes across the Antigua Recreation Ground: 'What do they know of cricket who only cricket know? West Indians crowding to tests bring with them the whole past history and future hopes of the islands.'³ For Brian Lara had done more than all the imperial ritual re-enactments of Columbus's 1492 landfall upon the Americas, staged across the region two years before, could ever accomplish. He had touched the collective Caribbean brain and heart of a dispersed people and fuelled their unity and hope. As the Barbadian Brathwaite had written over two decades before, the spectacle of cricket had provoked a sudden new regional pride and confidence – as it had done at Lord's in 1950 or after the 'Blackwash' of England in 1980:

All over de groun' fellers shakin' hands wid each other
as if was *they* wheelin' de willow
as if was *them* had the power.⁴

The context

More needs to be said about the particular context of this moment in the Caribbean. The young black Englishman, Chris Lewis, who had bowled the ball to which Lara had swivelled and then pulled decisively to the legside boundary for his record score, was himself from an Afro-Guyanese family of the diaspora. One of Lewis's team-mates, Mark Ramprakash, was a Londoner whose father is Indo-Guyanese. Watching from the English dressing-room, and foolishly omitted from the team by the English selectors, was a man born in Jamaica whose family emigrated to Sheffield in Yorkshire – Devon Malcolm. According to the great Jamaican fast bowler, Michael Holding (now retired and writing in the regional cricket journal), Malcolm was the one English bowler who had threatened Lara's ascendancy in a previous test match encounter, exposing a 'detectable flaw' in Lara's failure to deal with the sheer pace and 'line of attack' of rising balls coming in towards his body.⁵ Thus, the Caribbean was unequivocally a part of English cricket, too. Like the English health and transport

systems, it could not function effectively without the essential Caribbean contribution. Lara's achievement had also been integrally linked to the diaspora: it was something much more than a routine meeting of two sporting nations; it transcended a historically-charged confrontation between the ex-colonisers and the decolonised. Now the Caribbean was on both sides.

This truth was exemplified most forcibly during England's final test match against South Africa (now readmitted into international cricket after the end of formal apartheid) in August 1994. Along with Devon Malcolm's match-winning bowling of nine wickets for fifty-seven runs in the second innings, which, in Malcolm's own words, 'made history', of the still all-white South African team, nineteen of the twenty South African wickets fell to bowlers of Caribbean origin. In the October 1994 issue of *Wisden's Cricket Monthly*, normally a staunchly establishment journal, a poem called 'Irresistible', written by one Paul Weston, was published. Referring to the 'whipped-up cream of Devon', the poet ingeniously contrived the following verse:

For every Bok who took a lick
Was rendered copiously sick,
Their faces whiter than their shirts
Struck down by Malcolm's just desserts.

Such admiration from the white sports media was unusual for a black cricketer who, as Stephen Brenkly of the *Independent on Sunday* had put it, 'had been written off more times than he had been written up' and who, at a function at Buckingham Palace in 1991 when both the West Indian and England teams had been invited, had been asked by the Duke of Edinburgh himself, 'Why are you wearing an England blazer?'

In *Beyond a Boundary*, James had written of the pioneer English cricketer, W.G. Grace, that he 'was strong with the strength of men who are filling a social need'. If only the old agitator could have seen Lara's innings and experienced its impact within Trinidad and across the Caribbean! As Lara returned to Piarco airport in his home island on the night after the test match ended, a huge crowd awaited him. Prime minister Patrick Manning called it a 'redletter night' and the next day was designated 'National Achievement Day', with all schools having a holiday and Lara traversing the two-island state in a motorcade. President of Trinidad and Tobago Noor Hassanali presented him with the Trinity Cross, the highest national honour. An elated prime minister also announced that he could have a house of his choice, and a street in Independence Square, Port of Spain, was renamed 'Brian Lara Boulevard'. Lara, like James a boy from a small settlement in the hinterland, was presented with the keys of the city by the mayor of Port of Spain. And all this in a country that has often been slow to give

public recognition to its own great national figures, such as its writers James and Selvon. In these scenes of festivity, Lara travelled side by side with his team-mate, Chanderpaul, making a tableau of Afro-Caribbean and Indo-Caribbean unity against the communalism that has often plagued political progress in Trinidad and Guyana. It was a felicitous public expression of James's assertion in *Beyond a Boundary*: 'The cricketer needs to be returned to the community.'

And this community was a regional and international one wherein the shout of Maurice Bishop could be heard: 'One Caribbean!' The Barbadian daily paper *Nation* printed on its front page a photograph of Sobers with an affectionate arm around Lara's shoulders, and wrote in its editorial: 'In years to come, Caribbean people of this period will refer to the events of yesterday at the Antigua Recreation Ground with great relish and pride. The distinction of being the scorer of the highest individual number of runs in a test match was transferred from the shoulders of our own Sir Garfield Sobers and now rests on the shoulders of our own Brian Lara.'⁶ In Jamaica, Tony Becca, cricket correspondent of the *Gleaner*, wrote: 'When, years from now, the fans talk about the highest individual innings of all time ... they will remember the strokes that glittered in the Antiguan sunshine. What will keep flashing in the mind's eye forever were the drives and cuts, the hooks and pulls of Lara, strokes which sparkled like diamonds and which will also last forever.'⁷ The Antiguan socialist and cricket enthusiast, Tim Hector, wrote in the *Outlet*:

What an event Lara's innings was – the acuity of mind, the athleticism, the economy of movement and motion, using the bat for his brushwork, a bat commonly used by boy and girl. Boy and girl in the Caribbean, and maybe well beyond, will be lifted to new heights, for Lara is the beginning of something new.⁸

Island and race, nationality and gender suddenly fused in these words of a Caribbean morning, and cricket was their spur. And the words followed the diaspora. The most commonly published photograph of the Antiguan events across the world where cricket is played was of Lara kissing the pitch. 'Sealed with a kiss' headlined the London *Daily Mail*, and Australia's *Adelaide Advertiser* declared, 'Lara's greatness sealed with a kiss'. In Canada, the *Toronto Star* highlighted the innings, and even across the USA, where cricket is a relative rarity, Caribbean migrants and exiles could read about Lara in *Newsweek* or *Sports Illustrated* and watch the news of his achievement on the CNN cable network. In England, even that habitual peddler of sporting racism, the *Sun*, suddenly and uncharacteristically changed from vulgarity to a more sophisticated, even poetic, mode:

...he shattered one of the oldest and most majestic records in sport,

he made the world stand still. He temporarily cleared troubled minds of war and want, of conflict and poverty, prejudice and greed.

He deals in numbers beyond the imagination, the comprehension and reach of almost every batsman who has lived ... Go and see him, watch a genius at work.⁹

It was as if Lara's batting had also transfixed what Bishop used to call the 'saltfish' establishment press of the Caribbean, as well as strangely affecting the tabloid mammoths of the old seat of empire.

Other more authentic voices across the Caribbean and through its diaspora communities were raised in praise of Lara. Writing to the *Caribbean Cricket Quarterly* and island newspapers were cricket-loving letter-writers from across the region, from Dominica to Montego Bay, from New Amsterdam in Guyana to Belize. Many of these correspondents praised Lara as an example to Caribbean youth, as a role model in a region sinking deeper into US cultural influences and a drugs ethos. From Edwin Scott in Penal, Trinidad, came typical sentiments:

What impressed me most about Brian Lara's great innings in Antigua was not his strokes or his concentration. What I found very revealing was the tributes he paid to those who helped him in his career and how he made special mention of his parents and his family.

A lot of young sportsmen tend to get very swell-headed and self-centred when they achieve not a quarter of what Lara has. He is an example to all our youth, not only in the way he bats but the way he conducts himself.¹⁰

Filling the need

Yet in more than a cricketing sense, Lara's innings – all 768 minutes of it – had come with a deep breath of relief across the Caribbean. Starting to bat from what Barbadian cricket writer Tony Cozier called a 'base of potential crisis',¹¹ he had rescued the West Indies' first innings in Antigua after the loss of two early wickets – while facing the aftermath of the previous test match which had been lost in Barbados. This was but the microcosm on the cricket field of a more general social crisis, for there were wider and deeper sloughs that the Caribbean people and their progressive spirit had been mired in over the previous decade. The revolutionary defeats and setbacks suffered in Grenada and Nicaragua, the tightening squeeze of the US upon Cuba, the collapse of the Left in Jamaica and its weakening in Trinidad were all lodged within the consciousness of the region. And, in Lara's homeland, the violent and futile lunge at power in 1990 by the Jamaat-al-Muslimeen sect had

followed months of humiliating exposures of rampant corruption at the government level, in the shape of the Tesoro scandals.¹² The Trinidadian soca artiste, David Rudder, had satirised such sordid depths in his 'Panama', singing of those who made their dishonest thousands and then moved elsewhere to spend and benefit from them:

Dem rich Trinidadians show me
 Dis whole El Dorado ting
 Dey say dey living here like lords
 But den dey gone to live there like kings
 As dey get a little money in dey pocket...¹³

It had been ten years of US domination, through IMF and World Bank structural adjustment packages and attacks on local dependent economies, as well as cultural offensives through religious evangelism, tourism, food, music and information. And there was also what Tim Hector called 'the increasing influence of Americanised sport in the region'.¹⁴

Rudder had seen this loss of strength directly manifested in cricket. In his calypso, 'Rally round the West Indies', he had related it to externally organised attempts to confuse and divide Caribbean people by insularity, 'conflict and confusion' – as well as the making of new 'restrictions and laws' to undermine directly the West Indies' cricketing strengths, particularly the efficacy and power of its squad of fast bowlers. Yet, even in 1988, he could point forward to a cultural breakthrough through cricket, remembering James:

in the end we shall prevail
 this is not just cricket...
 This thing goes
 Beyond the boundaries

and could even anticipate the new era of Lara and the devastating Antiguan fast bowler, Curtly Ambrose, another destroyer of English cricket hopes in the Caribbean in 1994:

Pretty soon runs will flow again like water
 Bringing so much joy
 To each and every son and daughter
 So we going to rise again like a raging fire
 As the sun shines
 You know we got to take it higher!

When James wrote that 'if and when society regenerates itself, cricket will do the same', he gave an implicit message to the Caribbean people: watch your cricket, study it too, for it will tell you where you are and where you could go. This is not a fiction – so integral is cricket to the national spirit of the English-speaking Caribbean. It gives the

one enduring image of unity and aspiration, as well as inter-island cooperation. It is also an emblem, almost an icon, across Caribbean life that has been rendered even more powerful by the spectacular contribution of Lara. When the Barbadian government came to present an official gift to the first legitimate president of South Africa, Nelson Mandela, upon his inauguration in May 1994, it was an oil painting depicting Sobers driving a cricket ball. Even the baseball-loving Fidel Castro became involved in the cricket life of Cuba's sister islands in April 1994, during a visit to Barbados for a UN conference on sustainable development for small island states. *Caribbean Cricket Quarterly* described this bizarre yet unifying event in its region's cultural history:

As his entourage drove past a ground in the Holder's Hill district on his way to the Sandy Lane Hotel where he was staying, Castro ordered his car's driver to stop. He got out, an aide went onto the field to speak to the umpires and it was agreed that the famous and unexpected guest could have the chance of playing the game for himself. Play in the Barbados Cricket League match between St John the Baptist and Police was temporarily halted. Castro, in military uniform, faced and missed three balls from a Police bowler and bowled a couple of deliveries before thanking his hosts and taking his leave.¹⁵

Inventiveness and concentration

If there were two particular qualities that marked Lara's innings in Antigua directing the Trinidadian's speed of wrist and hand, and the prodigiously high backlift which gave his drives such force, they were confidence and concentration.* During the 1993 tour of Australia, Lara had scored 277 at Sydney and caused Sobers to change his mind about whether his record score could ever be passed. There were few batsmen playing, he had declared, 'with the necessary depth of concentration to stay at the crease for ten hours or more and aim for a score of 300 plus'.¹⁶ After watching Lara bat at Sydney, he thought again. For Lara, and particularly for his mother, confidence was not a problem. Pearl Lara saw her son's innings as ordained, as a gift of God, and remained utterly unsurprised by his achievement, declaring that she knew it would happen from when he was a boy. Lara himself had remained composed all through his time at the wicket, building his score consciously, fifty by fifty, his confidence being expressed in the way that he described his reaction to the ball that gave him his record-breaking boundary. Recalling Lewis's bowling approach to him, he

* Qualities that the Hampshire captain, Mark Nicholas, had seen as an expression of Lara's 'outstanding cricketing brain'.

said: 'The minute I saw him running in to bowl that ball, the energy I saw him putting in – I kind of predicted it was going to be short. I latched on to it pretty early and got it away.'¹⁷ As for concentration, Michael Holding compared Lara with the great Caribbean batsman of the previous decade, Viv Richards of Antigua. Whereas 'Lara still manages to keep his concentration no matter what his score, and never seems to become distracted', Holding sees Richards' genius as more adventurous and less disciplined: 'After he had been out in the middle for a few hours doing as he pleased, he would start looking to do something different and lose his wicket through carelessness.'¹⁸

These two, often counterbalancing, approaches to Caribbean cricket have also formed a dialectic for decades. They fascinated James, who knew that studying the way a people played their cricket meant that 'much, much more than cricket is at stake'. His friend, collaborator and great Trinidadian all-rounder, Learie Constantine, personified the creative genius of the Caribbean and its cricket in the years between the two world wars. Utterly inventive in his approach to batting, he made brilliant strokes with 'no premeditated idea' of making them, and thus continued a tradition in Trinidad begun by Wilton St Hill who, to the cricket-loving people of his island, was 'our boy' in the way that Lara is today. According to James, St Hill would 'invent' a stroke on the spot – like Rohan Kanhai and his falling-down pull of the 1960s – and Constantine added that this 'slender boy flashed his wrists and the ball flew to the boundary faster than sound'.¹⁹ Yet in international cricket, St Hill failed sadly and Constantine, despite his snatches of brilliance, never scored a century in a test match and could not sustain his domination over the bowling for long periods. James knew that with such erratic cricketing talent the Caribbean was 'still in the flower garden of the gay, spontaneous, tropical West Indians'. And, he added wryly, 'we need some astringent spray'. That came initially with the concentrated and disciplined batting of the Jamaican George Headley during the 1930s, and was followed by the 'Three Ws' – Weekes, Worrell and Walcott – in the 1950s, by Sobers and Kanhai in the 1960s and Greenidge, Lloyd, Richards and Haynes in the '70s and '80s. But the apotheosis of Caribbean batting stamina, as well as creative confidence in the fierce pulling, hooking, powerful cuts and drives, has come with the 375 runs in Antigua of Brian Lara. His innings provides an image of relentless application and will, of concentration and colossal physical and mental effort. 'I believe every great batsman is a special organism,' pronounced James, and Lara has become a living symbol of dedicated striving, fused with a virtually peerless technique, that will serve towards countering the self-critical fear in the Caribbean – made, for example, by the Barbadian cricket spectator in Brathwaite's 'Rites'. This is the fear that continued in the wake of the murder of Walter

Rodney, the self-devouring collapse of the Grenada Revolution after so much promise and achievement, and the violent fiasco in Port of Spain's Red House in July 1990 when the Muslimeen attempted their futile coup:

when things goin' good, you cahn touch
we, but leh murder start
an' ol man, you cahn fine a man to hole up de side...²⁰

Lara and Caribbean hope

Writing in the *Outlet*, Tim Hector invested Lara's innings with the heraldry of a profound hope and optimism. He recalled the all-round brilliance of Sobers and his 365 against Pakistan in Jamaica in 1958 as a product of the Caribbean federal and liberating impulse of the time – which gave birth to the short-lived West Indian Federation, the Cuban Revolution of 1959 and the cultural flowering of Naipaul, Wilson, Harris and Lamming in literature and the Mighty Sparrow in calypso. And he pointed towards a new era signalled by Lara's achievement:

I would want to think that Lara's innings put behind us the conditionalities of the IMF with its structural adjustment that has structured Caribbean people out of their own economy and history. They will return centre stage after Lara because Caribbean history can be divided into BL (Before Lara) and AL (After Lara).

After Lara, there will come in this part of the world a new creative impulse, rejecting the Ramboisation of life and living which now plagues our cracking or crumbling economies.²¹

Optimism indeed, but not groundless optimism, for these are the thoughts of a tireless Caribbean activist, a veteran doer who knows well his people and their culture. Those who do not know cricket and its beckonings and symbols may well say to themselves or each other, 'What is all this?' But, as James wrote and Hector knows, others, like Frank Worrell, the first regular black captain of the West Indies, have 'cleared the way with bat and ball' for the struggling people of the Caribbean, and new cricketing generations will do likewise in completely new contexts. The key to Hector's hopes lies in James's assertion that 'the cricketer needs to be returned to the community' – for there are many alternative forces waiting to consume such talent as that of Lara and the temptations of big money are enormous and potentially corrupting, as Caribbean cricket already knows well. They destroyed the previous West Indies triple centurion, the Jamaican Lawrence Rowe, who became a Caribbean hero after his innings of 302 against England in Barbados in 1974. Rowe took the repugnant step of leading a cricket tour to South Africa and promoting apartheid by breaching

the sporting boycott of the racist regime. Now Brian Lara is the hottest potential acquisition in world cricket, and companies across the Caribbean and beyond are thrusting to sponsor him and milk his achievement. His prodigious batting exploits while playing English county cricket for Warwickshire during the summer of 1994, including the highest ever individual first-class cricket score (501 made against Durham at Edgbaston in June 1994), have made him even more of a prize for multinational corporations. Early contracts promoting Coca-Cola and '501' jeans presage one potentially dangerous direction – the ordinary people of the Caribbean and its diaspora, their hopes and aspirations, stand on another road and they have claimed Lara as their own. He is 'their boy' and his bat strikes for their future.

But the temptations towards a multifaceted exploitation of Lara's achievement, in a US-dominated carnival of profit and graft, are only too real and enticing for those in the *comprador* economies of the Caribbean. It is a true test match for cricket, as well as for Lara. For if sport, particularly a sport so integral to the regional psyche as cricket is to the Caribbean, is to remain, as James saw it, both a spur and reflector, and not a deflector, of political and social reality, it must stay close to the people, to the community of those who love it and play it on recreation grounds and pitches improvised from pastures in villages all through the English-speaking Caribbean, to those who have transformed it from the imperial game and made it their own. If not, it becomes for that same community what Learie Constantine once wrote it could be, 'a hasheesh ... a drug in their poverty-stricken and toiling lives'²² – not the mirror which James saw into, but a clouded glass that reveals only cultural theft and the oppression of the new imperialism of the north.

A place in the world

As Lara played his innings in Antigua, another pathmaking Trinidadian died on their island. This was Sam Selvon, novelist, playwright and short story writer, of whom James said, 'He has an ear for the West Indian language, the West Indian speech that is finer than anything that I have ever heard.'²³ In the 1950s, Selvon's writing, in particular his re-creation of the ordinary speech of Trinidadians at home and as arrivants in London, had broken through the imposed, 'correct' and often lifeless version of English spoken and vindicated by the coloniser and his education system. The real world of Trinidad's people and their creole tongue – its images, its wit and tenderness, its beauty, energy and irrepressible national spirit – burst through in the narrative of Selvon's works: *A Brighter Sun* (1952), *The Lonely Londoners* (1956) and *Ways of Sunlight* (1957). Like Lara's cricket, his writing was made in the bloodstream of the Caribbean, in the villages 'behin' God back' like

Cantaro, near Santa Cruz, Trinidad, Lara's own birthplace. As one of Selvon's characters expounds in his play, *Highway in the Sun*:

Whatever it is, what do you expect to happen in this half-dead village? One day just like another. Is only in England and America big things does happen.²⁴

But every village has its cricket pitch, has its young people that can be other Brian Laras. That is what Selvon teaches us, and James too – the boy who formed his politics watching village cricketers like Matthew Bondman and Arthur Jones through his parents' bedroom window, cutting and driving on the recreation ground outside – that everywhere there is excellence and power in the ordinary, in the community of humans, in the languages that they speak and in their bodies which they move for work, pleasure and achievement. It had been the working-class Australians of town and outback who had adopted Donald Bradman as 'their boy' and their living anti-colonial symbol after his record-breaking scores of the early 1930s. Like the cricket lovers of Antigua who ran onto the pitch in a passionate embrace as Lara kissed the ground in April 1994, sealing what T.S. Eliot once described as 'the intersection of a timeless moment',²⁵ so thousands of working people in London, like my father, also fled from work and risked a sacking to see Len Hutton, a shy 21-year-old batsman from a Yorkshire village, score the final runs to overcome Bradman's record score at the Oval in the summer of 1938, on the threshold of the war against Hitler, and then to see Bradman, with the same 'grace and consideration'²⁶ as Gary Sobers, shake Hutton's hand in the middle of the pitch.

But back to Selvon, for his death on one Caribbean island coincided with a massive blast of life upon another. The Trinidadian novelist, Earl Lovelace, another beautiful user of his people's language as expressed in *The Dragon Can't Dance* or *The Wine of Astonishment*, who helped to clear the trail blazed by Selvon, takes up the narrative:

Sam had talked almost in a voice of bewildered hurt of what he was seeing in Trinidad. Something had gone dreadfully wrong. And that is why I believe it must have given him great pleasure and renewed hope that at his passing the young batsman Lara was playing his historic innings in Antigua. I don't think it's out of place to claim that as a stone in the monument for a man whose work was one of the earliest expressions of the West Indian's unconditional self-confidence and demands for a place in the world.²⁷

For that is what Brian Lara's success truly signified, like Selvon's liberation of language, Bishop's and Rodney's struggles or James's lifetime of luminous insights, an 'unconditional self-confidence and demand for a place in the world'. And those who will follow and

emulate Lara's innings must strive to transform his moment into their era.

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Racism and sport in Australia

Sport is a mirror of many things. It illuminates political, social, economic and legal systems. It reflects the Aboriginal experience, especially since 1850. In the land of sporting obsession, playing fields are *not* where most people expect to find, or want to see, racial discrimination. Yet sport is a measure of Australian racism.

To look beyond the immediacy of the oval and the ring is to find central issues: who is or is not Aboriginal; the policies and practices of protection-segregation, paternalism, assimilation, integration and Aboriginal autonomy; and the continuity of some gross inequalities, even in the civil and human rights eras.

The phrase 'from plantation to playing field' expresses the history of black American sport. With abolition of slavery in the 1860s and enactment of civil rights laws in the 1960s, came greater participation – and triumph. Aboriginal history has been the reverse. Sport, particularly cricket, flourished when there was relative freedom from legislative control – but so did genocide. Aborigines were to go from playing field to plantation or, rather, to institution called settlement, reserve, mission or pastoral property. It was a long period of incarceration. Most achievement followed abolition of special laws and the chance to escape isolation.

Decades of 'freedom'

Cricket was the only universal sport during the 'freedom period':

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football was barely organised and only corrupt boxing and professional athletics were sporting 'avenues'. A glimpse of cricket at this time is followed by a focus on sports people who symbolise the Aboriginal experience in each decade from the 1860s to the 1990s.

Remarkably, Aborigines played talented and enthusiastic cricket in eras which, while 'free' legally, saw geographic isolation, rigid missionary control, settler animus, poor diet, rampant illness and, of course, killing.

In 1850, Reverend Matthew Blagden Hale's vision was to protect Aborigines from 'a vicious portion of the white population' (and from 'the wild portion of the blacks'). At Poonindie, 70km from South Australia's Port Lincoln, he would 'train them in the habits of civilised life'. To overcome a 'native temperament' said to be distressed by 'continuous labour', illness and 'flagging spirits', he introduced cricket. The team did well, winning all but one of its local matches.

In Adelaide in 1872, the Anglican bishop attended a match between Poonindie and 'the scholars of the Collegiate School of St Peter'. Cricket, wrote Bishop Short, proved 'incontestably that the Anglican aristocracy of England and the "noble savage" who ran wild in the Australian woods are linked together in *one brotherhood of blood* – moved by the same passions, desires, and affections...' Not so. Legal and physical separation of Aborigines was already under way. Increasing ill-health, white complaints and pressure from farmers to acquire the Aboriginal land saw the mission close in 1895.

In Victoria, the Coranderrk people proved themselves as farmers, musicians, political demonstrators, Christians and cricketers. Successful crop growers, their land was always coveted by neighbours. A Royal Commission (1877) and a Parliamentary Board of Inquiry (1887) listened to their plight. The conservative *Age* newspaper viewed them as happy, virtuous and industrious amid the carnage that saw others 'shot down, starved, poisoned, corrupted in body and soul'.

Natalie Roberts, wife of Coranderrk's last manager, did not like Aborigines: one could not change these 'savage and nomadic people' – but 'their singing was sweet, mellow and appealing' and they had 'a love of sport, so natural to the race'. A similar sentiment was expressed by the famous British naturalist, H.N. Moseley, who visited in 1874. He saw them as 'incorrigibly lazy', gleeful when the plough broke down. However:

We found the cricket party in high spirits, shouting with laughter, rows of spectators being seated on logs and chaffing the players with all the old English sallies: 'Well hit!' 'Run it out!' 'Butter fingers!' etc ... The men were all dressed as Europeans; they knew all about Mr W.G. Grace and the All-England Eleven.

The Coranderrk people won the land war but lost their harvesters. The

expulsion of 'half-castes' from reserves – the 'forced assimilation' policy – had begun. By 1895, more than sixty adults were expelled, and all dependent children were sent away at the age of 14. By the 1920s, Coranderrk was finished. Today, a quarter-acre remains as a cemetery; the rest is white, suburban Healesville.

Cummeragunja ('Cummera') began as a private mission in 1874. Daniel Matthews, an Echuca merchant, ran the original Maloga Mission on strict religious principles. He was also prone to beating eloping girls. He resented their growing 'manifest ingratitude'. For him – in contrast to Matthew Hale and Abbot Salvado in Western Australia – cricket was 'an uncivilising activity'. The Aborigines saw things differently. Matthews' biographer, Nancy Cato, wrote: 'They had discovered that their prowess in sport, particularly in cricket and running, gave them a passport to the white man's world, even to his respect and friendship.' Matthews tried to withhold the passports.

In the mid-1880s, the New South Wales (NSW) Aborigines Protection Board was urged to follow Victoria's practice of expelling 'half-castes'. Begun in earnest in 1910, by 1918 the enforced removal of 'lighter caste youngsters' was in full swing.

'Cummera' is both a mystery and a marvel. In 1888, the population was only 134, reaching 394 in 1908. Yet their sporting (and political) success was phenomenal: in cricket; in professional running (pedestrianism), producing Doug and Dowie Nicholls, the numerous Briggs brothers, Alf Morgan, and world sprint champion Lynch Cooper; in Australian rules football, again through Doug Nicholls. In 1929, Nicholls won 100 guineas (Aust\$210) in twelve seconds in the 120-yard Warracknabeal Gift; in 1928, the total income for Cummera's 140 people – from all sources – was Aust\$1,164.

That a Spanish Benedictine monk viewed cricket as a civilising force was remarkable. In 1879, at New Norcia Mission, the much admired Lord Abbot Dom Salvado introduced the game to the people he described as 'these poor natives, so hideous to look at.' Daisy Bates was moved to write:

Cricketing patrons and lovers of the sport gathered in their hundreds to watch the Aboriginal players; and wherever the team went it was treated as a body of sportsmen and gentlemen, for such is the Kingdom of cricket.

Nicknamed 'the Invincibles', and coached only by a local grazier, they walked 100km each way to Perth and Fremantle to play. By 1905, it was all over. In 1904, the Queensland Protector of Aborigines, W.E. Roth, reported on legislation for the West: it was time 'to bring Aboriginal-white relations more securely under the rule of the law'. The *Aborigines Act*, and all its restrictions, followed in 1905. In 1909, the Western Australia Protector decreed:

I would not hesitate for one moment to separate any half-caste from its Aboriginal mother, no matter how frantic her momentary grief might be at the time. They soon forget their offspring.

Therein lies the personal story of a great many Aboriginal sports achievers.

Queensland settlers killed some 10,000 Aborigines between 1824 and 1908. The British high commissioner complained to the prime minister of England about the 'wholesale butchery' of Aborigines. Men of refinement, he wrote, talk of the 'individual murder of natives, exactly as they talk of a day's sport, or having to kill some troublesome animal'.

In the 1890s, Aborigines were playing cricket in and around Deebling Creek, near Ipswich, Queensland. Townspeople felt that 'every encouragement should be given to our ebony brethren'. Amid the slaughter, people came to watch the play. They 'behaved like white gentlemen', said the *Queensland Times*. The Deebling Creek team won a major trophy in 1895 and then played the National Cricket Union in Brisbane. The colonial secretary (about to receive Royal Commissioner Archibald Meston's report on the need to stop the genocide) sent the Aborigines two bats 'in appreciation of their excellent behaviour and smart turn-out'.

Strict isolation was Meston's solution. Despite his love of sport, he did not like cricket or Deebling Creek. The *Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of Sale of Opium Act* followed in 1897. Protector Roth began sending Ipswich Aborigines far and wide: they were 'malcontents' who had 'evidently been too much encouraged in competition with Europeans in the way of cricket matches ... and have been treated socially far above their natural station in life'. Even the great Albert (Alec) Henry, a Deebling Creek man who played seven Sheffield Shield games for Queensland between 1901 and 1904, was removed to Barambah (Cherbourg) and imprisoned there for 'loafing, malingering and defying authority'. From there he was sent further afield, to Yarrabah (near Cairns), to die of tuberculosis at age 29 – a defiant victim of the system.

The Aboriginal cricket tour to England in 1868 has been described as a 'dignified episode in race relations'. It was to be a short episode, occurring in the gap between the major massacres in Victoria and the establishment of the Aborigines Protection Board in 1869.

The story is that an Edenhope grazier sent pictures of 'his' Aborigines to the owners of the Melbourne Cricket Ground refreshment tent. They had been taught the game by the sons of pastoralists in the Lake Wallace district of western Victoria. A match was arranged against the Melbourne Cricket Club and, 'with the sympathies of the whole of the population of Melbourne behind them', and before 10,000

spectators at the MCG on Boxing Day 1866, 'these children of the forest', as the *Age* called them, lost by nine wickets.

Amid talk of exploitation and skulduggery, and certainly with much illness among the players, hotelier Charles Lawrence agreed to coach the team on an English tour. Playing well in Victoria and New South Wales in prior fund-raising, the team landed in England in May 1868, the first Australian cricketers to go abroad. They played forty-seven matches, for nineteen draws, fourteen wins and fourteen losses.

A year after the tour, the *Aborigines Protection Act* came into force. The earlier Central Board had felt the team might be abandoned in England and it could not then compel the tour organisers to guarantee Aboriginal safety. Among the players, King Cole died during the tour; Sundown and Jim Crow were ill enough to be sent home. Had the 1869 Act been operative a year earlier, the tour would not have taken place.

Herein lies a serious dilemma: there has to be condemnation of the protection-segregation and 'forced assimilation' policies because, in practice, they became the opposite of what they intended; but there has to be lament that protection was absent when it was truly needed.

Of the 1868 cricketers, only Johnny Mullagh achieved fame. The 'black W.G. of the team' was an early comment; 'a kind of early Sobers' was a later assessment. In England, he played forty-three matches, scoring 1,679 runs at 22.51 and took 237 wickets at nine runs each. He played for Victoria against Lord Harris's English team and stayed in the Murray Cup until 1890. His repute, personality and dignity kept him out of reach of the Board. Mullagh quietly confronted racism: he spent one night in the open rather than accept a room across the yard next to the stables which a Victorian pub-keeper judged good enough for 'the Nigger'. 'The Western district', wrote the *Sydney Mail* in 1891, 'will regret his death.'

In athletics, the prince of black runners was Charlie Samuels, a stock rider from Jimbour Station, Dalby, Queensland. In 1894, the *Referee* said it would have liked to confer the title of Australian champion on a white man 'but a black Aboriginal has to be accorded the laurel crown':

Samuels has, in a long course of consistent and brilliant running, established his claim, not only to be the Australian champion, but also to have been one of the best exponents of sprint running the world has ever seen.

In 1886, he ran 136 yards in 13.2 seconds, then Australia's fastest time. He ran 300 yards in 30 seconds, equalled only by the Englishman, Hutchens, rated the greatest sprinter of the nineteenth century. His greatest, yet generally unbelievably, achievement was running a 9.1-second 100 yards at Botany, Sydney, in 1888! He trained on 'a box of cigars, pipe and tobacco, and plenty of sherry'. On this diet he beat Hutchens in a match series.

After 'assault upon an artillery man over a lady' and some disorderly behaviour, he made a comeback while living at La Perouse. Freedom to run and to play was coming to an end. The police saw him as a 'troublemaker' and sent him to Callan Park Lunatic Asylum for 'intemperance to drink'. He died in 1912, aged 49, at Barambah, to which he had been 'removed on the Minister's order'.

Decades of restriction

Jack Marsh – 'a full-blood from the Clarence River' – was a controversial right-arm fast bowler for NSW who came to cricket when the campaign against chucking was hysterical.

Despite proving his legitimate action, he ran afoul of State umpires. In 1902 he took 58 wickets at 10 apiece in Sydney. He had 'gifts no other man in Australia – and probably no other bowler in the world – possesses: he curves the ball, he bowls a peculiar dropping ball, and his break back on a perfect wicket is phenomenal for a bowler of his pace'.

In 1903-4, he took 5 for 55 against a visiting English XI. One Englishman said he was the fastest bowler in the world, and a legal one – despite the English captain's wish that Marsh not play. M.A. Noble, NSW selector, felt Marsh 'did not have class enough' to play representative matches. Class did not mean calibre. L.O.S. Poidevin commented that he would not be picked for Australia 'because the absurd white Australia policy has touched or tainted the hearts of the rulers of cricket, as it has the political rulers'. The legendary batsman, Warren Bardsley, declared that 'the reason they kept him out of big cricket was his colour'.

Marsh was battered to death in a street in Orange in 1916. His assailants were charged not with murder but manslaughter, and Judge Bevan opined that 'so far as the kicking [of Marsh as he lay on the ground] was concerned, Marsh might have deserved it'. The jury acquitted the men without leaving the box.

Jerry Jerome also hailed from Jimbour station. Given an exemption certificate – that he was, in effect, not legally controlled by the repressive Aboriginal legislation – he was free to run, rifle shoot and box. The first fight of this 'weirdly constructed native' was at age 33. In 1912, he won the Australian middleweight title, the first of sixty-five Australian professional titles to be won by Aborigines. Disliking training, he often fought in poor condition, 'hog fat'. He was a crowd favourite and his fights are regarded as among the most memorable at Sydney stadium.

Deemed a 'pernicious influence' at Taroom Aboriginal settlement – for 'inciting all others to refuse to work unless paid cash for it' – Chief

Protector J.W. Bleakley claimed this 'moneyed gentleman' took a 'mean advantage' to 'obstruct discipline and defy authority'. Jerome – who never took a drink in his life – died at Cherbourg in 1950, his earnings 'poached' by the Native Affairs Department and the 'hangers-on'.

From 'Cummera' came the Briggs, Onus, Nicholls and Cooper families, who were to spearhead the fight for Aboriginal civil rights in NSW and Victoria. One son was Lynch Cooper. In April 1929, he won the World Sprint Championship. In 1928, he became the third Aboriginal winner of the legendary Stawell Gift, the world's oldest and richest professional foot race. (Bobby Kinnear won in 1883 and Tom Dancey in 1910.) Unemployed, having sold his fishing boat, he risked his remaining twenty pounds on himself at odds of 60 to 1. He had a long and rewarding career, able to sustain himself and his family through the depression years, able to keep away from the paternalistic but constraining Aborigines Welfare Board.

Early on, the man who was to become Pastor Sir Douglas Nicholls KCVO OBE KStJ, and governor of South Australia in 1976, discovered a principle: the only way 'to crack the white world' was to do something better than the white man. In 1929, he won the Nyah Gift and then the Warracknabeal, second only to Stawell in importance. Trying out for Carlton FC (in Australian rules football), he experienced their rejection: because of his colour, they said, he smelled. For five years he played association rules football for Northcote, and then came the glory years with Fitzroy.

Much later, during the 1960s, there were serious issues in Aboriginal Victoria, including the government attempt to close Lake Tyers settlement. Despite adverse comments on Pastor Doug by senior politicians, he was able to gain a hearing: his sporting fame undoubtedly gave credence to his political stance.

The Eddie Gilbert story is a sad but reflective story of life for Aborigines in the north in the 1930s. He was 'a dynamic Aboriginal fast bowler who at his prime ranked second only to Bradman among Queensland fans'. Off a run of only four or five paces, he bowled Bradman for a duck in December 1931, after a five-ball spell, of which Sir Donald wrote:

he sent down in that period the fastest 'bowling' I can remember ... one delivery knocked the bat out of my hand and I unhesitatingly class this short burst faster than anything seen from Larwood or anyone else.

In a spectacular match against the West Indies, he took 5 for 65 and 2 for 26. In the December 1931 game, he not only bowled Bradman but took 4 for 74 off 21 overs, in an innings in which the great Stan McCabe scored 229 not out. For these matches, the Aboriginal

Protector would not pay his expenses but 'gave his permission' for Gilbert to travel and to play. He died in 1978, having spent twenty-three years in a mental institution.

Ron Richards was probably the greatest Aboriginal boxer: the national champion in three divisions, the Empire middleweight champion, victor over Gus Lesnevitch (world light-heavyweight champion for eight years), twice loser on points to that great American legend, Archie Moore. Had the chance come his way, he would have been world champion. His hardest battle, wrote Peter Corris, 'was for full, dignified human status within a prejudiced community'.

Richards fought often, too often, in the late 1930s and early '40s. Attempts to get to England failed. Former champion Vic Patrick said he was the best fighter he had ever seen: fast, a renowned counter-puncher, a strong hitter, resilient, competent. His life was a disaster. The early death of his wife, poor management and exploitation, police harassment and alcohol saw him sent to Woorabinda settlement, near Rockhampton, for three years. After arrest in Sydney came the final humiliation: as vegetable gardener at penal Palm Island, where he died penniless in 1967. A bitter irony, perhaps, but had he remained in Queensland as a 'controlled Aborigine', he would have had no boxing career at all.

The decades of hope

The best of the fighting Sands family (born Ritchie) was Dave. 'Everyone loved him and admired his character,' wrote Ray Mitchell. In 1946, he won the Australian middleweight and light-heavyweight titles; in 1950, the heavyweight title, and in 1949, the Empire middleweight championship.

Watching the Randolph Turpin *versus* Sugar Ray Robinson world title fight in London, Sands, a shy, sensitive man, said he could beat both men. Moves began for him to fight these two great middleweights but a timber truck accident killed him in 1952, aged 26. 'World boxing has lost a great fighter; Australian boxing has lost its mainstay; society has lost a gentleman,' wrote Mitchell.

Apart from Sands, the late 1940s and early '50s saw few Aboriginal champions. One man deserves more fame: Norm McDonald of Victoria. A talented boxer, he chose athletics for a while. Having won Gifts at Maryborough, Lancefield and Wangaratta, he was runner-up in the Stawell Gift in 1948. Between 1947 and 1953, he played 128 games for Essendon in Australian rules, appearing in no less than five grand finals.

Faith Coulthard, later to become Faith Thomas, was a registered nurse when she first left South Australia to work in Alice Springs. Aboriginal professionals were not common at this time. Faith played cricket for South Australia in the early 1950s and was selected for

Australia to play against England in 1953. Later, she played hockey for Alice Springs. Returning to South Australia, she became a key member of the Aboriginal Sports Foundation, founded in 1969 and disbanded in the 1980s. Faith became a role model: she was the first Aboriginal woman to emerge in sport. Aboriginal men generally had little or no access to sport: Aboriginal women had infinitely less!

In the 1960s, there was a sense of guilt and atonement abroad, with the major newspapers and the Australian Broadcasting Commission presenting a case for radical change of attitude and behaviour. Legislative changes occurred in most jurisdictions. This era saw the triumphs of 'Polly' Farmer, 'Artie' Beetson, Lionel Rose, 'Darby' McCarthy and Cheryl Mullett.

The 'Steel Cat', Farmer ranks as one of the greatest Australian rules football players of all time. Revered 'as one of the immortals', many champions include him in their 'All-Star' teams. He began life in Perth's 'assimilation factory', Sister Kate's Orphanage. Anyone with any 'white blood' was deemed salvageable for life in mainstream society and shipped to the good Sister's place. Farmer played an incredible 392 senior games; he won two Sandover medals, four Simpson medals and one Tassie medal, among the highest accolades in football.

There can be no doubt that of the seventeen Aborigines and Islanders who have played rugby league for Australia, Artie Beetson is the champion. In 1966, he played the first of his twenty-eight representative games for Australia. Described then 'as the laziest forward in senior football', he played sixteen of the nineteen matches on the 1973 English tour – hardly the picture of a man said to last only half a game. The English rated him as the greatest forward in the world. A successful coach, this giant has had a profound influence on the game, and on Aborigines who play and watch it.

Like Beetson, Richard Lawrence ('Darby') McCarthy is a product of outback Queensland. The highlights of his horse-racing career in the 1960s were winning the Newcastle Gold Cup, three Stradbroke Handicaps, the Brisbane Cup, the Doomben One Hundred Thousand and, a remarkable feat, the AJC Derby and AJC Epsom in successive races at Randwick in 1969. The critics loved him: 'he is one of the finest jockeys I have ever seen – he was consistently good, a quiet man, a thorough gentleman' (Tom Brassell); 'a very gifted rider' (Pat Murray); 'a genius rider', 'no jockey was riding better in 1968 and 1969' (Bert Lillye).

Cheryl Mullett and Lionel Rose are kin from the same area: poverty-stricken Jackson's Track, near Drouin in rural Victoria. By chance, a local dairy farmer played badminton and decided to coach all the Mullett children. In 1969, Cheryl won an astonishing five titles at the Australian championships. She twice represented Australia and won six major doubles titles with sister Sandra.

Lionel Rose became a boxer, winning the Australian bantamweight

title in 1966 and the world title from Fighting Harada in Tokyo in 1968. Much has been written, and filmed, about the one-out-of-nine-children rise from the shack at Jackson's Track to international fame. The Harada contest was not televised. America's *Sports Illustrated* wrote that 'all across Australia that night people clung to radios as if the ringside announcer were Winston Churchill'. The continent did indeed go wild. There was national elation: but, for all Aborigines, 'Lionel Rose was Hercules, Charles Lindbergh and the Messiah all rolled into one'. From the Todd River in Alice Springs to Redfern in Sydney, he represented a hope 'that their own futures might rise beyond futility'.

Melbourne gave him an unprecedented homecoming – from the airport to the town hall some 200,000 people massed, shouting 'Good on ya, Lionel! You beaut little Aussie!' He retired in 1970, having won more money than any other Australian fighter till then. He also spent most of it, in his words, on wine, women and song. He gave Aborigines a moment of glory, perhaps the greatest single boost they have ever had.

The decades of opportunity

Opportunity did not mean full equality of access to, and facilities for, sport or an end to all discrimination. A sign of the times, however, was the fact that an Aboriginal girl from outback NSW could enter the realms of tennis and win seventeen state singles titles, three Australian singles, an Italian, South African and French Open and, to crown it all, two Wimbledon Championships (in 1971 and 1980).

Evonne Goolagong-Cawley is the most revered and most acclaimed Aboriginal sporting figure. Rex Bellamy of *The Times* said of her:

wonderfully gifted ... with a swift grace of balanced movement, an instinctive tactical brain, a flexible repertoire of strokes, and an equable temperament; inspired, imaginative, her tennis was so beautiful that at times it chilled the blood.

Ex-champion Virginia Wade states that Evonne is 'memorable' and 'she's still in people's minds': 'there was not a single false thing about her ... people just loved her'.

Evonne recalls only two racist episodes in her life: a beaten opponent in Sydney once called her 'Nigger'. More serious, one Australian premier said, before the 1980 Wimbledon final, he hoped she 'wouldn't go walkabout like some old boong'.

With Evonne came some enlightenment. The public and the sports administrations had accommodated Aboriginal achievement, with a mixture of guilt, awkwardness and immense pride. It was, therefore, not a total surprise when Mark Ella became a national hero,

representing Australia in twenty-six Rugby Union Tests, captaining the side on nine occasions. A black captain of the 'silvertail' football code would have been unthinkable a decade earlier. Others followed: a South Sea Islander, Mal Meninga, was to captain the Australian Rugby League side on twenty-three occasions until his retirement in 1994.

Jim Webster's tribute to 'Markella' on his retirement, at 26, is probably the most flattering given to any figure in Australian sporting history. A prodigy, with God-given gifts, he had a brain moving at shutter speed: 'It was like watching Bradman. Or Torvill and Dean. Or Carl Lewis. Or listening to Sutherland.' Ella did what few Aboriginal sports people have been able to do: retire at the top. In so doing, he remains in the memory while passing into history.

The first real sign of 'participatory democracy' in sport emerged in the 1990s. Cathy Freeman, a Queensland teenager, won a sprint gold medal at the Commonwealth Games in Auckland (1990), and the double of the 200m and 400m at the 'Friendly Games' in Victoria, Canada, in 1994. Karl Feifar, a young West Australian, won three gold medals and broke two world records at the World Championships for the Disabled in Holland in 1990. Both were hailed as national celebrities. The television series, *Rose Against the Odds*, was screened at the end of 1991. The serious press proclaimed Lionel a 'national treasure'!

However, the decade is not all Rose, or roses. In 1993, Collingwood Football Club president Allan McAlister told the television world that as long as 'they' behaved themselves like white folks off the field, they would be admired and respected; nay, it would be better, he said, if they behaved themselves like human beings. Regretting these comments and claiming he was 'a friend of the Aboriginal people', he sought permission to visit the Tiwi people north of Darwin. He apologised and told the chairman of the Tiwi Land Council he would be arriving with '20 footballs and a set of Collingwood jumpers for the Aboriginal boys up there'. The 'natives' were not impressed with this late twentieth-century version of beads, bracelets and bangles and refused him entry. Following a 1993 match won by St Kilda against Collingwood, the *Sydney Morning Herald* commented:

The Collingwood cheer-squad had decided to remind Nicky Winmar, an Aborigine ... that he was one of them rather than one of us, and they did so in the manner for which they are justly notorious ... after the final siren he gave the 'Pie cheer squad as good as he had received, lifting his jumper and pointing to his skin. As spectacularly talented as he is with or near a football, Winmar has never been more eloquent or effective for his cause or his colour than he was in that moment.

In 1994 Cathy Freeman hoisted the Aboriginal and then the Australian flag in her 400m lap of honour at the Commonwealth Games. Only a handful deplored this 'disloyalty': the rest of society approved, applauded or abstained. The point is that both of these acts of 'defiance' were accepted, even appreciated. A decade earlier the two athletes would have been excoriated and banned, much in the manner of Tommy Smith and John Carlos for their 'Black Power' salute at the 1968 Mexico Olympics.

Much of the Aboriginal experience, however, is unchanged. Aborigines remain at the very lowest end of all the social indicators: in housing, education, health, employment, income, social services, in the legal system. They imprison more readily and easily, they suicide at higher rates, they die younger. Sport, however, has paved the way for respect from white Australia; it has given Aborigines a sense of worth and pride, especially since they have had to overcome the twin hurdles of racism *and* their opponents; it has shown Aborigines that using their bodies is still the one and *only* way they can compete on equal terms with an often hostile, certainly indifferent, mainstream society.

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Colonialism and football: the first Nigerian tour to Britain*

On a recent visit to South Africa, prime minister John Major, in an attempt to repair political and economic relations with that country (damaged by the UK government's former covert acceptance of apartheid), took with him some UK 'ambassadors' of sport. Among them was Bobby Charlton, who at least has some credibility on the continent because of his involvement in African football at various levels.¹

The use of sport and sporting figures to break down diplomatic barriers for political and economic motives in this way is nothing new. During the period 1949-59, football, in particular, was seized upon by Britain's ruling class, to be utilised for the greater good of Great Britain Ltd. The football tours from Nigeria in 1949, the Gold Coast in 1951, Trinidad in 1953, Uganda in 1956 and the Caribbean in 1959 were seen by the football establishment here and in the empire as sporting and political inductions. Those who played were treated and feted beyond what was necessary for purely diplomatic propriety. Those who accompanied them as managers and trainers were aware of their carefully prescribed roles. These were no ordinary footballers. Their brief was to watch, listen and learn – not only about the way football was played in Britain but, more importantly, about how superior the British political and economic system was to the alternatives on offer to Africans.

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* Edited version of a chapter from *History of Black Footballers in Britain, 1886-1962* (forthcoming).

Race & Class, 36, 4 (1995)

The colonial context

The white colonial elite in West Africa was there to service the needs of imperial capital, not to sustain or administer a European settler community, as happened in the more 'acceptable' climates of east and southern Africa. Those who did settle tended to be traders. A consequence of the predominance of the merchant class and culture in the colony, as opposed to a non-mercantile elite, inevitably meant 'soccer fever tended to infect the locals and become endemic',² whereas more 'elevated' pastimes such as polo or cricket gained popularity where the tastes of the aristocracy stifled the sporting proclivities of the merchant class. The spread of organised football, in large measure, followed trade and war.

Post world war two, in Nigeria, as in the then Gold Coast, there was an active and vibrant nationalist movement, with the momentum for ending colonial rule increased by the struggle against fascism. Within these broad movements (often a varying mix of socialist, Pan-Africanist and social reformist strands) were cultural organisations such as football and sports clubs. For the imperial and colonial governments, however, the most urgent necessity was the management of change and the accommodation of nationalism. Here, too, the sporting dimension was included, as one among many approaches adopted. There was little novelty in this. Sir Ralph Furse, responsible for recruitment to the Colonial Office, had laid down two informal preconditions for the ideal candidate – he should be an Oxbridge second and a Blue.³ If the comradeship and bonding facilitated through sport produced politically dependable administrators among the European 'elite', why not apply the same methods to the African 'clerks'?

The problem of containing nationalism politically, through either incorporation or suppression, was highlighted by serious industrial unrest. In Nigeria, there had been a forty-four-day general strike, starting in June 1945;⁴ 1949 saw a strike on the railways and the fatal shooting of twenty miners at Enugu, with many more injured. Relations between the ruled and rulers had got so bad in West Africa that even 'football matches between Europeans and Africans are constantly producing incidents'.⁵ This was of vital concern to those entrusted with safeguarding the imperial legacy. Something would have to be done. Among the responses to this threatening situation can be placed the 1949 Nigerian football tour to Britain, which in many ways established the pattern of such sporting contacts for the future.

This was the first tour by a black African team purporting to represent its national football association. Its success acted as the catalyst for the Africanisation and modernisation of the game in that country – two potentially contradictory developments. For Africans to be accepted as legitimate international participants on the world stage,

they would have to modernise – give up – some characteristics of their football culture, such as playing without boots, which had been integral to the creation of a style of play that was markedly distinct from the European version.⁶ Yet it was this distinctness that gave their game its strength.

Football in Nigeria had developed from sporting initiatives in missionary and government elementary schools and through the influx of European soldiers and sailors.⁷ Those children whose parents could afford the fees of the missionary schools found an environment where the ethos of muscular Christianity, with its peculiar British complexion, predominated. Some feel that the propagation of sport, especially team games, allowed the British empire to transform itself into a commonwealth of nations by inculcating a body of values among all who met on this common playing field.

The missionary schools were the nurseries of aspiring, competitive footballers and the first destination of clubs looking for promising new players. In this, they built upon the rudimentary form of unorganised football that already existed among the indigenous people. For, in 'traditional' African societies, athleticism was essential to survival. Organised, ritual contest was a device often used to bring a community together, bonded by common appreciation of the skills involved. Sport in pre-colonial society would often reflect the predominant concerns of that community and seek rehearsed resolution through play. This legacy to contemporary cultural practices gave football an inevitable political dimension that ensured it could never be just a game, just as, for instance, legitimate physical assault between black and white in the boxing ring, in the first half of this century, was never allowed to be just a 'contest'.

F. Baron Mulford 'Baba Eko', a respected elder of Lagos, is viewed by many as the person most responsible for the development of soccer in the country.⁸ He had been arranging matches between Kings College school and European teams in Lagos from as early as 1914. F. Baron Mulford is credited with donating the War Memorial Cup in August 1919 for Lagos clubs to compete for.⁹ This probably represented the first formal, organised competition between teams in the city. During his career, Mulford played at right back for Diamonds FC, a mixed European-African team that included Nnamdi Azikiwe (Zik) – who was to become a leader of the nationalist cause in Nigeria – when they won the Lagos League in 1923.¹⁰ Inter-colony matches were also played with the Gold Coast during the inter-war period. In 1931, the Lagos and District Amateur Football Association (LDAFA) was established. By 1945, the year in which a national coordinating body was formed, the Lagos League had three divisions, mirroring the structure in England.

Organised football in and around Lagos was controlled by white

expatriates, mostly civil servants. Its development in the 1930s and '40s suggests that the drive for pre-eminence and domination over one's rivals had infected the attitudes and behaviour of those who ran and participated in organised sport. Tight control was exercised – for example, to prevent the free flow of African school graduates to African-managed teams, the LDAFA (controlled by civil servants) had a ruling which prohibited schoolboys from playing club football.

For the 1949 tour, Captain D.H. Holley, chairman of the Labour Advisory Board and Nigerian Football Association (NFA), was team manager. He was also president of the Nigerian Amateur Athletic Association (NAAA). (Two other civil servants-cum-football administrators, G.A. Henderson and T.B. Welch, were also on the executive of the NAAA.) Two more notable civil servant activists in realising the tour were P.A. Courtney, chairman of the LDAFA, and R.B. 'Darby' Allen, treasurer of the NFA during the 1950s – respectively director of posts and telegraphs and government printer.

The balance of power held by the civil servants at the administrative level reflected itself in the composition of the eighteen-member squad that travelled to England. As Rees-Williams, under-secretary of state for the colonies, put it at a civic reception held after one match:

Now it says something for the activity and energy of government servants in the Tropics that no fewer than fourteen of the players are civil servants, and there are two school teachers in addition.¹¹

The African anti-colonialist response

This activity and energy was not admired by everybody in the colony. African-managed teams in Lagos, such as ZAC (Zik's Athletic Club) Bombers, Spitfires and Hurricanes and the Muslim Eleven, were angered at the way those in positions of power used it as leverage to build strong teams at the expense of those without the cultural or economic capital to do the same.

Should the Locomotive Branch of Nigerian Railways not now be called the 'Railway Institute of Football Technology'? ... We have yet to learn ... [how] those at the head of affairs could use public time, public funds, public materials and public vehicles so liberally in order to foster football.¹²

This attack from the sports page of Nnamdi 'Zik' Azikiwe's voice of Pan-African socialism, the *West African Pilot*, alluded not only to continuous poaching by Railways of ZAC's best players but also to industrial unrest on the railways, the inference being that time and energy should be spent on easing tensions there, rather than creating them elsewhere.

If the Nigeria Railway is not efficiently run today, the fault does not lie with the Nigerian worker; it is those at the top who mix up railway work with football.¹³

In another issue, the *Pilot* stated:

Certain high officials ... make it their regular pastime to dismantle certain teams and ... virtually misuse public funds in making appointments in their departments ... dependent on the ability ... to play football.¹⁴

The political organisation of the game in Lagos (and Makurdi) 'where the African is not in full control of amateur football' replicated the political organisation of Nigerian society as a whole. The question of who ran the game and how power was exercised had exemplary relevance:

Through the avenue of sports the stranglehold on the African by alien peoples is strengthened and the control of the thinking processes of the African is thus assured for a long time yet.¹⁵

It was a commentary that recognised the ultimatum which, consciously or unconsciously, the administrators were presenting: play the game our way or suffer the consequences.

The better players, if they played for civil servant managed teams, were treated as semi-professionals in that they secured direct material reward for their abilities, gaining access to jobs and other privileges that would otherwise have been out of reach. For example, fifteen railway employees were given time off and travel passes to play football in Port Harcourt.¹⁶ A later issue of Zik's *Pilot* carried a telling cartoon (23 July 1949), showing the office of an 'employer'. Adorning the walls are football championship shields. The European employer is standing over a young 'Nigerian school graduate' who holds his Cambridge School Leaving Certificate. The former, clutching a sheet of paper entitled 'next year football season [sic]: recruitment for a super team', says: 'I have jobs for boys who can use – not necessarily their brains – but their legs.'

This preoccupation with constructing a winning team, which, in practice, meant eschewing the sporting ethos trumpeted by the colonialist elite, had much to do with intra-civil service rivalry between the Marine, Railway, Public Works, Posts and Telegraph, Lands Survey, Police and Town Council divisions and intra-European competition between the civil service and businesses such as the United Africa Company. This was having a detrimental effect on the values that were predominating in the game in Lagos.

Clearly those who enthrone themselves as Czars of Lagos football ... have come all out in order to destroy all that is fine in the nature of the African, and to provoke him. Yes, the African has a keen sense

of justice and ... he will fight and destroy the forces of greed, envy, jealousy and injustice even in the realms of sport.¹⁷

In his autobiography, Zik explained his sports philosophy. At ZAC, sportsmanship was encouraged rather than winning without consideration of context.

To make these ethical precepts in sport worthwhile, prizes are awarded to those few who stick to the code of behaviour stipulated for all contestants in a particular type of sport.¹⁸

A framework of sporting values that stressed playing the game for the game's sake and had been formulated, propagated and held up as a symbol of cultural superiority by the colonialists was now used by Zik and his press as a gauge of imperial decadence and unfitness to rule.

The teams of ZAC and the Muslim Eleven relied on ex-schoolboy players to replenish those enticed by the civil service teams. ZAC teams offered ethnically mixed sport and liberationist ideas rather than jobs. Unfortunately, the heart-warming beliefs of a burgeoning Pan-African socialism did not meet the immediate material needs of dispossessed Nigerians. One of the stated objectives of the NFA was to foster love and friendship among Nigerian football players. The *Pilot* felt talk such as this was not being translated in practice. There could be no 'love and friendship' while government departments and white-run businesses haemorrhaged the young life-blood of the African clubs. Far from improving the moral economy of the young African footballer, they were a corrupting influence:

Oh, football, what despicable crimes are committed in thy name, in Lagos, even by those who claim to be paragons of perfection and repository of all knowledge ... what they call 'civilisation' and which I call barbarism.¹⁹

The priorities of selection – culture and conformity

The selection of players for the tour, therefore, could never be based on footballing ability alone. The social composition of the 'soccerists' was important for the administrators. They wanted the players to present a collective face to the British public that went some way to dispelling racial myths about Africans and which would also stand testament to the positive contribution made by the expatriates, confirming the legitimacy of their presence in the colony.

Akpabot picks out the tensions that surfaced when lobbying began for inclusion in the team. Of the final eighteen selected, only four – Chukura, a teacher at Abeokuta Grammar School, Ibiam from Port Harcourt, Dankaro from Jos, and Akioye, a teacher from Ibadan – came from teams outside Lagos. Kanno, the player/secretary, had been

educated for a while in England, the selectors trusting that he had acquired the refinements necessary for the public engagements and appearances such an office would demand. Kanno was a polished, intelligent half-back or centre-forward, 'just past his peak' in 1949.²⁰ The squad that was selected represented not so much the best eighteen players as the balance of power, with its distinct racialist character, that existed in the Nigerian, and especially Lagos, footballing polity. For example, the influence of the railways senior management (personified by T.B. Welch and G.O. Urion, who also ran Railways FC) resulted in no fewer than seven railway employees being selected for the squad.

Public uniform was, for civil occasions, grey flannels and a green blazer with a badge emblazoned with the initials NFA and with 'United Kingdom 1949' woven underneath. For matches, there were olive green shirts, white shorts and green socks. (One concession made to the players' ethnicity was in the food supplement brought to a rationed Britain, 'yams, hams and jams, oils, rice, red peppers and dried shrimps'.)²¹

This concern with the correctness of public appearance – traditional African robes were not acceptable – caused friction between the players and the manager over the wearing of football boots, all but two players preferring bandaged feet. Only European teams played in boots in Nigeria and, after experimenting, the majority decided against (two opting for baseball boots). It was felt boots inhibited close control and sureness of touch, great strengths of the tourists' game. On disembarking from the liner *Apapa* at Liverpool, a team member said they would play in boots if the ground was soft.²² However, this debate resurfaced again in the match with the Athenian League. The pitch was muddy and did not suit play without studded boots. As the game progressed, the possibility of humiliation by a large score led the manager, Holley, through his authoritarian intervention, to draw the post-match wrath of 'Pangloss', amateur football correspondent for the *News Chronicle*:

I do not think their morale was improved by the hectoring manner of their team manager when the half-time argument arose as to whether they should play with or without boots.²³

The conflict over bare or booted feet was settled by a duo of converging forces: the relative brilliance of the team and concomitant acknowledgement by spectators that, with half-decent facilities and decent coaches, the Nigerian FA could confidently arrange international fixtures; and the desire by FIFA for conformity in footwear. When the organising committee of the 1950 World Cup met in Paris in February, it decreed that barefoot play would be banned. This, in effect, meant the Nigerians (and other Africans and Asians) would have to adopt boots if they wanted to play at international level.

Captain Holley, team manager, is reported to have said the tour represented 'the end of his dream' – an ambiguous phrase which he did not elaborate.²⁴ Did it have to do with the 'civilising' mission so often the excuse for practices that, if made public, would have been condemned as 'un-British' in the 'mother country'? After all, the very selection of players was, in part, a political, rather than a purely sporting, exercise.

For Zik, his press and West African socialists in general, the tour also formed part of a vision. The trip to England, though not theirs in conception and realisation, could with sweet irony become another weapon in the struggle towards independence.

More local loyalties had to be put aside for the greater goal of national unity. An editorial in *West Africa*, summarising the achievements of the tourists, recognised that among the tour's successes, 'it has also made a small contribution to Nigerian nationhood by focusing the attention of Nigerians on "our" team'.²⁵

The tour

The party sailed from Lagos on 16 August, seen off by a large crowd, the bishop of Lagos, 'many important European and African personalities' and with a message of support from governor Sir John McPherson.²⁶ The players, travelling third class, ran around the deck four times each morning to keep fit. They were met on arrival at Liverpool thirteen days later with a message from the Duke of Edinburgh. On disembarking, they were interviewed by the BBC for 'Radio Newsreel', messages being recorded in English and West African languages for broadcast back home. Television and cine-news also captured their entrance. Holley said his team came as 'ambassadors of friendship', a term and theme that became the staple currency of future tours.²⁷

A hard and strenuous fixture list stretched before them for the month of September. They would play some of the top amateur teams, including the FA Amateur Cup holders and one professional side.

The first game was played against Marine, at Crosby in Liverpool, in front of 6,000 spectators. The choice of Liverpool was convenient and not devoid of political content. The British Council, which was looking after the tourists' accommodation arrangements, had a regional office in the city. Merseyside also has one of the oldest black communities in Britain. In 1948, it stood at 8,000, swelled in number by those who had left their homelands to fight Hitler and fascism. In the same year, it suffered terribly from attacks by white racists, whose motivations were legitimised by the National Union of Seamen's divisive and destructive policy of a colour bar on British-owned ships. Thus, for some black scousers and anti-racists, the real and symbolic

consequence of the Nigerians' victory – they trounced Marine 5-2 – was a needed boost to damaged morale.

The *Liverpool Echo* acclaimed the Nigerians as 'wizards in bare feet'. Without boots, they still put 'astonishing power ... behind their kicking'.²⁸ The speed and brilliance of Titus Okere at outside left was quickly spotted; 'given the experience [he] could find a place in most English League sides'.²⁹

The return of the 'wizards' a month later to play South Liverpool, a professional side, in their parting game, held under floodlights, confirmed the suitability of the epithet. Their phenomenal speed was compared to that of the legendary Moscow Dynamo side that captivated Britain's entertainment hungry footballing public immediately after the war. 'Fastest since the Dynamos' ran the headline in the *Echo*. 'To see them give five yards in fifteen to a home player and beat him to the ball was to witness something new in football speed'.³⁰ A record crowd of 13,007 witnessed these footballing 'Macdonald Baileys'* playing out their tour with a 2-2 draw.

The Saturday edition of the *Liverpool Echo* illustrated the contradictory cultural images and attitudes that bubbled to the surface in response to the exploits of the West Africans. In one cartoon, a spectator comments: 'Is that a Nigerian flying down the wing?' To which the answer came, 'No, I think it's a bat.' A graphic elaboration of the connectedness of sight, night and colour followed, with the caption, 'Floodlight was necessary because it's always difficult to find a blackman in the dark.' The whole thing was rounded off with an excuse for the lack of goal attempts made by the home team forwards. 'I think S. Liverpool were instructed not to shoot until they saw the whites of their eyes'.³¹

Thus the speed (and other attributes) possessed by the Nigerians became caricatured in a vision that pulled to the foreground those characteristics which were different and admired – but in a way that set the visitors apart and confirmed the negative connotations imperial, metropolitan culture had constructed for the representation of its black, colonial subjects. These images, conveyed by the *Echo*, became the evaluative scales on which the Nigerians' achievements were weighed.

While in the north-west, the tourists were given a reception by the British Council in Liverpool to which colonial African students were invited, but not other black residents of the city. It was poorly attended.

Three games in total were played in the north, against the two Liverpool clubs, the other in the north-east against Bishop Auckland, a club with veteran amateur international Bob Hardisty in the forward

*Bailey was a leading African-Caribbean sprinter, holder of the British Amateur Athletics Association 100 and 200 yard record.

line and a fine tradition of achievement. A record crowd of 13,000 saw the home team win by five goals to two. The *Times* reporter felt 'two games within six days of arriving in England proved too much for the Nigerians who, while giving an attractive display, lacked the dash and stamina of their opponents'.³²

Amateur Sport, the house journal of amateur football in England, saw things a little differently.

The speed and footwork of these Nigerians were amazing and the crowd were thrilled by seventy-yard clearances from the bare-footed lads.³³

The visitors' strength, accuracy and confidence when shooting also left their mark:

Bobby Davison (of BA) swore after the game that Henshaw (captain of the tourists) knew he would score as he walked to take the (free) kick. It went into the net as if jet propelled.³⁴

The writer urged all who could to 'see these fine sportsmen from Nigeria'.

They trained at Highbury the day following their north-eastern excursion. The first game of their 'London season', as 'Pangloss' put it, was against Leytonstone in east London, twice winners of the FA Amateur Cup in the previous three seasons.

This was to be the occasion of the official welcoming of the Nigerians to the metropolitan capital by members of the British and Nigerian political establishment. Present at the game were Sir Adeyemo Alakija, a member of the Nigerian Legislative Council, A.G. Bottomley MP, secretary for overseas trade, David Rees-Williams, under-secretary of state for the colonies, and Stanley Rous, secretary of the FA. Other politicians and administrators attended, including representatives of London boroughs and members of the FA. A notable feature of the 10,000-strong crowd was the large presence of Africans and those of African origin.

Leytonstone scored in the last minute to win 2-1. The Nigerians had 'impressed', with their 'fast, quick thinking' bringing the 'best out of Leytonstone'.³⁵ Edgar Kail of the *Daily Graphic* eulogised upon their performance:

Their ball control is ... uncanny and is a form of caress that is helped by the spreading of the toes ... Okere is worth £15,000 and a row of houses. Their artistry is superb, their deportment and their behaviour exemplary, and they will beat more of our leading amateur sides than will beat them.³⁶

Two days later, the tourists met the Isthmian League. Such was their reputation that Arthur Salter of *Amateur Sport* 'was quite prepared to

see the Isthmian League beaten'.³⁷ (Some commentators had written that playing in bare feet put the booted teams at a disadvantage but Salter dismissed such excuses.) During the early exchanges, the correspondent of *West Africa* felt the League were 'reluctant to play a full-blooded tackling game'. However, this consideration did not last long, as 'several Nigerians were hobbling towards the end'.³⁸ It was the teamwork of the Isthmian League that provided it with the foundation for its 6-1 win. Salter felt the West Africans, 'whatever the result ... are good box-office-value-footballers who enjoy their game'.³⁹ His report picked out the strengths and weaknesses of the tourists' game, with speed their main strength and covering and positional play their weaknesses. Individually, they had some fine players, with Okere of the forwards and Ottun (right-back) and Ibiam (goalkeeper) standing out.

Prior to their third match in London against the Corinthian League, the Nigerians were entertained by the United Africa Company (UAC), part of the Unilever group. UAC had a team in the Lagos League and had donated £500 to the tour fund. For the tourists' physical preparation, they trained at Highbury the day before the game. The outstanding feature of their performance, according to 'Pangloss', was the 'superb passing of the Nigerian left-wing pair Anike and Okere'. Unfortunately, the partnership could not conjure a win. The match ended on level terms, 2-2. So ended the first half of the Nigerians' sojourn in Britain. The results, one win, a draw and three defeats, had not been spectacular, but their performances, integrity, athleticism and agility had created many friends among the footballing public of England.

The pace off the pitch had been almost as frantic as on, with the programme for the following week 'full of social engagements, including a tea party at the Colonial Office, visits to parliament, Westminster Abbey, Kew Gardens and Wembley Stadium'.⁴⁰

The final week in London saw the Nigerians play three matches, against Dulwich Hamlet, the Athenian League, rated the strongest of the amateur representative teams, and the Amateur Cup winners, Bromley. *West Africa* reports that in the first match 'the Nigerians produced all their tricks ... but luck was never on their side'.⁴¹ They lost 1-0. Their worst defeat followed, by eight goals to nil, and had much to do with the weather, the rain and muddy pitch being totally unsuited to the Africans' barefoot play. The adoption of boots by some in the second half merely swapped one inconvenience for another. It deprived the players of their primary instrument of ball control, their toes, used to caress the ball into submission and subservience. This was the only match where the weather had been unkind – September 1949 was the warmest since records began.

Their last game in London and penultimate one in England, against Bromley, was the 'big one'; Bromley was the team of the moment,

holders of the biggest prize in amateur football. At half time, it looked as though another defeat loomed, with the score at 1-0, 'but in the second half the cup holders were completely outplayed ... The speed and opportunism of the visiting side were brilliant.'⁴² Over 10,000 spectators witnessed a rare display of athleticism and quick thinking:

The Amateur Cup holders were unsettled by the unusual formation of Anyiam at centre-half playing as a sixth forward.⁴³

Praise for tactical awareness and flexibility was something new. This was considered an area of weakness in the Nigerians' game. It was a measure of their 'willingness to learn'⁴⁴ that such an improvement had brought such swift rewards, a 3-1 win.

The evaluation

The games in London had given sports writers such as 'Hibernicus', 'Pangloss' and Arthur Salter a chance to assess the development of football in the most populous colony of the empire. Judgment extended beyond sporting skills in the narrow sense. Just as the players had been chosen at home for the variety of their attributes – sporting, educational and vocational – which fitted the requirements of a colonial elite, so they would be assessed in England. It was important that they 'played the game', even if some of their employers and mentors were not so diligent.

In his 'review' of the tour, 'Pangloss' noted that

no touring side has ever been so popular with our amateur soccer public ... Their zest for the game, their willingness to learn, the thoroughly sporting way they accepted the referees' decisions, and the gentlemanly manner in which they fetched the ball when they conceded a corner kick deservedly earned the plaudits of our crowds.⁴⁵

That they were no ordinary footballers but 'gentlemen' was, as much as their undoubted skill, the prerequisite for their acceptance in the colonial football and sporting universe. It was the Nigerians' adherence to a sporting code, not the results they achieved, which primarily influenced the football critics and, therefore, the tone of their evaluations. The Nigerians were not allowed to be just footballers.

For 'Hibernicus', the tour had been 'successful', providing for many a cathartic cultural experience.

The conduct of the African on the sportsfield has contributed considerably to the abolition of the old idea existing among so many of the British public that the Africans are just woolly-headed nebulous sort of people.⁴⁶

The tourists had proved, through action, that the apparent remaking of the African was continuing apace. But there needed to be caution against full proletarianisation in the game:

Football has attained such a remarkable place in Nigeria's social and industrial life, that there is a danger that it may even become entangled with politics and professionalism. It would be a great pity if that were to happen.⁴⁷

Hibernicus's letter to the editor of *West Africa* warned against the ethical degeneracy that would inevitably occur should the players be openly paid for their labour. It would, in part, be a denial of the imperial project.

Those in Africa and many in the UK, who have contributed so generously and disinterestedly to finance the recent visit, will undoubtedly do so again, but only because they admire the spirit and enthusiasm of the amateur. It is right that the players should fully realise this, and also that they are considered sportsmen in the real sense of the word, uninfluenced by politics, racial bias or political gain.⁴⁸

Conclusion

The success of the tour, both in footballing and politico-diplomatic terms, led to further experiments in sport politics through football. It was hoped that smooth decolonisation could be enhanced by closer cultural fraternisation between the 'old masters' and 'new inheritors', thereby allaying the fears of European capital about the removal of the protection of the colonial state for capital's economic activities.

Many British-based sports writers like Hibernicus had an understandably limited perception and awareness of the scale of dealings in Lagos which violated the constitutional code of colonial sport. If we believe the sports columns of the *Pilot*, the players were 'sportsmen', despite the activities of the administrators. But there was a dual agenda in operation – that enunciated by ZAC (five of the players were ex-ZAC) and that set publicly by the sporting barons of Lagos, eager for their metropolitan peers to acknowledge their refashioned, colonial subjects. While all expatriates involved in organising the tour wanted to put on a good show 'back home', the methods considered and used by individuals to ensure success may have differed. Welch and Urion were criticised in Zik's press for their methods in settling industrial disputes on the railways, the inefficiency of the system itself, their unprincipled poaching of players and influence upon rule-making to obstruct the success of African-managed teams. The inference was that the same methodology was applied in both work and play: it was not

the playing of the game but the winning of it that mattered. A defeat of Railways FC by ZAC on the football field would have had implications on the engine footplate, among the station porters and may be even among the relatively privileged clerks, should the nationalists make a habit of it.

For the 'administocracy' in Nigeria, most importantly its (unofficial) sports division, the tour had achieved its objectives, even if it did bring friendly warnings about the future direction of the game from the amateur football writers. For the players, there were mixed fortunes. It had raised their status and many of them had shown they were the equal, at least, of their opponents. Henshaw, who stayed on in Britain, had 'been the subject of several enquiries by Football League clubs'.⁴⁹ He eventually signed for Cardiff Corinthians, an amateur club, while studying marine engineering at Cardiff Technical College. The player to achieve the greatest success in Britain was Tesilimi 'Thunder' Balogun, signed by Midlands League club Peterborough United in August 1955 on condition that he be found work through which he could subsequently develop a trade back in Nigeria.

Ottun, a draughtsman from the marine department, committed suicide soon after his return because 'he could not find a job commensurate with his skills'.⁵⁰ Ironically, he was nicknamed the 'Rock of Gibraltar' because of his sturdy defending. Another defender, Dankaro, 'disappeared'.⁵¹

The '49 tour gained respect for West African football and footballers in Britain. Balogun was not the first to play in the English League, but he certainly helped pave the way for others. Such moves were now acceptable, even encouraged, given the dearth of talent available to professional clubs. Did it serve the Africans' needs as well? According to a *Times* editorial:

There is a special place in Africa for sport. The disappearance of tribal warfare and other inconvenient forms of self-expression has left a gap there. Too often, while exempt from terror and famine, the African peoples are nowadays powerfully afflicted with boredom. They need new interests, cultural and sporting. Given a chance the African is a voracious reader and avid sportsman. The Nigerian visit has a sociological significance.⁵²

The insistence in the UK upon retaining amateur football in Nigeria was as much a warning against the possible proletarianism of colonial African cultures as it was a stricture to guard against the seedier side of the game so obvious in its professional dimension: intentional fouls, under-the-table payments and other unethical practices (such as payment itself).

It was as guardians of the amateur ideal that civil servants were entrusted. The idea of the 'generalist amateur', a good all-rounder,

from a public school/Oxbridge background with an education in the arts or classics, provided the vision and ethos upon which the service was built, both in the UK and in the colonies. The systemic dissemination of the amateur code, whether through public and/or sporting institutions, protected against the envisaged threat of proletarianisation, a threat made all the more ominous in the context of a Pan-Africanist or marxist nationalism.

To retain the amateur code and ethos in football was to retain the values and culture of the imperial project. The colonial subversion of the old order across Africa, whatever form that order took, left a cultural vacuum to be filled. What better way to fill this space than through exertion in activity that embodied and transmitted the values of muscular Christianity, the English public school and Oxbridge? 'New interests' would, henceforth, coincide with 'our' interests.

Yet the imposition of an outdated public school ethos of amateurism (often by means that flouted that very code) was destined to fail, flying as it did in the face of fundamental social and political change. This attempt to fashion what could not exist in the modern world, however, had an outcome far different from that anticipated. Just as old-style colonialism had to cede to decolonisation, so an emancipated Nigeria was able to assert and develop its own sporting identity. And Nigerian football, some forty-five years after its first encounters outside Africa, was sufficiently dynamic to qualify for the World Cup finals in 1994, which its former colonial master, England, signally failed to do.

References

- 1 See Charlton's comments in *Will to Win* (Channel 4, Autumn 1993), a television series on the achievements of black sports people with commentary on the linkages between politics, 'race' and sport. (He argued that African soccer 'should get a little guidance to learn about professionalism, but it mustn't detract from the African way'.) He also writes a coaching column for *African Soccer*.
- 2 Harold Perkin, 'Teaching nations how to play sport: sport and society in the British Empire and Commonwealth', *International Journal of the History of Sport* (Vol. 6, no. 2, September 1989), p.151.
- 3 A. Kirk-Greene, 'Sport and His Excellency in the British Empire', in *ibid.*, p.224. A Blue is someone who has represented either Oxford or Cambridge University in a major sport.
- 4 See correspondence of Governor Richards in Catherine Thomas, *Colonial Government Propaganda and Public Relations and the Administration of Nigeria 1939-51*, PhD, University of Cambridge, 1986, pp.149-50. And Richards to Swinton, 15 December 1945, where he argues (a) that it 'is time to go for Zik', (b) that the Zik press should be suppressed, and (c) that the previous governor, Bourdillon, 'encouraged every kind of wild cat trade union' (Swinton Papers, Churchill College, Cambridge).
- 5 Quoted in Thomas, *ibid.*
- 6 The speed of players over short distances was constantly remarked upon, as was their power of shooting. Heading abilities were compared unfavourably to European footballers. This may have had something to do with the appreciation of high leg

movements and the preference for the use of feet, to facilitate better control, whenever possible. Matches were usually eighty minutes in length. For an aesthetic assessment of the game in West Africa during this period, see Cecil Beaton, *Near East* (London, 1943), p.23.

- 7 See S.E. Akpabot, *Football in Nigeria* (London, 1984), and I.O. Akindutire, 'The historical development of soccer in Nigeria', *Canadian Journal of the History of Sport* (No. XXII, 1991), p.23.
- 8 Akpabot, *ibid.*
- 9 D.O. Ogunyibi, *The Development of Nigeria's Participation in International Sport Competition and its Effects on the Nation*, PhD, Ohio State University, 1978.
- 10 Nnamdi Azikiwe, *My Odyssey* (London, 1970), p.403.
- 11 *West Africa* (17 September 1949), p.889.
- 12 *West African Pilot* (9 February 1945), p.4.
- 13 *Ibid.* (10 February 1945).
- 14 *Ibid.* (6 February 1945).
- 15 *Ibid.* (8 February 1945).
- 16 *Ibid.* (9 February 1945).
- 17 *Ibid.* (6 February 1945).
- 18 Azikiwe, *op. cit.*, p.410.
- 19 *West African Pilot* (8 February 1945).
- 20 Akpabot, *op. cit.*
- 21 *Times* (30 August 1949), p.6.
- 22 *Ibid.*
- 23 Quoted in *West Africa* (15 October 1949), p.967.
- 24 Quoted in Akpabot, *op. cit.*, p.10.
- 25 'Ambassadors return', in *West Africa* (8 October 1949), p.943.
- 26 *West African Pilot* (17 August 1949).
- 27 *West Africa* (3 September 1949).
- 28 *Liverpool Echo* (1 September 1949), p.3.
- 29 *Ibid.*
- 30 *Ibid.* (29 September 1949).
- 31 *Ibid.* (1 October 1949).
- 32 *Times* (5 September 1949), p.6.
- 33 *Amateur Sport* (10 September 1949).
- 34 *Ibid.*
- 35 *West Africa* (17 September 1949).
- 36 Quoted in *West African Pilot* (13 September 1949).
- 37 *Amateur Sport* (17 September 1949).
- 38 *West Africa* (17 September 1949).
- 39 *Amateur Sport* (17 September 1949).
- 40 *West Africa* (24 September 1949) and *West African Pilot* (22 September 1949).
- 41 *West Africa* (24 September 1949).
- 42 *Times* (26 September 1949).
- 43 *Ibid.*
- 44 *Amateur Sport* (17 September 1949).
- 45 *West Africa* (15 October 1949).
- 46 *Ibid.* (24 September 1949).
- 47 *Ibid.*
- 48 *Ibid.*
- 49 *Liverpool Echo* (27 September 1949), p.3.
- 50 Akpabot, *op. cit.*, p.21.
- 51 *Ibid.*, p.22.
- 52 *Times* (29 September 1949).

TONY MASON

Futbol and politics in Latin America*

When reigning monarchs and republican presidents patronise football, they are acknowledging its cultural importance in their society and adding to it. They are both offering support to football and underlining their own authority as they present the cup to the winning team. Moreover, they associate themselves with a popular activity and show that they, too, share the passions of their people. But, in South America, the relationship between politicians and football has often been much stronger than that. Military governments in particular have employed a well-tried mixture of repression, bread and circuses in order to control their peoples – and football has played a leading role in the circus. Several writers have agreed with Uruguayan novelist Mario Benedetti, who pointed to the use of football as political soporific.¹ In such regimes, there is growing evidence that leading members of the world of football have been important political figures.² What follows will be an attempt to explore the developing relationship between football and governments in twentieth-century South America.

Historically, when the game was still in its elite phase, powerful figures would show themselves on important footballing occasions. In 1905, the president of Brazil, Rodrigues Alves, a man of São Paulo, watched Fluminense play CA Paulistano in Rio (although with some suggestion of a loss of prestige).³ In June 1906, president Figueroa

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Alcarta of Argentina was the most distinguished member of the record crowd which saw Alumni beat the touring South Africans. Three years later, the visiting Everton and Tottenham players were presented to the president at half time during their match in Buenos Aires.⁴

The state began to encourage football in other ways. In 1906, the president of Brazil offered a cup for competition between state teams, an early attempt to establish a national championship. The Argentine Congress had promised, and apparently voted, money to provide a trophy to be competed for annually by Argentine clubs but, somewhat mysteriously, it failed to materialise.⁵ The Argentine Ministry of Education did put up a cup to be played for by Argentina and Uruguay in 1908 and a number of matches were played between then and 1919. In 1911, the Uruguayan minister of education reciprocated, the last game in that series taking place in 1923.⁶

As football grew in importance, it began to play a part in national patriotic celebrations. In 1910 and 1916, for example, football tournaments were part of the centenary festivities in Argentina. The South American championships played a similar role in Brazil in 1922 and the first World Cup in Uruguay was arranged in 1930 to coincide with the centenary of that country's independence from Spain. The president of Uruguay attended all of his country's matches in that first world championship. It was clearly no coincidence that both River Plate, in 1938, and Boca Juniors, in 1940, opened their new stadiums on Independence Day, 25 May.

Leading politicians wanted to be associated with what was fast becoming a major cultural phenomenon. So, in 1919, president Pessoa, in the midst of the serious economic and political crisis of that dramatic year, went out of his way to congratulate the Brazilian team which in May won the South American championship for the first time. 'I salute in the name of the nation the victory of the young Brazilian sportsmen.'⁷ President Washington Luis was among the crowd at the opening of Vasco da Gama's new stadium in April 1927. He was there again seven months later for the final of the Brazilian championship between teams representing the old rivals of Rio and São Paulo. Before the game, the president and his ministers received an ovation lasting three minutes from the 50,000 crowd. The president later said he had never been applauded by so many people in his life. But his day began to go downhill from that moment. The match was a tight one and was still level at 1-1 with twelve minutes left. The home team was then awarded a penalty. The Paulistas, nonplussed, refused to continue. Up in the stands, the president of the Republic, himself a native of São Paulo, sent down one of his minions to tell the São Paulo players that they should get on with it. The captain of the Paulistas apparently declared that he gave the orders on the pitch and the team walked off. The referee insisted the penalty be taken, even though

there was no goalkeeper to oppose it, and Rio was declared the winner.⁸ The press had a field day and it is hard to escape the view that the image of the president was damaged – being president does not, after all, give you the right to intervene in football matches. Three years later, president Luis was ousted by a military coup. But, before he went, he showed that he was still interested in how football could promote Brazilian identity at home and abroad when his government provided the Confederação Brasileira de Desportos (CBD) with a special budget to organise the participation of Brazil in the first World Cup.⁹

* * *

The Brazilian government was to concern itself more directly with football during the presidency and then the dictatorship of Getúlio Vargas, who dominated the politics of the country for almost a quarter of a century after 1930. His coming to power marked the end of the supremacy of the coffee interests of São Paulo and his regime was eventually able to redirect the economy away from the unpredictable fluctuations of a coffee-exporting base through a state-guided programme of industrial development. These economic changes were accompanied by political ones aimed at reducing the power of the separate states and making Brazil more centralised. By the late 1930s, Vargas was a dictator in a country where civil rights were curtailed, the press was censored, political parties were banned and restraints on the activities of the police had been lifted. Attempts were made to promote feelings of national pride in Brazil. Every radio station had a compulsory Brazilian hour. The regime was also keen to encourage sport and especially football. In April 1941, a National Council of Sports was set up within the Ministry of Education and Culture, its five members – one from the army, one from the air force, plus three civilians – all chosen directly by president Vargas.¹⁰ The Vargas era was a turning point in the relationship between football and politics. From this time onwards, not only the federal government but individual politicians would try to associate themselves with what was an increasingly powerful manifestation of Brazilian popular culture. Not only did the leading football clubs offer social facilities in a country where such things were scarce, but the success of Brazilian football abroad, both at club and international level, illuminated the name of Brazil for the rest of the world.

There are many examples of Brazilian political involvement in football. In the late 1940s, president Dutra gave the football club Flamengo a prime piece of property close to the centre of Rio. Vargas himself, in his last period as president, also arranged for Flamengo to receive a low-interest government loan so that it could build a twenty-

four storey office block with spectacular views of the bay. A governor of Minas Gerais hoped to win votes by building the Magalhaes Pinto stadium in Belo Horizonte in 1965, and there was an orgy of government-inspired stadium building in the 1970s in all parts of this vast country, including Belém, Curitiba, Fortaleza, Maceio, Porto Alegre, Recife and Salvador. Between 1969 and 1975, thirteen new stadiums were built, nine of them in the less-developed north and east. By 1978, seven of the world's ten largest stadiums were in Brazil.¹¹ After the military coup of 1964, football was one of the ways the new dictatorship could associate itself with popular interests. President Medici, 1969-73, claimed to be a fan of Flamengo, regularly turned up at their matches and tried to influence the selection of the team. He may have been a genuine enthusiast. President Giesel certainly was not, but his public persona labelled him as a fan of Internacional from Porto Alegre in his home state, as well as of Rio's Botafogo. Brazil's famous third World Cup victory in 1970 was expertly exploited by the government. Immediately after the final, president Medici made a speech to the nation:

I feel profound happiness at seeing the joy of our people in this highest form of patriotism. I identify this victory won in the brotherhood of good sportsmanship with the rise of faith in our fight for national development. I identify the success of our [national team] with ... intelligence and bravery, perseverance and serenity in our technical ability, in physical preparation and moral being. Above all, our players won because they know how to ... play for the collective good.¹²

The marching tune written to inspire the world cup team, 'Forward Brazil', became the theme song of the regime. The nationalistic slogan, 'no one will hold Brazil back now', was combined on posters with a picture of Pele leaping with excitement after one of the goals. The team's first stop after the Mexico victory was Brasília to meet the president, who had declared the day of the team's return a national holiday. Photographs of Medici with the team were in all the newspapers. He then took the unprecedented step of opening the doors of the presidential palace to the public.

Only one year before, the government had created a lottery, based on the national game, which became a very successful promotion of the Department of Finance. Not only did it provide revenue which was divided between the Departments of Social Security and Education and Culture, it also penetrated to most corners of this vast country and provided a football-based geography lesson for punters. The lottery almost certainly contributed to the pressure placed on the Brazilian football authorities to organise a genuine national championship, rather than just a competition between teams representing individual

states. A Rio-São Paulo club tournament had been in existence since 1950 and was expanded in 1967 to include clubs from the other three southern states. Air travel made a national championship for clubs possible, especially if the government was prepared to contribute to the cost of the fares. By 1979, ninety-two teams from twenty-two states were involved in a championship which was added on to the state league's season, making football an all-the-year-round business. Both the travel and the playing exhaust the teams and a plethora of games, many of them between teams of grossly unequal strengths, deters the supporters.

Critics have claimed that the development of Brazilian football has been distorted by politics. So far as the military regime was concerned, a national championship, like a national lottery, contributed to the overall strategy of national integration. Having at first banned political parties, the regime then reinvented them, creating a majority government party and a minority opposition one. As winning elections became more difficult, football in general, and a place in the national championships in particular, was used in an attempt to sway the electorate. This was made easier by the fact that the presidency of the government Arena party in Rio and the presidency of the CBD were both in the hands of Admiral Heleno Nunes from 1974. Opponents claimed that, in the areas where Arena was doing badly, the local teams would be given a place in the national championship even if they had not earned one by success on the field. Politics and football remain closely tied in Brazil, perhaps one reason why this ludicrously overgrown national championship continued even after democratic government was restored in 1985. The present system is hardly in the interests of the players and, although there are many reasons why they so often follow the siren call of Europe, notably money, the physical and social pressures of too many matches must also play a part in the decision to leave. Leading football personalities know that their status helps if they want to go into politics in Brazil and, for a politician, an interest in football is a real advantage.¹³

Football as a political diversion is an old story in South America and by no means restricted to Brazil or Argentina (which I discuss below). In La Paz in 1968, for example, the Bolivian government attempted to distract the workers planning to march on May Day, to protest against low wages and anti-trade union measures, by arranging the visit of a leading Argentine team. Televised football was often used to keep people indoors on that dangerous holiday.

Dictators often prevented leading clubs from feeling the full impact of their own mismanagement. In Chile, General Pinochet rescued Everton of Viña del Mar in 1979 and the Rangers club of Talén in 1982, as well as nominating the president of the country's leading club, Colo Colo of Santiago, in 1981 and 1984. He did not want a collapse

of Chile's professional league. Similarly, the regime of General Stroessner in Paraguay saved two Asunción clubs, Sol de América and Cerro Porteño, when they got into financial difficulties in 1983 and 1985. The military junta in Uruguay did the same for Peñarol in 1978 and 1981. In both countries, state funds were used to support the national team: in Uruguay, by organising a tournament for World Cup winners at the end of 1980 and in the new year of 1981; in Paraguay by spending one million US dollars on preparing Paraguay for the 1986 World Cup.

* * *

In Argentina, there has been a history of contact between the worlds of football and politics. The nation's president was involved in the unification of the two organisations running the game in 1926. It was to the president that a deputation of striking players went in 1931. The nation's leader was also present when Boca Juniors opened their new ground on 6 July 1924, accompanying his minister of war, Agustín P. Justo, who was a big fan of the club. General Justo was himself the president of the Republic between 1932 and 1938, and the president of Boca 1939-46, Ferrero, married Justo's daughter.¹⁴ It is not surprising that clubs Boca and River had financial help from the state to develop their stadiums. A study of AFA presidents has clearly shown how the spheres of football and politics overlapped. Aldo Cantoni, for example, was president of the Asociación Argentina de Football in 1922-23 and 1926. He was president of Huracán between 1920 and 1923 and again in 1933-34, and also governor and national senator for the province of San Juan. Ramón Castillo was president of the AFA between 1941 and 1943. He had had no role in football until then but he was the son of the country's president...¹⁵ This relationship between football and politics would be made more systematic under president Perón.

Perón was a colonel in the army who quickly became an important figure in the military government which seized power in 1943. He was both minister of war and head of the Department of Labour and Social Welfare. Far from declaring war on labour, he promoted the expansion of trade unions in Argentina to such effect that, within two years, their proportion of the occupied workforce rose from 10 per cent to 66 per cent. In 1945, Perón married the actress María Eva Duarte, and in 1946 stood for the presidency and won. With the support of the unions and the urban middle class, Perón created a powerful political organisation. He introduced measures to redistribute income in favour of workers and nationalised foreign-owned public utilities like the railways. It was a nationalist impulse that lay behind his drive for state-led industrialisation, in order to reduce Argentine dependence on imports and on the export of food and raw

materials. Perón promoted activities designed to further the cultural progress of Argentina and stimulate national unity. Sport in general, and football in particular, was already popular and it was obvious and easy to use the resources of the state to encourage sport further. Like all heads of government, he thought such a policy might be a vote winner and take some people's minds off the less satisfactory aspects of his regime.

In 1947, the government created a new umbrella body for sport by fusing together the Argentine Olympic Committee and the Confederation of Argentine Sports. The new authority was chaired by the president of the Supreme Court. 'Perón sponsors sports' and 'Perón, the first sportsman' – echoing the claims made for Mussolini – were slogans designed to draw attention to the way in which sport and sportsmen were to play an important role in constructing the new Argentina 'which we all desire'.¹⁶ Government funds helped with the preparation of the largest team to have been sent to an Olympic Games up to that point, 1948, and it was delighted to associate itself with the team's considerable, if slightly surprising, success. Peronist medals were presented to the athletes in a public ceremony at the stadium of River Plate in 1949. In 1951, Argentina organised and won the first Pan-American games, providing opportunities for the Peronist government to emphasise the civilised nature of Argentine culture and its leadership of the American continent. Sporting heroes who won famous victories regularly dedicated them to Juan and Eva. Pascual Pérez, the first Argentine boxer to win a world professional title when he defeated Yoshio Shirai in Tokyo in 1954, grabbed the ring microphone at the end of the contest and cried, 'Mission accomplished, my general! I won for Perón and for my country.' Such triumphs were given the maximum publicity in the largely government-controlled newspapers and radio.

Eva Perón also promoted sports through the Social Aid Foundation which she headed. The first of the Evita Championships took place in 1950. It was a football tournament for children aged between 13 and 15. Anyone could form a team, choose a name, choose its colours – the Foundation supplied all the kit – and enter. The finals were played in Buenos Aires by twenty-four teams. Evita kicked off and, in addition to the national anthem, a march was played with the chorus, 'To Evita we owe our club, and for that we are grateful to her.' One hundred and fifty-thousand children took part in that first tournament, 200,000 in the second in 1951. The aim was not only to promote participation but also to improve the health of the young. Entry was accompanied by a compulsory medical and an x-ray. The championships were later extended to athletics, basketball and swimming, and were yet another public sign of the new Argentina. It appears fashionable to criticise the scheme for its failure to produce

many players who would play in the professional league but it does seem to have been widely enjoyed for the few years it lasted, with many small football enthusiasts putting on their first pairs of boots and socks.

Football had many supporters among the Peronist government, some in influential positions which enabled them to be real benefactors to their favoured clubs. The most famous example was Ramón Cereijo. He was finance minister and a passionate supporter of the football club Racing. Though not officially engaged in the management of the club, he was alleged to have taken part in negotiations with other clubs over player transfers. When the best Argentine players were leaving the country for Colombia and Europe during and immediately after the dispute of 1948-49, no one left Racing. The club was champion for three successive seasons, 1949, 1950 and 1951. After the third triumph, most of the team received new Chevrolets. Racing was nicknamed *Sportivo* (Sporting) Cereijo. As finance minister, Cereijo was central to the cheap loan of three (eventually eleven) million pesos which the government advanced to the club so that it could build its new ground. The loan did not need to be repaid for sixty-five years which, given the frequent bouts of inflation, made it a really good deal. No wonder that the stadium was named after president Perón, who was given the presidency of the club, and that Eva Perón, Cereijo, Bramuglia (minister of foreign affairs) and Miranda (president of the Central Bank of Argentina) were made honorary members. Both the president and the first lady turned up for the inauguration on 3 September 1950.¹⁷ Few clubs were without a state godfather, although it would be tedious to list them.

Given the attention which the Peronist government of Argentina focused on football, it is surprising to find that Argentina failed to send a team to the South American championships of 1949 in Brazil or to the World Cup of 1950, also held in Brazil, or that of 1954 in Switzerland. One possible explanation is that anxiety about defeat led the government to take the decision not to play – after all, many leading Argentine players had left the country during the strike of 1948-49. Critics have suggested that, by not risking defeat, the supporters of Argentinian football could still think their team was the best. The president of the AFA at the time was leading Peronist Valentín Suárez. Asked many years later about why Argentina had withdrawn from the 1950 World Championships, Suárez reminded his questioner of the strike and the fact that there was some tension between the AFA and the CBD of Brazil. But he also hinted that there was a political factor and that powerful figures in the government thought Argentina was not fit to compete. Such views may not have been decisive, but they had to be respected.¹⁸

Ironically, when Argentina did venture beyond the River Plate, it

won against Eire (1951), Spain and Portugal (1952). In fact, the only defeat inflicted on Argentina between 20 December 1945 and 5 December 1954 – excepting an unofficial match against Uruguay during the dispute of 1948 – was by England at Wembley in a friendly arranged as part of the Festival of Britain celebrations in May 1951. This was the first ever meeting between the two countries and must have meant a lot to the visitors. The British had introduced football to Argentina and done much to develop it. In spite of setbacks, the myth of their superiority, as is the way with myths, was reluctant to fade away. England boasted an unbeaten home record against foreigners, with the exception of Eire. (The immediate political background was not without tension either, as Argentina and Britain had just spent the best part of a year renegotiating their 1949 trade agreement.) The match provoked a good deal of interest and a record crowd for an international played on a mid-week afternoon. Argentina scored after eighteen minutes and, although mostly on the defensive for the rest of the match, were not beaten until England scored two goals in the final eleven minutes. Rugilo, the Vélez Sarsfield goalkeeper, made his name in that match as the ‘Lion of Wembley’; in spite of the tears from some players at the end, it had been an honourable defeat. The party received a heroes’ welcome on their return to Buenos Aires.

In 1953, England returned the visit. Argentina had again missed the South American championships, played in Peru just a few weeks before. Perhaps they were preparing for something they thought more important. After all, Argentina had won many such titles and would have plenty of opportunities to do so again. But the English were not to be taken lightly. For them, the visit was part of a tour which also took in matches against Uruguay, Chile and the United States, and was the first ever visit to South America of the national team. There were to be two games in Buenos Aires. The first, according to the English, was designed to give the reserve players in the party a game. It was not a full international but was described in English sources as an FA XI against an Argentinian XI. Not surprisingly, Argentina picked its best team. England included only four of their first choices and were soundly beaten 3-1. Argentine joy was more or less unconfined. President Perón declared the day of the match, 14 May, to be ‘Footballers’ Day’, to be celebrated every year.¹⁹ A few days later the full international was played but had to be abandoned after twenty minutes because the pitch was flooded.

There are three further examples of the close links between football and the government of Perón. On the death of Eva Perón in 1952, the AFA and most of its affiliated clubs and leagues sent copious messages of sympathy to the president. Two years later, in 1954, Alberto Armando of Boca dedicated the championship which the club had just won ‘to the man who has known how to give Argentinian sport the

content and vitality with which it finds itself at the moment, with international repercussions which have gained him acknowledgement as first sportsman of the world'. Finally, the AFA gave funds to the Eva Perón Foundation to benefit the victims of the failed coup of 16 June 1955.²⁰ Of course, the government did not run football; it did not decide every issue. But the AFA was run by the president's men; and, as Valentín Suárez noted, the views of the government had to be 'respected'. The close relationship between football and politics did not end with the overthrow of Perón. Nor would Peronism end with the overthrow of Perón.

* * *

In 1966, FIFA provisionally named Argentina for the venue of the World Cup of 1978. The selection could hardly have been better timed. In 1966, the eighth world championships were held in England. In the quarter finals, Argentina met the hosts. When footballing cultures clash, they can do so in fascinatingly fruitful ways or resoundingly negative ones. This game was one of the latter. There is not the space here to do more than mention how the English and the Argentinians saw it. The men from Buenos Aires went in for systematic fouling: no one was allowed to pass them. This was buttressed by continual complaints to, and criticism of, the German referee, orchestrated by the captain, Boca midfielder player Antonio Ubaldo Rattin. The climax came shortly before half time, when the referee lost patience and sent Rattin off. For a while, it looked as though the Argentinians would not continue. The stoppage lasted eight minutes. Both then, and at the end of the match, there was more trouble between the Argentine players and the officials. Two Argentine players were later suspended for their part in it, Ferreiro for attacking the referee and Onega for spitting at a FIFA official. In spite of being reduced to ten men, the rest of the team played well enough in a close game which either side could have won. England was relieved by Hurst's sixty-sixth minute winning goal.

In Argentina, the predominant response appears to have been outrage. This was fuelled by the England manager's comment in a post-match interview. 'We have still to produce our best football. It will come against the right type of opposition, a team who come to play football and not act as animals.'²¹ Argentina had been insulted as well as cheated. Argentina was the 'moral champion'. President General Juan Carlos Onganía greeted the team on its return to Buenos Aires. A popular daily newspaper, *Crónica*, published the headline, 'First they [the English] stole the Malvinas from us, and now the World Cup'. The same newspaper later financed a small expedition which landed a plane on the Falkland Islands.

Football remained closely related to the state. Valentín Suárez made it clear enough in January 1967: 'the government never closed its doors and never will close its doors on football clubs.'²² With many of the leading clubs in financial difficulties, this was just as well. The state loaned millions of pesos to football clubs. In return, the championship was restructured from 1967, with the Buenos Aires League becoming the Metropolitan Championship and a new National Championship extending the season to nine months of the year. As in Brazil, political factors were important. The smaller clubs and the provinces of the interior wanted their share of the national obsession. Some Argentinians have suggested that football had become a kind of public service. It was inevitable that the 1978 World Cup would be conscripted.

FIFA had confirmed in 1975 that Argentina would be the venue for the next World Championships. Little appears to have been done by a Peronist government overwhelmed by inflation and apparently on the brink of civil war. The government was overthrown by the military in March 1976 under a three-man junta led by General Jorge Videla as president. Some members of the new government suggested the country could not afford to stage the World Cup, but the junta disagreed. In July 1976, the World Cup was declared a national interest and an organising committee set up. EAM78 – *Ente Autárquico Mundial '78* – got off to a bad start when its first president, General Actis, was assassinated. But a lot of hard work and the spending of some 10 per cent of the national budget in Argentina for 1978, US\$700 million, produced remodelled stadiums at River Plate, Vélez Sarsfield and Rosario, and new ones in the provincial cities of Córdoba, Mar Del Plata and Mendoza. A new press centre for the two and a half thousand journalists expected was also constructed, together with new television studios. Colour TV was also introduced – a FIFA requirement for the billion people who would watch the games from their own homes.²³ Airports were improved and Buenos Aires smartened up. The organisers claimed that some of this outlay would be recouped by 50,000 tourists but no more than 10,000 eventually arrived.

From February 1978, EAM and its Coca-Cola allies moved into a propaganda offensive aimed at their opponents both at home and abroad. European civil rights groups were among the most important of the latter. At home, radio, television, advertisements, newspapers and posters bombarded the population with patriotic slogans such as 'twenty-five million Argentines will play in the World Cup'. The opening ceremony, on Sunday 1 June, went without a hitch – without the traditional difficulties of a football Sunday – in front of a president Videla dressed in his civilian suit.²⁴ *El Gráfico* summed up the excitement and satisfaction that not only the organisers felt.

For those on the outside, for all the journalists, the insidious and badly-intentioned journalists who for months have been organising a campaign of lies about Argentina, this tournament is showing the world the reality of our country and its capacity to do things with responsibility and to do important things well.

For those inside, for those who do not believe that we have in our own house ... after so many hard experiences ... enormous possibilities and this has nothing to do with the football results, Argentina has already won the World Cup.²⁵

Videla called it a 'World Cup of Peace' – he got an ovation for that one – and the goals of improving Argentina's international image and repairing the fractured national consensus appear to have been achieved.

But the enthusiasm with which Argentina overflowed for the World Cup of 1978 was not simply produced by the promotional activities of the dictatorship. It was, as the title of a feature film by Sergio Renán had it, 'La fiesta de todos' – Everybody's Feast. There were echoes of 1930, with firms placing television sets in factories and offices, families fitting their lifestyles around the football schedules, cinemas changing their programmes and newspapers publishing special supplements. Every time Argentina played, there were huge celebrations in Buenos Aires and the cities of the interior. When Peru was beaten 6-0 and Argentina's place in the final was assured, it was estimated that 60 per cent of the population of Buenos Aires went on to the streets to celebrate. Only the Brazilians and Alemann, the minister of the interior who had been critical of the cost, were suspicious: the Brazilians, because FIFA had foolishly allowed their game with Poland to be played before Argentina met Peru, which meant that, as Argentina and Brazil would have equal points if both won, Argentina would know exactly how many goals were required to win their place in the final; Alemann, because a bomb exploded at his home at the precise moment when the all-important fourth goal was scored.

After victory in the final against the slightly unfortunate Dutch, parties went on all through the night of 25 June and the next day the Plaza de Mayo was thronged with schoolchildren who were greeted by president Videla.

All the population without exception offered its happiness, its legitimate fervour, showing itself to be hospitable friends of visitors and these people will be the witnesses of our true reality in their own countries without the defamation of this international campaign of falsehoods. The sport was an opportunity, the way to express, as never before, the feeling of national unity and the common hope of peace, unity and fraternity.²⁶

But the people, too, had been in thrall. While the World Cup lasted, it was something to share and something to savour. It was a breathing space between an horrific immediate past and an anxiously uncertain future.

On the first anniversary of the victory of Argentina over Holland, the newspaper *Clarín* organised a great celebration in the River Plate stadium in the presence of the president. In September of the same year, the occasion of the victory of Argentina in the World Youth Cup, held in Japan, was used to obstruct the work of a committee from the Organisation of American States which was investigating violations of human rights. A well-known radio commentator, José María Muñoz, told his listeners to go to the Avenida de Mayo and show the people of the human rights commission that Argentina had nothing to hide. The Avenida de Mayo was the scene of the silent protest by mothers whose sons and daughters had 'disappeared'. This attempt to exploit the enthusiasm of football fans against the mothers appears to have backfired, as both the members of the commission and the public had the issue placed powerfully in front of them.

The euphoria produced by the 1978 World Cup was not simply the result of government power and, in particular, its control of the newspapers, radio and television. Neither was the enthusiasm shown in the first days of the Malvinas/Falklands war in 1982. But the connection between football, war and politics was close.²⁷ The chants of the crowds in the streets were from the stadiums. In the final of 1978 they had chanted, 'he who does not jump is a Dutchman'; in 1982 he was an Englishman. 'Ar-gen-ti-na, Ar-gen-ti-na' was used in 1982 to support the armed forces in their big match, and leaflets showing the 1978 World Cup emblem, a very young gaucho dressed in football kit accepting the surrender of a defeated British lion, were widely distributed. Official television coverage of the war was interspersed with football matches. When Argentina played, the games were clothed in patriotic sentiment. The national anthem, a minute's silence for the Argentine dead, followed by flag waving and chants of 'Ar-gen-ti-na'.

Before the end of that war, the military dictatorship decided that Argentina would play in the World Cup in Spain. 'The Army of the Andes in shorts', as one Peronist intellectual labelled them, lost to Belgium just one day before the military surrender in the Malvinas/Falklands. The second stage of the competition was reached but there followed comprehensive defeats by Italy and Brazil, and elimination. In the match against Brazil, the new hero of Argentine football, Diego Maradona, was sent off.

It is clear that the military dictatorship of Argentina hoped to use the staging of the World Cup in 1978 to enhance the legitimacy of the regime both at home and abroad. In a country where football was so

popular, a World Cup, and at home, was bound to test people's hopes and feelings of identity. Just as some Brazilian intellectuals had wanted the defeat of Brazil in the 1970 world championships, in order to prevent the exploitation of victory by the military government, so similar attitudes surfaced in Buenos Aires. It was a difficult choice for those who did not support the regime but wanted Argentina to win. As one of them told an American writer, 'for once, however unreal it may be, we have a team – an entity – that is called Argentina'.²⁸ Ricardo Halac, the playwright, put it more graphically:

The military men wanted to use the Mundial but they also wanted us to come out champions. Many Argentines who celebrated did not like the military, but we also wanted to be champions. What could we do? Not dance? Boycott the Mundial? Do dictatorships pass away, do Cups remain? We went, we won and we danced.²⁹

Such a response was very different from those who accosted the mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, mourning for their 'disappeared' children, and accused them of damaging their country. If all Argentinians supported the 'great party', they did not do so for the same reasons. But, in the end, all this investment in the World Cup could only purchase a breathing space for the government. Football victories, even in World Cups, do not solve economic, political and social problems.

The national euphoria produced by hosting the World Cup was repeated during the early days of the Malvinas/Falklands war in 1982. But again, some of the support had complex roots. As in Britain, where groups who detested the Thatcher government supported a military response to the occupation because they identified the Argentine military government with fascism, so in Argentina there were those who opposed the military regime but were persuaded that the British were imperialists fighting a colonial war.³⁰ Defeat in the World Cup would not have been the epilogue for the Argentinian military dictatorship. Defeat in the Malvinas/Falklands was.

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Race and college sport: a long way to go^{*}

As America confronts yet another racial crisis in the 1990s, the expectation remains that sport, nearly forty-five years after Jackie Robinson broke baseball's colour barrier, can lead the way. College sport, in particular, has been portrayed as a beacon for democracy and equal opportunity. This perception is taking place at a time when 75 per cent of high school students indicated to public opinion analyst Lou Harris that they had seen or heard a racial act with violent overtones either very often or somewhat often in the previous twelve months.¹ Fifty-four per cent of black high school students reported that they had been a victim of a racial incident.² One in three students said that they would openly join in a confrontation against another racial or religious group if they agreed with the instigators. Another 17 per cent, while they would not join, said they would feel that the victims deserved what they got.³

According to Harris, the nation's leading opinion analyst, too many of our children have learned how to hate. He concluded:

America faces a critical situation. Our findings show that racial and religious harassment and violence are now commonplace among our young people rather than the exception. Far from being concentrated in any one area, confrontations occur in every region of the country and in all types of communities.⁴

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• Part of a chapter from *Sport in Society: equal opportunity or business as usual?* (Sage, forthcoming).

Race & Class, 36, 4 (1995)

One of the most hallowed assumptions about race and sport is that athletic contact between blacks and whites will favourably change racial perceptions. However, for this change to take place, coaches must be committed to helping guide players' social relations. The *Racism and Violence in American High Schools* survey, conducted by Lou Harris for Northeastern University in 1993, showed that 70 per cent of high school students reported that they had become friends with someone from a different racial or ethnic group through playing sports. Among blacks, a 77 per cent majority reported this result; the comparable majority was 68 per cent among whites and 79 per cent among Hispanics. That, indeed, was encouraging news.⁵

Black student-athletes and white campuses

However, on predominantly white campuses, as in corporate boardrooms, the atmosphere naturally reflects the dominant white culture. Most campuses are not equal meeting grounds for white and black students, whether from urban or rural America.

American public opinion of college sport reached its nadir in the mid-1980s. In an attempt to create meaningful reform, many measures were passed. Among them were Propositions 48, 42 and 16. The wide-ranging debate and protest against Proposition 42 placed the issue of race among the central ethical issues in college sport in the 1990s. Proposition 42 would have prevented athletes who did not achieve certain academic standards from receiving a scholarship. The new debate over Proposition 16 in 1994-5 has again raised the racial spectre in college sport.

The American Institutes for Research (AIR) produced a study for the National Collegiate Athletics Association (NCAA) in 1989 which suggested that there are low academic expectations for black athletes. Only 31 per cent of the black athletes surveyed for the AIR study indicated that their coaches encouraged good grades. The study also suggested that black student-athletes are not receiving the education promised by colleges, since they graduate at a significantly lower rate than whites. They have few black coaches or faculty members to model themselves upon on campus.⁶ All of this is drawing attention and public pressure. The Reverend Jesse Jackson founded the Rainbow Commission for Fairness in Athletics to change such imbalances.

While less than 6 per cent of all students at Division I-A institutions are black, 60 per cent of the men's basketball players, 37 per cent of the women's basketball players and 42 per cent of the football players at those schools are black.⁷

All colleges and universities have some form of 'special admittance' programme in which a designated percentage of students who do not meet the normal admission standards of the school are allowed to

enrol. According to the NCAA, about 3 per cent of all students enter as 'special admits'. Yet more than 20 per cent of football and basketball players enter under such programmes. Thus, many enter with the academic odds already stacked against them.

The 1989 NCAA AIR study presented a wealth of data. Those familiar with college athletics were not surprised by the study's findings, which indicated that black athletes feel racially isolated on college campuses, are over-represented in football and basketball, have high expectations of pro careers and are uninvolved in other extracurricular activities. However, the results of the NCAA study stood in stark contrast to the findings published by the Women's Sports Foundation.⁸ It was the first major study of minorities playing high school sports. It clearly established that, in comparison to black non-athletes, black high school student-athletes feel better about themselves, are more involved in extracurricular activities other than sport, are more involved in the broader community, aspire to be community leaders and have better grade point averages and standardised test scores. Almost all those results contradict the view that most of white society has about the black athlete.

According to Lou Harris, it is apparent that most varsity athletes believe that their participation in high school team sports has helped them to become better students, better citizens and to avoid drugs:

The value of playing sports in all these areas was significantly higher for African-American student-athletes in particular and for football and basketball players in general. It merits considerable attention by colleges and universities where the experience of African-American student-athletes as well as their football and basketball players is significantly different and appears much more negative.⁹

The primary question which now must be asked is what happens to black athletes, and black students in general, between high school and college that seems totally to change how they perceive themselves. Among other things, many black students leave a high school that is either overwhelmingly black or at least partially integrated. If they are from an urban area, they leave behind a core of black teachers and coaches. If they live on campus or go to school away from home, they leave behind whatever positive support network existed in the community in which they were raised and leave behind possible black role models who are not exclusively athletes.

The student arrives in college to discover that the proportion of blacks at Division 1-A schools is approximately 6 per cent. Furthermore, less than 2 per cent of the faculty positions at colleges and universities are held by blacks. Finally, the athletic departments hire just slightly more blacks than the faculty and actually hire fewer blacks than the professional sports teams.

A great deal of emphasis has been placed on racial discrimination in professional sport, especially the hiring practices of professional franchises. In fact, a great deal of the research done at the Center for the Study of Sport in Society is devoted to the publication of the annual *Racial Report Card*. However, a look at the numbers of available employment positions in our colleges and universities indicates that it is less likely for blacks to be hired by higher education than in professional sport.

While the militancy and struggle of the 1960s and 1970s have reduced the negative self-perceptions of most young blacks, the stereotypes still exist for many whites. Those stereotypes come with all the taboos that go with them. White and black athletes can meet on campus carrying a great deal of racial baggage. Their prejudices won't automatically evaporate with the sweat as they play together on a team. The key to racial harmony is the attitude and leadership of the coach.

He must be committed to equality and clearly demonstrate this to the team.* The history of young athletes, and students in general, makes it an uphill task. Chances are that competition at the high school level bred some animosity; usually white teams play against black teams, reflecting urban residential housing patterns. There is virtually no playground competition between blacks and whites, as few dare to leave their neighbourhood.

On a college team, blacks and whites are competing for playing time, while in the society at large black and white workers compete for jobs, public housing, even welfare. A primary difference is that whites are apt to accept blacks on the team, since they will help the team win more games and, perhaps, get them more exposure.

It is easy for white athletes, no matter what their racial attitudes might be, to accept blacks on their teams for two other reasons. First, they need not have any social contact with black team-mates. Sports that blacks dominate are not sports like golf, tennis and swimming, where socialising is almost a requirement for competition. Players need not mingle after basketball, baseball or football. More importantly, black male players need not mingle with white women after those games. Housing on campus and social discrimination through fraternities and sororities further isolate the black athletes. Whether in high school or college, the black student-athlete faces special problems as an athlete, as a student and as a member of the campus community.

Most of white society believed that we were on the road to progress until Al Campanis and Jimmy 'The Greek' Snyder made us challenge our perceptions. Their statements on national television that blacks and whites are physically and mentally different were repugnant to

* The context, I should make it clear, is one of the overwhelming preponderance of male athletics, in terms of recruitment, sponsorship, media coverage, etc.

much of the country and led to widespread self-examination. Like many whites who accept black dominance in sport, Campanis believed that blacks had less intellectual capacity. It makes things seem simple to people like Campanis: blacks sure can play, but they can't organise or manage affairs or lead whites. Marge Schott, speaking in private, reopened the wounds in 1992, when her remarks about blacks and Jews again stunned the world of sport. Many people would not see much to contradict this view if they looked to society at large. In 1995, white men and women were twice as likely to hold executive, administrative and managerial positions as black men. At the same time, blacks were twice as likely to hold positions of manual labour as whites. Decades of viewing this pattern could easily reinforce the Campanis viewpoint: whites are intelligent and blacks are physically powerful.

After fifty years of trying to determine the genetic superiority of blacks as athletes, science has proved little. Culture, class and environment still tell us the most. Instead of developing theories about why black Americans excel in sports, perhaps more time will now be spent on the achievement of black Americans in human rights, medicine, law, science, the arts and education who overcame the attitudes and institutions of whites to excel in fields where brains dictate the champions.

Coaches: a study in black and white

The coach becomes the black student-athlete's main contact, and the court frequently becomes the home where he is most comfortable. Nonetheless, there are some black athletes who feel that their white coaches discriminate against them and that their academic advisers give them different counselling. This may reflect a general distrust of whites, or a strong perception that racism is the cause of certain events. Even well-intentioned acts can be interpreted by blacks as being racially motivated. Over the years, there have been black student-athletes who have made a series of similar complaints irrespective of where their campus was located: subtle racism has been evidenced in differential treatment during recruitment; poor academic advice; harsh discipline; positional segregation on the playing field and social segregation off it; blame for situations for which they are not responsible. There are also complaints of overt racism: racial abuse; blacks being benched in games more quickly than whites; marginal whites being kept on the bench while only blacks who play are retained; summer jobs for whites and good jobs for their wives.

To say that most or even many white coaches are racist is a great exaggeration. But most white coaches were raised with white values in a white culture. The norm for them is what is important for a white society. If white coaches accept stereotypical images of what black

society is and what kind of people it produces, they may believe that blacks are less motivated, less disciplined, less intelligent (53 per cent of all whites believe blacks are less intelligent) and more physically gifted. They may think that all blacks are raised in a culture bombarded by drugs, violence and sexuality, and that they are more comfortable with other blacks. They might believe those characteristics are a product of society or simply that they are the way God chose to make them. They might recognise themselves as racist, disliking blacks because of perceived negative traits. More than likely, however, such a coach views himself as simply trying to help. But, in any case, if he acts on these images, then his black players are victimised.

In one of the most important scandals of the 1980s, Memphis State University, a 1985 NCAA Final Four participant, fell into disgrace. There were many allegations about the improprieties of the school and its coach, Dana Kirk. One that could not be disputed was the fact that twelve years had gone by without Memphis State graduating a single black basketball player. Like several other urban institutions, Memphis State built a winning programme with the talents of fine black athletes. The fact that none had graduated brought back memories of Texas Western's NCAA championship team which failed to graduate a single starter, all of whom were black. But this failure went on at Memphis State for more than a decade. The NAACP sued the school. Publicity finally led to the dismissal of Kirk.

I do not mean to single out Memphis State. In the ten years since Dana Kirk was fired, I have been on more than seventy-five campuses. The pattern is frequently similar: the academic profile of black football and basketball players and their treatment as students is different from whites and their graduation rate is lower.

Positional segregation in college

The issue of positional segregation in college is becoming less of a factor. For years, whites played the 'thinking positions'. The controlling position in baseball is the pitcher; in football, it is the quarterback. Everyone loves the smooth, ball-handling guard in basketball. These are the glamour positions that fans and the press focus on and have largely been white positions. College baseball still poses the greatest problem at all positions, as fewer and fewer blacks play college baseball. Less than 3 per cent of Division 1-A college baseball players are black.¹⁰

However, in a major shift in college football, large numbers of black quarterbacks have been leading their teams since the late 1980s. Between 1960 and 1986, only seven black quarterbacks were among the top ten candidates for the Heisman Trophy and none finished higher than fourth. In 1987, 1988 and 1989, black quarterbacks Don

McPherson (Syracuse), Rodney Peete (USC), Darien Hagan (Colorado), Reggie Slack (Auburn), Tony Rice (Notre Dame), Stevie Thompson (Oklahoma) and Major Harris (West Virginia) all finished among the top ten vote-getters. In 1989, Andre Ware (Houston) became the first black quarterback to win the award. Florida State's Charlie Ward won it in 1993. In 1994, Nebraska won the national championship with a dramatic Orange Bowl victory behind the leadership of quarterback Tommie Frazier.

Top point guards coming out of college are becoming more and more predominantly black. Recent stars such as Kenny Anderson, Tim Hardaway, Anfernee Hardaway and Jason Kidd are just a few of the more prominent black point guards. Hopefully, this bodes well for an end to positional segregation in college sport in the near future.

Can black athletes speak out?

The coach is the authority. Historically, athletes have rarely spoken out. This creates problems for all coaches who come up against an outspoken player. When the player is black and not a superstar, he will often be let go. Only the superstars like Bill Russell, Kareem Abdul Jabbar and Muhammad Ali can remain secure, because no one can afford to let them go. But even the greatest ones paid heavy prices for many years after their outspokenness. Muhammad Ali, who had refused to go into the army, knew you had to be at the top to speak out if you were black. Ultimately, Ali had the money and influence to go all the way to the Supreme Court. Most blacks have neither the money nor the influence to make the system work.

In 1992, Craig Hodges spoke out about the Rodney King case in Los Angeles. Hodges was a great shooter but was a peripheral player on the National Basketball Association championship team, Chicago Bulls. He had won the three-point contest at the all-star game. After his remarks, he was cut by the Bulls and not one team picked him up. Tommy Harper's case is also instructive. His contract was not renewed by the Boston Red Sox in December 1985. The Red Sox said he was let go because he was not doing a good job as special assistant to the general manager. Harper, however, charged that he was fired because he spoke out against racist practices by the Red Sox. Earlier in 1985, he had said that the Sox allowed white players to receive passes to the whites-only Elks Club in Winter Haven, Florida, where they held spring training. (The Sox later stopped the tradition.) Harper sued and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission ruled that the firing was a retaliatory action against Harper because he spoke out against discrimination. It took him a while to get back into baseball. At the time of writing, he is a coach for the Montreal Expos.

There are positive examples as well. It did not go unnoticed that a

group of black athletes at Auburn asked the president of the university to get a Confederate flag removed from a dormitory; it was removed. In 1987, the Pittsburgh basketball team wore ribbons as a protest against their school's investments in South Africa. In 1990, black athletes at the University of Texas at Austin led a protest against racism on campus – encouraged by members of the athletic department. Whether or not this will become a trend is hard to see, but the positive and widespread media coverage of their actions stood in dramatic contrast to early reactions to Russell, Ali and Abdul Jabbar.

In 1969, fourteen black players in the University of Wyoming football team informed their athletic department of their intention to wear black arm bands during their forthcoming game against Brigham Young University. The players' intent was to bring attention to the doctrinal position of the church of the Latter Day Saints, which prevented blacks from holding the priesthood. After hearing of the players' plan, Wyoming's head football coach cited a long-standing team policy which prevented players from engaging in protests of any kind. When the players showed up at his office wearing the arm bands just one day before the game, the coach interpreted their action as a defiance of the rule and a direct threat to his authority. He summarily dismissed all fourteen players from the football team.

Although this incident remained a sore spot in the history of Wyoming athletics for nearly twenty-four years, the university held ceremonies to honour the players on 24 September 1993. The event was the result of the African American studies department working in conjunction with the school's administration to recognise the former players, signalling a new era in communications between student-athletes and the administration.

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- 5 See LH Associates, *Survey of High School Athletes* (November 1993).
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Commentary and reviews

UK

Kicking racism out of football: a supporter's view

The last eighteen months have been a watershed in the fight against racism in English football. In August 1993, at the start of the 1993-4 league season, the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) joined forces with the Professional Footballers' Association to launch a high profile anti-racist campaign entitled 'Let's kick racism out of football'.¹ It won the support of ninety-one out of the ninety-two professional league clubs, the exception being second division York City (who did not believe the club had a problem), and received considerable media coverage.

The CRE campaign entered a new phase at the start of the present 1994-5 season, when clubs were asked to back their words with actions. In addition, the Football Supporters' Association joined forces with the CRE to ensure that fans were fully involved with the campaign. The result of this partnership was *United Colours of Football*, an anti-racist fanzine (supporters' magazine) produced by and for fans.² Over 11,000 copies were distributed free in the first week of the season at virtually every ground in the country. The fans' initiative took the CRE campaign right down to the bedrock of English football, the fans themselves, and won further support.

Despite, however, the welcome nature of the CRE's campaign, football fans, both black and white, who had witnessed the virulent racism of the late 1970s and 1980s are entitled to ask, 'What took you so long?' Indeed, Herman Ouseley, chief executive of the CRE, commented in January 1995: 'We recognise that we came late to the fight against racism in football.'³

And there must still be real doubt about the commitment of football's governing bodies, such as the Football Association and the

Football League, to anti-racism, given the lack of action in the past and their low profile during the CRE campaign. The very fact that it has been prompted by an outside body (the CRE) and carried along by supporters and the PFA, rather than the clubs and the football authorities, shows the need for caution.

A recurring theme of English football over the past twenty years has been a denial of racism, backed up by the fallacious claim that talking about it would make it worse. Nonetheless, racism has been a genuine issue for English football since the mid-1970s. The reasons for the outbreak of overtly racist behaviour by fans at that time are outside the scope of this article, but much of it focused on the emergence of a new generation of black footballers, British-born rather than immigrants.⁴ From a small number in the mid-1970s, approximately 20 per cent of all professional footballers in England are now of African-Caribbean origin. This development mirrored the wider progression of black people in Britain from immigrants to settlers and the establishment of a genuinely multicultural society.

Football was one of the most visible symbols of this developing multicultural society and tension was inevitable. At the same time, the British economy went into structural decline and unemployment grew. These two separate developments led both to racial tension and an historically high level of support for far-right parties.

The net result for football was the emergence during the mid to late 1970s of overtly racist behaviour by fans on the terraces for which black players were an obvious target. This took the form of abusive chants, 'monkey' noises and banana throwing. It quickly became aggressive and large-scale, a major element of the wider 'hooligan' culture that started to dominate in English football from the late 1960s onwards. It needs to be clearly stated that this widespread racism was not instigated by anyone – it was a spontaneous racist response by white youth, in a climate in which such racism was endorsed rather than challenged, to a changing game and a changing society. However, from early on, fascist groups such as the National Front saw the potential of such racism and actively encouraged and promoted it. At Leeds United, my own club, NF paper-sellers appeared regularly from the mid 1970s onwards, building a considerable block of support. By the late 1970s, the NF's approach had become highly sophisticated, with the appearance of *Bulldog* magazine. In many ways, this offensive and aggressive publication was the first football fanzine, as its style was deliberately pitched at the young fans on the terraces. Its key feature was 'The Racist League', where fans of various clubs were ranked according to the ferocity of their racist chants. This prompted genuine competition for the 'most racist' title among fans from clubs such as Chelsea, West Ham, Leeds, Newcastle and Aston Villa.

It was a key moment – and one at which the football clubs and

authorities failed totally. A decisive public challenge was needed to the growing racism. Instead, football ignored it, hoping it would go away. It was part of a wider failure to face up to the growing hooliganism and disorder, responding with ill-directed repression rather than thought-out strategies. At that time, fans had no voice in the game, as supporters' clubs were weak and conservative. It was left to outside political organisations, such as the Anti-Nazi League (ANL) and its offshoot, Rock Against Racism, to try to influence football. Individual football personalities, like managers Brian Clough of Nottingham Forest and Jack Charlton of Middlesbrough, signed statements of support for the ANL but later distanced themselves. ANL activists leafleted grounds such as Leeds United's Elland Road but failed to dent the growing racism and fascism. This was partly because the ANL activists were not football fans and did not understand how to campaign successfully among them. Also, they had wider political aims and were not prepared to commit themselves to consistent long-term political work among football fans in the same way that the NF did at clubs like Chelsea, Leeds and West Ham.

The outcome was that, from the late 1970s to the late 1980s, racism went unchallenged in English football. At grounds throughout the country, racist behaviour was commonplace and was often accompanied by violence against the small number of black fans, or against local black communities. Although politically weak, fascist groups had considerable support amongst racist fans. (Only a limited number of fans were members or even active supporters, but many others identified with the name and outlook of those groups.) The shameful racist incidents that disfigured English football during that period could fill a book, one famous example being the racist abuse of John Barnes by so-called England fans during a tour of South America just days after he had scored one of the greatest goals ever seen against Brazil.

But, from the mid-1980s on, racism within English football began to be challenged, and it was ordinary fans who led the challenge. This was part of a wider transformation whereby they started to contest violence and racism by other fans, and went further to demand better treatment for fans generally, as well as a real say in the running of the game. In 1985, thirty-nine Juventus fans were killed following rioting by Liverpool fans at the European Cup final in Belgium. Soon after, the Football Supporters' Association (FSA) was established by a small group of Liverpool fans, with the aim of bringing supporters of all clubs together on a positive agenda, the aim of which was to transform, from the ground up, the culture of the game. Opposing racism and fascism was central. Over the past ten years, the FSA has established itself as the genuine voice of fans, leading the campaign against compulsory ID cards for football supporters and influencing England fans in positive directions during the 1990 World Cup in Italy.

At the same time as the FSA was born, a new phenomenon was developing – football fanzines. These are supporters' magazines, independent of the club, produced by and for fans. They are witty, rude, often irreverent and, for the most part, strongly opposed to racism and violence. Among them are the *Chelsea Independent*, *When Skies are Grey* (Everton), *Our Day Will Come* (Celtic/Manchester United) and *Red Attitude* (Manchester United). From starting with small print-runs and poor quality production, many fanzines have now become glossy magazines which sell in their thousands. Often there are several fanzines at each club – Leeds United currently has four.⁵ In addition, the national fanzine, *When Saturday Comes*, now sells over 200,000 copies each month.

Both these developments meant that a mood of anti-racism was starting to grow among English fans, fuelled by a younger generation who had grown up in the multiracial society that is modern Britain and who wanted nothing to do with the racism and violence that were plaguing football. The wider context for this was a modern youth culture of raves, fashion, etc., that emphasises personal freedoms and values. At certain clubs, concerted anti-racist campaigns led by fans started to appear. They drew strength from the fanzine movement and the FSA but also influenced the anti-racist content of those movements.

The key local campaigns have been Leeds Fans United Against Racism and Fascism, Newcastle United Against Racism, Foxes Against Racism (Leicester City) and the Scottish-based Supporters Campaign Against Racism and Fascism (SCARF), based around the two Edinburgh clubs, Hearts and Hibernian. What all the campaigns and fanzines have in common is that they are run by people who are genuine fans of their clubs and regularly go to games. Thus, they not only understand what is really going on at the ground, but have genuine credibility among their fellows.

Our own campaign at Leeds was started in 1987 by a small group of anti-racist fans who were sick of what was going on at Elland Road, where racist behaviour was commonplace on the terraces and fascists sold their papers outside the ground. Our first step – a step in the dark – was to print and distribute an anti-racist leaflet, which got a superb and supportive response from a clear majority of the fans. That encouraged us to produce two more leaflets that season, with the initial aim of isolating and exposing the fascist agitators. The response of Leeds United and the police exemplified the attitude of English football at the time. The police claimed in advance that we were likely to 'introduce political violence to Elland Road', even though the NF had been there for over a decade! And the club threatened to sue us for using its logo, though merchandise vendors had been using it without permission for years.

Pressure from local politicians led Leeds United to meet us and to

ask for evidence that there was a problem of racism. The result was our report, *Terror on Our Terraces*, published in March 1988, which received national publicity. Just days before the report came out, Leeds United issued an anti-racist statement signed by the manager and all the players – coincidence? Since then, under chairman Leslie Silver and team manager Howard Wilkinson, Leeds United have made sincere attempts to combat racism. Public statements have been made and action has been taken against racist fans.

Within twelve months of our campaign starting, we felt that we had made real progress: the club had begun to take action and the fascist fringe groups had been isolated. Support for the NF/BNP at the ground started to tail off and, within a couple of years, they had disappeared.

But there was still a long-term problem – the racist behaviour and attitudes of individual fans. What was needed was a long-term campaign. So we launched our fanzine, *Marching Altogether*. The first issue appeared in November 1988; number 21 has just been published. We bring out three or four issues a season and distribute them free to fans on certain match days. That it is free is crucial – in our experience, people who buy fanzines tend to be more progressive in their thinking to begin with. However, we wanted to communicate with all the fans, especially younger ones who might easily fall into racially abusing black players and fans. The fanzine is not about politics – it's about our love of Leeds United and football, and uses that to tackle racism and other forms of prejudice head-on.

Today, racism has not been eliminated from Elland road – but things have improved. Racist chanting is a thing of the past, though there are still occasional racist comments from individuals. This is partly due to the team's greater success in recent years (English League champions 1991-2) and the role of black players in that. At Leeds, they are not now, as they were in the '70s, a target for racial hatred but, in a more positive anti-racist climate, valued as a crucial element in the club's success. And in the creation of that climate, our campaign has made a significant contribution.

That mirrors what has happened at other clubs. Not all have had campaigns like ours, but not all have had a problem like ours. We have spent time liaising with other campaigns and fanzines and the FSA because racism has to be tackled nationally. The CRE's initiative was, as already pointed out, a national one, sponsored by supporters and players but not by clubs and the football authorities. Clubs put their names to it and a minority are clearly tackling racism in practice (such as Derby County, Charlton Athletic, Leicester City and Leeds United). Part of the CRE initiative is to follow up the progress of individual clubs. There is, in particular, a problem at lower division clubs, where a few racist individuals can influence the atmosphere.

Racist chanting was, in fact, made illegal in 1991, as recommended

by the Taylor Inquiry into the Hillsborough stadium disaster of 1989, where ninety-five Liverpool fans died.⁶ Fans were not opposed to this, but felt it should have been unnecessary. Clubs could already outlaw racist chanting under their ground regulations but most had either not bothered or not enforced the ban – which raises another question mark about the commitment to anti-racism of those in power in football. In the last resort, it is the lack of political will, not the lack of appropriate legislation, that prevents action being taken against racists.

But while racism is, on the whole, rare at big clubs, there is still a problem. That was shown by the racist abuse of Manchester United's Paul Ince by Nottingham Forest's Stuart Pearce earlier this season. That Pearce is still captain of his club is a disgrace. It was also shown by the role of fascist agitators at the recently abandoned international between England and Ireland. The fascists (mainly Chelsea supporters) are small in number but, over the last few years, have been able to set a consistent tone of racism and violence at England away matches.⁷ This has sparked a negative cycle whereby young racist fans from around the country are attracted to such matches and ordinary anti-racist supporters stay away in disgust. A campaign similar to our own is now needed among people who regularly go to England matches – particularly urgent in view of the fact that England hosts the European Nations Championship finals in June 1996.

Perhaps the greatest challenge for the next few years is to boost the number of black fans attending matches. Although things have improved, the number of black fans is only increasing slowly. Clubs are attempting to reach out to ethnic minority communities through their 'football in the community' officers but black fans still worry that they will have to endure racism if they go to games. That clearly means that clubs have to do more to attract black fans – spend more resources and give the issue more publicity. We believe that the CRE should continue its campaign and now focus on the participation of black fans. The anti-racists are ahead and playing well, but the final whistle hasn't gone yet!

Leeds Fans United Against
Racism and Fascism

PAUL THOMAS

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- 1 A parallel campaign was launched in Scotland, which has a separate football structure and league.
- 2 *United Colours of Football* is obtainable by sending a large SAE to the FSA, PO Box 11, Liverpool L26 1XP.
- 3 Speaking at Leeds United AFC at the launch of the CRE's 'Uniting Britain Campaign', on 23 January 1995.
- 4 Viv Anderson of Nottingham Forest became the first black player to play for England in 1978.

- 5 *Marching Altogether, The Square Ball, The Hanging Sheep* and *'Till the World Stops*. *Marching Altogether* is published by Leeds Fans United Against Racism and Fascism, PO Box 127, Leeds LS3.
- 6 The Football Offences Act (Racial Chanting) 1991.
- 7 These same Chelsea supporters, who have links to the small neo-Nazi group Combat 18, launched a violent attack on members of the anti-racist Chelsea fanzine, *Chelsea Independent*, in August 1994.

Reviews

John Arlott: a memoir

By TIMOTHY ARLOTT (London, Andre Deutsch, 1994), 223pp.
£14.99.

Last summer in Sheffield, the great Caribbean cricketer, Gordon Greenidge of Barbados, a veteran of over two decades of international cricket, visited our school and spoke to a group of our students about his life and career. One of the young cricket enthusiasts asked him how he had started in major cricket. He said that he had been introduced to county level and encouraged to achieve at it by John Arlott, the nonpareil of cricket commentators – whom Greenidge described as ‘the Shakespeare of cricket’. Over a quarter of a century ago, in a small Caribbean island where I was teaching, I met a man at work in his cliff-top field as I was out walking early one morning in the countryside. He stopped me and we talked. Where was I from, he asked. England, I replied. ‘Ah England!’ he exclaimed, ‘and how is John Arlott?’ For me, thousands of miles away from the old radio set in our front room at home, here was its proof writ large – and here was the fame of a voice.

It may seem incredible that a remembrance of a cricket commentator, the son of a cemetery attendant from Hampshire and owner of a bucolic dialect and a poetic facility for describing the processes and settings of the English summer game – a game which became a sphere of black excellence and spur towards nationhood – should be invoked all over the world where cricket is played. But millions came to the game through his unforgettable commentaries and wondrously evocative descriptions. He made a sport into a poem, and to its players he gave the personalities of characters from a rambling rural novel.

But he was much more, and the biography written by his son, Timothy Arlott, gives a rounded picture of a man of intense generosity yet sometimes blinding self-will, but also of committed and loyal principle.

In 1948 Arlott was travelling as a radio journalist with the England cricket team through South Africa. The tour coincided with the election victory of the National Party led by Malan, which swept the Smuts United Party government from power and proceeded to build the edifice of the apartheid state. On election night, the windscreen of Arlott's car was covered by the spit of National Party supporters, and the visits he later made to the townships around Johannesburg filled him with a loathing for South African racist government and the apartheid system for the rest of his life. It needs to be remembered that during this pre-Sharpeville period the mass of the British public had no real picture of the oppression of black people in South Africa, although in the empire of their subconscious it must have been present. As a cricket-mad schoolboy in the late '50s I can remember reading *Cricket in the Blood*, the autobiography of Dudley Nourse, ex-captain of the South African team, which was all-white – and to people like me at the time, unquestioningly so. And everything was white in Nourse's book, black people weren't even mentioned. The reader would have imagined, as I did, a white, English-speaking land, full of tough yet chivalrous cricketing farmers with their tanned, manly sons.

Thus, Arlott's intervention exposing South Africa's racism, and the effect it had on its black and mixed-race population, was well founded and all the more effective due to his international reputation. His championing of the Cape Town, classified 'coloured' cricketer, Basil D'Oliveira, whom Arlott helped to bring to England in 1960 to play as a professional in the Lancashire League, finally resulted in the severing of cricketing links between England and South Africa – and later South Africa's isolation from world cricket – when the apartheid sporting authorities refused to accept D'Oliveira as a member of the English touring party to South Africa in 1968. Arlott's own steadfast refusal to commentate on matches involving South Africa on the projected 1970 tour to England also created worldwide publicity about and pressure upon the apartheid state. During a televised debate at the Cambridge University Union, 'That politics should not intrude upon sporting contacts', Arlott's humanism beamed out across the world: 'Mr President sir, anyone who cares to support this motion will not exclude politics from sport but will in fact be attempting to exclude sport from life.' As Ian Wooldridge, cricket correspondent of the right-wing *Daily Mail*, conceded: 'He won the day not only with sane persuasion, but with a faultless flow of English so beautiful in its construction that you could almost hear the commas and semi-colons fall into place.' It was a victory for the language of the air, the global voice of Arlott.

For if it is by his voice that millions will remember him, his son's book of his father's life is, as well as being brave, critical and lovingly and honestly wrought, a story of pain and loss within a lifelong appreciation of what many hold to be the most generous and epic of games.

The death of a son and a wife-companion while in the heart of his fame was concealed from all those who listened intently to him and sat next to him in their imaginations while he talked to them from the Oval, Trent Bridge, Lords, Old Trafford or Headingly. Timothy Arlott's memoir also recounts his father's unhappiness and the loneliness of his last years, spent on the Channel Island of Alderney. For this book is also the story of a particular generation, a generation of lost Englishmen like Arlott, liberal and freethinking in their individual minds and generous in their individual spirits, yet blocked in themselves from shifting that individual humanism towards collective solutions and the economics of equity.

But what a voice, what use of words! And the world – the ex-empire world of bat, ball and stumps – will never again know its like.

Sheffield

CHRIS SEARLE

Anyone but England: cricket and the national malaise

By MIKE MARQUEE (London, Verso, 1994). 288pp. Paper £9.95, cloth £39.95.

It must be a mystery to most people that cricket can exert such a powerful influence on the national psyche. Although a minority sport in Britain – and in virtually every country in which it is played – cricket continually makes national and international headlines, not always on the sports pages.

To anyone who has even a passing acquaintance with the game, its patronage by the social and political elite might be familiar. But the completeness of the English land-owning oligarchy's domination of the game from its birth is still astonishing. Mike Marqusee knows and loves cricket and both qualities shine through his brilliant contribution to cricket literature. Neither blinds him to the reality that cricket in Britain is shot through with hypocrisy and a corrupt and vicious nationalism which perverts the supposed ideals of the game. In this, he puts most cricket writers to shame.

Cricket has its origins in pan-European stick and ball games which existed long before the nation state. The first reference, in 1478, to a game called *criquet* comes from France (where the custom of taking tea in the afternoon also originates). Marqusee traces the transformation of cricket from a pre-national rural pastime through its development as the first modern spectator sport, to its present status as commercial commodity, pillar of British identity and focus for xenophobia. And if the English land-owning elite's position was an 'accident of geography and social history', its strategy for ruling the game forever was planned and ruthlessly executed.

It was a momentous era. The Industrial Revolution was getting up a full head of steam, and the empire still expanding. And even as we begin to use the words 'industry', 'democracy' and 'class', we also see the appearance of 'cricket bat', 'cricket ball' and 'cricket stump'. The concepts of fair play and team spirit are also found for the first time, specifically in connection with the game.

Cricket and the English establishment are umbilically connected, and that connection directly affects the performance of the national team to this day. That connection has shaped cricket's present day organisation and is responsible for English cricket's failure to adapt to the changed economics, life-styles and demands of post-war society. That, in turn, has led the British media and cricket press to look for someone else to blame for England's chronic cricketing decline. And the lasting legacy of that complacent arrogance is an inability to identify the reasons for the decline or how to reverse it.

Marqusee's greatest quality, apart from his meticulous research, is the engaging and accessible way in which he makes apparent the inevitability of this process, given the decision of the rulers of the game to preempt the rapid social change of the time and entrench themselves in their 'natural' position for ever. He shows how the creation of the MCC and the machinations of its various factions, perpetuated over generations through the public school/Oxbridge continuum, are the most crucial influences on English cricket's history.

The subversives deserve a special mention, and get it: William Clarke, who organised lucrative matches between his teams of professionals and all-comers in the 1840s and '50s, threatening the dominance of the MCC; John Arlott ('nuff said), and Major Rowland Bowen, who served in India and Malaya and, anticipating cricket's post-war crisis, taught sabotage techniques to opponents of Tests against South Africa in the 1960s. Marqusee's exposition of cricket's imperial connection and racist traditions is equally comprehensive and skilful, as is his linking of the various strands of his analysis into an entertaining and authoritative whole.

Apparently, some people ask Marqusee how an American can possibly understand cricket. His standard response – 'How can an Englishman?' – is perfect. He is transparently in love with the game and its eccentricities, while scathing about those who have attempted to hijack cricket for their own narrow ends. His style, while gently ironic, is charged with deadly truth.

While other cricket writers try to explain how they always knew English cricket was in decline, but never said so, or trump up allegations of cheating against superior opponents to discredit them, Marqusee looks within and finds a barrel full of rotten apples. For a game so obsessed with its past, its analysts (Martin-Jenkins, Berry, Engel, Lander, et al.) are exposed as possessing short and selective

memories. For this, Marqusee deserves all the awards for which his book has been nominated.

London

SALIM SALAAM

Games and Empires: modern sports and cultural imperialism

By ALLEN GUTTMAN (New York, Columbia University Press, 1995), 288pp., \$26.00/£19.00.

The most powerful and insightful books on sport and sporting culture are those which come from the writer's engagement with the contradictions of the sport they love and know, and the place that it occupies in the society in which they live and struggle.

Hence the contexts of two books by writers of the Americas: James's *Beyond a Boundary*, written at the moment of British colonialism's exhaustion and withdrawal from the Caribbean, or the brilliance of Marqusee's *Anyone But England*, created while British nationalism, knackered and time-shocked, tries to re-equip and re-arm its erstwhile power through the medium of organised sport.

Both these books are about cricket and its specifics, but that particular interaction between the writer and the sport is the beginning of much more too. In such a context perhaps, Allen Guttman's *Games and Empires* suffers from being a book on sport which is of a broader, survey-type genre. Its analysis is frequently very sharp, its diverse facts are brought together effectively and its range is impressive. But, because it treats its individual sports superficially, rarely probing into their anatomy or cultural dynamic, it remains an account on the outside and carries less power and stimulus than an extract from James or Marqusee.

Guttman's favoured and oft-repeated expression is 'ludic diffusion' – the means by which European-devised sports became international cultural phenomena through the agency of two particular imperialist powers: 'From the British Isles, modern sports went forth to conquer the world,' he asserts, and later, 'not until World War Two did Americans finally supplant the British as the primary agents in the diffusion of modern sports'. In engaging and persuasive chapters on cricket and soccer, he shows how British imperialists – a concoction of industrialists, administrators, soldiers and sailors, missionaries, diplomats and teachers – consolidated the empire for the British by the use of sport alongside religion and language. 'In the history of the British Empire, it is written that England has owed her sovereignty to her sports,' declared J.E.C. Weldon, between 1881 and 1885 the headmaster of Harrow, with Eton the most prestigious of the British public schools which primed so many young imperialists, and there were so

many Oxford and Cambridge sporting achievers in the various branches of the imperial service in Sudan during the late nineteenth century that the colony was described by one wag as 'the land of the blacks ruled by the blues'.

Guttman is very much at home in his chapters on baseball and basketball. In these, the sporting domination of the US becomes the protagonist and the writer's work is at its most piercing, particularly in his description of the intertwining strands of imposition, resistance, migration and, as Louise Bennett put it in her Jamaican way, 'colonialism in reverse' that are at the heart of the baseball relationship between the US and the Caribbean. He also vividly demonstrates the role of the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) in taking basketball with it at every point where it established itself, following on a previous clerical strategy of the British to implant 'muscular christianity' through organised sport and make its converts and adherents among the colonised peoples.

But this is the canvas of sporting oppression, only one side to Guttman's work. For what has characterised the brilliance and audacity of those who used and transformed the imperial games is the way in which they have turned around these colonial institutions against political and cultural ascendancy itself. In a revealing section of the soccer chapter, Guttman reminds us just how significant that process has been. In Algeria, the FLN saw soccer as an 'instrument for sedition' and an infrastructural opportunity to meet, plan, mobilise and further the organisation of their national liberation movement. In Tunisia, the forces against French imperialism declared that 'every Tunisian sports victory against colonial power contributed to the destruction of the myth of colonial power'.

One would need to return to more in-depth accounts like that of James to see exactly how such resistance was achieved in all its complexity and contradiction through the grasp of one particular sport, or consider the specific social and political context of the triumph of black American athletes at the 1968 'Black Power' Olympics – or the supremacy of Kenyan and Ethiopian long-distance runners in the 1970s, or the exploits of individual African and Latin American soccer geniuses like the Mozambican Eusebio or the Brazilian Pele in the post-war period of world football.

But the excellence of Guttman's book is that he has offered us both a curriculum and a key to open it, to examine and investigate the achievements of these sporting resisters and their times. In this sense, his work can only provoke our gratitude and stimulate our further research.

Sheffield

CHRIS SEARLE

Hilary Arnott, 1944-1994



Hilary Arnott, who died on 23 December 1994, had been closely associated with the Institute of Race Relations for twenty-six years, for over twenty of which she worked as sub-editor to Race & Class entirely on a voluntary basis. Until the last year of her life, not one word reached the printed page without being scrutinised by her incisive intelligence and sharp editorial eye.

We publish below the speech given by A. Sivanandan at the Memorial Meeting for Hilary, held in London on 31 January 1995.

Thank you for letting me remember Hilary with you. Grief needs to be shared to be borne, and remembrance must renew our will to fight for the things Hilary fought for. And so I will not sully the memory of her going with high-faluting praise or grave solemnity. Hilary liked truth and Hilary liked fun.

I first met her at some sort of office party some twenty-five years ago. She had joined the Institute of Race Relations a little while earlier,

as editorial assistant (I was the Institute's librarian at the time). But we were a big organisation then, with some forty or so staff – stretched over three buildings in the heart of Piccadilly, in the Fortnum and Mason belt, not, as now, in the precincts of Pentonville – and we had not met till that party.

I remember asking her for a cigarette.

'Say please', she said, in that high-pitched, upper-class voice of hers, in which authority sits like a red rag to a bull.

'Bugger you', I said, digging deep into my colonial education.

We were friends after that. We got closer still when, with a few other like-minded people, we began to question the elitist, high-handed way in which the Institute treated its staff.

There was always that about Hilary – that curious sensitivity to injustice – curious, because it was not just a hatred of injustice but a distaste for it: it went against her grain, it was not in the order of human things: to be human was to be just. Her commitment came from that – that natural, simple, instinctive dislike of un-justness. And the way she fought it was also simple and direct and within her means, not flamboyant or dramatic, not given to marches and demonstrations (though she was known, on occasion, to have mounted a mean picket or two), but giving, of her skills, her time, herself.

It was these qualities that won her the trust of her colleagues when we chose her to represent us on the Institute's management council at a time when we were increasingly at odds with management. Over little things, at first, such as staff rights, and then over matters of policy and, finally, over the role of the Institute itself. The Institute was the only independent research and educational body on race relations anywhere in Britain at the time (or in Europe for that matter), but the research it did and the information it put out served, if only by default, to provide the government with the intellectual justification for its racist policies on immigration, and on Rhodesia, and South Africa.

The staff refused to collaborate in that exercise, to a woman, and Hilary carried that refusal to the council chamber – in the measure we had entrusted her with, no more, no less, representing our views, never intruding her own. We trusted her, you see, implicitly. Trust/Hilary, the same thing, synonyms.

We trusted her, as I say, to take our fight to the management council, but we also knew that she would not be fazed by the lords and ladies of humankind who ran the Institute at the time. She was one of them, and they were afraid.

And when the battle against the bosses was finally won – it was a Pyrrhic victory, because they took all the money with them and left us with the library and two journals (*Race* and *Race Today*) to run – it was Hilary's skills and expertise that turned *Race Today* into a viable magazine and helped to transform *Race* into *Race & Class* and make it the

most important Third World quarterly in the English-speaking world.

By then, we had moved to a disused old warehouse in Pentonville Road. We had no money to pay the staff and they left, leaving a handful of us to carry on as best we could. Hilary worked for virtually nothing, and then gave of her money too.

She believed in the work she and we were doing, fighting racial injustice, and the way we went about doing it – as a collective, without hierarchies, just and fair and equal among ourselves. Who we were and what we did were part of the same continuum. And work, we learnt, need never be stultifying when it's a service.

Hilary grew through that experience, as we all did, and it set her future course in the service of other causes – on the *Latin American Newsletter*, in the Child Poverty Action Group, in the Legal Action Group – doing the simple, ordinary, caring things that human beings are meant to do in an age when they no longer do them.

We put her on the Council of Management, then, made her our boss, knowing that we would be safe with her. And, from there, she went on to help us, not only on matters of policy and direction, but on every single project we were involved in which required her skill and guidance.

Yes, Hilary was a growing person. She took her ups and downs in her stride – not in her first stride, or even her second, but in her third, perhaps, or fourth. Of course, she railed against her unhappinesses, her disappointments, her losses – cried, broke down, became miserable. But, then, she got up and got on with it, accepting everything that had happened to her, making it grist to her mill, the stuff of her growth.

Even at the end, when she was suspended between hope and hopelessness, she managed to put forth a bud or two, resolved to make a fist of her life, renew herself, set up home again in her new flat. She had begun to say yes to life, another sort of life, diminished but not extinguished, when death took her.

In the words of Dylan Thomas, whose poems she liked me to read to her in my Sri Lankan/Welsh accent, 'Time held her green and dying. And she sang in her chains like the sea.'

A. SIVANANDAN

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