

Is participation up or down? Has the World Cup attracted investment into the professional game? But then this is a big enough topic for another book.

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**Race, Sport and Politics: The Sporting Black Diaspora**, by Ben Carrington, London, Sage, 2010, xii+201 pp., bibliography, index, £83.00 (hardback), £26.99 (paperback), ISBN 978-1-4129-0103-1

The relationship between 'race' and sport is, and has been for some time, the subject of a quite staggering volume of academic output, chiefly in the spheres of sport-specific sociology and cultural studies. In recent years, moreover, a much wider body of scholarly literature has escalated its interest in issues of ethnicity, culture and colonial legacy, with the role of sport itself being increasingly (though still limitedly) recognised as something greater than a mundane or peripheral matter. It is perhaps surprising, thus, that prior to the publication of Ben Carrington's splendid volume, there had been no book-length study focused entirely upon the task of clearly elucidating the reflexive relationships between sport, social theory, culture and racial identity. Hitherto, the academic community has instead been treated to a range of (often excellent) papers focusing in great detail on narrow aspects of a wide argument. Alternately, and particularly from an undergraduate perspective, the bulk of domain-relevant information has been provided by the obligatory 'race and sport'/'sport and race' chapter in more general sport sociology books. The latter suffer the opposite problem to the former, providing broad overviews but, necessarily, with little real detail. As such, before one even opens the front cover of *Race, Sport and Politics: The Sporting Black Diaspora*, the author should be applauded for the very project undertaken here. Carrington, centrally, works to provide a sustained and historically grounded look into a broad phenomenon that has previously only really been captured in high-definition partial snapshots, or in sweeping gazes from afar.

Separated into four main sections, *Sporting Resistance*, *Sporting Redemption*, *Sporting Negritude* and *Sporting Multiculturalism*, the main body of the work focuses upon (respectively) key neo-Marxist and post-colonial theories, the historical constitution of 'race' in and through sport, the commoditisation of 'blackness' in sport (featuring a sparkling case study of boxing), and finally issues of nationalism, identity and policy. Drawing on a wide range of materials, not least the autobiographies of sporting legends themselves, the Big Theory issues articulated here are clear and strongly grounded in examples from a sporting world we can all recognise, a grounding further enhanced by Carrington's thoughtful use of striking and memorable photographs and illustrations. It is important to note that, aside from the excellent case study aspects, there is not a great deal of material herein that is, substantively speaking, *new*. In some places, therefore, to the seasoned academic in the field, the volume may almost feel like an exceptionally well articulated meta-ethnography. This is not to invoke for one moment, however, J. Frank

Dobie's famous maxim regarding 'the transference of bones from one graveyard to another'. First, the value of collecting a wide range of important ideas together in one place should not be underestimated, especially for the purposes of newcomers to them. Second, and more importantly, Carrington imbues some of these ideas with such life that *Sport, Race and Politics*, if we are to stick with the cemetery analogy for another moment, is more an exercise in necromancy than in grave-robbing.

Well-researched and fluidly organised though it is, then, the real joy of this publication lies in the rare combination of precision and flair with which the writing is executed. This should render the complex themes and concepts it conveys as accessible and enjoyable to students at all levels as it is to their lecturers. Without reliance on the excessive jargon characteristic of some *Theory, Culture and Society* output, Carrington is able to move seamlessly between voices, shifting his 'footing', as Erving Goffman (1981) would have put it, variously foregrounding the expert academic, the playful journalist and the passionate moral activist to great and eminently readable effect. Take, for example, his splendidly succinct synopsis of the broader sociological community's enduringly negative attitudes to the study of sport in the two decades since Pierre Bordieu (1988) published his famous programmatic essay on the topic:

Sport remains a problematic intellectual object in a way that few other cultural forms are. Even when major social theorists do engage sport, it is often done in such a way as to reduce sport to a mere passing illustration of some other more fundamental point. The sociologist who takes sport as a *starting point* for sociological enquiry risks a certain professional disparagement. (p. 6)

It is to the author's great credit that he has the courage and clarity to pin-down such a serious concern relating to insidious intellectual snobbery. Words such as these will, doubtlessly, resonate with the many of us who consider sport to be every bit as important a topic for academic investigation as some more conventionally 'proper' cultural forms that are studied by thousands and enjoyed by tens. It is to his even greater credit that on the very same page he is able to underscore this concern with good-natured digs both at sociological legend Anthony Giddens, who studied the socio-historical formations of sport for his master's thesis, and at the noted North London football club that Giddens supports:

Giddens' sporting intellectual antecedents are barely knowable from his extensive writings over the years that have explored in sophisticated detail just about every facet of society and culture . . . But not sport. A Giddens analysis of sport remains as rare as a major trophy in the White Hart Lane cabinet. (p. 6)

It is such flashes of creativity and flexibility in style that, despite the obviously weighty topic of book itself, prevent Carrington's narrative from becoming the kind of grim-but-worthy reading material that populates too many shelves in university libraries.

It is fair to say that *Sport, Race and Politics* is fundamentally written as a work of sociology, and addressed primarily to sociologists. I would not hesitate to recommend it to anybody with even the faintest interest in the sociology of sport *or* race. To suggest, however, that its appeal might end at the (albeit notoriously peripatetic) disciplinary walls of the sociological enterprise would be to do great discredit to the sheer range of themes and ideas packed into what is actually a relatively short volume. While some historians of sport may be troubled by the characteristically sociological manner in which the data is often heavily glossed with theory, there remains an abundance here of pertinent intellectual worth. The second section of the book, at the very least, provides a rich account of the long-wave interweaving of racial identity and sport that would sit very comfortably on the pages of any quality publication in the historical domain. But the book

is above all a *book* in the way that few contemporary publications really are; it works as an organic whole and I found myself compelled to read through it in a single sitting, so engagingly it unfolded. *Sport, Race and Politics* is a superb contribution to the general field of sport studies and a hugely rewarding use of an afternoon's reading time.

### References

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