Sport. Blacks' involvement in British sport dates back to the late 18th century, when black prizefighters astonished spectators with their prowess. That prowess remained a source of fascination for over 200 years, prompting explanations that were often based on, and indeed provided momentum for, racist theories.

1. After the first battle

2. A handful of coloured
3. In the blood
4. Mind and muscle

1. After the first battle It is difficult to know exactly whether Tom *Molineaux was in breach or observance of norms when he challenged the all-England champion Tom Cribb in 1810. The fight, which took place in Copthorne, about 30 miles south of London, featured a black former slave from America against the most celebrated pugilist of his day. Molineaux was assisted by Bill *Richmond, another former slave turned prizefighter. Giving Cribb such a tough and punishing fight before losing in the thirty-ninth round (the Queensberry Rules were not introduced until 1867) violated the English sense of superiority. Yet Molineaux also observed the codes of what Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, in their *Unthinking Eurocentrism*, call 'animalization'. An account of the day described Molineaux: 'The Black stripp'd, and appeared of a giant-like strength, large in bone, large in muscle and with arms a cruel length.'

It is a resonant portrayal and one that reveals Whites' curiosity about the physical characteristics of Blacks. The curiosity went beyond sport: in their attempts to make the difference between themselves and those whom they conquered appear natural rather cultural, colonial Whites associated Blacks with natural, instinctive ability rather than learned competence. The trope endured.

In the same year as the Molineaux–Cribb match, Sarah *Baartman, a South African woman known as 'the Hottentot Venus', was exhibited like a freak in England and France. Spectators would examine her body, feeling her ample buttocks should they wish. After her death in 1816 the noted anatomist Georges Cuvier dissected her body and used its parts as evidence to support his theory of fixed racial types. Like other prominent Blacks who displayed their bodies, she was an emblem of exoticism and Otherness.

The racial studies pursued by Cuvier and many others in the 19th century

were, according to Audrey Smedley's *Race in North America: Origins and Evolution of a Worldview*, a reaction to the success of the anti-slavery movement. The view finds favour with Jan Nederveen Pieterse, who, in his *White on Black: Images of Africa and Blacks in Western Popular Culture*, argued that 'the science of race developed after the first battle had been won in the struggle against slavery, with the British prohibition of the slave trade in 1807'.

The appearance of black prizefighters in the aftermath of the abolition of the slave trade aroused further fascination with the sources of Blacks' physical distinctness. As the search for a justification of slavery gained pace, black sportsmen (unlike today, there were no female pugilists), like Molineaux and the several other prizefighters who followed him, were seen as much as specimens as athletes. Every time a black athlete stepped up to the scratch mark (the line from which the fighting commenced), he became an exhibit. Ex-slaves, like Bobby *Dobbs, and sons of slaves, such as Bob Travers, toured England, attracting the praise of journalists and audiences alike. They were, of course, rarities and as such became curiosities rather than the objects of disdain Blacks were to become in the 20th century. Yet they were still exhibits, shown publicly for the amusement of others or as living proof of the animalism of black people. Perhaps the most dramatic instance of this was the caging of an African youth in a Belgian zoo in the mid-19th century.

Even by 1907, when South Africa-born Andrew Jeptha became the first black boxer to hold a British title, Blacks remained objects of enthralment. Two years before, in a spectacle reminiscent of the Hottentot Venus exhibition, six Moutis from the territory we now know as the Democratic Republic of Congo appeared at the London Hippodrome. The 'children of nature', as they were called by *The Times* (4 June 1905), did not sing, dance, or perform in any way: they simply came out on stage to be peered at.

The moral horizons of the 19th century were set by religious and scientific discourses. The publication of Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* in 1859 affected both. If evolution and natural selection were the principles of natural existence, the reason why the poor remained poor and Blacks were in a position of servitude lay in their deficiencies rather than in social arrangements or historical circumstances. So it seemed reasonable to suppose that the demonstrable prowess of black sportsmen was the result of a natural surfeit of physical capacities. The same fortitude that had allowed them to survive the rigours of slavery had equipped them to excel in competition (this type of argument was to reappear in another guise in the 20th century, as we shall see).

The sporting achievements of Blacks, especially following *emancipation, would have been consistent with this worldview. So it was possible for the itinerant prizefighter Peter Jackson to draw acclaim and enjoy what we would now call a celebrity lifestyle. 'I knew him in the days of his greatness when sitting on top of the pugilistic world, fêted and lionized,' recalled the Earl of Lonsdale. As Jackson's fame waned in the 1880s, Arthur *Wharton appeared as a goalkeeper for Darlington Cricket and Football Club and distinguished himself as an exceptional all-round sportsman when he became the first man to run 100 yards in even time (10 seconds) at the Amateur Athletics Association (AAA) championships of 1886. In his *The First Black Footballer: Arthur Wharton, 1865–1930* (1998), Phil Vasili quotes from a speech given by a politician who alluded to Wharton's proficiency in Darwinian terms. The British Empire, he said, was composed of 'representatives of almost every race of men, and every stage of human progress . . . It is far from easy to understand savages.' Wharton was born in Ghana. Both he and Jackson died destitute, a fate that awaited many later black sportsmen. (Andrew *Watson is sometimes offered as the first black football player, playing briefly for the Scottish club Queens Park in the 1870s, though Wharton is conventionally credited with the distinction.)

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After Wharton, the next black footballer to play for a British club was Walter *Tull, who appeared in the Tottenham Hotspur team of 1909. The sprinters Harry Edward and Jack London, both from British Guiana, were regulars on the athletics circuit in the 1920s. By this time Jeptha, who lived in London, had retired. He held his title before the British Boxing Board of Control was established. In 1929, when the Board took control of the sport, its secretary justified a new policy with a oblique acknowledgement of Blacks' natural advantage: 'It is only right that a small country such as ours should have championships restricted to boxers of white parents—otherwise we might be faced with a situation where all our British titles are held by coloured Empire boxers.'

2. A handful of coloured Boxing's rule prohibited Larry Gains, among others, from fighting for a British title. Born in Canada, Gains moved permanently to England when he was 30, having already challenged for a version of the world heavyweight title in the United States in 1928. This was a time when the 'color bar', as Americans called it, operated to prevent African-Americans and Whites from competing together. Blacks played baseball in 'Negro leagues', organized all-black basketball teams (the Harlem Globetrotters started in 1927), and staged their own professional boxing championships. Gains went two years without defeat after moving to England but was denied a challenge: 'Ninety percent of the public wanted to see me win the British title,' he told this writer during an interview in 1980. 'There wasn't prejudice amongst the public then 'cause there was only a handful of coloured here, anyway.'

Gains may have been right, at least as far as numbers were concerned, though this should not obscure the presence of moderate organizations such as the *League of Coloured Peoples, which started in 1931, or the anti-imperialist lobby, which opposed the racism practised in British colonies. George *Padmore, who moved to London in 1932, was an active organizer of the Pan-African Congress, which was committed to 'civil rights for African peoples and the total abolition of all forms of racial discrimination'. At the 1945 meeting of the Pan-African Conference, Amy Ashwood *Garvey (widow of Marcus *Garvey) chaired a session on 'the colour problem in Britain', which, according Ron Ramdin in his *The Making of the Black Working Class in Britain* (1987), meant: 'unemployment, ashore and at sea, the support of illegitimate children fathered by Black Americans and discriminatory treatment by the police'.

Some prominent sports figures were granted the kind of status that removed them from the emerging 'colour problem'. MacDonald Bailey, for example, was one of the leading athletes of his generation. Born in Trinidad, he served in the Royal Air Force during the *Second World War, then settled in Britain, accumulating a record sixteen AAA titles and a bronze medal while representing Britain at the 1952 Olympic Games. His contemporary Arthur Wint also served in the RAF, though he competed for his native Jamaica at the Olympics, winning gold in 1948. He returned to Jamaica in 1955. Another Jamaican, Lloyd 'Lindy' Delaphena, played football for Middlesbrough immediately after the war and then for Portsmouth until 1958. His playing career was free of the kind of racist enmity that was to become commonplace in the 1980s.

Welcomed as athletes, they might inadvertently have concealed deeper antipathies that surfaced only occasionally. One such occasion was in 1943, when the celebrated Trinidadian cricketer Learie *Constantine was refused accommodation at London's Imperial Hotel because the management did not want 'niggers' at the hotel. The former Test player, who was revealingly described by the cricket writer Neville Cardus as 'a sort of elemental, instinctive force', was awarded damages. Lord Constantine (as he became in 1969) had been based in England since 1929.

Sport is part of what Pieterse called the 'terrain on which Blacks have been permitted to manifest themselves' (the other

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part being entertainment). Out of their appropriate context, they were exactly as the hotel's manager described them. Years later the American sociologist Harry Edwards wrote: 'The only difference between the black man shining shoes in the ghetto and the champion black sprinter is that the shoe shine man is a nigger, while the sprinter is a fast nigger.'

African-American champions such as the boxer Jack Johnson and sprinter–jumper Jesse Owens were well known to the British, who looked on from afar at the de jure segregation that until 1954 effectively divided the United States into two ostensibly 'separate but equal' societies. Britain had no comparable legal segregation, though, as we have seen, discrimination was present, and boxing employed its own version of a colour bar. This was lifted in 1948 when a British-born boxer, Dick Turpin, who had been boxing professionally for eleven years, was allowed to challenge (successfully) for the British middleweight title. Turpin's father was from British Guiana, his mother from Leamington Spa.

In the same year as Turpin's triumph, the Labour government introduced a Nationality Act that facilitated access to Britain from its former colonies. A labour shortage combined with a post-war economic expansion necessitated drastic measures. Even Enoch *Powell, the politician who later prophesied racial conflict, travelled to the Caribbean to recruit nurses for the understaffed *National Health Service. (Powell was, at the time, Minister for Health: in 1968 he sparked a conflagration on British race relations with a speech in which he predicted, 'in fifteen or twenty years' time, the black man will have the whip hand over the white man'.)

As if to accentuate the importance of 1948, in June 492 Jamaicans disembarked from the SS **Empire Windrush*. While they are popularly thought to be the start of a major movement, Caribbean migrants followed only slowly at first, with just over 5,000 over the next five years. Presumably heartened by the gainful employment found by the pioneers and the absence of overt hostility towards them, others followed. Mass migration from the Caribbean picked up after 1953, so that by 1958 about 125,000 émigrés had moved to Britain.

Shortly before the migration gained impetus, a black boxer secured himself a place in history by beating the seemingly invincible Sugar Ray Robinson, a fighter who had not been beaten in 91 consecutive contests since February 1943. In 1951 Randolph *Turpin, brother of Dick, became an improbable world champion, albeit for a short period of time: 64 days later he was beaten in a rematch and, though he stayed active for the next several years, never secured a third fight with Robinson. Turpin's life followed much the same elliptical path as Peter Jackson's and Arthur Wharton's, as well as those of several great African-Americans, including Jack Johnson and Jesse Owens and the heavyweight champion Joe Louis, all of whom experienced hardship once their sporting careers were over. After ascending to a sporting peak, Turpin ran into financial difficulties and was forced to engage in humiliating boxer versus wrestler freak matches when way past his prime. Turpin's demise was tragic: in 1966 he committed suicide by shooting himself.

3. In the blood While the Turpin brothers were born in England, most British-based Blacks in the post-war period were from either the Caribbean or Africa, their decision to domicile themselves in Britain being a pragmatic one. Migrants headed to the bigger cities, such as London, Birmingham, and Manchester, where the jobs were abundant. Traditional textile areas in Yorkshire and Lancashire were also targeted. In a period of full employment, native white workers moved up the occupational hierarchies, leaving less desirable vacancies, which migrants filled.

Caribbeans frequently worked in low-status, often unskilled positions, despite having qualifications and experience suitable for more prestigious jobs. They were also herded informally into certain parts

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of the cities where rents were low and overcrowding tolerated. Before 1965 there was no law to prevent overt racial discrimination. A landlord wishing to prohibit black tenants could advertise with impunity for 'Whites only'. And yet the combination of depression and chronic unemployment in the homelands and the plentiful job opportunities in Britain was a potent one and one that motivated significant population shifts from the Caribbean.

The first wave of migrants harboured a distinct ambition: to have a temporary, profitable stay in the 'motherland', as many regarded Britain, before returning to the Caribbean. This fortifying belief helped migrants to endure the often unduly harsh conditions they initially encountered, though it soon transmuted into what some called 'the myth of return'. Many black boxers would have used their purses (as boxing pay is known) to supplement their income; others had their eye on bigger prizes.

Hogan Bassey was, in many senses, a reluctant migrant: he left Nigeria for Liverpool in 1951 purely to pursue his boxing ambitions. By 1957 he had realized them, winning the world featherweight title. He retired at the relatively young age of 27 and returned to Nigeria to become a coach. Another conspicuously successful black boxer of the period was Yolande Pompey, from Trinidad, who fought his way to contention but failed in his attempt to win the world title in London in 1956.

Turpin's biographer Jack Birtley made no mention of racism, or any other kind of bigotry or unfairness that must have habitually confronted black people, when he wrote his account in 1976. During Turpin's heyday in the late 1940s–early 1950s racism was not popularly understood as a social problem, though Fryer argued, 'prejudice against black people was widespread'. At least half of Britain's white population had never met a black person. 'They saw them as heathens who practised head-hunting, cannibalism, infanticide, polygamy, and ''Black magic'',' wrote Fryer. 'They believed Black men had stronger sexual urges than white men, were less inhibited, and could give greater satisfaction to their sexual partners.' While Fryer did not specify whether they were regarded as 'natural athletes', we can extrapolate from his conclusions. The point is, however, that Blacks lived in a kind of peaceful, if slightly discommodious, coexistence with Whites. All this changed in 1958.

A Midlands town best known for Robin Hood and D. H. Lawrence was an unlikely site for Britain's first significant racially motivated unrest since the war. Nottingham's industry, especially in mining and bicycle manufacture, was an enticement for migrants in the post-war period. In August 1958 a gang of Whites stormed into the St Ann's Well district, where many Blacks lived, prompting 24 arrests. In the same month a similar disturbance in London's Notting Hill went on for several days. Elsewhere the pattern repeated itself, signalling the end of peaceful coexistence and the beginning of a period of hostility. There had been earlier inchoate demonstrations—in ports such as *Cardiff and *Liverpool—but nothing so clear and emphatically racist. Mindful of the Civil Rights Movement in the United States, the British government drafted two pieces of legislation: the restrictive Commonwealth Immigrants Act 1962 and the Race Relation Act 1965.

The attraction to boxing is not hard to understand. In terms of equipment its needs are minimal. Its tradition of black champions freed it from the restrictions of many other sports. Its individualism rewarded those willing to make sacrifices in the pursuit of success—as all migrants have to do. Yet there were other prominent sports performers, notably in athletics. Roy Hollingsworth, a discus-thrower from Trinidad, and Clive Long, from Guyana, both gained international honours in the 1960s, though it was a Jamaican, Marilyn Fay Neufville, who was the outstanding athlete of her day. Neufville arrived in Britain in 1961 when she was 8, and in her teens ran for Cambridge Harriers in

south-east London. There was some controversy about her decision to represent Jamaica rather than Britain at the Commonwealth Games in 1970. She won the 400 metres, setting a world record of 51 seconds in the process. Her career fizzled out prematurely as she struggled against injuries.

Neufville was not jeered or beaten, though her preference for representing Jamaica while she was resident in London angered many, especially as many black boxers sought to fight for British titles but were prevented from doing so by a rule that specified that a title contestant 'has been resident in the United Kingdom for a period of not less than ten years'. It was 1970 before a migrant boxer won a British title; that was Jamaican-born Bunny Stirling, who had moved to England in 1954.

The issue of patriotic fidelity swirled in the air. South Africa-born Basil D'Oliveira was selected to play cricket for England in 1968 and prompted an international incident when a tour of the then segregated South Africa was aborted. Clive Sullivan became the first black captain of a British national team in any sport when he led the rugby league team to a World Cup win in 1972. It was another 32 years before rugby union appointed Jason Robinson as the first black captain of England. In football Viv Anderson was the first black player to represent England in 1978. Two years later Roland Butcher played cricket for England, and eight years after that David Lawrence claimed the distinction of becoming the first British-born black cricketer to play for England. Of all Britain's many black boxing champions, none expressed their Britishness more prominently than Frank Bruno, who rarely missed an opportunity to hoist the Union Jack in the 1980s and 1990s.

There was no novelty at all in black sportsmen and -women displaying pride and commitment in representing Britain. So it came as a surprise when, in 1995, Robert Henderson wrote an article for the venerable cricket publication *Wisden* maintaining that the England cricket team should consist only of 'unequivocal Englishmen'. This specious category excluded black players and white players born outside England. Portentously entitled 'Is It in the Blood?', the article prompted legal action by the black cricketers Devon Malcolm and Phillip DeFreitas, both of whom played for England and were presumably stung by the suggestion that they might not have possessed the requisite substance. Over 8 per cent of all county cricket players were from African-Caribbean backgrounds. What made the widely reported argument more staggering was its timing: a year after Linford Christie's Olympic 100 metres triumph, following which the Jamaican-born athlete had wrapped himself in the Union flag.

4. Mind and muscle 'Black athletic achievement is still haunted by the Law of Compensation, which postulates an inverse relationship between mind and muscle,' wrote John Hoberman in his book *Darwin's Athletes* in 1997. The link between physical and intellectual capacity on the one hand and race on the other was not a subject that engaged the British until the 1980s. But the sudden, surprising emergence of so many black athletes in the higher echelons of the nation's most popular game, coupled with concern over the persistent underachievement of black children at school, prompted serious reflection.

The early prognosis about black schoolchildren's poor educational performance was that it would improve over time as they assimilated. Nevertheless, research suggested that it had become too consistent to be so easily dismissed. In 1980 the National Association of Head Teachers, reporting to the Rampton Committee on the education of ethnic minorities, stated: 'If there is a difficulty of cultural identity among second generation West Indians, there is also much to counter-balance that deficiency including their natural sense of rhythm, colour and athletic prowess.'

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Black footballers seemed to provide clear evidence. After Delaphena's disappearance in 1958, the South African Albert Johanneson played for Leeds United in the 1960s, the Bermudan Clyde Best for West Ham United in the 1970s, and the Kittitian Cec Podd for Bradford City and other clubs in the 1970s and 1980s. These were isolated cases, about which there was no disquiet. But when, in the early 1980s, black players began to appear in numbers, the reaction was startling. The players themselves were made to endure the torment of racial chants, monkey noises, and pelting with bananas from incensed crowds. They were also the focus of a media that found headlines like 'Black Magic' irresistible. The manager of West Bromwich Albion, Ron Atkinson, patronizingly dubbed Cyrille Regis, Brendon Batson, and Laurie *Cunningham 'the Three Degrees' (after the female singing trio of the time).

In a way, the incredulity is understandable. It seemed that every week a previously unknown black player would surface. Yet fans regarded black players as contaminants, and players like John Barnes, Garth Crooks, and Garry Thompson became inured to the roar of 'Nigger, nigger, lick my boots'. Football fans' racist response became one of Britain's least creditable exports: over the next several decades fans in Spain, Italy, and east European countries systematically abused black players. The practice continued in Britain into the 21st century: in 2003 fans at Sunderland chanted racist epithets during an England–Turkey game. In reply, campaigns such as Let's Kick Racism Out of Football were aimed at combating the development.

Even the more measured responses had racist undertones. The former track hero and, later, neurologist Roger Bannister, in 1995, offered his observation, 'as a scientist', as he put it, 'Black sprinters and black athletes in general all seem to have certain anatomical advantages.' It had been possible painlessly to neglect the overachievement of Blacks in many sports, but football was Britain's perennially most popular sport, and in the 1990s black players flowed into Britain from far and wide. These included Tony Yeboah, from Ghana, Ruud Gullit from the Netherlands, and Patrick Vieira from Senegal. Several coaches, managers, and owners marvelled at the brilliance of many black players and concluded it was because of natural ability rather than the painstaking acquisition of skill, practice, and sheer hard graft associated with white players. In a similar way, Ron Noades, in 1993, when chair of Crystal Palace, detected that, while black players were effective in temperate weather, in winter 'you need a few of the maybe hard white men to carry the artistic black players through'.

The animalizing trope manifests in different ways. Abusing black athletes with apelike gestures expresses long-standing racist inclinations; explaining Blacks' prowess as the result of natural talent has much the same effect. Almost two centuries after Molineaux had excited thoughts of animalistic abilities, Blacks' sporting achievements continued to be devalued or reduced to primal impulses.

Americans had become accustomed to Blacks' pre-eminence: since Jackie Robinson's historic major league baseball debut in 1948, African-Americans had graduated to the top levels of baseball, basketball, and American football, encouraging some writers to offer explanations. Martin Kane's was the most influential. First published in 1971, his article 'An Assessment of Black Is Best' mixed physiological, psychological, and historical material to produce an argument based on racial characteristics: black people were naturally equipped to do well in sport. At the time Harry Edwards opposed the view, arguing that so many black people do well in sport because alternative paths to success were obstructed by racist practices. Sport, on the other hand, seemed free of racism and attracted an extraordinary number of highly motivated young men and women.

Kane's theory had a common-sense appeal for the British: even by 1990 black people in Britain accounted for less than 4 per cent of the total population but about 20 per cent of professional

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footballers—not to mention over half of all boxers and perhaps even more than half of all track and field competitors. While Bannister's views seemed to complement the theory, it was Jon Entine's book *Taboo: Why Black Athletes Dominate and Why We're Afraid to Talk About It* (2000) that lent it credibility. Being careful to avoid charges of racism when explaining Blacks' sporting achievements, Entine stressed, 'genes set parameters, but it is life experiences that "express" biological capabilities'. Still, in the last instance, nature has primacy: 'Cultural conditions exaggerate the small but meaningful differences that led to the athletic edge.'

Those 'small but meaningful differences' were the subject of research by Bengt Saltin, who observed how highly trained Swedish athletes could be easily beaten by Kenyan schoolchildren and concluded that environments contribute only 20–25 per cent to an athlete's proficiency: the rest is all natural. With this kind of evidence, Entine asked, with a sideways glance at British football's pre-eminent black players: 'Is it just cultural serendipity that Brazilians are time and again the best soccer players?'

While it was asked rhetorically, it actually invited answers. If we take 'serendipity' to mean the faculty of making happy, unexpected discoveries, a reasonable historical case might be made. Slaves and their offspring, finding themselves at an impasse in which they and their forebears had their progress in society impeded by institutional arrangements (formal or informal), learned that a 'terrain on which Blacks have been permitted to manifest themselves is sport', to repeat Pieterse. Applying themselves with unparalleled motivation and a determination to overcome adversity, they found success attainable—not easily, but attainable nonetheless. Sport provided them with an area in which they could, as David K. Wiggins put it in his *Glory Bound: Black Athletes in a White America* (1997), 'realize a certain degree of dignity'. Buoyed by this, their sons and daughters followed the same path, all the time helping to carve out a tradition of accomplishment that inspired successive generations. The specific cultural conditions for Brazilian footballers' brilliance lie in Portuguese imperialism, the remnants of the plantation economy, and the corresponding enthusiasm for football after its introduction by the Englishman Charles Miller in the early 20th century.

This is the nurture side of an argument that has tended towards nature. There are echoes of the race–IQ debate, which resists every attempt to bury it and returns in new guises to explain the different patterns of educational achievement among Blacks and their peers. Sport presents a different though not unrelated conundrum. Is Hoberman's 'Law of Compensation' actually in force? If Blacks' achievements in British sport are because of their natural advantages, is their relative lack of progress in formal education because of natural disadvantages? One possibility offers the other.

The trope of the animally endowed black athlete refuses to go down without a fight. It includes expressions and images that ostensibly celebrate black achievement, while obscuring the historical circumstances that have commissioned Blacks' progress in sport—and obstructed their progress in other areas. Paradoxically, the appearance of Blacks in sports once considered out of reach has lessened its force. As recently as 1990 those who considered Blacks equipped only for events demanding muscularity and speed would not have countenanced the prospect of black golf and tennis champions. It later became clear that the barriers blocking their progress were social rather than physical.

Somewhere between the prizefighting ex-slaves of the 19th century and today's football plutocrats, black people skipped a transition. Otherwise there would be more black promoters, owners, managers, and administrators—the people who govern and oversee sport. In the United States some Blacks have moved into positions of this kind, though in Britain conspicuous gaps remain. Black athletes continue to perform and entertain, and

are well rewarded for their exhibitions. But the function of exhibitions is to entertain, amuse, or edify. Blacks' disengagement from the decision-making centres of sport suggests that, in celebrating their achievement-strewn history in sport, there is the risk of concealing an inglorious exclusion that closely reflects their experience in society generally. ECa

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See also EUGENICS; SKIN COLOUR AND RACE, THEORIES OF