SPORTS MEDIA IN THE UNITED STATES

Trivializing Race

Daniel Sipocz

On Sunday January 19, 2014, National Football League player Richard Sherman, cornerback for the Seattle Seahawks, was interviewed on live television by Erin Andrews on the field immediately following a physical playoff win over the San Francisco 49ers. Rather than focusing on the thrill of victory or the Seahawks’ berth to the Super Bowl, Sherman shouted excitedly about an opponent he had just gotten the better of to clinch the win. He said, “I’m the best corner[back] in the game! When you try me with a sorry receiver like Crabtree, that’s the result you’re going to get. Don’t you ever talk about me.” When Andrews asked who was talking about Sherman, he responded equally enthusiastically, “Crabtree. Don’t you open your mouth about the best, or I’ll shut it for you real quick. LOB [Legion of Boom]!” The interview caught Andrews off guard and created a stir among fans and media alike.

The media reaction following Sherman’s interview did not focus on what he said, but how he said it. Much of the media, including sports and mainstream news media, asked if Sherman was a “thug” and concentrated on his socio-economic status growing up in Compton, California (Rogers 2014). His educational background, including studying communication while attending Stanford University, did not play a strong role in the discussion of Sherman’s interview. The subtext of asking if Sherman was a thug played upon dominant stereotypes about his race, intelligence, socio-economic background, and athletic ability. In press conferences following the interview and leading up to the Super Bowl, Sherman had to respond to the media stories asking if he was a thug rather than focusing on the championship game itself. Such a focus by the media marginalized Sherman, diminishing his team’s accomplishments and distracting from the reason why the press conference was occurring to begin with: the Seahawks were playing in the Super Bowl. The racially based coverage also marginalized the sports journalism profession by focusing on the stereotypes rather than producing a serious and substantial discussion of the stereotypes and their impact on society. Sherman questioned the racially based media discussion about his status as a “thug,” telling those same media members, “The reason it bothers me is because it seems like it’s an accepted way of calling somebody the N-word now. It’s like everybody else said the N-word and then they say ‘thug’ and that’s fine” (Wilson 2014). The comparison by Sherman of the N-word and thug raised important
questions about the use of racial stereotypes in sports media that reinforce negative connotations based on the color of one’s skin.

This contemporary, prominent example highlights the difficulty sports media in the US have in offering any insightful substance in discussing the role race plays in sports coverage. The lack of substance in media coverage of sports should not be the case, however. The coverage could act as a spotlight to help guide national conversation on important topics. Hall (1981) argued, “The media construct for us a definition of what race is, what meaning the imagery of race carries and what the ‘problem of race’ is understood to be” (35). Because the media establishes definitions, imagery, and the meaning audiences are supposed to understand, as described by Hall, the media also has the task of discussing the significance of race and the problems that come with coverage as seen in Sherman’s case. Hall (1981) noted that race, a social construct, is part of a “cultural map” (31). These cultural maps “provide the frameworks through which we represent, interpret, understand and ‘make sense’ of some aspect of social existence” (Hall 1981: 31). Therefore, sports and sports media as institutions contribute to our sociological understanding of the world around us, especially regarding social relationships and learning how to interact within those relationships (Brooks and Rada 2002; Bruce 2004). The Sherman coverage portrayed black NFL players as thugs who lack intelligence, and it played into other racial stereotypes as well. However, sports coverage rarely discusses or examines on a substantial level the impact it has on society when it disseminates these types of stereotypes.

The lack of substance in sports media coverage is hardly a problem limited to the US, though. Whannel (2008) critiqued the media coverage of race in sports media in England, describing a lack of “reflective philosophy of sport” resulting in sports stereotypes being taken for granted. The same critique can be applied to the U.S. sports media. Whannel (2008) noted, “The media report sport with great professional skill but discuss it with a crass lack of seriousness” (112). By asking if Sherman was a thug, the U.S. sports media lacked the seriousness that Whannel noted was necessary to discuss race in sports and society. The difficulty in discussing race in sports media reflects the difficulty mainstream news media and society in the US have in approaching a sensitive and conflict-inducing topic. Despite society’s difficulty to construct a significant, serious discussion about race and how it is covered, scholars across many fields of study have compiled a large body of knowledge about race in sports media.

The body of scholarship surrounding sports and sports media has grown quickly over the last two decades. The use of racial stereotypes in sports coverage is among the most frequently studied topics by scholars (Birrell 1989; Davis and Harris 1998; Eastman and Billings 2001; Hartmann 2000; McChesney 1988; Riess 2014; Wenner 1988; Whannel 2008). Scholars have examined the practice of racial stereotyping in many sports, from football (Bruce 2004; Rada 1996; Rainville and McCormick 1971), to basketball (Denham, Billings, and Halone 2002) and professional golf (Eastman and Billings 2001) to the Olympics (Billings and Eastman 2002). Each found that sports media played a significant role in the way minorities were represented, usually through racial stereotypes. As the body of scholarship grows in breadth and depth, there remains a need to study race in sports media as society, sports, and the media change. Scholarship encompasses many interests beyond the scope of stereotypes in the messages and meanings disseminated in the production of sport coverage. Other popular topics of study include, but are not limited to, ideological content of sports coverage, the process of producing content, the meanings of the content, and how the coverage reflects and reinforces dominant values of society.
This chapter will outline why sports are significant in society, why there is a need to study sports media, and the sports media’s role in reinforcing stereotypes, through previous scholarship and the Sherman example. This chapter will also give an overview of the scholarship produced and outline the difference of quantitative and qualitative studies and their findings that have contributed significantly to the body of scholarship in regards to race in sports coverage.

Sports are increasingly televised, covered by a variety of media organizations and influential in the US. Athletic competition serves as a proving ground that unites the athletes and fans alike through a shared experience of victory, defeat, and big plays. Those who view sporting events experience the spectacle of the event and are often entertained by the live, unscripted drama and unpredictability. However, until the last two decades, scholarship all but ignored sports. Consequently, formal study of sports, media and their impact on society has been limited. Wenner (1988) noted, “It is ironic that sports programming has eluded the scrutiny of mass communication researchers. Indeed, research is often initiated by that which is obviously visible in the marketplace” (16). Sports coverage is increasingly visible on television with more than 30,000 hours of live event and studio programming airing on ESPN, the self-proclaimed “Worldwide Leader in Sports,” alone in 2012 (ESPN Fact Sheet 2015). According to Riess (2014), one of the reasons why scholars generally ignored sports media was the perception of sports as only a game. Riess (2014) noted, “The prevailing view that sports is the ‘playground of the newspaper’ contributed to the trivialization of the history of sports media” (552). Even legendary sports broadcaster Howard Cosell trivialized sports media, referring to sports as the toy department of human life (Thomas 1995).

The trivialization of sports media began to change in the late 1980s as technology changed the capabilities of broadcast companies in the US. The expansion of sports broadcast on television in the late 1980s was in large part because of ESPN’s increasing popularity with fans as the network brought an increasing quantity of athlete competitions into the homes of millions of Americans.

As sports became more prominent in media, they also became more commercialized. According to McChesney (1989), the media made sport into the institution we know today. Television brought the personalities of athletes and the journalists who covered them to the forefront. These personalities changed the culture surrounding sports and its coverage from just an activity to commercialized, must-see spectacles available on countless channels. Mass media also exposed racial and cultural problems that were rooted in the coverage of sports. According to Wenner (1988), “The mass-communicated and highly commercialized sports culture is easily related to a myriad of issues concerning socialization, interpersonal communication, value formation, racial and gender assessments, and the balance of political and economic power” (16). With the increase in commercialization, the sports media’s focus has centered on generating revenue and creating a spectacle and spending less time discussing the issues that are presented in the coverage. The emphasis of spectacle only further increased the lack of serious coverage and the inability to talk about sensitive and controversial topics. In other words, the spectacle once again trivializes sports and its coverage back to the toy store of life. Consequently, sports function as a means to reinforce and celebrate the dominant beliefs of a culture which help to form identity (Wenner 1988). However, few gave critical thought to the ways in which the media cover sports and reinforce dominant beliefs of a society, and what the dominant beliefs say about society until something, such as the Sherman interview and its fallout, forces sports media and society to confront the issues head on.
Even though sports have not been studied much until recently in academia, sports are often viewed as a place where equality exists. In the US, much of society believes that the athletic realm is a racial equalizer, but sport is actually the site of struggle. Sports are a contested racial landscape that serves as a reflection of white male hegemony in the context of society in general. White men own teams and media companies, manage leagues, and generally have control over the rules that govern the black athletes. For example, more than 80 percent of the athletes in the National Basketball Association (NBA) are African American (Associated Press 2009). The athletes, consequently, are the focal point of the “product” of the NBA. As the focal point of the NBA’s product, there is an overabundance of representation of black athletes which creates impressions and assumptions about the athletes, league, product, and roles in society that black athletes have. These representations in sports media legitimize racially based assumptions that blacks are well suited for careers, especially in the NBA, in sports but not for other occupations (Artz and Murphy 2000; Sabo and Jansen 1998). Consequently, the belief is that sports equal the playing field. Prominent ESPN sports commentator Chris Berman (1999) furthered the belief when he wrote that sports help break down barriers and bring people together. Sports may provide opportunities to individuals based on their talent and skill rather than appearance as Berman wrote, but sports can do even more than symbolically standing for equality. Human rights activist Nelson Mandela emphasized the ability of sports to unite the world and provide opportunities to overcome discrimination. Mandela said in a speech in 2000, “Sport has the power to unite people in a way little else can. Sport can create hope where there was only despair. It breaks down racial barriers. It laughs in the face of discrimination. Sport speaks to people in a language they can understand” (Mandela 2000; Muir 2007). Despite the beliefs that sports are played on a level playing field, media coverage is not. The media rely upon stereotypes in their coverage to tell stories and sell the spectacle of the event to society. Consequently, sport’s ability to level the playing field may be limited. Hartmann (2000) pointed out that the belief of a level playing field often leads to specific assumptions regarding the benefits sports offer to racial minorities in the US:

Dominant cultural conceptions of sport’s racial impact can be stated easily enough. Sport is seen by most Americans as a positive and progressive racial force, an avenue of racial progress, and an arena of racial harmony. It is understood as a “way out of the ghetto,” the general racial “equalizer,” and a leader in Civil Rights, if not a literal “model” for race relations in the United States.

Such racial assumptions could reinforce stereotypes on a mass scale, affecting society, without producers or audiences recognizing it (Campbell 1995; Entman and Rojecki 2000). For example, the media coverage surrounding Sherman was that football was his way “out of the ghetto.” Although football presented Sherman with opportunities to get out of the bad neighborhood he grew up in, his intellect and academics also helped him. He achieved success in the classroom and attended Stanford because he was intelligent and applied himself in academics just as he did in football. Sherman’s intelligence and success challenge the sports media’s use of two stereotypes—sports as a means to escape the ghetto and the dumb jock—used in covering his post-game interview. This also showed that stereotypes trumped the outcome of the game, further trivializing sports media back into the toy store. Wenner (1988) noted, “A good portion of mediated sports
consumption has little to do with information about who is winning or losing a game that is broadcast live” (42). The information provided often depends on the context surrounding the sporting event and athletes involved. In Sherman’s case, the context the media focused on was the ghetto and not the academics or his intelligence. Consequently, information provided in commentary and storylines can be based on and reinforce racial stereotypes that further the “commonsense” belief in equality (Campbell 1995).

Despite this commonsense belief that all Americans are equal, stereotypes undermine the equality argument in sports and society as a whole. Hartmann (2000) noted the need for continued study of race in sports because the coverage in sports media (and media in general) does not often reflect reality. The disconnection between reality and what is actually covered is one of the reasons why scholars study race in sports coverage. According to Pease (1989), “Minorities seem to have made little progress since 1965 in terms of having their voices and concerns heard, their problems discussed, their triumphs and sorrows reported and their opinions considered” (34). Findings such as these continue to be supported in research examining race in the media. According to Campbell (1995), the lack of progress in minorities having their voices and concerns heard or represented in media is “evident in news coverage that reflects a common sense that is decidedly white and that contributes to an understanding of minorities as a peripheral part of mainstream American society” (42). The same commonsense culture that reflects white hegemony in mainstream news media is also reflected in sports media. Black athletes are sometimes pigeonholed into certain types of athleticism, reinforcing specific stereotypes of minorities, limiting cultural understanding, and creating social tension. Often the focus of such pigeonholing is about an athlete’s intelligence, socio-economic background, and pure athletic ability as evidenced in the coverage surrounding Sherman. When media singles out racial differences as it did in Sherman’s case, it reinforces prejudice by the majority (Entman and Rojecki 2000).

Reinforcing prejudices becomes a societal problem as large numbers of people who pay close attention to sports are convinced the prejudices are appropriate. Sports and sports media coverage are studied to confront the social values promoted by the media as worthy of being reinforced and maintained in society (Carrington 2009; Coakley 2009; Giacobbi and DeSensi 1999; Gruneau 1983; Hartmann 2000; Juffer 2002; Nichols 2011). Studying sports media and the coverage it produces can help attack racial stereotypes and societal structures that promote differences that support white hegemony and privilege in hopes of incrementally changing those structures and the stereotypes that support them.

Racial difference, like other differences based on outward appearance, presents socially and culturally constructed differences as natural or common sense (Brooks and Rada 2002; Campbell 1995). Many (Barth 1969; Gorham 1999; Hall 1981; Hartmann 2000; Lipmann 1922) agree that stereotypes based on racial and ethnic groups are humanly created social constructs that serve as a cultural map for society. Therefore, stereotypes contain cultural knowledge, beliefs, or expectancies about differences between groups of people (Hamilton and Trolier 1986)—all of which help make sense of the world. Seiter (1986) added that stereotypes help people make evaluations that justify social differences and norms, which paves the way for coverage that asks if someone is a “thug.” Kellner (2003) noted specifically the media’s role in the reinforcement of stereotypes: “The media are a profound and often misperceived source of cultural pedagogy: They contribute to educating us how to behave and what to think, feel, believe, fear, and desire—and what not to” (7). Because the media help society learn what is accepted and what is not in culture, the media is a powerful entity; the media can also redefine stereotypes and cultural norms.
The power of the media is not often thought about consciously by the average audience member, making critical engagement with the messages disseminated even more important. Because the average person does not think consciously about the power of the media or the messages disseminated and what the messages are telling society, there is a need to critically think about the media’s power. According to Long and Hylton (2002), there is a definite need to examine race in the media because, “wherever there are structured differences and privilege because of whiteness and blackness we need to establish a critical gaze to emphasize and then challenge these powerful inequalities” (100). Confronting the differences and stereotypes and attempting to redefine accepted societal commonsense definitions of race can help turn the focus of sports media coverage into something more substantial and promote the equality U.S. citizens feel exists. Instead of asking whether Sherman is a thug, the sports media could have shifted its focus toward the ways in which Sherman reflects a twenty-first-century America.

Thinking about the media’s scope of influence on society can be a challenging task. There is much to consider and all of it can be studied. Everything from reporters and editors, the word choices, organization of stories, photographs or videos used in the stories, the sources quoted and attributed, and the placement of stories on the page (print or online) should be subject to scrutiny in addition to the message disseminated. Sports provide a rich body of content, sometimes referred to as text, to study because of the audio, visual, commentary, and context (storylines) elements that go into covering each event. All of these elements are part of the text that can be consumed, shared, and studied. Each element makes up a piece of a puzzle that a scholar assembles to describe the significance of the story and the context it was created in and exists in, as well as deconstructing the cultural definitions the story establishes. Stangor and Schaller (1996) described the elements in media products as follows:

> The tangible artifacts of consumable mass media thus comprise an “information highway” for the transmission of social stereotypes. These representations of stereotypes are bought, sold, traded, checked out, and otherwise shared by millions, even billions of people across boundaries of distance and time untraveled by ordinary interpersonal communication. (12)

Each artifact, whatever it may be—a newspaper article, radio broadcast, television program, online stories and videos, tweets, vines, Instagram photos—contains information which is disseminated to and consumed by a mass audience. These are the artifacts, or texts, that scholars study. In studying the text, scholars examine not just the message and meaning, but also the context of the message. This includes how and why the text was created and disseminated as well as the public reaction to the text; each piece of text, whether physical newspaper clippings, video footage, or digitally rendered, are engaged with and consumed by an audience. The text can be studied in two different ways: qualitatively and quantitatively.

Qualitative research methods help to answer “how and why questions” regarding the topic of study. In sports scholarship, qualitative researchers often focus their attention on using theory or concepts to help explain how the text and society interact with each other. It is important to consider the research questions in determining if qualitative methods are appropriate in studying the chosen text. In the realm of race and sports, scholars address the cultural meanings constructed by the media coverage, what
the meanings reinforce or challenge, and the significance of the meanings. Qualitative studies usually employ a variety of methods in the same study to examine the text closely with the purpose of addressing the meanings generated in and outside of the text. When studying race in sports, qualitative methods help to study the context and meanings created around specific media coverage, the importance of stereotypes in the media as well as what they signify in understanding the power relations within a society. Solomos and Back (1996) further explain why race and stereotypes are studied:

Race and ethnic categories are ideological entities that are made and remade through struggle. In this sense, race can be seen as a discursive category through which differences are accorded social significance. But it is also more than just a discursive category since it carries with it material consequences for those who are included within, or excluded from, a particular racial identity. Stereotypes are studied because of what they mean and how they shape society.

(14iv)

Like the Sherman example at the beginning of this chapter, there are many other anecdotal examples of racial stereotypes in sports media coverage.

Former NFL player-turned-announcer Amad Rashad described his experiences as a black athlete through the narrative of his autobiography. Rashad’s experiences are explained in a qualitative examination of sports commentary of announcers as it relates to the racial makeup of athletes. He noted that there was a significant and distinguishable difference in the way commentators described black and white athletes in the 1980s:

If you close your eyes and listen, you can tell whether a commentator is discussing a white or a black athlete. When he says that somebody is a “natural,” so fluid and graceful, you know he’s talking about a black performer. When you hear that this other guy’s a hard worker, or that he comes to play every day on the strength of guts and intelligence, you know that the player in question is white. Just open your eyes.

(83)

Rashad was not the only one to take note of racial stereotyping in sports. Doc Rivers, former National Basketball Association player-turned-coach of the Los Angeles Clippers, expressed concern for the way in which race was depicted in basketball. According to Rivers, there were multiple racial stereotypes used regularly in teams’ scouting reports while he played in the NBA during the 1990s. In these scouting reports black players were described as “athletically gifted,” “explosive,” and having great instincts. Simultaneously, white players were described as “determined,” “floor generals,” and as having strong work ethic (Rivers and Brooks 1993). That type of anecdotal evidence supports the findings of qualitative research and differs from quantitative research that often simply counts the occurrences of such descriptors.

The evidence presented through the Sherman, Rashad (1988), and Rivers (1993) examples illustrates that stereotypes are retransmitted by media. The stereotypes are not limited to professional athletes, however. Washington and Karen (2001) noted that college-level athletes also see racial stereotypes in coverage. There is hope that some progress is being made, though. A 2001 study of commentary during collegiate basketball games found some progress in the media’s portrayal of race between athletes. Despite more
positive and less stereotyped descriptions, African-American players were still presented most often in regards to their athletic ability while white players were described as hard working and students of the game (Eastman and Billings 2001). Murrell and Curtis (1994) summarized decades of racial stereotyping that qualitative researchers find in their studies: “Performance was a function not of what the player does, but what the player is: a natural athlete” (230). The athletic ability ultimately hinges on race and that is one of the issues critical and cultural researchers take aim at.

Many quantitative studies about race in sports coverage use content analysis as the primary way in which researchers examine race in sports quantitatively. These studies provide empirical evidence that racial stereotyping existed in the media artifacts and discuss the statistical significance of the findings relating to racial aspects in sports media coverage. Rainville and McCormick (1977), one of the first to examine race in sports coverage, conducted a content analysis investigating ethnic stereotyping in college football broadcasts. In doing so, Rainville and McCormick noted the difference in descriptors used in broadcasters’ explanations of players’ skills and established a foundation for future studies to follow. Their approach was rooted in numbers and counting the actual occurrences of specific stereotypical descriptions rather than the anecdotal evidence that Rashad and Rivers produced in their autobiographies.

Rainville and McCormick (1971) found that white players were significantly more likely to be praised than black athletes while black players were found to be more likely to be criticized for making poor plays. Rainville and McCormick also noted blacks were described as “naturally gifted” athletes who should automatically succeed because of this, as have many others over the years (Rainville and McCormick 1977; Rushton 1995; Herrnstein and Murray 1994; Entine 2000). Rivers (1993) and Rashad (1988) added to the findings, but through qualitative methods. Rainville and McCormick (1971) also found that white football players were described as overcoming the odds when succeeding at football while being praised for their work ethic.

One of the most popular ways to study race in sports media is to examine how the media represents an athlete. Framing, the concept of how information is presented to an audience by the media—usually through omission—is an important one to draw upon when examining media coverage (Goffman 1974; Iyengar 1991). By framing information, the media can make some aspects of reality more salient while obscuring other aspects (Entman 1993). Frames used by the media serve as a central theme or idea in which information is built around and disseminated to an audience. Using framing in media studies can help to reveal patterns in how information is presented to the public and what beliefs, values, or definitions are worthy of being part of the dominant culture. This reinforces the status quo. Entman (1993) described how the status quo can be reinforced through the influence of frames on the public: “Frames, which are manifested by the presence or absence of certain keywords, stock phrases, stereotyped images, sources of information, and sentences that provide thematically reinforcing clusters of facts or judgments” (15). The existence of framing in media coverage, however, does not guarantee an influence on how the audience thinks, but rather what to think about. Consequently, McCombs and Shaw (1972) contend that framing is an extension of agenda-setting theory which posits that the media provide audiences limited windows on the world. Framing and agenda setting are popular theoretical foundations for studying race in sports media.

Giacobbi and DeSensi (1999) analyzed the frames in the media coverage of Tiger Woods as he became a household name as a professional golfer in the late 1990s. Much like Rainville and McCormick (1971), the authors found marginalization of Woods
through framing practices that excluded him or used racial stereotypes to emphasize racial difference to explain how Woods did not fit in with the Professional Golfers Association. Similarly, Major League Baseball player Sammy Sosa, from the Dominican Republic, was initially framed out of media coverage during the 1998 homerun chase in favor of white baseball player Mark McGwire (Juffer 2002). Only when it became apparent McGwire and Sosa were contenders to break the record for most homeruns in a season was Sosa included in the coverage (Juffer 2002). The frames in the Sosa and McGwire homerun case could also be broken down by nationalism. According to Juffer (2002), Sosa and McGwire were also framed by country with McGwire being depicted as the rugged American, which had similar effects as framing by race had with McGwire being the hero and Sosa being the outsider intruding on a heroic story.

Whether examining race in sports media coverage quantitatively or qualitatively, racial and ethnic stereotypes will continue to play important roles in the findings. However, there is much more to studying race and the sports media. Sports and sports media’s influence on society must be taken into account as well, as noted by previous scholarship in this chapter. Stereotypes help scholars earmark the beliefs of society and have a benchmark with which to compare previous sports coverage. As sports media grows as a field of study, the findings will continue to become more sophisticated and demonstrate the significance of sports in American culture.

Sports are more than just a toy store of newspapers and media organizations, although the lack of substance in discussing race, as in the case of Sherman, does trivialize sports journalism as a profession. The coverage of sports can reinforce or challenge racial stereotypes that both reflect and define culture in a society. Previous scholarly work has described the racial issues in sports coverage. Those same issues continue to be present in the sports media coverage today. Whether it was NBA stars Rivers or Rashad in the late 1980s and early 1990s, professional golfer Tiger Woods in the late 1990s and early 2000s, college sports, the Olympics, NBA stars LeBron James and Jeremy Lin, or NFL star Sherman in the 2010s, race plays a prominent and regular role in the sports coverage produced.

The reinforcement of the current status quo within sports media coverage will not improve the situation. As Campbell (1995) noted, the current environment creates a commonsense definition of what is to be expected regarding race. These commonsense stereotypes do not reflect the reality and need to be challenged. Lin, for example, should not have been stereotyped as the serious, academically centered Asian during the “Linsanity” coverage of 2012 (Sipocz 2015). The sports coverage of Lin, which emphasized puns on his Asian ancestry and name, supported commonsense definitions about Asians and their athletic ability. The same can be said about black athletes. Previous scholarship has shown that while some progress has been made in how black athletes are described, they are still stereotyped as natural athletes. Until recently, the quarterback position in football fell into these commonsense definitions of race that told society that black football players could not be quarterbacks. It was common sense that white football players led the offense and the team in general. Consequently, the commonsense definitions disseminated by the sports media reinforced the stereotypes in society at large.

It is these very commonsense definitions, described by Hall (1981) as cultural maps that help society make sense of the world around them, that betrayed the sports media in its coverage of Sherman leading up to the Super Bowl in 2014. The attention of the sports media reinforced significant racial stereotypes following Sherman’s interview. By asking if he was a thug, the sports media supported racial stereotypes that tell society that black athletes are not as intelligent as white athletes and also come from the ghetto.
The implications of such assumptions and use of racial stereotypes by the sports media continue to trivialize sports coverage, perpetuating the idea that the sports section is nothing more than a toy store.

References


SPORTS MEDIA IN THE UNITED STATES


Further Reading


Hylton, K. and Morpeth, N. D. (2012) “London 2012: ‘Race’ Matters and the East End,” *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics* 4(3): 379–396. (Examines the London 2012 Olympic Development Program, specifically the belief that the program was designed to lead to the regeneration of communities; they argue that policies stemming from a single mega-event cannot alter the racial inequalities entrenched in a culture.)