

<sup>8</sup> Thus it would seem that in terms of advancing less restrictive understandings of gender and masculinity, the effeminate practices within the molly houses did little more than move an outraged “general public” toward a renewed investment in normative masculinity. For a recent critique of drag and gender parody (*a la* Judith Butler) as a transgressive political strategy see Lloyd (1999).

<sup>9</sup> Laqueur demonstrates that scientists moved from viewing the male and female bodies as essentially the same (with the female form being a “less developed” form of the male) to one which emphasized the radical differences in their sexed bodies and dispositions.

<sup>10</sup> In addition to the evidence provided earlier in this paper, there is this vigorous defense of gender experimentation from Carl Wittman’s 1969 *Gay Manifesto*: “There is a tendency among ‘homophile’ groups to deplore gays who play visible roles – the queens and the nellies. As liberated gays, we must take a clear stand. 1.) Gays who stand out have become our first martyrs. They came out and withstood disapproval before the rest of us did. 2.) If they have suffered from being open, it is straight society whom we must indict, not the queen” (cited in Miller 1995: 385).

<sup>11</sup> Lest I be seen as a hopeless curmudgeon, I would like to indicate here that I am “in on the joke.” I am fully aware that the books, TV show and website mentioned are proposed as entertainment and thus “not to be taken seriously.” I am also aware that under conditions of postmodernity, a plethora of resistant (even contradictory) readings are facilitated by these texts. I am less concerned here with the variety of readings enabled by this material than I am with the fact that its manifestly misogynistic focus exists to be subverted in the first place. I would also argue that it is precisely in its function as entertainment that this material most effectively defines the feminine and sustains its denigration.

<sup>12</sup> Citing José Muñoz (1996) Halberstam offers a possible explanation for this in terms of an “active disidentification,” whereby such subjects adopt “a mode of dealing with dominant ideology, one that neither opts to assimilate with such a structure nor strictly opposes it.” Thus female masculinity “disidentifies” with hegemonic forms of masculinity, “which are subsequently recycled into alternative masculinities.”

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## CHARACTERIZING GENDER AND RACE IN THE 2000 SUMMER OLYMPICS: NBC’S COVERAGE OF MAURICE GREENE, MICHAEL JOHNSON, MARION JONES, AND CATHY FREEMAN

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*Media representations of African Americans and indigenous peoples tend to follow stereotypical notions of both gender and race. Because African American and indigenous peoples are gendered and racialized simultaneously by media forces, this study examines how the television network, NBC, managed portrayals of three (3) celebrated African American athletes and one (1) Aboriginal athlete in Sydney’s 2000 Olympic Games. Specifically, the study investigates media descriptions of Maurice Greene, Michael Johnson, Marion Jones, and Cathy Freeman. Findings reveal that media presentations of African American men attempt to moderate threatening imagery out of sport while also promoting nationalism, and (for Greene) amplifying threatening imagery in sport. Both African American and Aboriginal women are feminized, and political activism carried out by Aboriginal athletes is heavily mitigated by liberal pursuits of multiculturalism, as well as feminized commentary.*

### INTRODUCTION

Although very few professional athletes openly express political viewpoints, the Olympic Games have stood as a site where various levels of political protest emerge, the Olympics being one of the few global events which consistently attracts extensive worldly attention (Lapchick, 1996). However, in terms of both gender and race politics, the Olympic Games generally reflect larger societal trends. Women, for instance, were not allowed to compete in Olympic competition

until 1900 (Guttman, 1991), making the 2000 Sydney Olympics the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of women's Olympic participation. Without question, discriminatory obstacles have stymied women's progress in the Olympic Games. Following the 1928 Olympics, all women's track and field events that required higher levels of endurance were terminated in order to "protect" women from overly exerting themselves and from experiencing pregnancy complications (Cahn, 1994). Such sexist myths that attempt to maintain men's control over women's bodies have since been shattered by elite female athletes, such as Joan Benoit-Samuelson, who won the first Olympic women's marathon in 1984 (*The Olympic Games*, 1999, p. 316).

Race politics have also characterized Olympic competition. The triumphs of Olympic sprinter and jumper, Jesse Owens in the face of Adolph Hitler in 1936, and the courageous activism displayed by 200 meter sprinters Tommie Smith and John Carlos during the 1968 Games in Mexico City are remembered as monumental moments in American and world history. Like women from all ethnicities, African Americans were also excluded from early Olympic competition. However, African Americans (as well as international athletes of African ancestry) now show disproportionately high representation in some (though certainly not all) sports, especially in track and field.

Still, traditional sentiment surrounding the modern Olympic Games does not involve gender or race politics. The Olympic Games were revived in 1896, with Olympic architects hoping that the Olympics would promote universal values and connect "humankind through an international festival dedicated to athletic greatness" (Schaffer & Smith, 2000a, p. 2). Although such altruistic notions of world harmony still permeate the Olympic spirit, present day Olympic competition is distinguished most heavily by media, in particular by television. In other words, television media has a much stronger impact in shaping public sentiment than any other factor, including whimsical longings for global harmony. As noted by Godwell (2000a), the Olympics are an international spectacle, in which every four years,

Olympic organizers try to outdo previous and future Olympic Games. Says Godwell, "Organizers believe that better shows will entice visitors and generate larger television contracts. In particular, events are designed to seize the imagination of the television viewing public" (p. 245). Some events and figures that seize viewers' imagination include pre- and post-Olympic festivals, actual Olympic competition, and marquee athletes promoted by television networks.

As noted by McChesney (1999; 2001), in recent decades corporate media giants and their advertisers benefit by depoliticizing their audiences, in particular the poor and working classes. McChesney argues that a depoliticized poor and working class will be less likely to question business domination which exacerbates economic disparity. Thus, although the present study heavily critiques television commentary, it is important to point out that media reform also entails corrections with producers, executives, and advertisers.

As just stated, because television plays such a key role in presenting Olympic events and figures to international audiences, this study investigates how notions of gender and race are crafted by NBC—the primary television network that presented the 2000 Olympic Games to the United States and American audiences. More specifically, this study will examine NBC commentators' descriptions of four accomplished and celebrated athletes in track and field: Maurice Greene, Michael Johnson, Marion Jones, and Cathy Freeman. All four athletes won at least one gold medal in the 2000 Olympic Games, and each of the four had also won gold medals in previously held Olympic and/or World Championship competitions. Jones, the most hyped American athlete going into the 2000 Games, is an African American female sprinter. Greene and Johnson are both African American male sprinters, and Freeman is an Aboriginal female sprinter, who runs for Australia. Critical for this study will be identifying the ways that women and men from ethnic minority groups are described that gender and/or

racialize the athlete, and in the end, depoliticize their image. Commentator descriptions of these particular athletes were chosen for this study because these athletes emerged as highly significant figureheads before and during Olympic competition. Athletically, all four athletes fulfilled expectations and consequently, received a disproportionate amount of television air-time dedicated to them. In short, these athletes emanated as Olympic icons within NBC's coverage, and thus, media descriptions of them are of crucial value.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### African American Male and Female Athletes

As stated previously, female athletes from many ethnicities have made great strides in Olympic history. Olympic promoters heralded the 1996 Olympic Games as the "Year of the Woman," with American women winning gold medals in the team competitions of basketball, gymnastics, soccer, softball, and synchronized swimming, and media representation of female athletes did show improvement in 1996 (Heywood, 2000). In the Sydney 2000 Olympics, women competed in the pole vault for the first time in Olympic history, with American Stacey Dragila winning the gold medal. Despite women's accomplishments and movement past discriminatory barriers, scholars have demonstrated that mainstream media forces continue to cover women's sports less than men's (even in sporting events like the Olympic Games where women comprise a high percentage of the total athlete population) and portray female athletes in ways that reinforce patriarchal ideology (Eastman & Billings, 2000).

Even while making hypes about the "Year of the Woman," NBC showed a heavy bias in favor of men while covering the 1996 Atlanta Olympics. Eastman and Billings (1999) reveal that although "the NBC network executives were very concerned about the appearance of gender equity in 1996" (p. 164), commentators mentioned male athletes significantly more than female athletes, even after taking into account the smaller absolute numbers of female athletes. As an example, Eastman and Billings write, "In 1996 in particular, three quarters (74%) of mentions of sports

in profiles were of men's events, and only one quarter (26%) were of women's events" (p. 157). In addition, female athletes were labeled "as beautiful, elegant, charming, and so on, women athletes were sometimes tagged 'America's little lady' or 'America's little sister,' ...that belittled and had no corresponding male equivalent" (p. 160). NBC coverage also allocated nearly twice as much television coverage to individual women's events over women's team events in Atlanta (Tuggle & Owen, 1999), even though American women won gold medals in five team sports.

African American women began showing high numbers in international track and field competition in the 1940s and 1950s, but as Cahn (1994) notes, "Athletic success which could, in one context, affirm the dignity and capabilities of African American womanhood, could also appear to confirm derogatory images of both black and athletic women" (p. 121). According to Cahn, African American female track stars were not fully endeared by the general American public. In comparison, America generally embraced white female athletes who succeeded in sports such as swimming and tennis, sports considered less physically demanding, and therefore, more acceptable for women. Babe Didrikson, a Norwegian American athlete (widely considered the greatest female athlete of all time) garnered far more mainstream acceptance as a "feminized" golfer than as a "masculinized" track and field athlete.

While sports like track and field and basketball perceivably entail greater degrees of physical contact and pounding (for track and field, physically jolting contact with the ground), sports like swimming, tennis, and figure skating tend to embody notions of grace, elegance, and artistic performance under customary American perception. As African American women excelled in the more "manly" sports, both racist and sexist stereotyping followed. African American female track and field athletes were portrayed as mannish and as "naturally" gifted in terms of physical abilities. Institutional efforts to feminize African American women in track and field did occur, particularly in the 1940s and 1950s, by constructing "appropriate" beauty images in sport media (Cahn, 1994). Towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the cultural landscape in track and

field had shifted further, with some female sprinting stars receiving too much notoriety for their sexuality. In a more recent example, the late Florence Griffith-Joyner, 1988 Olympic gold medallist and current world record holder in the 100 and 200 meters, was both sexualized in media accounts and had her athletic triumphs dismissed as a product of both steroid use and “natural” black athleticism (Dewar, 1993).

Writing off black athletic achievement as a result of “natural” or genetic physical advantages that are tied to race is hardly uncommon in American society. A much greater quantity of scholarship has covered African American men in sport, and like African American women, African American male athletes have had their long lists of athletic successes discarded as a consequence of their “innate” physical superiority (Davis, 1990; Miller, 1998). Burfoot (1992) and Entine (2000) have both argued strenuously that black athletic “dominance” can ultimately be traced to racial, physical, and genetic superiority, focusing for the most part on men. Such arguments fit nicely into contemporary and conventional ideologies of race. For instance, if African American athletes did have a physical advantage, they would not have to establish a disciplined work ethic or “smart” play, as would successful white athletes. Ultimately, African American bodies (both men’s and women’s) are valued more so than African American’s minds (Hall, 2001; Wiggins, 1997, p. 177-199).

In fact, media commentators have frequently conformed to this racist ideology, relegating black athletic success to physical descriptors and white athletic success to high intellectual capabilities (McCarthy & Jones, 1997; Miller, 2001, pp. 79-83; Sabo *et al.*, 1996). These racist tendencies have resulted in African American athletes being stereotyped as “dumb jocks” (Sailes, 1993) on college campuses and contributed to one black masculinity that attempts to assert itself via sport, sex, and crime (Hoberman, 1997). Finally, Shields (1999) has illustrated how sporting institutions attempt to subdue public posturing that is occasionally displayed by African American male athletes. In *Black Planet: Facing Race During an NBA Season*, Shields displays how NBA superstar, Gary Payton, is asked to hold back on his “aggressive trash talking” by NBA coaches and officials so

that he does not enact a black masculinity that is offensive and threatening to a conservative American audience. Essentially, Payton is asked to transform into an “acceptable” black man, one who does not question authority or defy institutional regulations. He is coerced into becoming more “Michael Jordan-like,” who “serves as the good or safe Negro by means of his celebrity, his apolitical approach to social issues, and his role as the epitome of the assimilation paradigm” (Harrison, 2000, p. 70). In short, Michael Jordan’s silence in regard to social inequality makes him an “ideal” African American male model for conservative forces—an ethnic minority who almost never draws attention to race, class, and/or gender disparity and who has been fully assimilated into modern and conventional American culture (Andrews, 2001).

African American men and women have achieved great status as athletes in the United States and occasionally used sport as a vehicle for overt political protest. On the other hand, African American success in sport has simultaneously been used to discriminate against them by reaffirming racist and sexist stereotypes. The sparse literature that specifically addresses African American women’s experiences in sport shows that African American women are too frequently described in ways that either masculinize or sexualize them, and in effect exclude them from the category of “proper womanhood,” which has traditionally been defined in white, middle-class terms. Likewise, sport has been used to enhance a hyper-sexual stereotype of African American men, and a racial profile that values brawn over brains. How these stereotypes are perpetuated or challenged by media coverage of Marion Jones, Maurice Greene, and Michael Johnson, three of the most distinguished and famed African American athletes in Sydney’s 2000 Olympic Games, is a critical issue both within and beyond sport.

#### *Racism Against Aborigines in Australian Sport*

The British began colonizing Australia in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. With colonization, diverse communities of Australia’s original inhabitants (now known collectively as Aborigines) suffered the

consequences. Like other indigenous peoples surviving in colonized countries, many Aborigines have been forced into assimilation (McGrath, 1995). An officially sanctioned policy initiated in 1918, allowed British officers to take or steal Aboriginal children from their parents with the intention of forcing European assimilation, leading to a lost number of Aborigines, now known as the "Stolen Generation." As a consequence of historical and neocolonialism, Aborigines now show unusually high incarceration rates (Gale, 1987; Gale, Bailey-Harris, & Wundersitz, 1990), face housing discrimination (Beresford, 2001), are over-represented in physically dangerous occupations (Mayhew & Vickerman, 1996), and hold unusually low educational and income levels relative to larger Australian populations (Taylor & Gaminiratne, 1993). Clearly, Aborigines face harsh interpersonal and institutional racial discrimination in Australia. Turning to sport and integrating gender, Australian women have faced difficulties reaching gender parity (Nadalin, 2000; McKay, 1995); Tatz (1995) adds, "Aboriginal men generally had little or no access to sport: Aboriginal women had infinitely less!" (p. 51). Aboriginal athletes have also been unfairly racialized as "athletically inclined" (Godwell, 2000b). And though to a somewhat lesser extent, again like African Americans in the United States, Aboriginal men and women in Australia have turned to sport as an avenue to attain social representation, equality, and justice.

In 1994 after winning the 400 meters in the Commonwealth Games, sprinter Cathy Freeman ran her victory lap carrying first an Aboriginal flag, and second an Australian flag—an act of political protest against Australia's unforgiving treatment toward Aborigines, as well as an act of pride in being Aboriginal herself (Tatz, 1995, p. 54); Freeman was reprimanded for her actions. Following the International Olympic Committee's decision to hold the 2000 Olympic Games in Sydney, Aboriginal leaders threatened an Aboriginal boycott and protest if social conditions surrounding Aborigines did not improve. As a result, the Sydney Organizing Committee for the Olympic Games made a mild effort to include Aboriginal representation while planning for Olympic

events (Godwell, 2000a). Freeman did not intend to partake in a boycott, as she made clear her intentions to compete in the 2000 Games (Schaffer & Smith, 2000b, p. 220). Still, Aboriginal voice was strong enough that Aboriginal culture became a strategic element of Sydney's Olympic experience.

In a 1997 pre-Olympic ceremony, entitled "The Festival of the Dreaming," Aboriginal leaders were able to assert the colonial context in which Olympic festivities were taking place. Meekison (2000) quotes an Aboriginal speaker, who said, "[T]his [ceremony] has been 209 years in the making." Meekison adds, "making an explicit reference to 1788, the year that the British invaded Australia and the dispossession of indigenous people began" (p. 192). Thus, Aboriginal presence and resistance was very much alive and in force. However, as both Meekison and Godwell (2000a) point out, Olympic festivities ultimately sought to reach reconciliation by forgetting history, by including cultural but not radically political Aboriginal participation. Moreover, cultural events showcased primordial images of Aborigines that reinforced primitive and uneducated Aboriginal stereotypes. Godwell (2000a) exposes the ways in which Aboriginal culture was turned into a form of "cultural prostitution" (see also Trask, 1993, p. 179-200), where "the world was introduced to Sydney's Olympics by alien images of sparsely clothed Aborigines dancing around a fire to the tunes of a didgeridoo" (p. 248) and goes on to state that "These Aboriginal stereotypes are permitted because they do not challenge fundamental nonindigenous assumptions about race" (p. 256). Being the favorite to win the women's 400 meters, Cathy Freeman became both an Aboriginal and Australian Olympic icon for audiences. How would NBC's presentation of Freeman affect her image as an Aboriginal woman and political leader?

#### *METHODOLOGY*

Birrell (1989) makes an important contribution to sports scholarship when she notes that "'Black athlete' usually means 'Black male athlete,' an equation that obliterates gender" (p. 213). Examining both male and female athletes is important in order

to make relational comparisons. As Carby (1987) states, “stereotypes only appear to exist in isolation while actually depending on a nexus of figurations which can be explained only in relation to each other” (p. 20). Consequently, it is necessary to showcase how stereotypical comments vary between male and female athletes, who have African American and Aboriginal heritage.

**Video Footage and Transcript Analysis**

All of NBC’s track and field coverage (except for coverage aired on MSNBC) was tape recorded for scrutiny, including track and field coverage that did not involve Jones, Freeman, Greene, or Johnson. In order to attain all of the track and field events aired by NBC’s primary station, NBC’s full Olympic coverage was tape recorded on VHS videotapes on days when track and field events were aired. In all, approximately 85 hours of Olympic coverage were tape recorded; this included coverage of non-track and field sports as well. From there, all track and field coverage was sifted out and re-recorded onto new VHS tapes that were comprised of exclusively track and field footage. Footage was re-recorded chronologically, according to both the days and the times that track and field events were aired. This footage that included track and field events only, amounted to approximately 14 hours worth of video time.

While watching coverage, any time commentators made remarks in regard to at least one of the four sprinters under study, those remarks were transcribed verbatim. It should be noted that some commentary directed towards the four athletes under study was not transcribed, if deemed highly insignificant to any sociological analysis (e.g., “Greene is lined up in lane four.”). Following transcription, key quotes were categorized into various themes using Strauss and Corbin’s (1990) methodology of grounded theory. This methodological approach seeks to establish themes from qualitative information by breaking down and comparing data, by identifying significant qualitative information from one section of the data pool and connecting that data with similar qualitative information from other parts of the data source. “Key quotes”

were distinguished when commentators’ comments fell into the following emergent themes:

Table 1: Description of Qualitative Themes

Study Themes	Theme Descriptions	Examples
Constructed Masculinity	Comments focus on athlete’s aggression, anger, or threatening disposition.	“He paces like a caged tiger...”
Constructed Femininity	Comments focus on athlete’s beauty, charm, or other aesthetic qualities.	“And now that smile returns...”
Constructed Nationalism	Comments focus on athlete’s loyalty to his/her country, or on how the athlete symbolizes his/her country’s values.	“...running for all Australia...”
Verbal Reprimands	Comments criticize the athlete for his/her behavior outside of athletic competition.	“But when it continued up on the podium. I think that hurt some people.”

For example, possible comments that highlighted Marion Jones’s “smile” would be grouped together thematically with comments that focused on Cathy Freeman’s “beauty,” since both of these comments heighten the athletes’ femininity by featuring physical appearance over athletic performance. As already stated, commentators’ accounts that addressed perceptions of race and/or gender (both accounts that reaffirmed or disputed conservative notions of race and gender) were inspected most carefully.

## Control Group

In addition, commentary describing two European American, gold medal winning athletes in track and field were analyzed in order to provide for a racial control group. Although the primary objective of this study is not to compare different commentary techniques applied to athletes from different ethnic and racial groups, presenting at least some racial comparisons is important, for both female and male athletes. This is not to argue that gender is a more important basis of comparison than race. For the current study, however, interrogating constructed notions of gender (for African American and Aboriginal athletes) stands as the core subject of inquiry. Therefore, commentary pertaining to 2000 Olympic gold medal winners only in the pole vault (Stacy Dragila—U.S. women's team, and Nick Hysong—U.S. men's team) will be analyzed, albeit to a lesser extent (no European American sprinters qualified for the U.S. Olympic Team who could serve as a racial control group within the sprinting events).

## RESULTS

### Maurice Greene, the World's Fastest Man

"He holds the world record and with it the title 'World's Fastest Man,' but Maurice Greene wants to be called something else—Olympic Champion." (NBC host, Hannah Storm, 22 September 2000).

Well before the 2000 Olympics Games began, Maurice Greene had established himself as an athletic "bad boy." During the U.S. Olympic Trials, sports media spotlighted Greene's open challenges to track and field legend, Michael Johnson, regarding who stood as the superior 200 meter sprinter (Layden, 2000a). Both Greene and Johnson failed to finish the 200 meter final at the Olympic Trials due to minor injuries. Still, the media had located an extremely talented Olympian, who they knew would likely draw high public attention.

The Olympic 100 meter preliminary heats began relatively early in the track and field competition, and almost immediately, NBC juxtaposed two sides of Greene—one "bad boy" and one "acceptable." Track and field head commentator, Tom Hammond, introduced a pre-recorded promo that covered Greene just before the 100 meter final: "His walk is a swagger. His talk is brash, but his performance backs it up. It's all part of being Maurice Greene" (23 September 2000). The piece featuring Greene then turns to Greene, who says, "I've heard people call me cocky and boastful, but I don't see it. I see it as being very confident in myself and my God-given talent." Later, the piece goes on to temper "brash," threatening, or overly confident images of Greene by showing his tender side, discussing the 1996 Olympic Games, when Greene cried in the stands during the 100 meter final because he had not made that year's Olympic team. Discussion of this episode was made repeatedly during commentary on Greene. Thus, Greene is portrayed as the animal-like brute on the track, but pacified off the track while not in competition, neither threatening nor intimidating outside of the athletic sphere.

Greene also made strong personal efforts to align himself with American patriotism, frequently expressing his "love" for the United States. Following victory in the 4x100 meter relay, Maurice Greene said in an off-track interview, "The last 4 years have paid off tremendously. And I just thank God for, you know, leading me the way and the U.S. for supporting me the way they have. Thank you U.S.A., I love you" (30 September 2000). In an interview conducted by Bob Costas, later that same evening in an NBC studio, Greene said, "Yea, I've always said I wanted to bring the United States sprinting back on top, where I believe it belongs. The United States is the greatest country in the world" (30 September 2000). And on the *Today Show* host Matt Lauer interviewed Greene (and friend Ato Bolden), who said, "...and you know, we hadn't won the gold medal in the Olympics since Carl Lewis, and me bringing the United States back the Olympic gold medal, here, I mean it's just overwhelming and I'm just happy that I could do it for the United

States" (24 September 2000). Thus, Greene is not the antithesis of American patriotism and assimilation, but rather an African American male, walking the line between traditional notions of African American narcissism on the track and acceptability off the track, where he takes agency in displaying more easy going and passive behavior and "pro-U.S.A." nationalism.

In many ways, NBC constructed Greene in the same way that Shields (1999) saw the National Basketball Association (NBA) attempting to reconstruct Gary Payton. Shields quotes Payton, who defends his aggressive style of play and "trash talking" by saying,

They're gonna try to make an example out of us. We're the known ones—me, Dennis Rodman, Charles [Barkeley]; we're all gonna be focal points. Every ref is gonna say, 'We got Payton tonight; watch out for this, watch out for that.' They can call what they want to call....My brother and father were always telling me not to back down to anybody. (p. 12, 13).

Shields also quotes Payton's head coach, George Karl and the vice president of operations for the NBA, Rod Thorn, who both state that players like Payton must control their anger, aggression, and disrespectful behaviors if they want to continue a successful career in the NBA. Just as the NBA attempts to control Payton, NBC attempts to reframe Maurice Greene's "bad boy" image by tempering his flashy persona and quick witted mouth, thus, turning Greene into a more "suitable," non-threatening African American male athlete.

Greene is clearly not as resistant as Payton, but this institutional agenda that mitigates any unsettling off-track behavior became glaringly emergent after Maurice Greene anchored the 4x100 meter relay team to Olympic gold. During the team's victory lap when the actual competition was over, Greene and his three African American teammates (Jon Drummond, Brian Lewis, and Bernard Williams) acted in a controversial manner, posing and celebrating in ways that went too far for NBC executives and a conservative American audience.

A verbal exchange between NBC host, Bob Costas and Greene in an interview aired later that same evening (30 September 2000) exemplifies NBC's agenda. During the interview, Costas stated to Greene, "Now in the aftermath of the four by one relay win, you, Jon Drummand, Brian Lewis, Bernard Williams, were preening and posing quite a bit...a number of people, including some members of the U.S. track and field team, have been critical of this. How do you feel about it?" Television sets, at this point, show the four athletes posing with American flags while Costas and Greene converse. Team member Bernard Williams has his shirt off, draping the American flag around his body as he flexes his muscles and emulates World Wrestling Federation professional wrestler, "The Rock." Brian Lewis ties the American flag around his head, like a sort of bandanna. Greene responded,

Well, when I first heard it, I really didn't understand what they were talking about. How you can explain it? For some people, it was their first time out there...just letting out all their emotion that they had bottled up at one time. If I offended anyone, and I will speak for the team, I believe we're all sincerely sorry for offending anyone if we did, and we didn't really mean to offend anyone. We were just out there enjoying the moment and enjoying that time...

Costas then turned to the athletes' behavior during the medal ceremony. "But when it continued up on the podium. I think that hurt some people. I know that you're sincerely regretful about it." Greene responded, "Yea, um, yea I am. I'm very sorry for offending anyone. I really really, we really didn't mean to...there's no reason for that, but as I said before, I'm sorry for offending anyone, but you know, it won't happen again." Finally, Costas began to close discussion of this topic when he said,

You're an exuberant guy, and for the most part, people really like that, and now, I hope that they're able to see that whatever happened in that moment is



something that you don't plan to repeat, that your teammates don't plan to repeat.

Thus, Costas almost guided Greene back into making the acceptable response that will grant him America's forgiveness and embracement: "No, I will talk to my teammates, and I will make sure that it will never happen again." One can almost sense Costas escorting Greene out from the "field" and back into the "house." In this case, Maurice Greene's patriotic "make-over" is glaringly evident, and was likely facilitated by Green's previous efforts to show strong personal patriotism. Imagine the difficulty NBC would have had forgiving Greene had he been a harsh social critic of American racism prior to his and his teammates' victory celebrations.

Nonetheless, although NBC softened Greene off the track, on-track descriptions of Greene heightened his "bad boy," threatening image. Earlier in the 100 meter heats, lead track and field commentator Tom Hammond made the following comments regarding Greene: "Maurice looked good this morning, winning his first round race, 10.31, and typically he steps it up a notch in the quarter-finals, and he's been pacing back and forth like a caged beast" (22 September 2000). Then before the 100 meter semi-finals Hammond said, "And Maurice Greene, this is the quietest he's been so far since he's came on the track. Just as we saw in the quarter-final round, like a tiger in a cage, pacing back and forth..." (23 September 2000). Finally a third time Hammond compared Greene to a beast/tiger before the first round of the 4x100 meter relay: "Meanwhile, Maurice Greene, we've seen this before his 100 meter races. He paces like a caged tiger. He just can't stay still" (29 September 2000). These comments harmonize with a larger cultural context that associates African American maleness with threatening primitivism and animal-like qualities, and was evident in print media as well. ESPN's Olympic Preview magazine featured Maurice Greene on its cover, positioned next to a cheetah, the headline saying, "Greene Streak: Who's the quickest cat? Don't bet against Maurice" (Keown, 2000).

Evidently, while on-track and in competition, Maurice Greene is allowed the leeway to promote a menacing personality, one that commentators promote themselves, and take even further, comparing the African American Greene to a beast and tiger. But off-track when competition ends, such behavior must correspondingly close, as African American male athletes must subdue any hints of protest, hostility, or national disrespect. In terms of reinforcing a national ideology via sport, such commentary tactics remind African Americans to follow the political strategies employed by African American athletes like Joe Louis and Jesse Owens, who promoted assimilation and advancement through hard work and non-resistance throughout most of their careers. Conversely, anger or (in the present case) national disrespect outside of sport, like that previously employed by Muhammad Ali (Wiggins 1997), is obstructed by media interventions.

#### **Michael Johnson, the Man with the Golden Shoes**

"On the track they are fire....The confident one, who dares to wear shoes of gold, the wind seemingly always at his back." (NBC host, Bob Costas, 22 September 2000).

Unlike Maurice Greene, Michael Johnson embodied the complete image of African American male acceptability, both on and off the track, as presented by NBC. On-track and in competition, Michael Johnson was characterized accurately as one the most serious, athletically impressive, and strategically competent competitors. Johnson, the 1996 Olympic champion in both the 200 meter and 400 meter races (also the world record holder in those events) has already established his legendary status in track and field. At the 2000 Sydney Olympics, NBC honored Johnson's high accomplishments and relished in presenting an off-track amiability, as well as an all around apolitical delivery of Johnson.

In a pre-recorded promo of Johnson aired just before his 400 meter semi-final (24 September 2000), Johnson poked fun at himself, joking

about his now famous upright running form. Describing his unique technique to sprinting, Johnson laughed as he said, "Beautiful, some people think so, and then some people think it looks funny. I think it's both. I think it looks funny sometimes....'Let's talk about Michael's style of running you know, and how funny he looks when he runs.'" Being able to laugh at his own social "imperfection" (a humorous running style), Johnson is pictured as humble and socially non-threatening, qualities very much in tune with sanctioned African American male acceptability.

Johnson also discussed aspects of patriotism in promos, saying "I try to go out there and represent my country well and make people proud. That's what I want them to show their kids, their grand kids, that this man went out and represented us well" (27 September 2000). The same promo then had its commentator, Tom Hammond, signify Johnson's family and the relationship Johnson formulates with his son. Hammond said, "He has a child now, a son of his own, who one day will ask him to explain. And the father will do what fathers have always done. He'll brag and he'll boast, maybe even exaggerate..." Johnson, here, again displayed a humble persona that humorously mocked his athletic greatness. Referring to himself and his son, he said sarcastically, "I'll probably be a lot more boastful, then you know, 'Eh, son, your Dad was, let me tell ya...oh I was the greatest,'...he'll probably be like 'Oh God, tell the story again about '96...'" These verbal comments were made with visual pictures of Johnson draped in an American flag, waving to fans, along with a picture of Johnson, laying down with his wife, and infant son. Such imagery encourages "acceptable," nuclear African American families; single-parent African American households (an indicator of structural problems in America, tied heavily to historical and current aspects of racism) were not mentioned and were subsequently dismissed in the subtext.

And finally, Johnson mentioned in this same promo that people have compared his running style and athletic success to Jesse

Owens. Though Owens was one of the more apolitical African American spokespersons throughout the 1960s, his athletic excellence in the face of Hitler helped embolden racial pride for African Americans in the 1930s and symbolized African Americans' fight for racial equality both within and beyond sport. But nowhere did Johnson mention political concerns, either his own or those impacted by Owens. Thus, audiences are persuaded to remember and honor our political race leaders from the past, but to also move on, and now dismiss race as a meaningful factor in contemporary society.

A humble, humorous, soft spoken, and apolitical figure, Michael Johnson personifies what conservative Americans long for in African American men. These are the sides of Michael Johnson that were promoted by NBC, both in live commentary and especially in promotional pieces covering Johnson. Though Johnson mentions Jesse Owens, nobody from NBC asks Johnson to expand on his views regarding Owens's political prominence. Audiences never know where Johnson may stand on political issues, as they are never brought to the table for discussion. To some degree, this was also the case with Maurice Greene. In commentary and in promos covering Greene, overt politics never emerged. But with Greene, covert political skepticism did emanate that made NBC influence Greene to control his (and his teammates') "out of control" behavior while off the track and out of competition. Meanwhile, Johnson came across as the fully admissible African American male athlete in all social spheres.

General commentary describing Michael Johnson was very similar to that connected with the European American winner in the pole vault—Nick Hysong. Olympic commentary during the men's pole vault competition (which notably also included Lawrence Johnson, the 2000 silver medalist, an African American) generally focused on competition (e.g., pole vaulters' techniques as they vaulted over the bar; athletes' standings in the medal competition). After guaranteeing their first and second finish in the pole vault competition, commentator Dwight Stones stated,

“...Nick Hysong and Lawrence Johnson will go one-two in the men’s pole vault....No one inside or outside the sport would have expected either one of these guys to win the gold, much less go one-two” (29 September 2000). Ostensibly, this more “neutral” and fair commentary surrounding these athletes is partially a result of the event itself, the pole vault being a very different type of competition, less frequently perceived as being as “primitive” as straight-out sprinting. Still, the African American Lawrence Johnson was an “ethnic exception” in the pole vault competition field, as virtually all the other competitors were of European ancestry (unlike most Olympic running events). Consequently, it may not be necessary to soften a potentially threatening African American image, being a numerical minority in the field.

### **Marion Jones, and The Drive for Five**

“She’s made no secret of her goals. There’s no mystery about her beliefs in herself. Now Marion Jones is out to make believers of us all. The Drive for Five begins.” (NBC host, Hannah Storm, 22 September 2000).

Even before the track and field portion of the 2000 Olympic Games began, Marion Jones was posted as America’s most prominent athlete in any sport, male or female. Well in advance of the Olympic Games, Jones had publicly proclaimed that she was striving to win an unprecedented five gold medals in a single Olympic Games—individually in the 100 meters, 200 meters, and the long jump, and in the 4x100 and 4x400 meter relay events. Before any Olympic competition, Jones was featured heavily in *Sports Illustrated* (Layden, 2000b). She also donned the cover of at least five major magazines: *Track and Field News* (October 2000), *Women’s Sport and Fitness* (September 2000), *Sports Illustrated for Women* (September/October 2000), *Newsweek* (11 September 2000), and *Scientific American* (Fall 2000). Having competed successfully at the U.S. Olympic Trials (Hendershott, 2000), Jones illustrated serious potential to make colossal Olympic waves, and consequently, was featured as America’s principal Olympic athlete.

There is no question that NBC has made improvements in the ways commentators describe female Olympic athletes. Eastman and Billings (1999) do state that male and female athletes who failed in their events were described in similar ways at the 1996 Olympics (i.e., women were not cited as failing due to being “intimidated” or being “mentally weak”). Accordingly, NBC commentators generally described Jones’s athleticism in ways that complimented her physical abilities and capacity to focus mentally under extreme pressure.

However, Jones’s on-track success was often times upstaged by commentary that recognized beauty over athletic performance. While the two premier African American male athletes were characterized as physically ominous on-track (particularly Maurice Greene) and constructed as passive off-track, Jones was feminized, or softened, in on-track commentary. Most notably, chief track and field commentator Tom Hammond incessantly referred to Marion Jones’s smile during her athletic events. Commenting on the immense pressure Jones would face in her quest for an unprecedented five gold medals, track and field analyst Lewis Johnson said, “...as much pressure as Marion Jones has put on herself, going for five gold medals, I’m just impressed with her sense of professionalism. She’s made herself available to the media, and she’s also able to balance the pressure with fun.” To this compliment of Jones, Hammond responded, “I mean the lasting image of her, at least so far in Sydney, has been with a huge smile on her face” (22 September 2000). Hammond would certainly make sure that image was lasting.

After another track and field analyst, Carol Lewis, explained why Jones needed to conserve her physical energy while still performing well in order to continue qualifying in the 100 meter heats, Hammond asked, “What do you think about her new running suit?” (22 September 2000), turning the focus to cosmetic interests. Other very typical comments of Jones made by Hammond are documented in Table 2, following page:

Table 2: Commentary Constructing Jones's Femininity

Date	Commentary
22 September 2000	And a big ovation, as Marion was introduced to the 110,000 in attendance at Stadium Australia. They've sort of adopted Marion, and why not, she's had a smile on her face since she's landed in Sydney.
22 September 2000	The first step on the road to five would be the 100 meters, and in two races today Marion was as sparkling as her new running suit, as dazzling as her smile.
22 September 2000	Marion Jones as we said has done it all so easily since arriving in Sydney, not only the races but the public relations. And there's why, that beaming smile. It's become her trademark as much as her flying feet.
23 September 2000	And Marion Jones is ready. She had a little bit of tension on her face as she came into stadium, something that has been unusual. For all the times she's in Sydney, there's been nothing but smiles.
23 September 2000	And the smile finally came back from Marion after she crossed the line, but she didn't seem to attack the race like she did yesterday, but the smile and the wink says 'everything's okay.' Marion's on the way to the finals.
23 September 2000	And now that smile returns. It certainly has to be relief. The first one is in the books....Smiling through the tears, let's go to the 100 meter champion.
28 September 2000	She has one gold medal in the bag. This would be her second with the long jump still to come, and the smile just won't go away. Briefly, when the news about C.J. broke, it seemed that the smile had gone, but it is back in full force.
28 September 2000	And smiles and kisses for all as she takes another step in the Drive for Five.

According to NBC's lead track and field analyst Tom Hammond, Jones's "Drive for Five" was largely a concern about beauty, about whether or not Jones could sustain her smile throughout her drive for five gold medals. Maurice Greene and Michael Johnson also smiled frequently following their sprinting heats and event victories, but references to their smiles were extremely rare. And in the few cases where this did occur, their smiles were hardly a significant focus in the discussion.

It is also important to mention that Jones's then husband, former World Champion shot putter C.J. Hunter, allegedly tested positive for banned performance enhancing drugs in a previous track meet, yet these allegations emerged in the midst of the Olympic track and field competition. Naturally, these allegations initiated a media frenzy that surrounded Jones. As noted by *Sports Illustrated* reporter Tom Layden on NBC's *Today Show*,

She is going to be implicated in whatever her husband is implicated in because that's the way track and field is. If the husband is dirty, hey, probably the wife is dirty. It's not fair, it's not proven, but it's a gossipy world, with a lot of suspicions surrounding it. (24 September 2000).

However, Jones never became involved in any accusations surrounding her specifically. Jones avoided such accusations for three reasons. First, Jones has never tested positive for illegal steroid use, displaying a history of fair play. Second, following the accusations surrounding her husband, Jones stated very assertively that she would not answer any questions about the allegations until after the Olympics. Jones went on to win three gold and two bronze medals, showcasing an unbelievable mental toughness. Her continuous ability to focus on her athletic goals and in turn, realize success, helped to combat association with Hunter's drug scandal. As Jones continued succeeding, media focus shifted from Hunter back to her Olympic prosperity; Jones's physical and mental toughness served as critical personal agents in distancing herself from unfair media scrutiny.

However, the third reason that Jones was able to evade association with any drug allegations is the most significant on a societal level. Jones, like Michael Johnson and the made over Maurice Greene, was a perfect African American "model minority." "Model minority" has been a term generally directed toward Asian Americans, that stereotypes all Asian Americans and many Asian immigrants as quiet, industrious, economically and educationally successful, unthreatening, and in the end, supportive of traditional American ideals (Lee, 1996; Osajima, 1988; Takagi, 1992; Wong, 1994). Though neither Jones, Johnson, nor Greene were particularly quiet, they ultimately were portrayed and/or remodeled as unthreatening and patriotic. Although the two core issues of public debate surrounding the model minority myth and Asian Americans are perceived educational and economic success, on a broader cultural level, the model minority myth truly revolves around American nationalism. Spickard (1996) points out that in the 1960s "Japanese Americans and other Asians had become what other, darker, seemingly more threatening minorities had not: successful members of the American middle class" (p. 144). Takagi (1992) goes on to illustrate how the model minority myth ultimately has to do with much more than just economic achievement. In fact, it is no coincidence the model minority myth emanated in the 1960s during the Civil Rights Movement:

Against the backdrop of rioting in black ghettos, the "long hot summers" of the late 1960s, and mass public demonstrations for civil rights, Asian Americans appeared to be a relatively quiescent minority. There were no Asian American counterparts to fiery black political leaders such as H. Rap Brown, Malcolm X, Stokely Carmichael, and Martin Luther King, Jr., nor was there an Asian American equivalent of, for example, the Black Panthers. (p. 58, 59).

Certainly, Jones was not a radical black feminist pushing for social change. As hooks (1992) asserts, "Radical black female subjects are constantly labeled crazy by those who hope to undermine our personal power and our ability to influence others" (p. 54). Had Jones not smiled and been outspoken regarding various political

injustices, it is very probable she would have been associated with Hunter's drug scandal to a far greater degree as a means to undermine her political force. Instead, celebrated as an apolitical figure, Jones's on-track performances translated into feminized media presentations that encourage depolitization among African American women in general. Even Jones's phenomenal ability to maintain focus throughout her drive for five and throughout her then husband's alleged drug scandal did not prevent her from being stereotyped along both race and gender lines. In the end, Jones was cast and celebrated as a politically passive and pleasant "model" for minorities.

### Cathy Freeman, A Symbol of Racial "Reconciliation"

"This is a significant night for Australia and its Aboriginal population, with the choice of Cathy Freeman significant because she is not only a hero to Aborigines, but to all Australians....she is a figure in the goal towards reconciliation." (NBC host, Katie Couric, 17 September 2000).

One woman of color did speak out on political issues, and not just any minority female, an indigenous Aboriginal star, running for Australia. Just months before the 2000 Olympics began, Freeman (a symbolic, and arguably active leader in Australian racial politics) countered an Australian government official's claims that the "Stolen Generation" of Aborigines was nonexistent by stating,

I was so angry, because they were denying they had done anything wrong....The fact is, parts of people's lives were taken away—they were stolen. I'll never know who my grandfather was. I didn't know who my great-grandmother was. And that can never be replaced. (quoted in Gustafson, 2000, p. 110).

Hargreaves (2000) does note, "Cathy Freeman has said that she is not political, but has also said that she is aware of her heritage and the importance of an Olympic Gold to her people" (p. 127). To Freeman's credit, in this day and age, when corporate capitalism

runs athletics, and where athletes are strongly discouraged by their corporate sponsors to initiate political discussion, comments like those made by Freeman convey critical social value. How then, would NBC depict Freeman, an Aboriginal woman, fighting through sport to increase a country's consciousness and affect social change?

NBC did make substantial efforts to acknowledge Freeman's political importance in the Games. One of the first and perhaps the most enduring image of the 2000 Olympics was Cathy Freeman's lighting of the Olympic Torch in the Opening Ceremonies. In honor of the 2000 Olympics being the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of women's Olympic participation, the final 7 torch bearers, who carried the torch into Stadium Australia were all women. The first 6 women carrying the torch into Stadium Australia were all white women, former Australian Olympians. Minutes after Freeman lit the torch, Bob Costas said,

You know she is a genuinely shy...young woman, but she is aware of the significance that her presence in this ceremony and as a potential gold medal winner in these Games carries. And so she is willing to step up to that, both athletically, and as a symbol for the people, and as a symbol of a unifying force for Australia. But it is not her nature to be front and center. (17 September 2000).

Two consistent themes seen in the above quote ran throughout NBC's Olympic coverage of Freeman. First, that Freeman was aware of her political significance, but that she was also "shy" and not an eager leader pushing for Aboriginal equity. Secondly, Freeman was turned into a symbol that stood for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians. Her presence was portrayed in a way that helped Australia to "move past race" and "reconcile," not to induce radical social change.

Like the pressure surrounding Marion Jones, the social pressure surrounding Cathy Freeman was tremendous. Commenting on this immense pressure Freeman had to endure, track analyst, Carol Lewis said, "...for Cathy, she not only has the fact that she has great

competitors, but also that she's Aboriginal, that she's a woman, and how much she stood for..." (23 September 2000), placing Freeman's hardships in a proper political context that accounts for both gender and race. Comments like these by Lewis (who is both African American and female) were neutralized by comments made by lead track and field commentator Tom Hammond, who made the following statements in regard to Freeman (see Table 3):

Table 3: Commentary Pacifying Freeman's Political Agency

Date	Commentary
23 September 2000	...she realized her athletic ability could help her make a statement. Now she's a symbol for the Aboriginal race and for all Australian women. It's just that sometimes it all gets to be a bit much.
24 September 2000	Well there she is, that tattoo on her arm...not intended to be a political statement when she got it. Just a reflection of her personal philosophy, but it has become a statement and a cause for the Aboriginal race...
24 September 2000	Cathy Freeman running for all Australia.

Freeman's media presentations pacify her as a race leader and woman, who according to commentary, sometimes fails to handle the social pressure. Her tattoo is turned into a political statement only by virtue of her subsequent stardom, leading viewers to believe she did not have any political consciousness prior to being an elite athlete. And again, she runs "for all Australia," proceeding beyond historical colonialism and its resultant racial inequality. NBC's descriptions of Freeman did nothing to further her political importance; rather, NBC's commentary of Freeman constructed her personal qualities in ways that minimized her

political symbolism. With colonial history forgotten, Freeman's media portrayals also reflected the 2000 Olympics' Opening and Closing Ceremonies.

In both the Opening and Closing Ceremonies, Aboriginal culture was signified extensively. However, like previous Olympic festivities involving Aboriginal culture (Meekison, 2000), the Opening and Closing Ceremonies in the Olympics depicted Aboriginal dancers as primitive and beastly, while ignoring present-day inequality. In the Opening Ceremonies, performers depicted as ancient Aborigines (many, though not all of whom, were of Aboriginal descent) were dressed scantily with white make-up covering their faces and bodies, walking on stilts, dancing, and blowing fire. In regard to the theme of reconciliation, co-host for the Opening Ceremonies, Katie Couric said,

This performance tonight, of course, is another step in that direction. Some 1,500 Aborigines from all over the country are here. Many of them flying on a plane, or even riding on a bus for the first time, some of them using a escalator for the very first time. The fact that they wanted to be a part of these Olympics, a part of this Opening Ceremony is really significant. (17 September 2000).

Godwell (2000a) writes that by having actual Aboriginal participants partake in the Aboriginal component of ceremonies, narrow, primordial, and in the end, racist definitions of Aborigines are not only reinforced, but also legitimized for largely white audiences. Couric legitimized this overly generalized primordial perception even further when she stated that many Aborigines have not been exposed to modern day devices. Furthermore, Couric made such apolitical cultural performances appear as the proper route to social justice when she stated that it is significant for so many Aborigines to want to be in the performance. How easy it is to forget that there were also many Aborigines who protested Australia's Olympic Games.

Moving back to Freeman, her agency as a female Aboriginal leader was further minimized by her feminization, which occurred, notably, when adjoined by Marion Jones. Again, Tom Hammond accentuated the two women's femininity, as they competed against one another in the 200 meter finals. After Cathy Freeman advanced past the 200 meter semi-finals, Hammond chuckled and said, "She'll be in the final later tonight to take on Marion Jones, the match of the two track divas," and continued, "...the final, which is set now, for the showdown between the two divas of track, Marion Jones and Cathy Freeman" (28 September 2000). Then just before the 200 meter finals, Hammond persisted with his word choice, saying,

...with the tension mounting, for the last few days the Australian newspapers have been touting the match of the two track divas, and it's about to unfold. Marion Jones of the United States against Australia's hero, as they say, 'our Cathy,' Cathy Freeman. (28 September 2000).

Applying the term "divas" to Freeman and Jones, only in the context where they race head to head in competition, illustrates Hammond's desire to further feminize minority women in a collective and competitive nature. Cahn (1994) attests that continued use of gendered terms (in this case "divas") perpetuates inequality between the sexes. Hammond's increased feminization of the two women, which only occurred when they faced each other in direct competition, exposes a media tactic that reinforces gender distinctions and directs attention away from these women's athleticism. hooks (1992) reminds us that "Popular culture provides countless examples of black female appropriation and exploitation of 'negative stereotypes' to either assert control over the representation or at least reap the benefits of it" (p. 65). In this case, these two elite female athletes—one African American, the other Aboriginal—are appropriated by way of feminized imagery, and their representation is controlled by the white male commentator for a predominantly white, male audience.

James (1999) argues that images of strong black feminists, more prevalent in the 1970s, became depoliticized in the 1990s by adding

a softened dimension to those icons. In 2000, this same media tactic is used in an important sporting venue to depoliticize the Aboriginal Cathy Freeman. Being an athlete representing Australia (and not the United States) one might have assumed NBC would not make efforts to weaken Freeman's political force; Freeman was not critiquing American class or race inequality. Nevertheless, being a symbol of gender and racial resistance, NBC weakened Freeman as a political icon, making it less likely that ethnic and gender minorities in the United States follow Freeman's resistant lead.

Finally, in comparing Jones and Freeman with descriptions surrounding the European American gold medal winner in the women's pole vault, Stacy Dragila, significant differences in gendered commentary do emerge. At least in NBC's coverage of the women's pole vault, feminization of the competitors was virtually absent. And importantly, every women's pole vaulter shown by NBC was of European descent. The following excerpt describing Dragila's athletic efforts is very typical of those covering the entire women's vault competition: "And over easily under tremendous pressure, a huge favorite coming into this competition, but Dragila is a tough competitor. With that clearance she remains in the hunt for the gold" (25 September 2000). Dragila, however, was also gendered by commentators, but in a way that promoted her as a symbol of women's liberation. Dragila was encouraged by NBC interviewers to stand as a role model for young girls to break gender boundaries in sport and society, these 2000 Olympic Games being the inaugural women's pole vault competition. Thus, whereas the European American Dragila was heightened by NBC as a progressive female role model who symbolized gender headway, the African American Jones and Aboriginal Freeman were softened as political icons who could have otherwise symbolized significant social/political progress for women of color.

## DISCUSSION

At the 1968 Olympic Games in Mexico City, Tommie Smith and John Carlos sprinted to a first and third place finish, respectively, in the 200 meter final. Prior to these Olympic Games, African American male athletes had considered an all out boycott in support of the ongoing Civil Rights Movement, but determined after considerable discussion that each individual athlete could protest as he or she chose (though African American women were largely excluded from the discussions) (Harrison, 2000, p. 66, 67). While receiving their Olympic gold and bronze medals, Smith and Carlos took off their shoes, raised their black gloved fists in the air, and looked down at the ground as America's national anthem played in symbolic protest. Smith and Carlos were both asked to leave Mexico City by the United States Olympic Committee.

Now in 2000, we have seen a different, yet somewhat similar gesture that transpired involving Maurice Greene, Jon Drummand, Brian Lewis, and Bernard Williams. It would be highly erroneous to argue that Greene and his 4x100 teammates intended to act in a way that emulated Smith and Carlos. Smith and Carlos acted with a distinct political agenda in mind that criticized America's maltreatment towards African Americans and minorities in general. Greene, for the most part, verbally expressed "love" for the United States in a way that was more similar to patriotic actions carried out by boxer George Foreman at the Mexico City Games, who carried an American flag after his gold medal performance (Sammons, 1988). However, Greene and company composed themselves in ways that displayed disrespect towards America—towards America's flag, America's national anthem, and the American audiences who disapproved of their actions.

Of course the analogy is not perfect, as Greene and his teammates were not acting with definite anti-American sentiment in mind, but like their African American forefathers in 1968, Greene, Drummand, Lewis, and Williams were reprimanded for exhibiting disrespect toward important American symbols. Being the 100 meter champion, the world record



holder, and America's primary power sprinter, Greene faced the most scrutiny from the media, although he was the least exuberant of the four athletes during their victory celebrations.

Consequently, media forces tried vigorously to bring Greene back to his initial image that glorified America, an image that corresponded more with Michael Johnson. NBC highlighted all of Johnson's values that jived nicely with admissible notions of African American men. Images of Johnson did not remind America of angry African American figureheads who question authority and draw attention to America's complicity in creating and perpetuating social inequality. Rather, images and descriptions of Johnson stood as an example of what African American men "should" be. Likewise, two of Johnson's teammates on the gold medal winning 4x400 meter relay team, identical twins Alvin and Calvin Harrison, were repeatedly praised for their sustained motivation while enduring extreme hardship and familial tragedy, which eventually led to their present athletic stardom. Essentially, these two young African American men were verbally praised for "pulling themselves up by their own bootstraps," enduring misfortune, but never complaining or questioning America's role in their misfortune as African Americans. Surely their sustained motivation is commendable, but NBC's repeated verbal praise of their past and present circumstances suggests they are the example other African American men "should" follow. Basically, Michael Johnson and his teammates were presented as the principal model to which Greene and his teammates were supposed to return, and the model that stood for all African American men. Finally, that these men were often times literally draped in American patriotism perpetuates false national notions that African Americans do not question economic and racial stratification in the United States, but rather support America wholeheartedly.

Likewise, Marion Jones was presented by NBC as a model for African American women. Her unbelievable mental toughness and verbal assertiveness did assist her in resisting an unfair association with then husband, C.J. Hunter's drug fiasco. But what also helped Jones was her apolitical approach to the Games. American media forces

had no need to undermine Jones's power as an elite athlete, as she did not openly critique traditional American values or questionable political policies. Jones was strictly an athlete, and presented as a pleasant one at that. Unfortunately, being labeled "pretty and pleasant" led to Jones being beautified as a woman, praised for her cosmetic qualities to an extent far greater than her African American male counterparts. In turn, her astonishing athletic accomplishments (no other woman in history has won five medals for track and field in a single Olympics) were devalued.

Cathy Freeman was this Olympics' primary political figure, an Aboriginal woman taking center stage in the very country that discriminates against Aborigines. NBC did not ignore her political gravity. In Bob Costas's final comments to NBC viewers, NBC's Olympic host said of Freeman,

...perhaps no individual will represent these Games as much as Cathy Freeman. While the particulars differ, Americans can certainly understand the idea of a country ripped by a racial divide and un-remedied in justice. Australia still grapples with its own troubled past, but as we know, sometimes there can be power in symbols, and what a symbol it was, to have an Aborigine chosen and the face Australia first showed to the world before an audience of billions. And then, to have this athlete come to the track and come through and have, at least in one night, an entire country in rapture. That was really something. It's on such nights that we feel the Olympics should endure....Only in the context of sports that the world gathers in this way, only in this context that a woman from a long excluded and mistreated people can light a torch of hope. (1 October 2000).

Costas not only honored Freeman for her political activism and athletic greatness as an indigenous minority and woman. He also connected historical and present racial unfairness in Australia with racial inequality in America. Furthermore, Costas accented

the power of sports, one of the only contexts in which local or national causes can be expressed to the world. Unfortunately, Freeman's push for Aboriginal rights was weakened by images of Aborigines that reified long standing racist stereotypes. Aboriginal dancers (some actual Aborigines and some non-Aborigines) looked more like cave-men and women than Aborigines of today who receive poor health care, who are over-represented in the criminal justice system, and who face interpersonal and structural discrimination constantly. Although historical colonization and discrimination against Aborigines emerged in NBC's coverage, these contemporary issues were never brought to the forefront by NBC. Instead, reconciliation was the presented answer, an answer that acknowledges the past, but forgives and forgets, and does not address current systematic inequality, which obviously stems from historical oppression. Media presentations of Freeman embodied reconciliation, not radical social change. In short, NBC's presentations of the politically active Freeman brought her closer to the completely apolitical, non-threatening presentations that symbolized Greene, Johnson, and Jones.

Additionally, when comparing commentary descriptions of athletes who competed in one track and field event (the pole vault), where greater proportions of white athletes excel, the depoliticization of Greene and Freeman becomes that much more obvious. Neither Stacy Dragila, Nick Hysong, nor even the African American Lawrence Johnson were described with language that emphasized an intimidating or feminized physicality. In fact, Dragila was actually lauded as a successful female role model, breaking traditionally gendered confines. Consequently, it appears that in social spheres where people of color comprise a majority (in terms of both numbers and achievement), media efforts to depoliticize the symbolic leaders will be considerably stronger.

One can then surmise that when prominent athletes of color act in ways that disrespect conventional national concerns (e.g., Green via body language and Freeman via verbal assertion), television media

forces will take significant measures to redirect the athletes' presentation, making these athletes appear less disrespectful and/or critical of their respective nations. The same cannot be said for prominent white athletes who symbolize progressive social change (e.g., Dragila). Further research in this area may want to examine media descriptions between athletes from different sports that follow racialized trends, for example, descriptions of track and field athletes (majority of African descent) in comparison to swimmers and divers (majority of European and Asian descent).

## CONCLUSION

The four athletes under study, Maurice Greene, Michael Johnson, Marion Jones, and Cathy Freeman, are all extraordinary athletes, competitors, and human beings. The mental and physical preparation they put into their daily lives in order to become Olympic champions is a discipline very few people can even begin to fathom. It takes the most stringent diet, sleep patterns, practice schedules, mental rehearsals, and sustained desire, which fuse to create phenomenal physical talent in elite athletes. It is important to make this point because these athletes should not ultimately be blamed for the ways they are represented in popular media. In essence, they have enough to worry about already, just training to become the storied athletes they are, which is the basis of their livelihood. Moreover, even the most socially conscious and outspoken athletes often cannot control their own discriminatory media representations—just ask Martina Navratilova.

But as Cathy Freeman shows us now, and as athletes from our past have shown us before, there are those few athletic headliners who take their celebrity status beyond the track, pool, court, and field. In essence, elite athletes have agency—they are not blindly puppeteered by media forces. Donovan Bailey, demonstrated this agency elite athletes can utilize. A Jamaican-born sprinter, Bailey won two Olympic gold medals in the 1996 Olympic Games, running for Canada. Bailey, however, actively

made public his proud Jamaican heritage and has not been adverse to discussing racism in Canada (Jackson & Meier, 1999). To those athletes who demonstrate a higher social consciousness in the midst of their athletic stardom, we owe a great thanks, knowing that in today's sporting world, money and corporate contracts usually weigh heavier than social responsibility. Without question, it is critical that we see more Cathy Freeman's in our current sporting environments, considering the immense public exposure athletes command in our larger society.

Of course Freeman was not a politically radical symbol and did not construct herself as such. During her victory lap after the 400 meter race, Freeman "...held both the Australian and Aboriginal flags but this time, she had tied them together in a knot, reinforcing the impression of oneness and stability. Again, Cathy had made a gesture of goodwill and not defiance" (Hargreaves, 2000, p. 126). On the other hand, Hargreaves's (2000) research also illustrates how Freeman's actions have truly extended feelings of pride in Aboriginal women, though many of the Aboriginal women interviewed by Hargreaves were keenly aware of the way media forces (like NBC) were constructing Freeman as a symbol of reconciliation. Clearly, interpretation of Freeman's actions are complex, and therefore, when athletes take their political consciousness beyond their playing fields, it is important to stop media forces from downgrading their political agency.

It is also crucial to illustrate how media presentations of Freeman and Australia's Aboriginal population at the 2000 Olympic Games typify liberal pursuits of multiculturalism. Discussing multicultural spectacles in Los Angeles, Lowe (1996) states that,

None of the productions of multiculturalism reckons with the practical relationships between heterogeneous and economically unequal racial, ethnic, and immigrant communities in Los Angeles....All depend on 'forgetting' the historically produced spatial discipline and geographical separations and ghettoizations of Black Americans and the poorest of these immigrant groups. (p. 89, 90).

Such was also the case in Sydney. Although colonial history was discussed, albeit rarely, there was even less discussion presented by NBC in regard to what should happen now in order to rectify past wrongs. Sydney's "multicultural" Olympics only showcased ancient Aboriginal culture, along with one modern Aboriginal musical group who performed a song that addressed Aboriginal rights. Beyond that, concentrated discussions of what needs to happen next in order to remedy colonization's current conditions were virtually absent. These multicultural strategies might make people feel good, in particular those non-indigenous people who feel guilty about historical and current discrimination, but in the end, these strategies do nothing to enact change and strive towards racial parity.

Considering the worldly attention each Olympic Games secures, academic scrutiny of them is imperative. Although popular culture does not dictate public or individual attitudes and behaviors, it unquestionably does influence our personal and collective sensibilities. In this millennium's first Olympic Games, we saw four athletes perform up to their expected abilities and capture the world's attention. Nevertheless, the Olympics are disseminated to the world via mass media, and athletes' representations are mediated by social forces, at times beyond their control. It is essential that media executives, producers, and commentators understand and care about the negative social consequences that result from racial and gender stereotyping of athletes and other celebrity figures. In turn, network executives must pressure their commentators to avoid using commentary that follows racist and sexist standards and that depoliticizes athletes like Cathy Freeman. In all likelihood, such reform will only occur when corporations reach some level of ethical consciousness and choose not to advertise with networks that perpetuate discrimination. In addition, however, progress towards this objective could be achieved by hiring more ethnic minorities, particularly women, as lead commentators. Why Lewis Johnson (an African American man) and Carol Lewis (an African American woman) were secondary commentators behind Tom Hammond (a white man) is deplorable, in light of Hammond's recurrent references

to Maurice Greene looking like a "caged tiger," Marion Jones's "smile," and Jones and Cathy Freeman being "divas," all descriptions that reaffirm racist and sexist stereotyping, both on the track and in households across America.

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## THE SEXUALITY OF GENDER: GAY MALE SOCIAL THEORIES AND THEIR RELATIONS TO WOMEN

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Men in various cultural locations of manhood employ heterosexual masculinity in a manner designed to maintain male privilege. This advantage relies on the exclusion of women from employing or participating in the codes of masculinity. A perspective of gender difference, that is a sense that biological women are in some important way inherently different than biological men, thus not only underlies the effort to construct male exclusivity and privilege, but it exists as an explicit category in the maintenance of men's social power. Yet, gender difference is not the only aspect of male power. The dynamic of sexuality plays an implicit role in the attempt to essentialize manhood as heterosexual, in that heterosexuality contributes to the exclusivity of men's masculine power. The hierarchical gender structure supports men's sexual and familial privileges. Among other reasons, such as their own ambiguous desires and sexual paranoia, heterosexual men exclude gay men from the category of privileged masculinity because, without sexual advantage over women, male power would be significantly weakened.

As feminist literature, from such disparate perspectives as radical and liberal feminisms, has explicated, men's sexual objectification of women is the dynamic of sex being used to maintain male power. In this context, sex can be understood as men's desires for physical pleasure and the derivation of that pleasure from objects, women, perceived as external to the subjects. Even when men do not explicitly employ that objectification, it infects their