



# THE LAST LECTURES

DR. HARRY EDWARDS

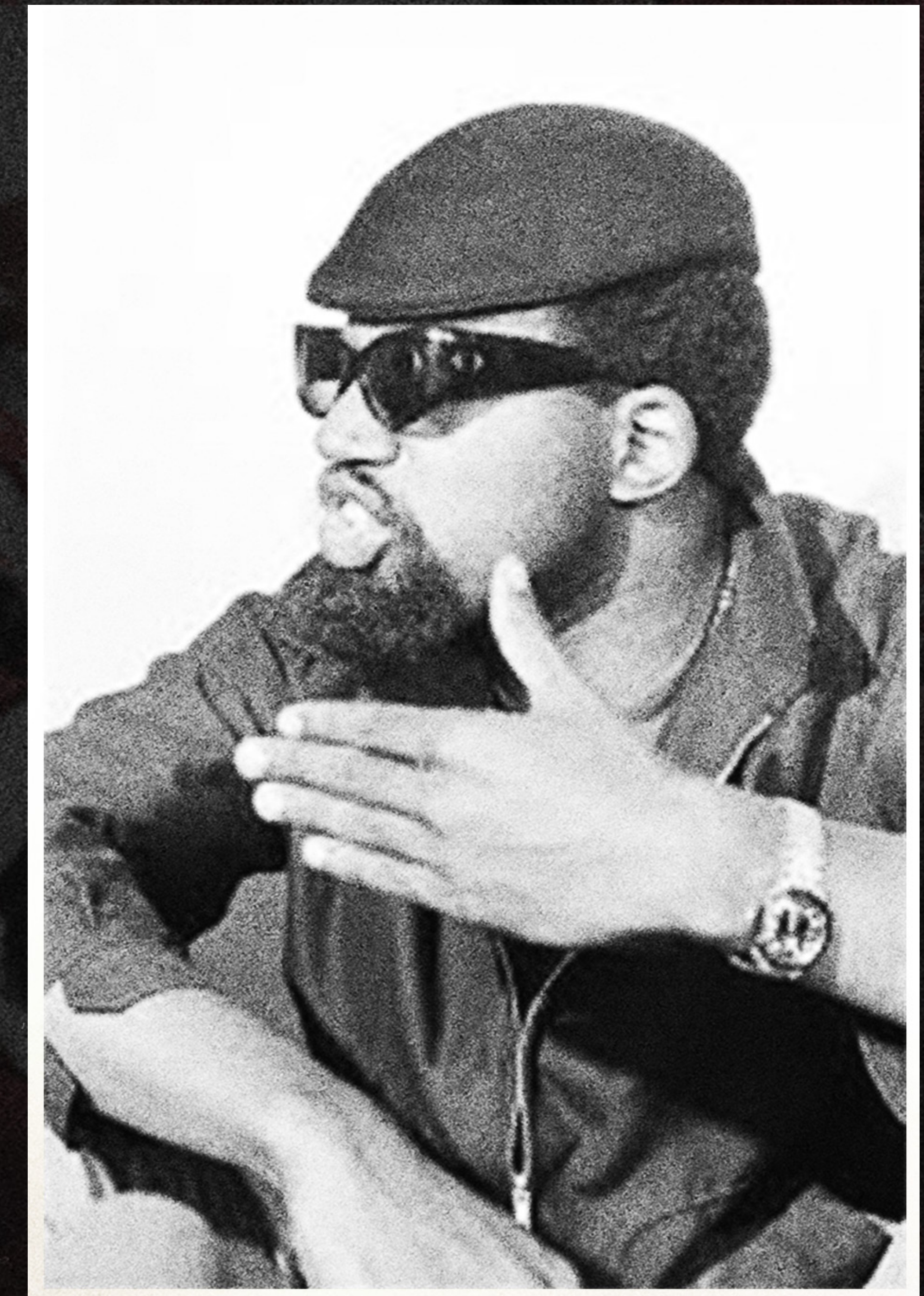


## LECTURE 1

# THE FOUNDATIONS OF ATHLETE ACTIVISM

---

*“Your introduction to Dr. Harry Edwards, the significance of athlete activism, and the sociology of sport.”*







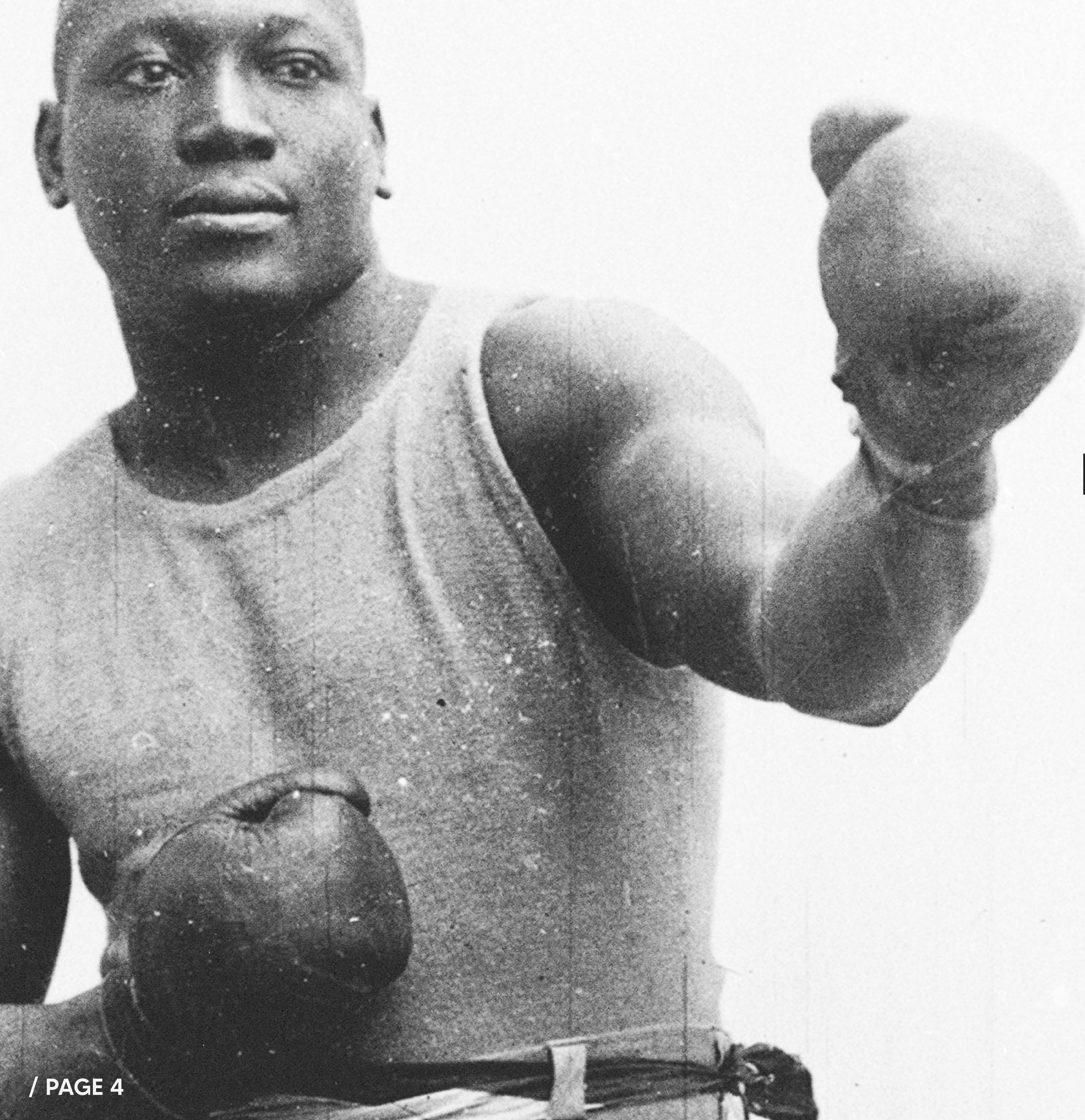
**Dr. Harry Edwards**, the longtime activist, academic, and the first person to study sport as a formal discipline within the field of sociology, explains the foundational principles of the sociology of sport and athlete activism, focusing on issues of race and gender.

---

*Topics covered include:*

- Introduction to Dr. Edwards and the sociology of sport
- The Blueprint for Success and the theoretical basis for athlete activism
- The six waves of athlete activism (1865-present)





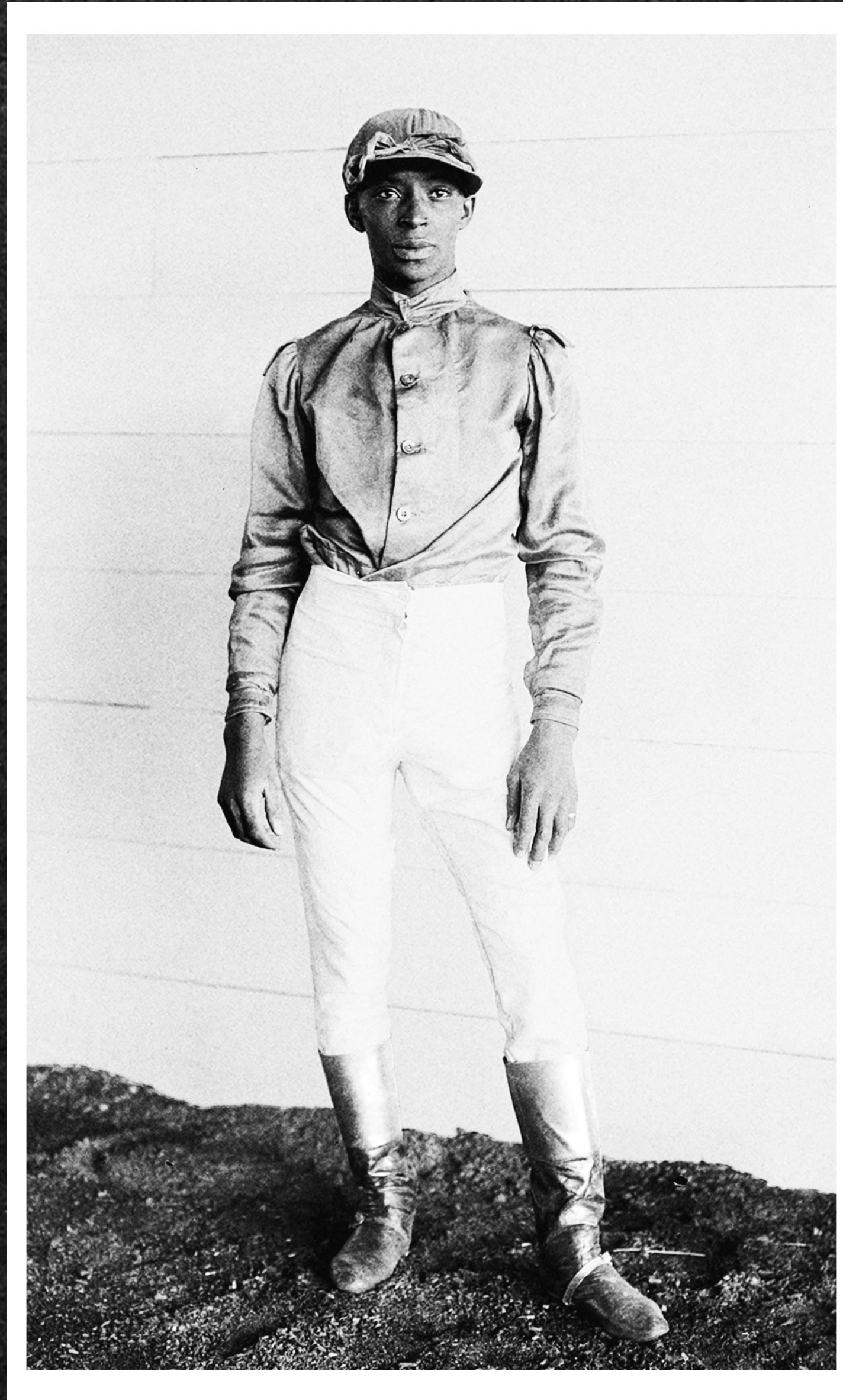
## LECTURE 2

# EMANCIPATION AND THE FIRST ATHLETE ACTIVISTS

---

*“The stories of the earliest first-wave athlete-activists  
and the ideologies that inspired them.”*





Dr. Edwards goes back to the first time that sports and activism crossed paths in America – during the turbulent years following Emancipation and the Civil War, including the most powerful athlete-activist of the early first wave, Jack Johnson, who challenged white supremacy in America by winning the World Heavyweight Championship of boxing. Framing the earliest athlete-activist struggles in the context of social and political trends in America with a focus on the predominant intellectual currents in Black society Dr. Edwards establishes the dynamics of athlete activism in society that hold true to this day.

*Topics covered include:*

- Octavius Catto – America's first athlete-activist
- Accommodation vs. Integration – Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois
  - Major Taylor – the first Black athlete superstar
- Black jockeys – America's forgotten champions
  - Jack Johnson and "The Great White Hope"





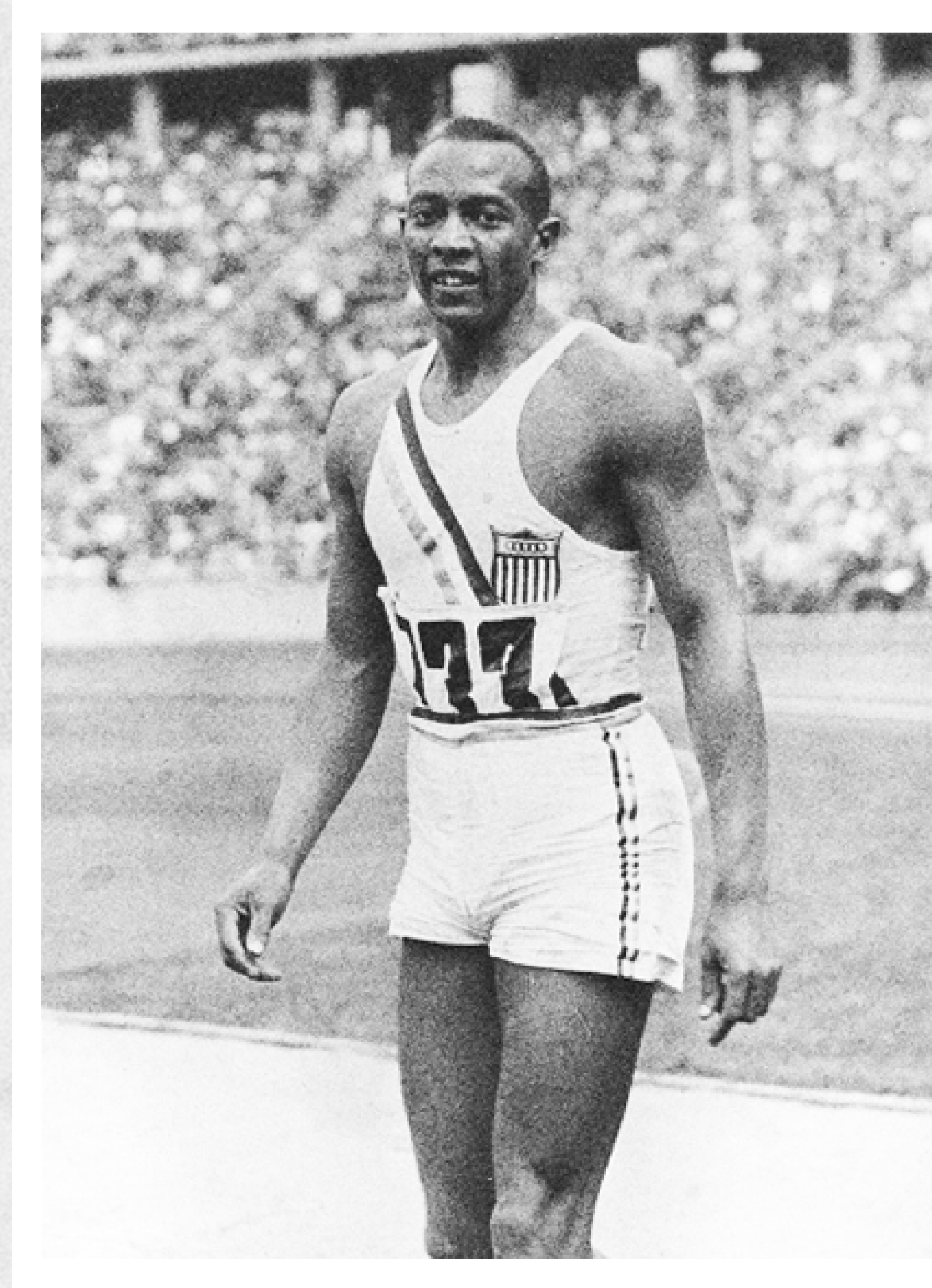
## LECTURE 3

# JESSE OWENS AND THE RACIST ORIGINS OF THE OLYMPICS

---

*“Featuring Jesse Owens and his challenge to the white supremacism  
of the global sports establishment.”*





Dr. Edwards describes how the so-called “purest” athletic competition – the modern Olympic Games, founded in 1896 by Pierre de Coubertin – was built on white supremacist principles and shocking racist displays. Concluding with the story of Jesse Owens and the Nazi Olympics of 1936, the full extent of the moral deficiencies of early 20th century sport and society come painfully clear.

*Topics covered include:*

- The racist origins of the Olympics and Pierre de Coubertin
  - The 1904 “Racial” Olympics in St. Louis
- The first Black women Olympians, Tidy Pickett and Louise Stokes, and the racist shame of Babe Didrikson
  - Jesse Owens threatens an Olympic boycott, then wins four gold medals
  - The abandonment of Owens by the sports establishment





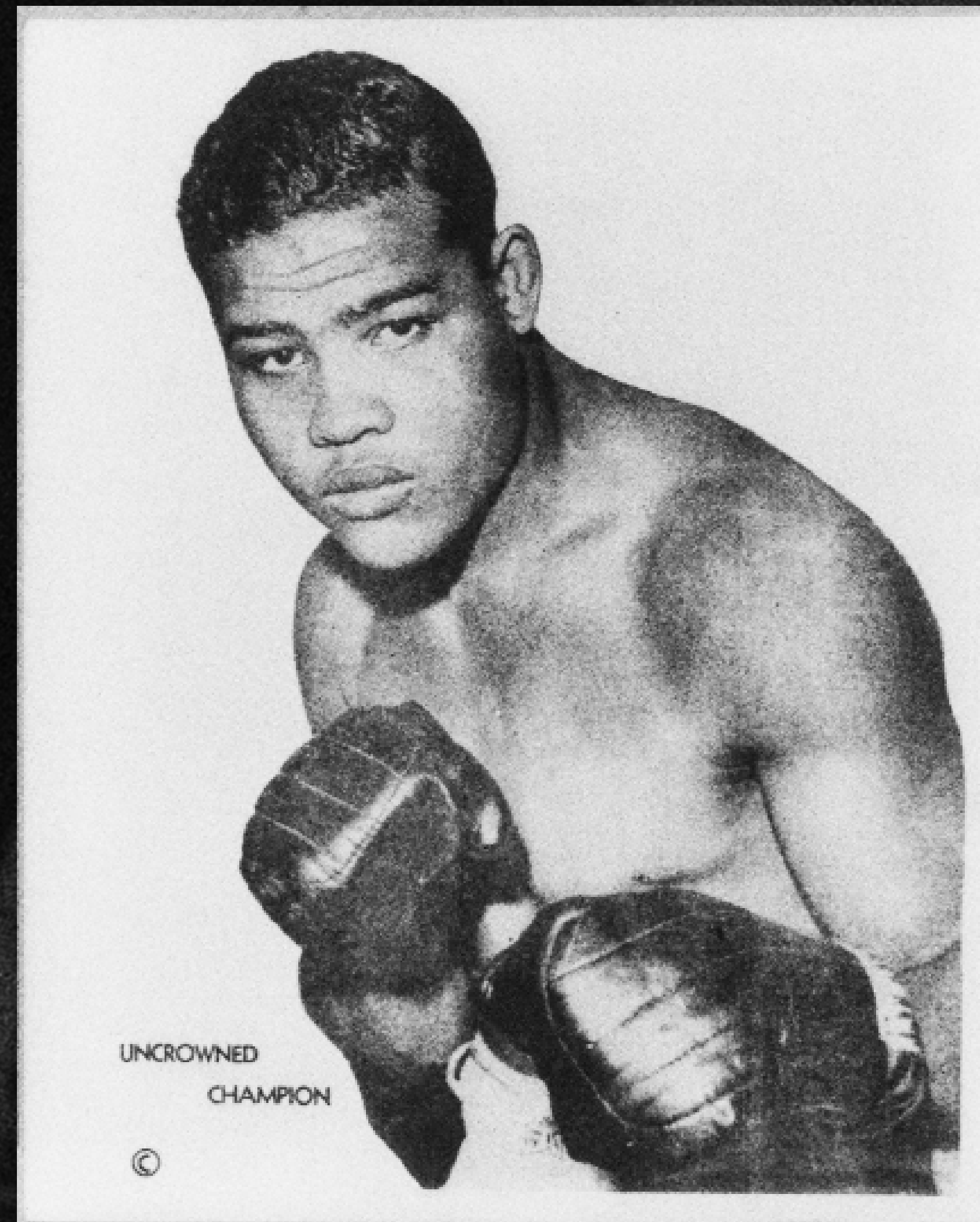
## LECTURE 4

# JOE LOUIS AND THE STRUGGLE FOR LEGITIMACY

---

*“The life and career of the great Joe Louis and his influence on the Black community.”*





The apex of the first wave of athlete activism, personified by heavyweight champion Joe Louis, depicts Black athletes' struggle for legitimacy as human beings at its most powerful. Dr. Edwards shows how – through Joe Louis's athletic achievements – a single high-profile, powerful sports personality can impact Black society almost beyond measure.

*Topics covered include:*

- Joe Louis becomes an American hero as war looms, but also reveals the enduring illegitimacy conferred upon Black athletes as human beings
  - Joe Louis's friendship with Jesse Owens and Owens's struggles
  - Louis defeats Max Schmeling of Germany and is hailed by FDR
- Joe Louis joins the army during World War II (and meets Jackie Robinson)
  - The Double V movement





## LECTURE 5

# BLACK BASEBALL AS A RESISTANCE MOVEMENT

---

*“The evolution of Black baseball in the twentieth century  
and the early career of Jackie Robinson.”*



Dr. Edwards frames the most celebrated all-Black sports organization in American history not just as a legendary sports league but as a true resistance movement against the degradations of second-class citizenship. The full cultural impact of Negro League baseball, right up through the integration of the Major Leagues by Jackie Robinson, went far beyond the field of play, and even laid the foundation in Black America for non-violent direct action, priming the pump for Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and the Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and 60s.



*Topics covered include:*

- Rube Foster and the early Negro Leagues
- The early career of Jackie Robinson and the model of non-violent direct action
- Effa Manley and the cost of Predatory Inclusion





## LECTURE 6

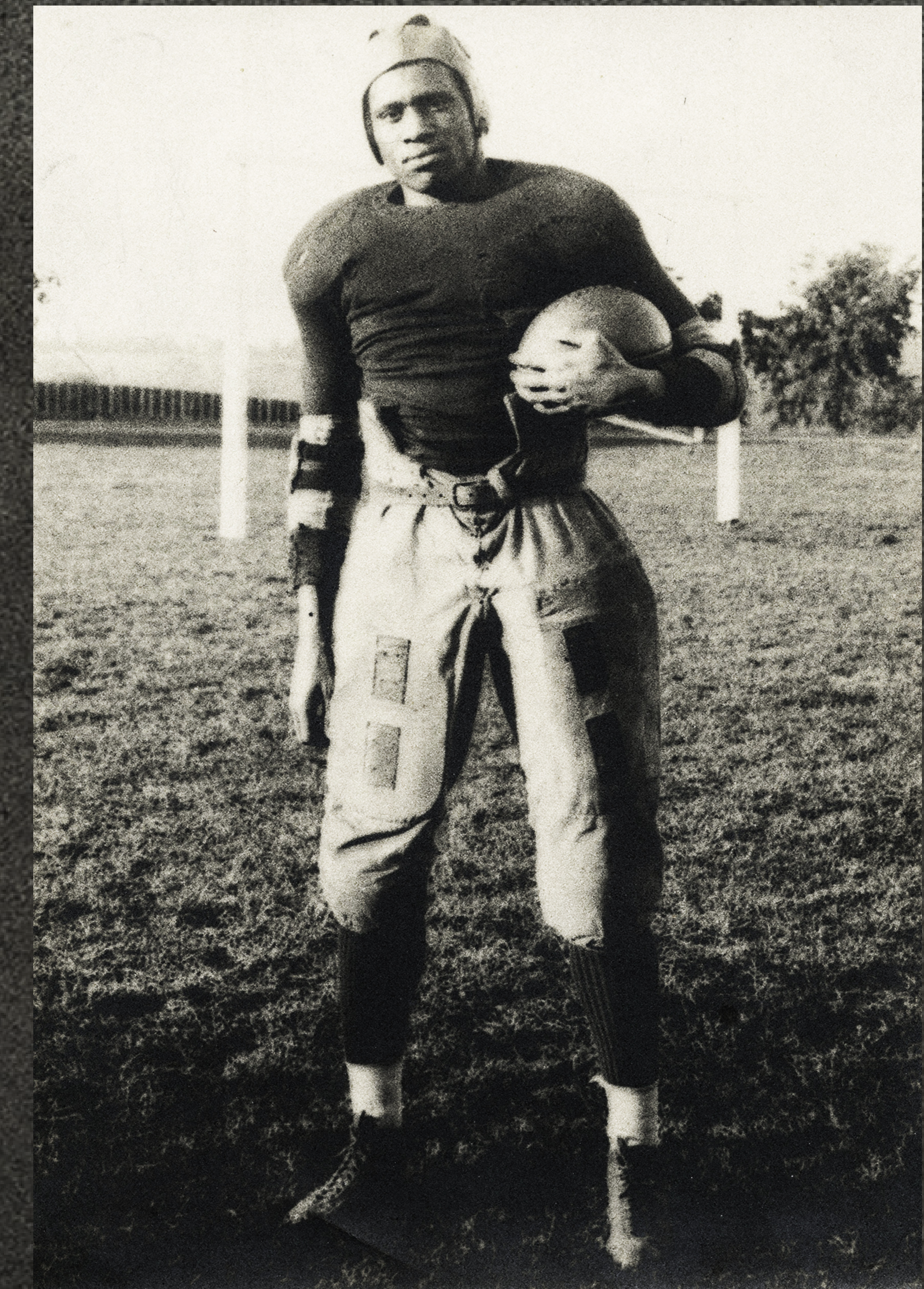
# “THE TALLEST TREE IN OUR FOREST”

---

*“The tale of Paul Robeson, “the tallest tree in our forest,” his critical importance, his conflict with Jackie Robinson, and his erasure from history.”*



The glorious achievements and tragic demise of Paul Robeson embody the struggles of all 20th-century athlete-activists. Propelled into the public eye as the greatest college football player of his time, then during a second career as the country's most celebrated singer, Robeson exhibited the power of passionate protest, and – when the white power structure pits Black man against Black man – the terrible cost paid by those who threaten the white supremacist foundations of power in America.



*Topics covered include:*

- Paul Robeson as a young superstar athlete and scholar
  - Early sports desegregation efforts
  - Robeson vs Jackie Robinson



## LECTURE 7

# DIGNITY AND RESPECT

---

*“Changing social conditions in the 1950s and 1960s  
give birth to a third wave of sports activism  
through passionate protest.”*





The third wave of athlete activism begins as a largely female group of new athlete-activist leaders usher in a struggle for dignity and respect. Dr. Edwards teaches us the stories of several of these extraordinary women and discusses the conditions in the American political climate of the 1950s and 1960s that gave birth to this critical period of passionate protest.



*Topics covered include:*

- The societal conditions of the 1950's that gave rise to third wave
  - Rose Robinson and the first National Anthem protest
  - Olympic hero Wilma Rudolph compels her Tennessee hometown to stop racial segregation



## LECTURE 8

# HEROES AND VILLAINS OF THE THIRD WAVE

---

*“Including Dr. Edwards’s first major personal contribution  
to the critical third wave of athlete activism.”*



We learn more stories of other players and teams that defined the third wave of athlete activism and partook in the struggle for dignity and respect. We get one of the most powerful straight from the source: the tale of Dr. Edwards as a student and scholar at San Jose State in the early 1960s, as he found himself at the center of the movement, becoming a nationwide leader of athlete activism.



*Topics covered include:*

- Elgin Baylor
- Bill Russell
- The 1965 AFL All-Star Game Boycott
- Texas Western vs. Adolph Rupp
- Arthur Ashe
- The San Jose State football boycott, where Dr. Edwards takes on the white power structure all the way up to California Governor Ronald Reagan





## LECTURE 8A

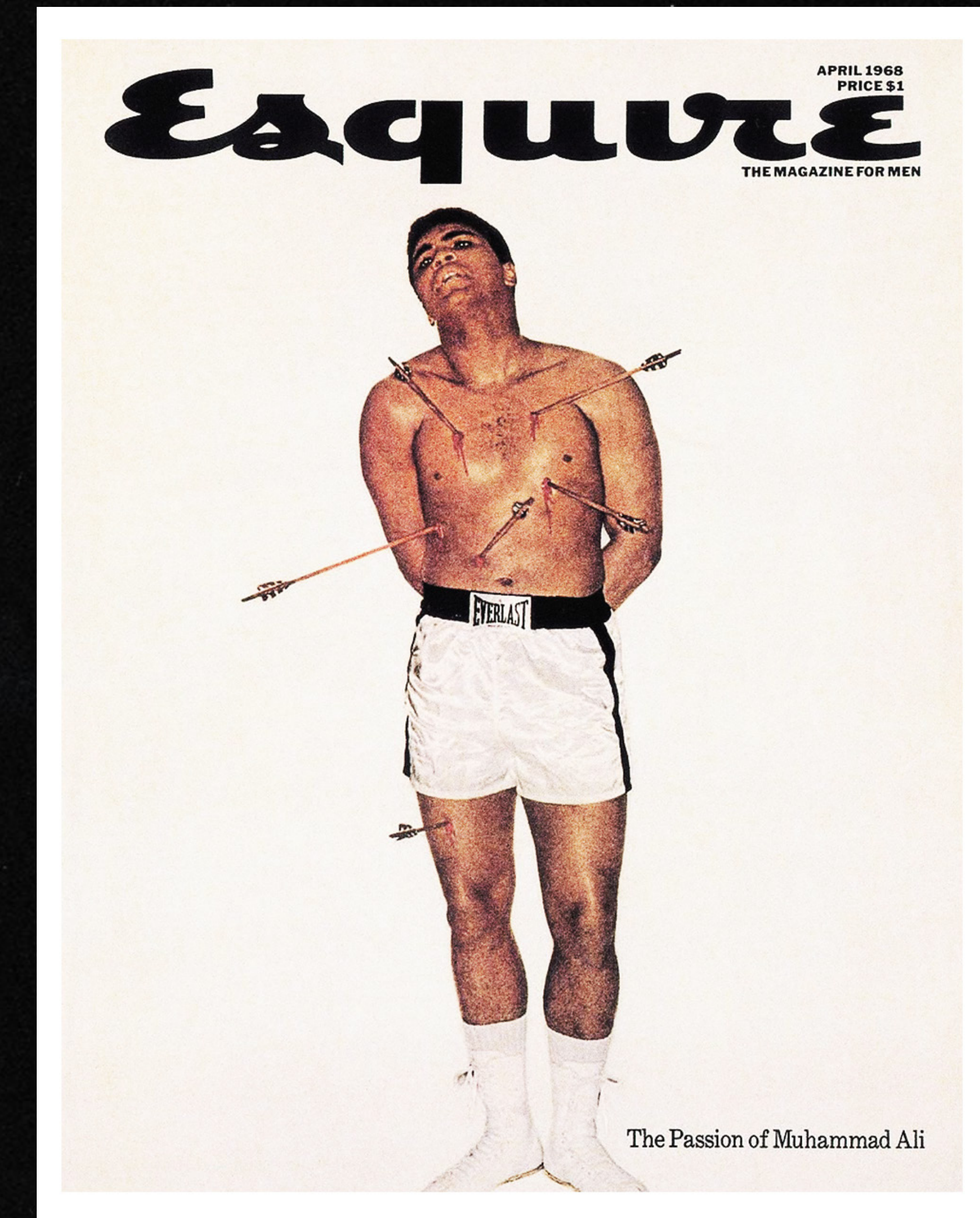
# THE ACTIVIST JOURNEY OF MUHAMMAD ALI

---

*“Cassius Clay becomes Muhammad Ali  
and refuses to fight in Vietnam.”*



Muhammad Ali's principled stance against the Vietnam War united the Black Power and antiwar movements in America, placing athlete-activism at the heart of the battle for the soul of the country. Dr. Edwards – whose master's thesis was on the Black Muslim family and who became a personal friend of Ali – provides insight into Ali's struggle against the white power structure, the sacrifices he made for his principles, and how anti-authoritarian movements throughout America coalesced around the single athlete known as "The Greatest."



*Topics covered include:*

- Dr. Edwards meets Cassius Clay on the eve of the 1960 Olympics
  - Muhammad Ali's journey to Islam
  - Ali's protest against the Vietnam War





## LECTURE 9

# THE OLYMPIC PROJECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

---

*“The activist climate of the 1960s, the Olympic Project for Human Rights, and Dr. Edwards’s reflections on one of his greatest achievements.”*



In 1967, Harry Edwards was writing his doctoral dissertation on the Sociology of Sport and teaching at his alma mater, San Jose State, where the track team featured future Olympians Tommie Smith, Lee Evans, and John Carlos. It was here that Prof. Edwards created the Olympic Project for Human Rights, a movement that would bring to life his theories about sport and society, seeking to advance the rights of oppressed people around the world through the power of athlete activism. Though it put his academic career in jeopardy and his very life in danger, Edwards and the OPHR refused to back down from their activist position, and their message – captured for the world by Smith and Carlos's raised gloved fists on the medal stand at the Mexico City Olympics – forever changed the trajectory of athlete activism around the world.



*Topics covered include:*

- The inside story of Olympic Project for Human Rights, from a lecture hall at San Jose State to Nelson Mandela's prison cell on Robben Island



## LECTURE 10

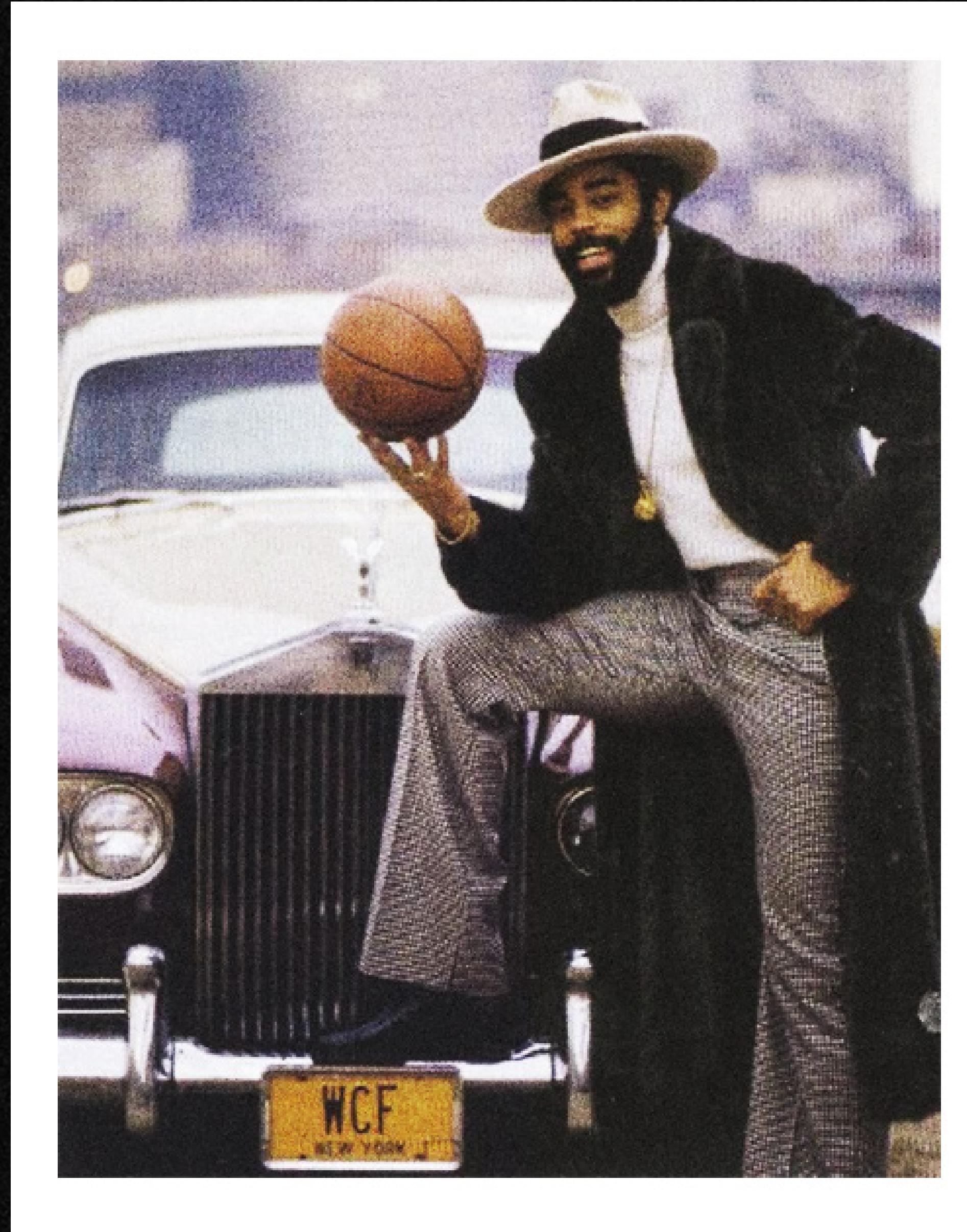
# THE DECLINE OF PROTEST AND THE ERA OF COLLABORATIVE ENGAGEMENT

---

*“After the decline of the third wave, a new form of collaborative engagement emerges to replace the direct action of the 1960s.”*







The murders of leaders like Malcolm X and Dr. King contributed to “movement fatigue,” bringing the Black Power era of passionate protest to a close in both America generally and in American sports particularly. Great heroes of the third wave were defeated through legal and extralegal means, and the methods of struggle that had come to reflect the orthodoxy of Black activism fell out of favor. And so, an era of Collaborative Engagement was ushered in, where contributions came from athletes who chose not to protest but rather to work hand-in-hand with the mainstream power structure in the shared the interests of everyone involved. From 1972 to 2012, athletes became walking corporations. And while advancing their personal goals, they were also setting the stage for the future exercise of power by athletes – to a degree unimagined during the era of the third wave.

*Topics covered include:*

- Curt Flood destroyed and Muhammad Ali defrocked
- The rise of the Black athlete as corporate pitchman
- Collaborative engagement with mainstream institutions
- The ill-fated protests of Mahmoud Abdul-Rauf and Craig Hodges
  - The heroism of Maya Moore

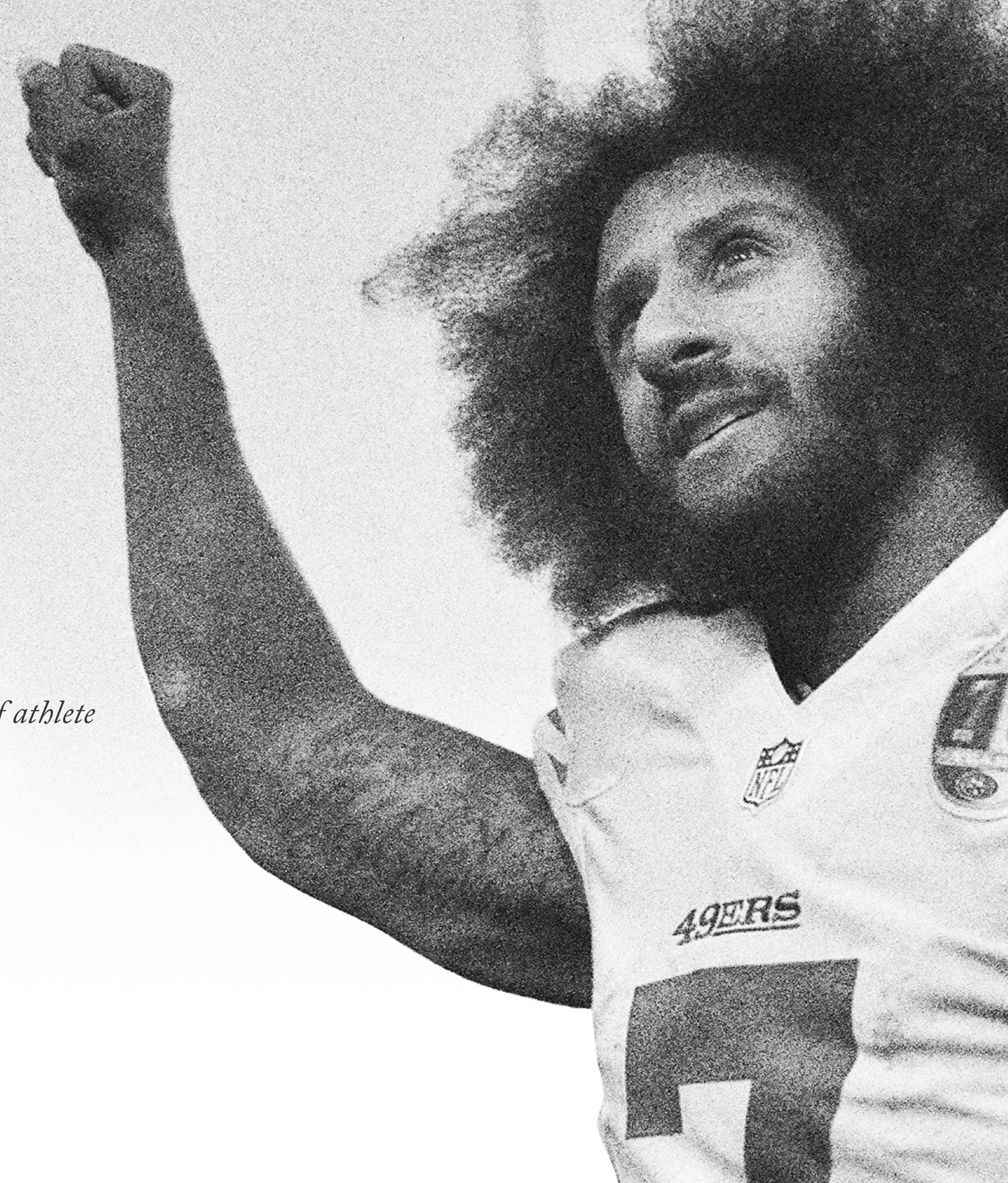


LECTURE 11

# THE FOURTH WAVE AND THE STRUGGLE FOR DEFINITIONAL AUTHORITY

---

*“With a new era of direct-action activism in the 2010s comes a new wave of athlete activism, including Colin Kaepernick’s national anthem protest.”*





In 2012, a slogan became a hashtag that became a movement – #BlackLivesMatter. As passionate protest returned to American streets, so too did it return to the world of sports. Athletes returned to third wave strategies of protest, but rather than demanding dignity and respect as in the 1960s, these athletes were demanding definitional authority over their own lived experience. Black athletes in the fourth wave protested conditions they found in society – such as police killings of unarmed Black men, women and children – in order to re-define these conditions on their terms. So, when Colin Kaepernick took a knee during the national anthem before an NFL game, he was urging America to call police violence what Black people experienced it as – murder under cover of the badge.



*Topics covered include:*

- #BlackLivesMatter and the return of passionate protest
- Trayvon Martin, the Miami Heat, and athletes making new kinds of statements
  - WNBA players declare that “Change begins with us”
- Colin Kaepernick silently takes a knee and the whole world is forced to listen



## LECTURE 12

# FROM PROPERTY TO POWER

---

*“Athlete activists finally claim a seat at the table, and new civil rights struggles create new protest opportunities on the sports political horizon.”*







In a fifth wave of activism, athletes have claimed “a seat at the table,” using their platform as high-profile examples of excellence not just to bring attention to issues, but exercising the power to force the mainstream to actually address those issues. In 2020, NBA players brought the playoffs to a halt and WNBA players drove a racist owner from the league. And what does the future hold? Already, Dr. Edwards tells us, a sixth wave of athlete-activism is visible this side of the sports-political horizon, as the reversal of *Roe v. Wade* has triggered a groundswell of activism around women’s issues in sports. And what lies beyond? The first principle of the Sociology of Sport tells us – whatever currents of social and political changes rise up in response to conditions in society, sport will not only

reflect but those changes but will reproduce them. Because it has never been, and will never be, the athletes themselves who create waves of activism, but the conditions that athletes find themselves in. And now as always, because these high-profile, powerful members of society will be looked upon as the embodiment of our most cherished values, their activism as athletes will continue to shape America and the world.

*Topics covered include:*

- The pandemic and the murders by police of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd create a perfect storm for athlete activism
  - Renee Montgomery and the WNBA’s Atlanta Dream
- NBA players shut down the playoffs in response to police violence against Black people
  - *Roe v. Wade* is overturned and a sixth wave begins, focusing on women’s issues





For information about bringing  
**THE LAST LECTURES** to institutions of higher learning,  
please contact Dr. Harry Edwards and Hock Films at  
[info@hockfilms.com](mailto:info@hockfilms.com) or (917) 623-9381.