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SPORT IN SOCIETY

LOSING THE RACE GAME

By Susan Leitao

Despite the last forty years of progress racism is alive and well throughout many of today's institutions. Today's form of racism is much different looking than of past years. It can still be violent and overt, but more often it takes the form of subtle acts that may be unconscious but can still inflict a lot of pain.

An award winning program aimed at reducing discrimination and racism is *Project TEAMWORK* these An exercise we conduct during one of our *Project TEAMWORK* diversity training sessions that challenges conventional thinking about race is our Race/Ethnicity Quiz. Participants are asked to place individuals from different ethnic groups into one of the government's official racial categories. For example; when participants are asked into which racial category they would place an Egyptian, we often receive multiple responses such as; White, Black, Asian, or Other.

Consensus among participants is rarely reached with any of the examples in this exercise, leading to long heated discussions that often create even more questions. We are never surprised by the reactions or the discussions, because this happens every time. This may be the first time well-educated people have questioned (or for that matter even discussed) the concept of race.

The stance held by Sport in Society's *Project TEAMWORK* is that the concept of race **does not exist** as we know it. If our exercises fail to make you re-examine the concept of race, then years worth of research should. Much of the information we collected on race doesn't help clarify this complex system, but actually denies the existence of it. In his article "A Nonracial Approach Towards Human Diversity", C. Loring Brace discusses the problems with how racial categories were developed and cites other researchers who share similar concerns; (Hogben,1931; Huxley and Haddon,1936; Montagu,1941; and Livingstone,1962).

Other extensive research on the topic was led by Dr. Ramos of UNESCO (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization) who called together a committee of experts in the fields of physical anthropology, sociology, social psychology, and ethnology to answer some of the perplexing questions about

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The mission of Northeastern University's Center for the Study of Sport in Society is to increase awareness of sport and its relation to society, and to develop programs that identify problems, offer solutions, and promote the benefits of sport.

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race. Once a conclusion was made, a statement was then drafted was sent to scientists around the world representing the fields of genetics, biology, social psychology, sociology, and economics for criticisms and suggestions. A summation of this statement is as follows:

“Scientists have reached general agreement in recognizing that mankind is one: that all men belong to the same species, Homo Sapiens.For all practical social purposes race is not so much a biological phenomenon as a social myth. The myth of race has created an enormous amount of human and social damage”.²

The art of categorizing human differences have been man’s obsession for as long as we have existed. Carolis Linnaeus a Swedish naturalist was credited as being one of the first to begin recording these differences back in 1734. He created four categories: white Europeans, red Americans, yellow Asians, and black Africans. These categories created by Linnaeus and advanced by other researchers separated individuals primarily by physical differences, but after the exploration and expansion of the European population to other parts of the world, behavioral, psychological, and intellectual characteristics began being assigned to these groups. These four categories were not the only ones developed, additional categories have been offered by scientists with numbers ranging from two or three to literally hundreds.³

A recently published book titled “Taboo: Why Black Athletes Dominate Sports and Why We’re Afraid to Talk About It” by Jon Entine, attempts to further define these categories.⁴ He believes the athletic superiority of certain ethnic groups proves that differences exist and there can be no other explanation why those of West African descent have dominated sprints, East and North Africans are the best at endurance sports, especially distance running, and that whites fall somewhere in the middle. A book which caused a great deal of controversy in its attempt to explain the intellectual differences in man is “The Bell Curve” by Charles Murray and Richard Herrnstein. They believe that certain racial and ethnic groups are intellectually superior and these differences can also determine their “delinquent behavior” or “success.”⁵

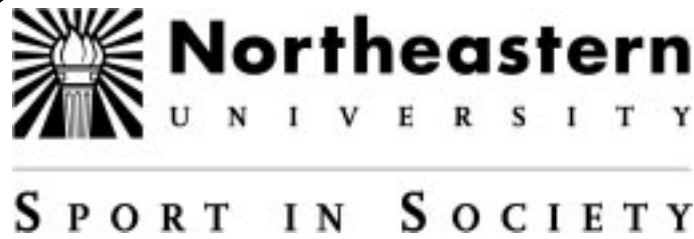
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Despite the evidence provided by these authors, the most recent findings published in 2002 by scientists studying the human genome have concluded that any two humans on this planet are more than 99.9 percent identical. Leaders of this project confirm that racial and ethnic differences are indeed social concepts and should challenge those who use biological differences to promote racism.⁶

Even with this information, we are amazed at the reluctance of participants to consider this evidence. This is understandable once you consider how much of society functions using these categories. Private institutions and government organizations routinely publish lists comparing and contrasting perceived differences between groups, analyzing and re-analyzing what they believe to be racial differences. Other organizations have very legitimate reasons not to change the current system. Because we all know racism and discrimination still persists in almost every area of society, sometimes much more than many of us would like to believe, organizations who document progress made in eliminating this behavior would have no other way to measure this progress.

We understand that eliminating these categories would initially cause confusion and would not necessarily eliminate racism, but considering the years of pain, hurt, and even deaths committed because of race, how can we **not** attempt to challenge the current system. If we fail to start soon, this is one race we have surely lost.

¹ C. Loring Brace, "A Non-Racial Approach Towards the Understanding of Human Diversity", In Ashley Montagu (ed.), The Concept of Race, (The Free Press of Glencoe, New York, 1964).

² Ashley Montagu, Man's Most Dangerous Myth: The Fallacy of Race (New York: Columbia University, 1942).

³ Carolus Linnaeus, Systema Naturae (Amsterdam:Nieuwkoop, 1964).

⁴Jon Entine, Taboo: Why Blacks Dominate Sports and Why Were Afraid to Talk About It (New York: Public Affairs, 2000).

⁵ Richard J. Herrnstein and Charles Murray, The Bell Curve (New York: Free Press, 1994).

⁶ Eliot Marshall, Human Genome Project Science Magazine, 29 November 2002 Vol 298.

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