

**Jim Thorpe, Indian or Athlete? Sports Performance and Mediated Accounts of Racial Identity**

by

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## Abstract

This study allows us to understand how the media coverage of Native American athletes shapes and naturalizes racial stereotypes. Sport is a site where racial formations are constantly and publicly negotiated. Therefore, it is essential to explore how and why stereotypical representations have been used to shape the understanding of Native Americans. The misrepresentation of Native Americans in sport reinforces racial stereotypes and shapes the way non-Native Americans understand them. The media are prevalent, and understanding how they communicate stereotypes about minorities helps critics better understand how the media influence and reinforce dominant racial stereotypes.

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## Chapter 1: Sport and Identity

Sport and its surrounding discourse have become one of the master narratives of twentieth-century culture. Substantial growth in media coverage of sport has amplified the pervasiveness of sport and its ideological prominence. Mega-sporting events, such as the Olympics, encompass the entire globe, attracting a great deal of media attention. The resulting mediated accounts shape and construct the identity of athletes, often functioning to reinforce communal expectations. For example, Sabo, Jansen, Tate, Duncan, and Leggett (1995) found that Asian athletes were depicted using society's expectations of the Asian race during the Olympics, as commentators relied on stereotypes emphasizing Asian discipline and obsession with success. Asian athletes were also described much more often in physical terms than were Black or White athletes. This is significant because in many cases mediated sport is the only exposure some people have to members of other minority groups. This becomes problematic when mediated accounts represent inaccurate and stereotypical images. For example, Huang (2009) found that in the media depiction of Chinese, Chinese women are shown as sexual and submissive, while Chinese men are shown as action heroes. Exposure to those depictions reinforced these stereotypes of Chinese for American audiences, despite the lack of contact between the majority of Americans and Chinese. When the media portray racial difference, even subtly, they reinforce tendencies toward prejudice by the majority. Although it is often the result of a larger racial divide, these messages shape the public's perception of minorities. Additionally, they can shape the development of individual identity.

The focus of this study is how mediated coverage may affect an athlete's identity. This thesis begins to fill in a gap in studies regarding Native American athletes. While much has been written about minority athletes and Native America mascots, most of it centers on Black athletes

and the influence of Native American mascots. Little research exists on Native American athletes. Although this thesis does not completely answer questions regarding the mediated identity of Native American athletes, it does contribute to the research needed in this area. It seeks to explain how newspaper coverage about Jim Thorpe reinforces and communicates Native American stereotypes. From a larger perspective, this project helps us better understand how the media communicates and reinforces dominant racial stereotypes about minorities. This next section will discuss performance identity.

Through performance, athletes have the ability to shape their own identities (Fenske, 2007). However, media accounts typically reinforce stereotypes by covering performances in a way that highlights physical markers of identity, creating a tension between an athlete's performance and his or her identity. This tension exists because despite great performances, the media often rely on stereotypical representations to denigrate the athlete's identity. For example, Davis and Harris (1998) found that Black athletes are often depicted as naturally athletic and oversexed, suggesting that they are animal-like. These characterizations not only affect the athlete's entire race by reinforcing racial stereotypes, but it also dismisses an athlete's successful performance and identity. Massao and Fasting (2010) found that Black athletes' performances were dismissed by remarks relating to the believed biological advances possessed by Black individuals. This tendency not only overshadowed their performance, but it influenced how society views Black athletes as a whole. Performance identity focuses on the relationship between sport and the body, which is interpreted as "a site of cultural inscription, self-regulation, and resistance" (Patterson & Corning, 1997, p. 7).

While bodies are material entities that communicate health, success, or physical markers of identity, they also accept or challenge the dominant expectations of division such as race.

Often, an athlete's race is emphasized through the mind/body dichotomy. The mind/body dichotomy holds that the body is divisible in its constitutive parts, while the mind is not. This dichotomy, as it is produced in media and popular culture, operates as a cultural signifier of difference by feeding stereotypes that reinforce society's expectations of race or grounds an athlete's identity in biological terms. For example, a study of television coverage of English soccer matches revealed that Black players were depicted positively although depictions were excessively related to physicality (McCarthy & Jones, 1997). Similarly, a study by Eastman and Billings (2001) of commentary during men's and women's collegiate basketball games found that Black male players were presented as more athletic while White players were presented as hardworking and mentally adept.

One case that demonstrates how mediated accounts use racial signifiers to shape identity is Jim Thorpe's. In the early twentieth century Thorpe was one of sports' biggest stars, excelling in baseball, football, and track and field. He was named the "world's greatest athlete" after his record-breaking performances in the 1912 Stockholm Olympics. He was celebrated by a wide variety of mediated voices, including nationwide newspaper outlets, sports enthusiasts, President William Taft, and even the King of Sweden. In the Games, Thorpe became the first and only athlete to win the gold medal in both the pentathlon and decathlon, becoming what many consider the best all-around athlete in the world at the time and perhaps of the century ("Clean Sweep," 1912; "Thorpe is best," 1912). In fact, his efforts helped the American team win by a larger margin than in any previous international meet ("Thorpe is best," 1912). Because of his dominant performance Thorpe was embraced by the U.S. newspapers as a symbol of American Exceptionalism, or the idea that America is superior to all other nations because of its history and

mission. This concept fostered the belief that U.S. athletes won national and international competitions because they were American, not merely as a result of their physical abilities.

From 1911 to 1913, Thorpe's athletic performances were extraordinary. Unfortunately, the focus of the newspaper coverage was Thorpe's race, rather than his performance and athletic ability. The coverage continuously referenced his race, reinforcing Thorpe as an outsider and dividing him from the White populace despite his success. Additionally, the coverage used the perceived biological physicality of Native Americans to further characterize Thorpe as savage. This coverage shaped the way individuals viewed Native Americans and continued until Thorpe entered the Olympics. Once Thorpe represented the United States, there was a marked change in his coverage. At first, Thorpe was unable to escape the media's portrayal of his Native American identity. However, once his success served the United States' national identity, the coverage began celebrating Thorpe's success.

However, the praise quickly turned to disappointment in January 1913 when a story was published in the *Worcester Telegram*, accusing Thorpe of professionalism. At the time professional athletes could not participate in the Olympics. Thorpe's Olympic prizes had to be returned, and he was stripped of his honors and title (Wheeler, 1979; "World's Greatest," 1913). Because of his high national profile, thanks in large part to the Olympics, Thorpe received national media coverage. Unfortunately for Thorpe his reports of his outstanding feats were rife with references to his race, transforming his performances into more of a communication of attitudes toward Indian culture rather than a celebration of his abilities and achievements. Thorpe's coverage illustrates how an emphasis on division often shapes identity and reinforces society's expectations of race. The newspaper outlets continuously highlighted Thorpe's race instead of his athletic performance. As a result, Thorpe was never allowed to be just Thorpe, the

athlete, instead he was known as Thorpe, the Indian. This analysis reveals that Thorpe's mediated performance before, during, and after the Olympics was linked to his race through stereotypes of savagery, animalistic behavior, superhuman feats, and ignorance. As a result, his personal identity was subsumed to fit the racial stereotypes that Americans had toward Native Americans. These racial stereotypes centered on his body while dismissing his mind, thus reinforcing the mind/body dichotomy that is so common in sports media. As a result, the coverage communicated Native American stereotypes that served to denigrate Native American identity, while inevitably reinforcing White superiority.

In a broader sense, this examination reveals how the newspaper coverage of minorities shapes and naturalizes racial stereotypes. An understanding of the operation of rhetoric can help us to see the effects coverage produces, and allows us to question the choices rhetors make when constructing messages. More specifically, studying Thorpe's mediated performance provides an understanding of how division often feeds racial stereotypes and shapes the ways audiences understand Native Americans. This is important because of the limited contact the public had with Native Americans and can be devastating when the media continuously reinforces negative and stereotypical characterizations. Racial ideologies are constantly and publicly negotiated in the media. Additionally the media are prevalent. Therefore, it is essential to explore how and why stereotypical representations are used to define identity and shape society's views. An understanding of how newspaper coverage portrays minorities will help critics better understand how the media influence and reinforce dominant racial stereotypes. Also, critiquing Thorpe's coverage shows how the racial division of minority athletes can reinforce the natural status of Whiteness against the differentness of non-Whiteness. A clearer understanding of the construction of racial stereotypes allows a stronger possibility of disrupting this process.

To better understand how Thorpe's performances were constructed into racial stereotypes that shaped the ways audiences understand Native Americans, this paper uses the mind/body dichotomy as a framework to examine print representations of Thorpe's athletic success. At a time when Native Americans were considered an inferior race, Thorpe's case reveals how the mediated portrayal of performance can shape identity and serve to reinforce society's expectations of race.

### Chapter Summaries

Chapter two presents the theoretical and methodological framework for this analysis. This study draws on Burke's rhetorical theory of identification and division to examine how newspaper coverage portrayed Thorpe's performance using racial stereotypes that shaped the ways audiences understand Native Americans. First, I introduce identification and division, and establish how the two occur simultaneously. This information is necessary to better understand how individuals create and manage differences, making sure we are at odds with one another in a particular manner. Identity is influenced as a result of this division. The next section discusses sport as arena for the construction of this facet of identity. As an illustration, I explain how performance identity studies examine the tension between the ways in which the media communicate identity and the ways in which athletes present themselves. Then, by using race as an example, I explain how identity is shaped using division. Finally, I introduce my method for this project, which is the mind/body dichotomy, or the idea that the body is divisible into its constitutive parts but the mind is not. This mind/body dichotomy is embedded in American culture and has reinforced stereotypes, shaping the identity of athletes.

In order to understand how and why newspaper coverage described Thorpe the way it did, one must understand the context, particularly the racial setting of Thorpe's performance. The third chapter explores the relationship between non-Native Americans and Native Americans in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It reveals what the government termed as the "Indian problem" and explains how that problem was rooted in ideological beliefs about Native American inferiority. Additionally, the chapter shows how the removal, colonization, and education policies enforced were an outgrowth of that perspective. It is important to understand the relationship between non-Native Americans and Americans because coverage of Thorpe communicated and reinforced the dominant ideologies that were embedded in the United States culture during this time.

In chapter four I use the newspaper coverage of Thorpe's athletic career to illustrate how stereotypical portrayals about minorities shape the ways in which audiences view them. I apply the mind/body dichotomy to Thorpe's performance before, during, and after the Olympics. This chapter demonstrates how Thorpe's mediated performance naturalized and reinforced racial stereotypes about Native Americans by demonstrating how the mind/body dichotomy was prevalent in Thorpe's coverage, reinforcing stereotypes of Native American inferiority. This case also illustrates how the mind/body dichotomy can be used as a signifier of difference by feeding stereotypes that reinforce society's expectations of race. Finally, this chapter reveals how the construction of racial stereotypes shapes the way audiences understand minorities.

In the final chapter I begin with a summary of what critics may learn about Thorpe's identity and performance before, during, and after the Olympics. Specifically, Thorpe's case demonstrates how newspaper coverage communicated stereotypes which reinforced dominant ideologies about Native American inferiority. Broadly speaking this case also exemplifies how

the racial division of minority athletes can reinforce the oppression of minorities. Next, I discuss the impact of stereotypical portrayals of athletes in the media, and how this can impact society's perception of his or her race. Finally, I will discuss what Thorpe's case teaches us about the relationship between identification and division.

## Chapter 2: Identification, Performance, and the Mind/body Dichotomy: A methodology

Noted scholar Kenneth Burke (1950) considered the basic purpose of rhetoric to be “the use of words by human agents to form attitudes or to induce actions in other human agents,” which was only achieved through identification (p. 41). Burke (1950) explained identification thusly:

A is not identical with its colleague, B. But insofar as their interests are joined, A is *identified* with B. Or he may *identify himself* with B even when their interests are not joined, if he assumes they are, or is persuaded to believe so. (p. 20)

Burke argued that identification does not undermine persuasion, but instead precedes it. He outlined the available means of persuasion as, “the resources of identification whereby a sense of consubstantiality is symbolically established between beings of unequal status” (p. 21). He illustrated consubstantiality as being achieved by “an act,” “acting-together,” and in acting-together, sharing common “sensations, concepts, images, ideas, and attitudes” (p. 21). In other words, when two people’s interests appear to overlap, there is identification. To be consubstantial with someone is to be identified or associated with them. This is important as it allows individuals to relate to one another. The obverse of identification, division, also plays an important role in rhetoric. As Burke (1950) explained it’s because “to begin with ‘identification’ is, by the same token, though roundabout, to confront the implications of *division*” (p. 22). He contended that the need to identify arises out of division. As Burke (1950) discussed, “identification is affirmed with earnestness precisely because there is division. Identification is compensatory to division” (p. 22). Essentially, identification and division occur simultaneously and are inescapable: “if men were not apart from one another, there would be no need for the

rhetorician to proclaim their unity” (Burke, 1950, p. 22). Thus identity may be established through the process of identification or division.

During this process, division can be a byproduct of identification. In fact, Burke (1941) argued that it is sometimes difficult to see where identification or division ends and the other begins. He illustrated this principle by exploring how Hitler created identification within the Aryan community. Hitler’s efforts at assembling a collective Aryan identity relied heavily on differentiating Germans from the Jewish communities surrounding them. Hitler called this use of identification the “unifying devil-function” which created a common enemy in order to unite a group toward a particular purpose (Borrowman & Kmetz, 2011, p. 282; Burke, 1941). Engels (2009) further demonstrated this idea, arguing that labeling someone an enemy is an act of both division and identification. Essentially, identification and division are establishing that two individuals are different or similar, are those that appear to have interests that overlap, and those with common enemies (Engels, 2009). In other words, our identity is influenced collectively by who others say we are or who we are against.

Sport provides an interesting arena for the examination of the relationship between identification and division because of the ways it permeates American culture and identity. As MacClancy (1996) explained, “sport does not exist in a world of its own but reflects the world around it” (p. 2). Sport communicates society’s experiences, providing physical expression to social values, acting as a means of communicating those values, thus functioning to define identity. Additionally, sport serves “as potentially contested space by opposed groups” through the creation and challenge of social identities (MacClancy, 1996, p. 7). Sport becomes a vehicle of identity, providing opportunities for subordinated groups to challenge social orders as a means to defy (at least symbolically) the oppression forced upon them (MacClancy, 1996). In other

words, communities often use sports to resist or challenge dominant views about important social signifiers. In some cases, sport acts as a “key signifier for wider questions about identity within racially demarcated societies in which racial narratives about the self and society are both read into and from sporting contests that are imbued with racial meanings” (Carrington, 1998, p. 280). Therefore, sport can be viewed as an “institution through which domination is not only imposed, but also contested; an institution within which power is constantly at play” (Messner, 1992, p. 13). The following section will explain the interplay of identification and division within sport, the influence of mediated representations of identity, and how these representations can affect individuals and society.

Sport provides an opportunity for athletes to resist or overcome racial issues; however, sport is often a mediated activity. The media play a substantial role in the way social groups are understood by assigning representations, meaning, images, and identity to individuals in society (Robertson, 2015). For decades scholars have devoted attention to the exploration of identity, focusing on how the media create identity and define reality. In essence they argue that what we take from reality is implicit in our choice of terms. Burke’s concept, terministic screens, can help to explain how terms direct our attention. A terministic screen is “composed of terms through which humans perceive the world, and that directs attention away from some interpretations and toward others” (Stob, 2008, p. 131). Terministic screens are created consciously and unconsciously as a reflection of our perception, culture, and shared perspectives (Burke, 1966). Terministic screens help critics account for differences in terms. Burke (1966) stated that we must use these terministic screens, “since we can’t say anything without the use of terms” (p. 51). Further, the behaviors we observe must be “observed through one or another kind of terministic screen, that directs the attention in keeping with its nature” (p. 49). Mediated

discourse serves as a terministic screen that both influences and reflects the community's positions on important social issues such as race (Burke, 1966). In doing so media dialogue can serve as an expression of broader communal representations of terministic screens. Additionally, mediated accounts often provide a substitute representation for real-world exposure between majority and minority groups (Miller & Ross, 2004). The mediated accounts of sport events provide a pervasive, familiar, and naturalized way of understanding an athlete's identity through reflections of cultural perspectives and values. In many cases, mediated sport is the primary exposure some people have to other racial groups. This becomes problematic when mediated accounts serve as an inaccurate or stereotypical representation about social groups (Leavitt, Covarrubias, Perez, & Fryberg, 2015). Unreliable representations help to explain why rather than challenging racial stereotypes in society, the media often use terminologies that reinforce and reflect them (Leavitt et al., 2015). These choices can impact the ways in which audiences interpret media messages community-wide. In this manner the media help to shape how audiences process and react to different groups in the community (Shapiro, 1989). As Baker and Todd (1997) explained,

With the media having made sports such a fundamental part of American culture, their significance as reification for the most essential of American ideals is foregrounded.

Sports, and the discourses that surround them, have become one of the master narratives of twentieth-century culture. (p. ix)

The mediated accounts of some groups, such as racial or gendered depictions of athletes, construct identity and shape performance, reinforcing community expectations of groups. More specifically, performance identity focuses on the relationship between sport and the body, which is interpreted as "a site of cultural inscription, self-regulation, and resistance" (Patterson &

Corning, 1997, p. 7). While bodies are material entities that communicate health, success, or physical markers of identity, they are also culturally formed through discourse and categorized as a term describing an athlete's performance. Performance identity accepts or challenges the dominant expectations of gender, ethnicity, nationality, and other types of division. Through performance, athletes have the ability to shape their own identities (Fenske, 2007). However, media accounts typically reinforce stereotypes by covering performances in a way that highlights physical markers of identity, thus creating a tension between an athlete's performance and his or her identity.

### Performance Identity

Performance identity studies examine the tensions between the ways in which the media portray identity and the ways in which athletes present themselves. As Fine and Speer (1992) summarized, the study of performance is “a critical way for grasping how persons choose to present themselves, how they construct their identity, and ultimately, how they embody, reflect, and construct their culture” (p. 10). Sport, as a cultural form, communicates and reinforces various divisions in communities, such as gender and racial inequalities. Many studies have found that mediated identity shape the ways in which we divide ourselves. Performance studies typically focus on three high-profile divisions in communal discourse: gender, ableism, and race. The most evident form of division is the gender variable because sport often becomes stereotyped as gender-neutral, feminine, or masculine based on conceptions regarding gender (Colley, Nash, O'Donnell, & Restorick, 1987; Csizma, Wittig & Schurr, 1988; Koivula, 1995; Matteo, 1986; Metheny, 1965; Ostrow, Jones, & Spiker, 1981; Salminen, 1990). For example, Postow (1980) examined the categorizations of a feminine and masculine sports and found that

feminine sports are those that provide for aesthetic pleasure, whereas masculine sports were defined by risk, danger, speed, violence, and endurance or by attitudes that are believed to be essential for playing well and excelling in the sport, such as aggressiveness, competitive spirit, discipline, stamina, and devotion to a team. (Koivula, 2001; Metheny, 1965; Postow, 1980). Postow demonstrated how the labeling of sport as feminine and masculine is largely a social construction based on stereotyped expectations regarding gender and perceived differences. This is important as it illustrated how sport, as a gendered cultural form itself, bears significant relation to gender segregation and inequalities. Other gender performance scholars have had similar findings. For example, many scholars argued that sport media often emphasize female and male sexuality over athleticism (Cahn, 1994; Davis, 1997; Fuller, 1999; Messner, 2005; Trujillo, 1991). By focusing on the body over athletic performance, the sports media function hegemonically by reinforcing gender ideologies (Trujillo, 1991; Connell, 1990; Hanke, 1990). Some feminist scholars have examined a number of cases when female athletes challenge dominant, hegemonic notions of femininity, as well as the potential for female empowerment through sport (Caudwell, 1999; Giardina & Metz, 2005; Shilling, 2003). However, mediated performances of sexuality typically feed stereotypes by reinforcing gendered expectations (Burris, 2006; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Denham & Duke, 2010; Trujillo, 1991). Indeed, rather than reducing gender stereotypes, sports media increase their usage when highlighting gender (Caudwell, 1999). While the expectations of male and female athletes are different in sport, sports media continuously refer to the body when creating identity, rather than athletic ability. Rather than breaking down conventional images of femininity or masculinity, media coverage of sport typically reinforces cultural hegemony of heterosexuality and femininity. Thus,

mediated accounts of performance can function to limit identity and reinforce stereotypes, despite the athlete's efforts to challenge them.

Another example that demonstrates characteristics of performance identity is in the study of ableism. Ableism is overt and implicit discrimination against people with disabilities, the notion that people with disabilities are inferior to non-disabled people, and the idea that a person's disability is a defining character flaw (Linton, 1998). Historically, sports media has perpetuated an ablest gaze that obscures, rejects, and isolates disabled bodies, while privileging the able-bodied viewers (Brittain, 2004). These images are also demeaning because they frame disability as an individual issue, requiring acceptance of his or her inferiority to the able-bodied culture in which they live (Cherney & Lindemann, 2010). Conventional images of disability include stereotypes such as "supercrip" "monster," "abnormal," and "criminal" (Guthrie & Castelnovo, 2001; Hardin & Harding, 2004; Longmore, 1987; Smith, 2015). Other images frequently communicated include: the disabled individual who escapes through suicide, the one who adjusts to ableist expectations, and someone who dramatically overcomes disability (Longmore, 1987). These labels represent how disabled athletes can be marginalized in the media, despite athletic performance. Disability sport participation is used for rehabilitation from spinal cord injuries and is believed to help repair damage to an individual's identity that occurs when one transitions from able-bodied to disabled (Taub, Blinde, & Greer, 1999). However, it can be a challenge to overcome the stigma ableist culture assigns to individuals with disability (Cherney & Lindemann, 2010). Overall, when media coverage constructs images of disability, they overwhelmingly portray it in a negative and ableist light.

While mediated performance feeds stereotypes by reinforcing gendered expectations and ableism, the focus of this project is how stereotypes are manifested in racial performance. As Solomus and Back (1996) explained “race be can seen as a discursive category through which differences, such as skin color and ethnic background, are accorded social significance” (p. xiv). Race and racial differences are assigned social meanings given to biological and inherited differences. They are socially constructed and altered by social influence. Race is an example of Burke’s assertion that identification can be made and remade through division.

Throughout sport studies, considerations of race typically fall into two broad areas: the role of Whiteness and the impact of mediated identity on minorities. Whiteness is historically unmarked because it signifies the “raceless” and has been the cultural norm of American identity (Long & Hylton, 2002, p. 90). As Nakayama and Krizek (1995) noted, “The invisibility of Whiteness has been manifested through its universality” (p. 293). The universality of Whiteness lies in its already defined position as everything. Where Black is always marked as a color, White is not an identity, because it is everything—White is not color because it is all colors (Dyer, 1993). As a result, “In addressing race, in the law, in literature, in popular culture, in communication studies, in religion or other areas of our lives, Whiteness is privileged, normalized, deified, and raceless” (Johnson, 1999, p. 1). Because of that trend there is growing scholarly interest in interrogating “Whiteness” (Dyer, 1993; McKinney, 2005; Nakayama & Martin, 1999). For instance, some scholars have focused on how certain forms of Whiteness become dominant or hegemonic (Hughey, 2010). Hegemonic ideas are presented as universally valid, and alternative views are appropriated into the dominant frame (Artz & Murphy, 2000). Hegemonic Whiteness often leads to unspoken privilege, exoneration, and invisibility. This power leads to non-White actors to be known as “other,” making them “raced” in the

community's discourse (Dyer, 1997, p. 1). Butterworth (2007) found that representing heroism in American culture is often a mythological enactment of Whiteness. Foregrounding the role of race in his study on the 1998 home run race, Butterworth demonstrated how baseball player Mark McGwire's portrayal as a mythological hero simultaneously diminished Sammy Sosa's role in the home run race by constructing Sosa's identity "in accordance with long-standing stereotypes of dark-skinned and Latino peoples" (p. 229).

The invisibility of Whiteness is contrasted by an emphasis on the most common area of inquiry, "Blackness," most often expressed through the mind/body dichotomy. "Blackness," as it is produced in mass media and popular culture, operates as a "cultural signifier" of difference by feeding stereotypes that reinforce society's expectations of race, as it pertains to African Americans (Gray, 1995, p. 12-13). Descartes' (1668) mind/body dichotomy held that the body is divisible into its constitutive parts but the mind is not. This mind/body dichotomy is embedded in American culture and has reinforced stereotypes, such as Black men being "all brawn and no brains" (Mercer, 1994, p. 178). The mind/body dichotomy defines and grounds Black athletes in biological terms, as opposed to White athletes who are celebrated for their intellects (Hartmann, 2000). For instance, coverage of Black athletes often communicates a differentiation between "natural" physical talents and "hard work" (Hardin et al., 2004, p. 212; Hoberman, 1997). This perspective suggests that portrayals of Black athletes in sport legitimizes the idea that Blacks are ideally suited for sport as opposed to other non-physical acts (Arts & Murphy, 2000; Sabo & Jansen, 1998). For example, Laucella (2002) found that coverage of Olympian Jesse Owens framed him in terms of biological athletic superiority. One article stated, "The Negroes are just better runners and jumpers...the collapse of the American Whites has been terrific" (p. 12). As you can see the emphasis on Black physicality necessarily differentiates them from non-physical

acts and implicitly questions their intellect. Subsequently, Black success is often framed as only achievable in the realm of sports (Sabo & Jansen, 1998). Harris (1994) found that Black athletes are pushed by coaches, teachers, and friends to pursue sports as a more realistic career opportunity (Harris, 1994). Similarly, Hardin et al. (2004) found that Blacks were overrepresented in sport media, reinforcing the stereotype that sport is the only arena in which Blacks can excel. More specifically, this study found that Blacks were most represented in strength sports, such as boxing, accentuating the stereotype of Blacks as “brutes” and “savages” (p. 224). These examples demonstrate how mediated performance often generates stereotypes by reinforcing society’s expectations of race.

These and other conceptions about Black athletes extend the mind/body dichotomy even further. The mediated coverage of Blacks sometimes dramatizes the biological physicality of the Black male, leading to presumptions of deviance (Artz & Murphy, 2000; Hardin et al., 2004; Sabo & Jansen, 1998). This coverage suggests that Black athletes are destructive and incapable of social and moral sophistication because of the emphasis on the body and physicality (Entman & Rojecki, 2000). Black athletes also have been misrepresented as more aggressive and criminal in relation to violence, “reinforcing their biological cultural status” (Cunningham, 2009; Hardin et al., 2004, p. 214). Feber (2007) suggested that media coverage of criminal charges against Black male athletes are disproportionate when compared to similar charges against White male athletes, reinforcing the stereotype of Black men as inherently dangerous. Similarly, Simons (2003) discovered that mediated coverage of Black male athletes focused on their inability to get along with team owners or follow regulations.

As these examples show, sport acts as a key signifier for wider questions about aspects of gender, ableism, and particularly race. Performance identity studies have done an exceptional job

examining the representations of traditional gender roles and stereotypes, as well as the influence of, hegemonic Whiteness and ableism (e.g. Cahn, 1994; Cherney & Lindemann, 2010; Colley, Nash, O'Donnell, & Restorick, 1987; Cooky, 2006; Csizma, Wittig & Schurr, 1988; Davis, 1997; Fuller, 1999; Guthrie & Castelnuovo, 2001; Hardin et al., 2004; Hundley & Billings, 2010; Koivula, 1995; Laucella, 2002; Longmore, 1987; Matteo, 1986; Messner, 2005; Metheny, 1965; Ostrow, Jones, & Spiker, 1981; Postow, 1980; Salminen, 1990; Trujillo, 1991). However, most of the studies in this area focus on representations of Black performances, resulting in a lack of research in regard to the ways in which these concepts impact other races.

### Native American Performance

One cultural group that receives relatively little attention is Native American athletes. Native American athletes provide an interesting position from which to explore the discourses available for the construction of racial identity and relationships because what little is known about Native Americans by non-Native Americans often comes from mediated representations (Leavitt et al., 2015). This becomes problematic when mediated accounts represent inaccurate and stereotypical images. Instead of providing a nuanced picture of Native American identity each mediated representation communicates racial and ideological presumptions, contributing to White hegemony, and illuminating rhetorical practices that normalize and reinforce racial stereotypes (Davis, 1993). Essentially, mediated accounts of Native Americans represent a service to a racial hierarchy that privileges Whites by replicating the stereotypical perception of Native Americans (Staurowsky, 2006). Therefore, it is important to examine the media's representations of Native American athletic performance.

One way these stereotypes are reinforced is through mascots. Native American sports mascots receive more research than media treatment of Native American athletes (Davis-Delano, 2007; Fryberg, Markus, Oyserman, & Stone, 2008; King, 2008; Staurowsky, 2007). Studies of Native American identity have focused on how mascots at predominately White schools perform as “Indian.” Often, these mascots imitate the aforementioned mind/body dichotomy in performance studies, representing Native Americans as aggressive fighters and trivializing aspects of their cultures. These stereotypes limit the understanding of the Native Americans to the public (Davis, 2008). King (2008) described the clichéd images of Native Americans that are typically used: feathered headdress, face paint, warfare, dance, the tomahawk chop, and buckskin pants. This imagery confines Native Americans in the past and traps them within the tropes of savagery by continuously misappropriating Native American identity (Staurowsky, 2007). Additionally, these images are celebrated not because they represent the people and their culture, but because of “their attendant qualities of fighting prowess and bravery” (Staurowsky, 2007, p. 62). Through the use of stereotypical mascots and fight songs, Whites attempt to “become” Indian, rendering invisible the complex relationships and history of Native-Americans, most notably their genocide at the hands of the U.S. government (Staurowsky, 2007). As this example shows, mediated images of mascots reinforce Native American stereotypes that trivialize and limit the understanding of these individuals. Team names that appropriate Native American terminologies function in a similar fashion. U.S. sports teams frequently use Native American names such as “Braves,” “Chiefs,” and “Redskins” (Miller, 1999). Grounds (2001) argued that there is a “doubleness” about the use of these names remarking “the existence of Native Americans while relegating them to the past, appearing to bestow honor on them while cloaking the destructive deeds of Euro-American society” (p. 304). Miller (1999) focused on performance

when examining protests against the use of Native American mascots, asserting that the protests were “a performative struggle for identity because they constitute an attempt to reclaim or recapture popular notions of what it means to be Native American” (p. 189). The use of Native American mascots in high schools, universities, and professional sports domains is an ongoing national debate (Davis, 1993; King, Staurowsky, Baca, Davis, & Pewewardy, 2002; Lapchick, 1995; Staurowsky, 1998, 2004). At the center is the significant question about whether Native American mascots can elicit both positive associations and negative psychological effects for Native Americans. Native American protests have increased and their objections have been taken to heart by some teams, but sports teams still continue to use Native American names, symbols, and mascots. Fryberg, et al. (2008) suggested “that the relative invisibility of American Indians in mainstream media gives inordinate communicative power to the few prevalent representations of American Indians in the media” (p. 208). The research on Native American mascots illustrates how mediated performance can lead to stereotypical portrayals. Additionally, these studies emphasize the impacts such portrayals have on audience perceptions in the absence of contact with Native American cultures.

Although Native Americans are rarely mentioned beyond their depictions as sport mascots, they have excelled as athletes in a variety of sporting events. Additionally, their performances have at times facilitated the reformation of their cultural traditions and identities (King, 2008). Media coverage of Louis Tewanima, a Hopi athlete in the 1912 Stockholm Olympic Games, influenced Native American identity. Bloom’s (2005) analysis elucidated how American writers used Tewanima’s success to reinforce U.S. nationalism while simultaneously recreating Hopi traditions. As Tewanima’s case demonstrates, positive accounts of Native American athletes can improve the image of indigenous people through his or her actions and

achievements. However, despite attempts to challenge Native American identity through successful athletic performance, mediated accounts of performance continuously reinforce racial stereotypes. Native American athletes' performances are framed within stereotypical imagery that shape and construct their culture, casting them into the role of the "other" (Staurowsky, 2006). In other words, Native American athletes are degraded as outsiders, despite their successes. What little coverage exists rarely is empowering and often represents Natives as naïve, childlike, lazy, and savage (Miller & Ross, 2004).

Despite great performances in sport, Native American athletes' identities are still subject to the influences of mediated sports. As mentioned earlier, Burke's (1950) terministic screens help explain how terms direct our attention. Terministic screens are created consciously and unconsciously as a reflection of shared perspectives that can privilege and disempower different groups. This can occur through reflections that reinforce ideas about race, feeding stereotypes. What few studies there are confirm that Native American performances typically are demeaning (Bloom, 2008; King, 2005; Miller & Ross, 2004; Staurowsky, 2006). Additionally, coverage seems to be diminishing. For example, Bloom (2005) discussed Jim Thorpe's career after he was named Athlete of the Century in 2000. Not only had there been a reduction in media coverage of Thorpe's achievements, but the status of Native American athletes within American culture had diminished substantially from the beginning to the end of the twentieth century. As Delora (1996) pointed out,

When considering Indian athletes, it is easy to slide into the heroic mode focusing on Jim Thorpe and perhaps a few other outstanding individuals- Chief Bender, Hopi Olympic medalist Louis Tewanima, or William Lone Star Dietz, who head coached football teams at Purdue and Louisiana Tech as well as the NFL's Washington Redskins.

But more obscure gridirons and dugouts all across America were also peppered with Indian athletes and coaches (p. 330).

These figures have been unable to escape their Native American identity in sport. In other words, they are more known for being Native American than they are for their success as athletes. For example, William Lone Star Dietz has held continuous coverage, not because he played for Carlisle School and became one of the first Native Americans to coach a professional football team, but because he serves as the alleged reason for the Washington franchise to be called the “Redskins.” This was also the case for Louis Sockalexis, a Penobscot Indian from Old Town, Maine and the first Native American to play major league baseball, and the Cleveland Indians (Guggenheim, 1998). Similarly, despite Jim Thorpe’s documentable record as an athlete, he was demoted by sport media sources when being compared to his White counterparts and other athletes of his age from the first half of the century (Staurowsky, 2008). In fact, *Sports Illustrated* failed to include him in their 1999 *Gathering of the Greats* issue, despite his success in football, baseball, and the Olympics. (Sullivan, 1999). While Rubinfield (2008) found that when the Hollywood film, *Jim Thorpe – All American*, recast Thorpe into a “Hollywood Indian,” it was a demeaning characterization, portraying images of savagery or in some cases nobleness (p. 1467). Another example can be seen in an examination of the short stories, *Siwash*. Stangl (2006) found that the collection served to especially reproduce Whiteness and maleness by reinforcing and naturalizing the mythical construction of “Indianness.” Such cases illustrate how Native American athletes are more remembered for being Native American than for their success. Since the cultural production of Native American images involve little or no input from Native Americans, these constructions tend to be distorted and mythic, serving White audiences more than the athletes they claim to represent. Although sport is often thought of as

entertainment, the sport coverage of Native Americans has become a deceptively effective tool in the preservation of racialized ways of thinking (Staurowsky, 2008). As a result, Native Americans have become marginalized and framed as ignorant, savage, and “other.” These constructions communicate the lack of substantive changes in the community of sport and beyond. Since the media is essentially inescapable, the impact of media representations can either harm (by fostering negative stereotypes) or help (by fostering new identities for athletes) racial relations. When the media shapes identity through stereotypes a tension is created between an individual’s identity and his or her performance identity. This study will contribute to a deeper awareness of mediated performance, and subsequently provide a better chance of illuminating rhetorical practices that normalize and reinforce racial stereotypes.

In this project I analyze how Thorpe’s mediated performance naturalized and reinforced racial stereotypes about Native Americans. From 1911 to 1913, Thorpe was the center of the national media’s attention. Mediated representations of athletes create terministic screens for society. Terministic screens of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century highlighted cultural divisions that stereotyped Native Americans. Eventually, the focus of the newspaper coverage was Thorpe’s race, rather than his performance and athletic ability. Critics will have a clearer understanding of the processes of racism by considering the construction of racial stereotypes, thus allowing the possibility of disrupting them.

In order to examine Thorpe’s mediated performance I collected several representations of his performance. Thorpe was one of few living Native American athletes to command national attention throughout the first half of the twentieth century. Mediated representations of his personal success contribute to a broader picture of Native American racial relations and performance identity. Because Thorpe’s accomplishments occurred before the advent of

broadcast media this examination focuses on newspaper accounts of Thorpe's performance. I first focused on major papers in circulation that provided national coverage during the 1912 Olympics, including the *New York Times*, the *Washington Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *New York Tribune*, the *Day Book*, and the *Evening World*. I also collected articles from smaller papers, including the *Tacoma Times*, the *Salt Lake City Tribune*, the *El Paso Herald*, the *San Francisco Call*, the *Weekly Journal Miner*, the *Pensacola Journal*, *The Farmer*, the *Omaha Sunday Bee*, the *Rock Island Argus*, the *Topeka Daily State*, the *University Missourian*, and the *Colville Examiner*. I chose these papers to gain the perspectives of all regions of the United States. Additionally, these articles allowed me focus on his performance before and after his Olympic career when he was not receiving national coverage. I chose articles from his athletic career beginning with his emergence as a Carlisle Indian football star in 1911 and ending with his career as a professional baseball player in 1913. I chose to examine Thorpe's coverage during this time in order to understand the difference in discourse about his identity before, during, and after the Olympics. Additionally, the Olympics are the largest sporting event in the world and presents a venue in which athletes of all races compete in a variety of sporting events; thus the Olympics are useful for gauging media progress in the presentation of racialized images.

This examination explores how the collected sources communicated dominant attitudes toward Native Americans. Despite his performances, mediated accounts of Thorpe's actions revealed the same prejudices that informed the cruel oppression Native Americans faced during this time. First, I discuss racial relations during Thorpe's athletic career. Then, I discuss the variance between Thorpe's performance and the ways in which his performance was mediated. Finally, I discuss how Thorpe's coverage communicated and reinforced Native American stereotypes of inferiority.

### **Chapter 3: Native American Relations during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century**

In order to understand how and why newspapers framed Thorpe the way they did, it is important to understand the context, particularly the racial setting, of Thorpe's performance. In the nineteenth century, the federal government faced what it termed the "Indian problem." The Indian problem, rooted in ideological beliefs about Native American inferiority, was twofold. First, it stemmed from the government's belief in Whites' "manifest destiny" to expand westward. White settlers believed that Native Americans were savage hurdles that impeded their western progress. Because of this belief, the government began forcing Native Americans from their land. This contributed to the second aspect of "the Indian problem," the belief that White Americans and Indians could not coexist without conflict (Hays, 2007). The discourses surrounding the relationship between Native Americans and the United States reached a level of rhetorical intensity during this time that affected Native American identity legally and socially. Federal policies implemented throughout this era were evidence of the underlying ideologies that viewed Native American culture as inferior and savage. First, I will explain the root of the Indian problem, then I will describe the government's actions and attempts to solve the problem.

Much of the impetus for this belief stemmed from the idea that Indians were savage outsiders which justified the government's harsh actions against them (Hauptman, 1995). In 1866, when Congress passed a post-Civil War bill assigning citizenship to freed slaves, it specifically exempted the Indians in any territory or state (Hays, 2007). Native Americans weren't considered citizens of the United States until the 1924 Indian Citizenship Act (Hale, 2002). In fact, until this time, the United States government had difficulty defining who was a Native American. In 1892, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, T.J. Morgan, released a report to Congress titled, "What is an Indian?". Morgan (1892) stated,

One would have supposed that this question would have been considered a hundred years ago and been adjudicated long before this. Singularly enough, however, it has remained in abeyance, and the Government has gone on legislating and administering law without carefully discriminating as to those over whom it had a right to exercise such control. (p. 5)

Indeed, the federal government's affirmation of the Indian problem led to broad misconceptions of Native American identity, especially the belief that Native Americans were uncivilized and were therefore not considered citizens. Native Americans were marginalized as "other." The creation of "other" is based on the notion that Whiteness is somehow natural, while non-Whiteness is different and demanding of demarcation because they were uncivilized and not citizens (Bloom, 2005). Such policies reinforced the ideologies behind the Indian problem. The following sections explain how the government's policies exposed the underlying "otherness" of Native Americans. The policies and the surrounding discourse forged one misconception after another to shape Native American identity legally and socially. Overall, the Indian problem grew out of a sense of Native American inferiority, and the policies the government enforced were an outgrowth of that perspective. As a result, America saw only two outcomes to the Indian problem: extermination or civilization.

### Native American Removal

The government first attempted to solve the Indian problem by forcibly removing Native Americans from their land. The government believed Native Americans were an "obstacle to frontier settlement and progress" (Hauptman, 1995, p. 62). As an example, in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century the government began pressuring Native Americans in the Southeast to leave their

homes. As the *New York Times* explained in 1878, Native Americans faced the “advancing tide of White civilization,” an “irrepressible conflict between their roving mode of life and the demands for strictly prescribed bounds made by civilization” (“The Indians,” 1878, p. 4). Their reasons for removal were often contested. Some claim that the government wanted to foster White nationalism. Black (2015) pointed to the Naturalization Act of 1790 which required every American citizen be “a free White person,” “a good person of character,” and willing to break all allegiances to other nations of origin (1790, p. 103). Since the federal government viewed Native Americans as belonging to separate nations within the United States the act drove a legal wedge between “true” Americans, i.e. White Americans, and Native Americans. This, of course, reinforced the notion that Native Americans were not citizens and were in fact outsiders.

Others justified removing Native Americans from their land as a means to protect them from encroachers. President Andrew Jackson’s Indian Removal Act of 18XX provided funds for removing and resettling thousands of Native Americans under the guise of guarding them from hostile settlers (Remini, 2001). Jackson argued that the benefits of excess land, such as the possibility of expansion and fertile soil, and the expulsion of Native Americans threatening frontier communities were important enough for such drastic actions. Though Jackson struck a friendly pose to the Indians at this time, promising to lead them out of harm’s way and protect them from Whites, in reality the act granted the government authority to forcibly remove Indians from desired lands. Eventually Jackson deployed the United States Army to round up and push out the Indians who refused to comply with orders to relocate, relinquish their land, and move to shared allotments (Debo, 1970).

Thus while it promised protection, in reality displacement became the blanket policy for the Indian Removal Act. Since Indians obstructed the progress of Whites that could use the land

more effectively it was believed that assuming control of Native American lands was a God-given right. This policy was commonly implemented through violence and intimidation, including heinous techniques such as disease, starvation, and exhaustion (Oswalt, 2009). Trails were created to prompt efforts of displacement and force assimilation. These dramatic actions were justified by a belief that Native Americans were inferior and childlike compared to Whites. In President Jackson's 1829 State of the Union address, he expressed concern for the Native Americans and the way in which they would destroy their resources with their savage ways. He told the American people that "it has long been the policy of Government to introduce them among the arts of civilization," professing his desire to "civilize and settle them" (Jackson, 1829, para. 1). He later stated that "under the protection of the government and through the influence of good counsel" the Indians would "cast off their savage habits and become an interesting, civilized, and Christian community" (Jackson, 1830, para. 2). Since Native Americans were denied citizenship, including the basic civil rights guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution, they were deemed "wards of the nation" (Hays, 2007, p. 4). The government stripped Native Americans of their land, what few rights they had, and gave Congress full power to occupy and possess their property whenever national interests made it necessary (Scheckel, 1998). The government was empowered to "tame" them for their own good, or as it was popularly put, "kill the Indian, and save the man" (Pratt, 1973, p. 260). In actuality this policy was "cultural genocide" (Gagnon, 2014, para. 4). Further, the removal policies reinforced the belief that Native Americans were uncivilized outsiders who "loved the wild fastness of the frontier, with the tepee, gun, and blanket, and generally prefer to subsist by hunting rather than to submit to the tasks imposed by civilized life" (Kyle, 1894, p. 434). The federal government's policies toward Native American identities communicated broader social constructs of Native Americans as other. The enforced

policies were embedded in the belief that Native Americans were outsiders and were an attempt to disintegrate their identity completely.

### Policy of Colonization

The government's relocation policies eventually expanded to create a colonization and reservation system. Again, stemming from the belief that Native Americans were outsiders, the federal government saw colonization as a "paramount duty" and believed that by removing the "savage" element and forcing Indians to live a more "civilized" life, they could control and eliminate what they saw as the "problem" ("Bureau," 1839, p. 345). The government's policies of removal and colonization functioned to not only solve the "Indian problem," but also to assimilate Indian culture. The American government believed

The Indians must conform to "the White man's ways," peaceably if they will, forcibly if they must. They must adjust themselves to their environment, and conform their mode of living substantially to our civilization. This civilization may not be the best possible, but it is the best the Indians can get. They cannot escape it, and must either conform to it or be crushed by it. ("Bureau", 1889, p.3)

The removal and colonization policies thrust upon Native Americans a variety of marginalizing constructions. In both cases, the government displaced Native Americans to make more room for Whites. At the same time, the government strove to assimilate Native Americans to control and eventually eliminate the "savage" behavior that they believed threatened the frontier and White culture. As the Indian Rights Association claimed in 1885, the "Indian as a savage member of a tribal organization cannot survive, ought not survive... but his individual redemption from the condition of savage nomad... is abundantly possible" with American protection ("Statement of

objectives,” 1885, p. 5). This type of policy enacted the underlying ideology of Native American inferiority and shaped the very identities of Native Americans as inferior and dangerous.

According to the government, their best chance for modern evolution was to assimilate with White culture. According to the government’s terms, Native Americans were rescued; however, the government in essence reaffirmed White dominance as much as it provided land to the government.

### Educational Policy

Of particular interest to this project is the educational component of the federal government’s assimilation policy. The government saw education as a particularly potent assimilation tool. According to the federal government the quickest way to accomplish this goal was by separating children from their tribal homes and educating them, then further segregating them from White Americans and educating them in what the government considered traditional schools (Bell, 1998). Some in the government believed that “education was the best way to Americanize the Indians and integrate them into the rest of the U.S. population as equals” (Crawford, 2004, p. 17). The hope was that by treating the children humanely, educating them, and demonstrating peaceful coexistence, all traces of hostility and “barbaric” behavior would be lost. Not all tribes opposed the creation of educational institutions because in general American Indians considered education itself as necessary and valuable. Education was not a new concept to the Native Americans, but Whites did not recognize the holistic and lifelong process of learning that was being used. In Indian societies, education focused on the oral tradition, the concept of learning by observing and doing, as well as exposure to narratives based on moral instruction and values. Since this combination did not fit the definition of White formal

education, Whites continued to see Native Americans as uncivilized. Therefore, a plan was put into action to educate and civilize Native American families (Vuckovic, 2001).

The Board of Indian Commissioners, established in 1869, recommended to Congress that more schools for Native Americans be established and that the government employ teachers to instruct students in English, mathematics, agriculture, and mechanical arts (Hale, 2002). In response Congress appropriated of \$100,000 dollars to support schools for Native Americans. The program spread rapidly and soon twenty-five boarding schools were built on or near reservations (Bloom, 2005). At their peak, 20,712 Native Americans attended these federally operated schools. While this number continuously increased, there was little expansion or construction of new schools (Hale, 2002). As a result, the schools quickly became dilapidated, overcrowded, and inadequate for the number of students they were serving. The passing of the Act of July 21, 1882 allowed the secretary of war authority to utilize unused military forts, installations, and stockades to alleviate overcrowding in these schools. Congress justified this act with the underlying ideology of Native American inferiority.

The teachers at the schools were tasked with civilizing Indians through strict control (Hale, 2002). The government's attempts at cultural indoctrination were enacted through tightly structured and strictly authoritarian climates in which students were expected to separate themselves from all remnants of Indian identity. Teachers regulated Native American students' every move: what they learned, how they dressed (the schools required students to wear government issued suits, vests, and hats), and what games were played (Bell, 1998). Most significantly, they were stripped of their tribal names and given new, traditional White names when entering the schools, thus reinforcing the underlying ideology that Native Americans were inferior.

Schools were organized into various departments, each designed to enculturate Native American students in a different fashion. The first was the educational department. Their initial goal was to teach students the English language by assigning a thought or object first, then expressing the idea using English (Pratt, 1880). Students were drilled in correct pronunciation, spelling, and writing all designed to reinforce English as the proper language. Another department within schools was agriculture which focused on mechanical arts. Boys were encouraged to work as an apprentice with a blacksmith, wagon-maker, harness-maker, tinner, shoe-maker, tailor, printer, or a baker. Boys who did not wish to learn a trade were required to work under the direction of a farmer. Girls were trained in the mending and manufacturing of clothing, cooking, and routine household duties. Accompanying these efforts was the discipline department tasked with maintaining control of the students. The students were separated by gender and organized into companies as soldiers, with the best and brightest selected as sergeants and corporals. The school reinforced obedience and cleanliness by wearing uniforms and performing military drills. The students marched to and from class, meals, and school activities. As one can see the government believed that controlling every aspect of the students' lives could mitigate the influence of their former savage ways. These strict regiments enacted the underlying ideology of Native American inferiority and shaped the very identities of Native Americans as inferior and dangerous.

The government's end goal was to use these White-educated Indians as inoculations against Native American culture once they returned to their home tribes. By giving them a thorough, "common-sense" education they would be able to influence the lives of their fellow tribesmen. Friedman (1911), for example, wrote, "The educated Indians are in the van of progress. They are among the leaders of their race, and are rapidly being afforded that

recognition which every life worthily lived is bound to receive” (p. 4). The government’s endgame was to curb the opportunity for Native American culture to be passed to the younger generation. Freidman (1911) stated

The American Indian is finding himself. He is rapidly taking his proper place with the White man as a good citizen, a true patriot, a self-respecting and self-supporting workman, and a Christian. There is a great gap between the aboriginal American of the days of Longfellow and Cooper, with primitiveness and savagery surrounding him, and the Indian of today, putting aside petty warfare and inter-tribal strife, forsaking the roaming from place to place for the farm and the workshop, and building a permanent home, which is each year better furnished and more sanitary. (p. 3)

It was believed that traditional Native American culture must be replaced by the institutions of a higher society, such as American ideals, schools, and laws (U.S. Board of Indian Commissioners, 1901). Although the government’s intention was to assimilate Native Americans into White culture through education, this policy was enacted through segregation, and therefore served to reinforce Native American identity as “other.” Further, the education policy was justified by the underlying ideology that Native Americans were inferior and childlike compared to Whites.

### The Outing System

As part of the students’ education, the schools sought to expose Native Americans students to White culture as much as possible. One way was through the “Outing System.” During this process, Native American students were forced to leave school and spend the summer months with non-Indian farming families in Pennsylvania and Massachusetts (“Bureau,”

1889). The hope was to promote the government's assimilationist goals by placing children in intimate contact with "civilized" Americans (Trennert, 1983). The first outings were conducted in the summer of 1878 (Trennert, 1983). During the 1890s, the system was expanded into several federal Indian schools in the west. The government justified this policy thusly:

It will separate the Indians from immediate contact with settlements of Whites...and perhaps cause them, gradually, under the protection of the government and through the influence of good counsel, to cast of their savage habits and become an interesting, civilized, and Christian community (Jackson, 1830, para. 2).

The outing system originated with Richard Henry Pratt, founder of the Carlisle Indian School (Friedman, 1911). Pratt believed that the contact would be a "supreme Americanizer" (Trennert, 1983, p. 267). The outing system was another outgrowth of the underlying ideology that Native Americans were savage outsiders. Because of this belief, Pratt and the government considered their actions were justified. He suggested that students would benefit by spending their summers "among our farmers to gain practical knowledge for managing their own farms" (Adams, 1975). This system, combined with other policies, would help to accomplish the task of "Americanizing" the Indians (Trennert, 1983, p. 267). During this summer, participants were placed on farms, doing chores for wages and learning the English language.

Pratt considered the outings proof that direct contact with the White community was the most beneficial form of Indian education (Ludlow, 1881). He was pleased that the students, having learned "the English and education that we push in theory and practice at the school," were using those skills to their advantage (U.S. Board of Indian Commissioners, 1881, p. 187-188). Pratt noted

It is fairly and fully demonstrated in our experience at Carlisle that there is no great difficulty in making pretty good, industrious, self-supporting Pennsylvanians out of the Indian youth of any tribe, provided they are brought into contact with the good, industrious, and self-supporting people of Pennsylvania. (U.S. Board of Indian Commissioners, 1881, p. 187).

Overall the outings were considered the “strongest and most effective feature” of the government Indian schools (Trennert, 1983, p. 288). They believed the outings produced a Native American on the reservation who was more productive and industrious, making them “respected citizens and competent workmen” (Friedman, 1911, p.3). This policy reinforced the notion that Native Americans were uncontrollable, thus shaping the understanding of Native American identity as undisciplined and savage. Historically, this outing policy contributed to White dominance and served to reinforce notions of Native American otherness.

The removal, colonization, and reeducation of the Native Americans are evidence of the underlying racial ideology that privileged White identity at the expense of Native Americans. First, the Native Americans were uncivilized savages and therefore could not be citizens. Next, while the colonization policies sought to assimilate and rescue Native Americans from their savage ways. Further, the education policy, despite good intentions, still reinforced the disparity between Whites and Native Americans through segregated schools. Thus, shaping the identity of Native Americans as savage outsiders and reaffirming White dominance. Finally, the government outing system reinforced the notion that Native Americans were unruly and required constant management in order to become civilized. Overall, the “Indian problem” grew out of a sense of Native American inferiority, and the policies the government enforced were an outgrowth of that perspective, to the benefit of White privilege. The government believed that

the removal and assimilation of Native Americans would enable “States to advance rapidly in population, wealth, and power” because the Native would become “more White” and less of a problem (Jackson, 1830, para. 2). This belief undergirded the government’s systematic oppression of Native Americans, inevitably constructing and reinforcing Native American identity legally and socially.

### Jim Thorpe

As a member of this generation Jim Thorpe provides us with an opportunity to see how the ideology and surrounding policies in particular played out in public discourse on sports. In a broader sense, Thorpe’s case not only provides insight into the construction of identity, but it also highlights the construction of racial stereotypes in mediated sport. Thorpe was born May 28, 1888 in a one-room cabin in the plains country of Oklahoma Territory to Hiram G. Thorpe, an Irish immigrant and Charlotte Vieux, of the Potawatomi and Kickapoo tribes (Wheeler, 1979). Although he was only part Indian, he and his twin brother, Charlie, started school at the age of six at the Sac and Fox Indian Agency School near Tecumseh, OK. The government provided the boys education and room and board at no cost. They joined students ranging in age from five to twenty, mostly from the Sac and Fox, although there were some from other tribes. The boys also participated in the highly regulated, government-approved sports such as horseshoes (Wheeler, 1979). Many students, including Thorpe, hated school and frequently ran away and as a result were labeled incorrigible. In fact, in 1896, runaways were so common that the school superintendent requested federal troops to help bring back missing students (Crawford, 2004). In 1897, a typhoid epidemic swept through Thorpe’s agency school, killing several students and staff, including Thorpe’s twin brother Charlie. After his death, Thorpe lived at home for a while,

spending time with his older brother or hunting and fishing. He eventually returned to the Sac and Fox school the following year but ran away again. His father decided the agency school was not far enough away and decided to send Thorpe to a new school, Haskell, which was in northeastern Kansas and home to more than 500 students from ninety different tribes (Crawford, 2004). Here, he lived a life of strict discipline that mixed elementary education with military drills, vocational training, and athletics in an English-speaking only environment. Thorpe showed little interest in academic or vocational work but found his place in athletics. However, he still hated school, preferring instead to hunt and ride horses. He ran away again and took the next few years off to be with his family. After another failed attempt at education in 1903 at a private school called Garden Grove, Thorpe's father made arrangements for him to be sent to a fourth school. He heard Carlisle, located in faraway southeastern Pennsylvania, was a good place for athletes. Thorpe enrolled in the Carlisle Indian Industrial School in 1904. It was there that his fortunes changed.

At Carlisle, Thorpe was treated in the same manner as he was at the other schools with the same strictly regimented hierarchy. He belonged to a company of students who marched together to and from classes, the dining hall, and other organized programs (Crawford, 2004). However, shortly after enrolling, he became part of a different group: the athletes. Fortuitously for Thorpe Carlisle had hired legendary football coach and eventual Collegiate Hall of Fame entrant Pop Warner in 1907. At Carlisle Warner served as the athletic director, as well as the track and field and football coach. Quickly Thorpe became one of Warner's select athletes. Warner worked with Thorpe to teach him the training and discipline that could enhance his significant natural ability to win.

Thorpe excelled at every sport he attempted. He led the football team to several victories and national prominence, and won gold medals at every track meet from 1908 to 1912 (Wheeler, 1979). Warner's proudest moment was when Thorpe led Carlisle to their first victory over their biggest rival, the University of Pennsylvania. With the help of Thorpe at halfback, the team defeated Pennsylvania after the first five minutes of play (Adams, 2001). He was an athletic marvel, shining at many positions on the football field, including kicker. In a game against Syracuse in 1908, Thorpe was named the star of the game by the *New York Tribune* ("Indians on warpath," 1908). As a member of the track team, Thorpe competed in several events. In 1908, Thorpe jumped 6 feet 1 inch at a meet in Philadelphia, taking the gold medal for the high jump. Later, at an intercollegiate meet at Harrisburg, he placed first in all five events in which he participated: the high and broad jumps, the high and low hurdles, and the hammer throw (Wheeler, 1979). He also ran the 100-yard dash, the 120- and 220-yard hurdles, and threw the shotput. His teammates stated that Thorpe could never explain how to complete each task and that he did little training. However, after watching someone attempt an event, he could do it better than they could on his first try (Crawford, 2004).

Thorpe's performances for the Carlisle Indian football and track and field teams generated significant coverage. Newspapers called him "Carlisle's great half back" and the "Christopher Columbus of the greatest athlete the world has ever seen" ("Gloom at," 1911, p. 14; "This Indian," 1911, p. 2). All of this training led to an invitation to the 1912 Stockholm Olympics, perhaps Thorpe's most notable athletic moment. He was chosen to represent the United States in more than a dozen events, ranging from the shot put to the high jump, each promising "to take up all of his competitive efforts" ("American Olympic," 1912, p. 10). In Stockholm, Thorpe became the first and only athlete to win the gold medal in both the pentathlon

and decathlon, becoming what many consider the best all-around athlete in the world at the time and perhaps of the century (“Clean Sweep,” 1912; “Thorpe is best,” 1912). His efforts helped the Americans win by a larger margin than in any previous international meet (“Thorpe is best,” 1912). After having successfully represented the United States, Thorpe returned from Stockholm with \$50,000 worth of awards and trophies (“Thorpe, Olympic Hero,” 1913).

Thorpe’s accolades were short lived. Stories began circulating that he played professional baseball for the Rocky Mount Club in North Carolina in 1909 and 1910, receiving small payments for each appearance he made. This infringed upon the strict rules of amateurism enforced by the Amateur Athletic Union, the governing body of amateur sports and the de facto Olympic Committee. Less than a year after returning from Stockholm, Thorpe was accused of being a professional athlete after the story published in the *Worcester Telegram*. Because professional athletes could not participate in the Olympics, Thorpe’s Olympic prizes had to be returned, and he was stripped of his honors and title (Wheeler, 1979; “World’s Greatest,” 1913).

Thorpe’s life, in particular his celebration and eventual denigration, serves as an example of general public attitudes toward Native Americans. Thorpe’s identity was foregrounded in newspaper coverage using the same ideologies that influenced policies against Native Americans. His identity was manipulated by the media. On the one hand he was “just an Indian,” who was childlike and foolish. On the other he was one of America’s greatest athletes who represented the best and brightest of the United States. Thorpe’s race was excused by his performance, but it also became an excuse for his downfall. Despite his attempt to redefine his identity and thus Native American identity, coverage continuously constructed notions of “otherness,” savagery, and ignorance. This reinforced the dominant nineteenth century expectations of Native Americans. The racial setting of Thorpe’s performance prevented his

identity from being anything other than, “Jim Thorpe, the Indian.” Despite great success in athletics, Thorpe’s life illustrates how ingrained ideological attitudes toward race are difficult to overcome. In the end, his failures only contributed to dominant expectations of Native American inferiority.

Thorpe’s case not only provides insight into the construction of identity, but it also highlights the construction of racial stereotypes in mediated sport. Reducing an athlete’s performance, based on misconceptions about racial identity, eradicates the individual’s identity. Despite his performances, mediated accounts of Thorpe’s actions revealed the same prejudices that informed the cruel oppression Native Americans faced during this time. In the next chapter I use the mind/body dichotomy to examine newspaper coverage of Thorpe. Then, I demonstrate how coverage served to reinforce dominant notions of Native Americans.

#### **Chapter 4: Jim Thorpe, Indian or Athlete?**

In the previous chapters I explained the context in which Thorpe's performance occurred and how the role of identification in rhetoric provides a methodology for examining media messages. To reiterate, identification is achieved through consubstantiality. To be consubstantial with someone is to be identified or associated with them through an act, acting together, or through sharing common sensations, concepts, images, ideas, and attitudes. Rhetoric facilitates this process through symbols or words, which form attitudes or induce action. The obverse of identification, division, occurs simultaneously because we identify with each other as a result of division. Division differs from consubstantiality in that it occurs when individuals see themselves as being separate, dissociated, or different from others. Sport provides an interesting arena for the examination of the relationship between identification and division because of the ways it permeates American culture and identity. As an example, performance identity is defined as how athletes choose to present themselves, construct their identity, and ultimately, how they embody, reflect, and construct their culture. It shows how division in sport often shapes identity because an athlete's performance often accepts or challenges the dominant expectations of gender, ethnicity, nationality, and other types of division. As a result, performance identity communicates division within our culture. One type of division common in sports media, race, illustrates how identification can be made and remade through division. Race is most often expressed through the mind/body dichotomy. Race functions as division when the media grounds an athlete with biological terms, separating him or her from the White populace.

To illustrate these principles, I use the mind/body dichotomy to interpret how newspapers communicated stereotypes about Jim Thorpe. Thorpe is most known for his physical versatility and accomplishments in the 1912 Olympics. Despite his exceptional athleticism, a large portion

of mediated coverage linked Thorpe's racial identity to his performance. Thorpe's coverage illustrates how an emphasis on race in the media functions as division by shaping identity to reinforce social expectations. From 1911 to 1913, newspaper coverage continuously highlighted Thorpe's race instead of his athletic performance. As a result, Thorpe was never allowed to be just Thorpe, the athlete, instead he was known as Thorpe, the Indian.

This analysis reveals that Thorpe's mediated performance before, during, and after the Olympics was linked to his race through stereotypes of savagery, animalistic behavior, superhuman feats, and ignorance. As a result, his identity was appropriated, despite his success. During this time, mediated coverage communicated Native American stereotypes that served to denigrate Native American identity, while implicitly reinforcing White superiority. In this chapter I analyze how Thorpe's mediated performance in newspaper coverage naturalized and reinforced racial stereotypes about Native Americans. First, I will discuss how Thorpe's coverage illustrates how the mind/body dichotomy is used as a cultural signifier of difference by feeding stereotypes that reinforce society's expectations of race. Then, I will explain how the mediated coverage of his performance changed during the Olympics when his accomplishments reinforced national identity. Finally, I will examine how newspaper coverage reverted back to stereotypical images of Native Americans to excuse Thorpe's transgressions after the Olympics. Overall, this study allows critics to understand how the coverage of Native Americans shapes and naturalizes racial stereotypes. Such knowledge can help us to understand the responses coverage produces, and allows us to question the choices rhetors make when constructing messages. More specifically, studying Thorpe's mediated performance provides an understanding of how division often feeds racial stereotypes and shapes the identities of minorities such as Native Americans. This is significant because of the prevalence of the media

and the limited amount of contact between the general public and Native Americans. Therefore, it is important to understand how the media communicate about minorities and influence dominant racial stereotypes. Additionally, critiquing Thorpe's coverage also shows how racial division may reinforce the natural status of Whiteness against the differentness of non-Whiteness. Further, the consideration of Thorpe's coverage recognizes how racial division of minority athletes can reinforce the oppression of minorities. A clearer understanding of the construction of racial stereotypes allows a stronger possibility of disrupting this process.

Before examining Thorpe's mediated performance it's important to understand how newspaper coverage may function as a rhetorical artifact. The best way to uncover how Thorpe's coverage communicated racial stereotypes is by looking at fragments collectively. Typically, critics focus on one artifact at a time. However, rhetorical scholars have demonstrated how examining a collection of cases spanning over a specific time frame or confined to a theme allows us to describe "the life cycle of issues, or predicable and identifiable phases through which issues pass to reach maturity and then recede from the public eye" (Hallahan, 2001, p. 30; see also Campbell, 1972; Railsback, 1984). The progenitor of this movement, Griffin (1952), asserted that it can be beneficial to look at rhetoric across a historical movement. He stated that we should devote "somewhat less attention to the single speaker and more to speakers," thus, undertaking research that "would permit the study of a multiplicity of speakers, speeches, audiences, and occasions" (p. 184). For example, Campbell (1972) looked at the rhetoric of women's liberation over time and identified its unique qualities that make it a distinct genre, while Hallahan (2001) examined organizational responses to issues across time, finding that involvement and knowledge are key to issue activation and response. These studies allow critics to see patterns of rhetoric in the process of social change. Using this approach to examine

Thorpe's coverage allows critics to recognize how the reinforcement of racial stereotypes reflects the state of racial relations during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In this particular case, a close examination of the stages of Thorpe's performance shows how throughout Thorpe's career his coverage functioned to reinforce Native American stereotypes.

### Before the 1912 Olympics

Prior to entering the Olympics, Thorpe was known primarily for his performance as a Carlisle athlete. During this time, nearly all coverage of Thorpe's athletic performances emphasized his race through the mind/body dichotomy. The mind/body dichotomy holds that the body is divisible in its constitutive parts, while the mind is not. In other words, a minority athlete that is portrayed in biological terms, such as terminology that highlighted physical size or difference, reinforces racist beliefs that minorities are the less intelligent, cognitively driven group. This dichotomy, as it is produced in the media and popular culture, operates as a cultural signifier of difference by feeding stereotypes that reinforce society's expectations of race. For example, Laucella (2002) found that coverage of Olympian Jesse Owens framed him in terms of biological athletic superiority. This emphasis on race differentiated him from Whites. More specifically, highlighting Owens' physicality essentially distinguished him from non-physical acts and implicitly questioned his intellect.

Like Laucella's (2002) study, an analysis of Thorpe's coverage reveals how the mind/body dichotomy is used as a cultural signifier of difference by feeding stereotypes that reinforce society's expectations of Native Americans. Studies similar to this have presented ways in which minorities are portrayed as savage through animalistic characterizations. However, Thorpe's case shows how the mind/body dichotomy feeds Native American stereotypes of

savagery by relying on images of frontier conflict as well. It was common to see articles utilize terms that highlighted his race to differentiate him from the White populace through terms that highlighted physical difference: “Jim Thorpe, of Carlisle,” “Jim Thorpe, the Indian Halfback,” “This Indian the Athletic Marvel,” or “Indian Thorpe in Olympiad” (“Jim Thorpe,” 1911a, p. 27; “Jim Thorpe,” 1911b, p. 22, “This Indian,” 1911, p. 2; “Indian Thorpe,” 1912, p. C9). Many of these terms were repeated throughout national coverage, demonstrating how newspapers continuously reinforced Thorpe as an outsider, dividing him from the White populace despite his success. This functioned to communicate society’s expectations of race and to ground his performance in his body rather than his mind. During these instances, Thorpe’s performance was subordinated to a racial identity that prioritized his physicality over his intellect. By differentiating Thorpe from the White populace, the newspaper coverage grounded his performance in his body, rather than his mind, so that every performance that followed was an enactment of his racial identity. Additionally, this coverage influenced how individuals in society perceived Native American identity as a whole. What little was known about Native Americans by non-Native Americans often came from mediated representations. In Thorpe’s case, the coverage influenced how Native American identity was understood by continuously reinforcing his race within articles. For example, across the United States his performance was credited to his race. On the East coast, the *Washington Times* referred to him as “the Carlisle Indian” and the “Sac and Fox Indian,” while the *New York Times* referred to him as “the Indian athlete,” “Jim Thorpe, Carlisle Indian,” “the Indian, Thorpe,” “Redskin from Carlisle,” and “Jim Thorpe, Sac and Fox Indian” (“Jim Thorpe,” 1911, p. 12; “Knew Thorpe,” 1913, p. 9; “American Olympic,” 1912, p. 10; “Clean Sweep,” 1912, p. 1; “Indian Thorpe,” 1912, p. C9). On the other side of the country, the *San Francisco Call* referred to Thorpe as “the greatest Indian halfback” (“Jim

Thorpe,” 1911, p. 11). In the Midwest, the *Topeka Daily State* called him “Jim Thorpe, of Carlisle” (“Here are,” 1912, p. 3). Meanwhile, the South just referred to him as “the Indian” (“Jim Thorpe,” 1911, p. 22). No matter which part of the nation one turned, the media identified Thorpe utilizing a racial signifier: “the Sac and Fox redskin,” “hefty, young Sac & Fox redskin,” “the big Indian,” or “redskin youth” (“Jim Thorpe,” 1911, p. 27a; “Jim Thorpe,” 1911, p. 22b; “Jim Thorpe,” 1912c, p. 1; “The Indian,” 1911, p. 2). Instead of providing a nuanced picture of Thorpe’s identity, each mediated representation reinforced racial and ideological presumptions about Native Americans. By constantly leading with “Thorpe, Indian,” the coverage wasn’t just dividing Thorpe from Whites, they were grounding his performance in his body, rather than his mind, so that everything that came afterward was centered on his racial identity, rather than his performance. Overall, these images influenced how individuals understood Native American identity and illuminated rhetorical practices that normalize and reinforce racial stereotypes.

One way newspaper coverage further shaped the public’s perception of Thorpe was by evoking Native American stereotypes of savagery through images of frontier conflict. A result of the larger racial divide of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, these conceptions about Thorpe extend the mind/body dichotomy even further. Thorpe’s mediated coverage dramatized the biological physicality of Native Americans, relying on society’s presumptions of Native American savagery to further characterize Native American identity. For example, following a win against Harvard in 1911, Thorpe was praised as the “hefty, young Sac and Fox redskin” that was unstoppable and who “crushed the Harvard eleven” (“Jim Thorpe,” 1911, p. 22). “Through a bending crumbling line of Crimson forwards,” the *Boston Sunday Post* vividly reported, “around the baffled, disconcerted ends, over the battered forms of crushed and helpless defenders, a relentless band from Carlisle tore its savage way in an unequal conflict” (Shannon, 1911, p. 14). The paper described this

unequal conflict as a competition “between White man’s brawn and the red man’s cunning, the wiles of redskin prevailed” (Shannon, 1911, p. 14). Similarly, the *New York Times* described a Carlisle win as “sweet revenge,” during which Thorpe’s performance was characterized as a “battle” where he was “aided and abetted” to victory (“Thorpe’s Indians’,” 1912, p. S2). These terms reinforced stereotypes of savagery by relying on society’s expectations of Native American identity. Although these expectations were a result of historical frontier conflict, the coverage functioned to highlight the division and further reinforce the ideology of Native American inferiority. As a result, Thorpe’s performance was grounded in stereotypes of savagery. This can be seen again in a game against Army where Thorpe was described by *The Times Dispatch* as a “nemesis” and his game was “marked by rioting, rough work,” and “a general display of bitterness” (“Jim Thorpe,” 1912, p. 1). Carlisle won by 21 points and despite the praise for Thorpe, he was defined as wild or bloodthirsty when they stated that Thorpe “took the scalps of Uncle Sam’s boys in gray” (“Jim Thorpe,” 1912, p. 1). Such coverage may seem to be innocuous hyperbole, but it is important because of the limited contact the public had with Native Americans. Newspaper coverage used savage characterizations by relying on society’s expectations of race to provide information about Native Americans. In the end, this coverage communicated and reinforced stereotypes of savagery.

The mind/body dichotomy was also evident in Thorpe’s coverage because of an emphasis on Indian ignorance. The mind/body dichotomy argues that minorities are portrayed as naturally athletic, thus less intelligent than their White counterparts. Often, Native American athletes are described as ideally suited for sport, as opposed to White athletes who are celebrated for their minds. This perspective suggests that minorities in sport can only achieve success in athletics because of their natural physical ability, not because of hard work and intelligence. Further, it

shows how the emphasis on difference privileges Whites and keeps minorities oppressed. For example, the *Salt Lake Tribune* explained that despite being a “Redskin youth from Oklahoma” with no knowledge of athletics when entering Carlisle Indian School, Thorpe still became a “wonder of the athletic world” (“This Indian,” 1911, p. 2). In a similar article, the *El Paso Herald* wrote how Thorpe came to Carlisle “with little knowledge of letters, except that acquired at a reservation day school” (“Jim Thorpe,” 1911, p. 22). As these examples show, newspaper coverage relied on stereotypical ignorance to foreground Thorpe’s athletic ability over his intellect, thus naturalizing Native American stereotypes and inferiority.

To summarize, the mediated coverage of Thorpe prior to the Olympics fell back on the mind/body dichotomy because it relied on Native American stereotypes to foreground Thorpe’s racial identity. Newspaper coverage repeatedly referred to Thorpe as “Native American,” “the Indian,” or “the Redskin.” As a result, his race operated as a cultural signifier of difference, feeding stereotypes rooted in Native American inferiority. Newspaper coverage called upon tropes of the past to define Thorpe’s identity, as well as Native American identity, as savage through biological terms and portrayals of ignorance. Instead of providing a nuanced picture of Thorpe’s identity, each mediated representation reinforced racial and ideological presumptions about Native Americans. Overall, the coverage emphasized Thorpe’s difference from the White populace and reinforced society’s expectations of Native Americans, maintaining the ideology of Native American inferiority.

## Thorpe as an Olympian

Once Thorpe became an Olympian, there was a marked change in his coverage. At first, Thorpe was unable to escape his Native American identity in newspaper coverage. However, once his success served the United States' national identity, the coverage began celebrating Thorpe's success. Thorpe's race initially operated as a cultural signifier of difference, feeding stereotypes rooted in Native American inferiority. This prevented him from being taken seriously in pre-Olympic coverage. Although he was defined by his athleticism, the mind/body dichotomy was reinforced through portrayals of ignorance and savagery. However, once he achieved Olympic success, the coverage no longer defined Thorpe stereotypically. Prior to the start of the Olympics, Thorpe was selected to represent the United States as the familiar "Jim Thorpe, the Carlisle Indian," rather than Jim Thorpe, the American athlete ("American Olympic," 1912, p. 10). By qualifying his identity as "Indian," or simply referring to him as "the Indian," newspaper coverage used biological terms in order to purposefully delineate him from the White American athletes. Although this was a reflection of a larger social divide, it served as evidence of the underlying ideology of Native American inferiority. This can be seen again when coverage of Thorpe implied that his athletic ability would not suffice against the White Americans. The *New York Times*, explained how the "Redskin from Carlisle will strive for a place on American team" ("Indian Thorpe," 1912, p. C9). The same article was unenthusiastic about Thorpe's chances, stating, "Thorpe will have to compete against the flower of American athletes" ("Indian Thorpe," 1912, p. C9). Thorpe was considered no match for American athletes in the pentathlon tryouts:

Further entries for the pentathlon tryouts are to be held at Celtic Park next Saturday are Henry Klages, New York Athletic Club, and Thomas A. McLaughlin, Loughlin Lyceum,

both of whom are expected to give Jim Thorpe, the Carlisle Indian, a hard battle for the qualifying honors. ("Many Men," 1912, p. C9)

Newspaper coverage earnestly defined Thorpe's identity by choosing the term "compete" and stated that Thorpe will "strive against Americans." This differentiation served to isolate Thorpe from the White Americans. The mind/body dichotomy that dominated Thorpe's coverage extended to the pre-Olympic coverage, as well. However, in this case his savagery and ignorance kept him from being a serious contender. Even though he was defined by his athleticism, it still wasn't enough to make him competitive with Whites.

However, upon making Olympic team, Thorpe amazed spectators with his athletic ability. Thorpe represented the United States in the Olympics, and his performance shifted to a reflection of national identity. For example, in an article in *The Day Book*, Thorpe was praised when winning the Decathlon, for "adding six more points to the Yankee total" and leading to the Americans winning by "a larger margin than in any previous international meet" ("Thorpe is," 1912, p. 1). The same article asserted, "Thorpe has proven himself the best all-around athlete in the world, winning both the Pentathlon and Decathlon" ("Thorpe is," 1912, p. 1). The *Sunday Capital News* called said "he would go down in history as the greatest Indian athlete of all time" ("Jim Thorpe," 1912, p. 7). In summary, Thorpe's coverage still referred to him as Indian, but his racial identity was subsumed to the larger national identity. However, newspaper coverage no longer relied on prevailing stereotypes to reinforce Native American inferiority because Thorpe represented American supremacy and exceptionalism. In other words, Thorpe was still an Indian, but newspapers were willing to celebrate him because of his position on the American team.

The celebration of Thorpe's Olympic accomplishments propagated the physical prowess and supremacy of the nation. His dominance in Olympic events served as such a useful tool for

reinforcing American Exceptionalism, or the idea that America is superior to all other nations because of its history and mission, that they conveniently overlooked the fact that he was legally not an American.<sup>1</sup> Thorpe's Olympic success for the United States was covered across the nation. For example, the *New York Tribune* described "Thorpe, the Indian" an "easy victor" in the pentathlon, "which was intended as a test of all around prowess" ("Clean Sweep," 1912, p. 1). The article continued to rave that "the United States got the lion's share of victory" from Thorpe's win (p. 1). Again, once Thorpe's athleticism contributed to the United States' Olympic dominance, the coverage included less about his Native American identity and more about his athletic prowess. In fact, the *Washington Post* called him a "legitimate successor" as best all-around athlete, while several papers, including the *Rock Island Argus*, *Topeka Daily State*, the *Evening Standard*, and the *University Missourian*, listed him as one of the athletic heroes of 1912 ("U.S. Athletes," 1912, p.5; "Here are," 1912, p. 3; "Here are," 1912, p. 3; "Jim Thorpe," 1912, p. 2).

Although Thorpe continued to contribute to the United States' Olympic victories, his Native American identity was stressed through the mind/body dichotomy. Not only were the terms "Indian," "Carlisle Indian," or "Redskin" continuously used throughout his Olympic performance, Thorpe's efforts were often described as "superhuman," which emphasized a differentiation between natural physical talents and hard work ("Jim Thorpe," 1912, p. 1). Thorpe was singled out as "the superb physical machine," and as "invincible" ("Jim Thorpe," 1912, p. 1). In summary, the mediated coverage continued to reinforce Thorpe's race through biological terms and by emphasizing his natural athletic abilities. However, it is important to note that the coverage stressed his athleticism, not racial stereotypes of ignorance and savagery.

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<sup>1</sup> Native American tribes weren't considered citizens of the United States until the passing of the 1924 Indian Citizenship Act.

The United States was willing to celebrate Thorpe's accomplishments, despite his race, as long as it served American national supremacy and athletic excellence.

Another change in coverage took place after the Olympics. Once Thorpe no longer represented the United States, newspaper coverage reverted back to the mind/body dichotomy, returning Thorpe to a position of inferiority by linking his identity to stereotypes of ignorance and animalistic qualities. Immediately following the Olympics, newspaper coverage continued to frame Thorpe using animalistic characteristics. For example, in the *Omaha Sunday Bee* Thorpe was described as "a man of whale bone, whose anatomy is impervious to injury: a human torpedo that plows its way through all sorts of opposition" ("Noblest Redskin," 1912, p. 4). In the same article he was "likened to nothing better than that of a rabbit close pressed by a hound" (p. 4). These stereotypes overshadowed his great performance and reinforced society's expectations of Native Americans. Rather than emphasizing his hard work and dedication to athletics, newspaper coverage characterized Thorpe as animal-like because of his race, thus grounding his athletic abilities as natural. As a result, the coverage reinforced the ideology of Native American inferiority.

To summarize, newspapers were willing to omit representations of Native American inferiority, in order to serve American Exceptionalism, while representations of Thorpe, the Indian, reinforced and naturalized racial stereotypes of animalistic behavior. Thorpe's coverage reveals how newspapers were willing to overlook Thorpe's racial differences when it served American Exceptionalism. Overall, Thorpe's coverage demonstrates how newspapers influence and reinforce dominant stereotypes about Native Americans and how these portrayals reflect the ideology of Native American inferiority.

## Thorpe's Transgressions

Despite his usefulness in highlighting American Exceptionalism, the newspaper coverage of Thorpe ultimately fell back on the mind/body dichotomy that relied on Native American stereotypes to emphasize racial division. Additionally, Thorpe's case shows strong how dominant ideologies regarding race can often chain out in other types of rhetoric. For example, the mind/body dichotomy that communicated Native American inferiority throughout Thorpe's coverage was even present in Thorpe's own rhetoric. After returning from Stockholm, the coverage revealed that Thorpe was a professional athlete. Thorpe's responses regarding his professionalism mirrored the dominant ideological perspectives about Native American inferiority. First, I will explain how newspaper coverage framed Thorpe's transgressions as an example of a racial deficiency, rather than as a mistake. Then, I will use Thorpe's comments to illustrate how dominant ideologies chained out in his responses.

During the Olympics, newspapers were willing to overlook Thorpe's race and could not praise him enough for his Olympic successes: "Jim Thorpe will go down in history as the greatest Indian athlete of all time" ("Jim Thorpe," 1912, p.7). "The whole country" was "proud of Thorpe" for his success in the Olympics representing America ("Jim Thorpe," 1912 p. 11). However, once Thorpe no longer represented the United States, newspaper coverage reverted back to framing Thorpe with cultural signifiers that reinforced Native American stereotypes and differentiated him from Americans. The United States no longer needed Thorpe for Olympic victories; therefore, it was acceptable again to portray Thorpe as a member of an inferior race. The tension between Thorpe, the American victor, and Thorpe, the Indian, became most noticeable in January 1913. During this time, praise for Thorpe quickly turned to disappointment when the *Worcester Telegram* released a story that Thorpe had played professional minor league

baseball in North Carolina in 1909 and 1910. His appearance in a professional game was important because it violated the Amateur Athletic Union's rules against professionalism, thus disqualifying him from Olympic competition. Soon after, Thorpe confirmed his professional status and his medals were taken away. Newspaper coverage then fell back on the mind/body dichotomy by relying on stereotypical inferiority to explain his transgressions, which portrayed him as an ignorant savage. The American victor, Thorpe, was no longer a celebrated athlete, but was instead simply a "dumb Indian." One reporter from *The San Francisco Call* reported that Thorpe "is an Indian of limited experience and education and lacking in the knowledge of other than his own people" ("World's Greatest," 1913, p. 6). Americans were willing to celebrate the athletic accomplishments of a minority, as long as they glorified the United States. However, when Thorpe's image was challenged, newspaper coverage used his race as a scapegoat to excuse his transgressions and relied on racial stereotypes to explain his failure. This can be seen in an article in *The Evening World*: Thorpe's confession revealed that he "didn't know it was wrong to play professional ball and compete in amateur athletics" ("Thorpe, Olympic Hero," 1913, p. 1). Mediated accounts of Thorpe's coverage relied on stereotypical ignorance to dismiss Thorpe's failure. As a result, his Olympic achievements were overshadowed. In the end, newspaper coverage used his race as a scapegoat for his transgressions, thus shaping Native American identity and reinforcing the ideology of Native American inferiority.

The mind/body dichotomy that denigrated racial identity as a deficiency throughout Thorpe's coverage was even present in Thorpe's own rhetoric. His public comments about the incident mirrored dominant ideological perspectives about Native American inferiority. For example, Thorpe himself played upon stereotypical ignorance, claiming in official statements that he did this because he "was simply an Indian school boy and did not know all about such

things. In fact, I did not know what I was doing was wrong” (“World’s Greatest,” 1913, p. 6). In this case, newspaper coverage was not the only representation of Native American inferiority, Thorpe himself fell back into the characterization, using his race as a scapegoat. This provided more evidence to support the newspapers’ reliance on Native American stereotypes. He also stated in this confession, “I was not very wise to the ways of the world and did not realize that this is wrong and that it would make me a professional in track sports...I never realized until now what a big mistake I was making” (“Thorpe, Olympic Hero,” 1913, p. 1). By playing into the stereotypical interpretations of the time, Thorpe provided more evidence to support the portrayal of Thorpe as ignorant and therefore inferior. This further assisted the news outlets in transforming his performance identity as “the greatest athlete of all time” to a stereotypical representation of ignorance (“Case Against,” 1913, p. 1). Additionally, Thorpe’s coverage demonstrates how newspapers can reinforce societal expectations of race. In contrast to American coverage, the British newspapers believed Thorpe was making a mistake as opposed to being ignorant, illustrating how Americans were more concerned with race. The *New York Times* published an article titled “British Sympathy for ‘Jim’ Thorpe.” In it the author stated, “We feel rather sorry for Thorpe, who seems to have posed as an amateur athlete rather out of ignorance than with any deliberate idea of committing fraud” (“British Sympathy,” 1913, p. 4). In the end however, the United States newspapers used the prevailing stereotypes of the day to undermine Thorpe’s performance. In their interpretation, his ignorance outweighed his performance.

Following Thorpe’s confession, newspaper coverage continued to reinforce Thorpe’s racial identity throughout his football career. In The *University Missourian* Thorpe was praised for his great performance and his remarkable runs. The article asserts that his performances “will undoubtedly go down in history” (“Jim Thorpe,” 1912, p. 2). However, newspaper coverage still

made sure to qualify him as “the remarkable Sac and fox Indian” (p. 2). In some cases newspaper coverage definitively pointed out Thorpe’s race, stating, “Thorpe is a real Native American, too” occasionally providing a biological description: “save that his color is less pronounced than the average Indian. Jim Thorpe is a typical Indian” with his “high cheek bones,” “straight jet black hair,” and long legs (“Jim Thorpe,” 1912, p. 2; “Noblest Redskin,” 1912, p. 4). Throughout Thorpe’s post-Olympic performances, he returned to the status of “Jim Thorpe, the Carlisle Indian” and the coverage still emphasized his race through the mind/body dichotomy (“Thorpe is,” 1913, p. 1). For example, in a football game following the Olympics, the *New York Times* relied on animalistic characteristics and stereotypes of savagery to ground Thorpe’s performance to his race: Thorpe “invaded the plains” as “the big Indian” “ran wild, while the cadets tried in vain to stop his progress. It was like trying to clutch a shadow” (“Thorpe’s Indians, 1912, p. S1). His defensive play was described as an “attack,” as he “wormed his way through the entire team” (p. S1). Again, his racial identity was foregrounded and his performance was linked to Native American stereotypes. Despite his great athletic performances, the references to his race continuously grounded Thorpe to Native American terms. Thorpe was unable to escape his Native American identity in newspaper coverage.

Overall, Thorpe’s case reveals how the mediated portrayal of performance can shape reinforce society’s expectations of race. The mediated coverage of Thorpe’s performance prior to the Olympics fell back on the mind/body dichotomy because it relied on Native American stereotypes to emphasize racial division. Newspaper coverage repeatedly referred to Thorpe as “Native American,” “the Indian,” or “the Redskin.” As a result, his race operated as a cultural signifier of difference, feeding stereotypes rooted in Native American inferiority. Newspaper coverage confined Thorpe’s identity, as well as Native American identity, within the tropes of

savagery by defining Thorpe's identity through biological terms and portrayals of ignorance. Instead of providing a nuanced picture of Thorpe's identity, each mediated representation reinforced racial and ideological presumptions about Native Americans. Overall, the coverage prior to Thorpe's Olympic career maintained the Thorpe's division from Whites and reinforced society's expectations of Native Americans.

During Thorpe's Olympic career, newspaper coverage used his positive representations of Thorpe, the American, to highlight the nation's physical prowess. They were willing to omit representations of Native American inferiority, in order to serve American Exceptionalism, while representations of Thorpe, the Indian, reinforced and naturalized racial stereotypes of animalistic behavior. After the Olympics, Thorpe's transgressions were excused as a result of his race. His comments also served as a reflection of the dominant ideologies surrounding Native Americans. By playing into the stereotypical interpretations of the time, Thorpe provided more evidence to support the newspapers' portrayals of Thorpe as an ignorant, and therefore inferior, Indian. This analysis of Thorpe's coverage reveals how newspaper coverage influences and reinforces dominant stereotypes about minorities and how mediated depictions of race can naturalize stereotypes. Because the media are essentially inescapable, understanding how the media portray minorities will help us see how the media influence and reinforce dominant racial stereotypes. Additionally, this consideration of Thorpe's coverage recognizes how the racial division of minority athletes can reinforce the oppression of minorities. A clearer understanding of the construction of racial stereotypes allows a stronger possibility of disrupting this process.

## Chapter 5: Where do we go from here?

This project focused on newspaper coverage of Thorpe's performance before, during, and after the 1912 Olympics. As my analysis revealed, the mediated coverage of Thorpe prior to the Olympics fell back on the mind/body dichotomy because it relied on Native American stereotypes to emphasize racial division. Newspaper coverage repeatedly referred to Thorpe as "Native American," "the Indian," or "the Redskin." As a result, his race operated as a cultural signifier of difference, feeding stereotypes rooted in Native American inferiority. Newspaper coverage called upon tropes of the past by defining Thorpe's identity, as well as Native American identity, as savage through biological terms and portrayals of ignorance. Instead of providing a nuanced picture of Thorpe's identity, each mediated representation reinforced racial and ideological presumptions about Native Americans. Overall, the coverage emphasized Thorpe's division from the White populace and reinforced society's expectations of Native Americans, thus maintaining the oppression of Native Americans.

During the Olympics, newspaper coverage was willing to celebrate Thorpe's race to highlight American Exceptionalism. They praised him for his victories and called him the greatest Indian athlete of all time ("Jim Thorpe," 1912). However, once Thorpe no longer represented the United States, newspaper coverage fell back on framing Thorpe with cultural signifiers that reinforced Native American inferiority. Following the Olympics and Thorpe's admission to professionalism, mediated accounts of Thorpe's coverage relied on stereotypical ignorance to dismiss Thorpe's failure. Thorpe's titles and medals were removed, and newspaper coverage used the mind/body dichotomy by relying on stereotypical inferiority to explain his transgressions. Newspaper coverage was willing to celebrate Thorpe as a minority, as long as it glorified the United States. However, when Thorpe's image was challenged, newspapers used his

race as a scapegoat to excuse his transgressions and relied on stereotypes of ignorance to explain his failure. As a result, Native American inferiority was reinforced, and Thorpe's Olympic achievements were overshadowed. Despite his great athletic performances, newspaper coverage with references to his race continuously grounded Thorpe to Native American terms.

Newspaper coverage of stereotypical ignorance was not the only representation of Native American inferiority at this time. Thorpe himself played into the stereotypical portrayal. The mind/body dichotomy that denigrated racial identity as a deficiency throughout Thorpe's coverage was even present in Thorpe's rhetoric. His comments mirrored the dominant ideological perspective about Native Americans. In other words, Thorpe himself fell back into the characterization of Native American ignorance, using his race as a scapegoat. This provided more evidence to support the coverage's reliance on Native American stereotypes and further reinforced Native American inferiority.

Overall, this study allows us to understand how newspaper coverage of Native American athletes shapes and naturalizes racial stereotypes. Sport is a site where racial formations are constantly and publicly negotiated. Therefore, it is essential to explore how and why stereotypical representations have been used to shape the understanding of Native Americans. This is important because of the limited contact the public had with Native Americans during this time. The misrepresentation of Native Americans in sport reinforces racial stereotypes and shapes the way non-Native Americans understand them.

The media are prevalent and understanding how they portray minorities helps critics better understand how the media influence and reinforce dominant racial stereotypes. Additionally, critiquing mediated coverage also shows how the racial division of minority athletes can reinforce the natural status of Whiteness against the differentness of non-Whiteness.

By understanding the operation of rhetoric, we can begin to recognize the effects coverage produces. This also allows us to question the choices rhetors make when constructing messages. More specifically, studying mediated performance provides an understanding of how division often feeds racial stereotypes and shapes the identities of minorities. A clearer understanding of the construction of racial stereotypes allows a stronger possibility of disrupting this process.

### Future Research

The lack of research on Native American athletes in Communication suggests that this study has heuristic value. By looking at Thorpe's mediated performance, I found that newspaper coverage relied on communal expectations to stereotypically communicate about Thorpe. There is an opportunity to extend this study by using Thorpe's mediated identity during his football and baseball careers, as well as after his death. It is possible that Thorpe's coverage included fewer racial stereotypes following his death and the reinstatement of his Olympic medals. Also, this study only looked at one Native American from the 1912 Olympics, while there were actually four Native American athletes representing the United States that year. Future research should investigate how the media portrayed other 1912 Native American athletes for a deeper understanding of how media coverage shaped Native American Identity. Also, future research is needed in understanding how current Native American athletes are portrayed. Future research is needed in this area because of the prevalence of the media and the emphasis placed on sport in American culture. Research should examine the messages produced and disseminated by sport media and evaluate how all athletes are presented to the public.

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