



## A Level Playing Field (Alain Locke Lecture Series)

*By Gerald Lyn Early*

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**A Level Playing Field (Alain Locke Lecture Series)** By Gerald Lyn Early

The noted cultural critic Gerald Early explores the intersection of race and sports, and our deeper, often contradictory attitudes toward the athletes we glorify. What desires and anxieties are encoded in our worship of (or disdain for) high-performance athletes? What other, invisible contests unfold when we watch a sporting event?

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## **Editorial Review**

### **Review**

The intersection of race and sports is one of the most dangerous in American culture... Perhaps only a steady, steely academic like Gerald L. Early can take the turn wide open, pencil to the metal, without spinning out. Early has tricky moves and a way of bouncing off the wall of other writers' theses. As a boxer, he'd be a counter-puncher. As a hockey player, he'd be a blind-side hip checker... *A Level Playing Field: African American Athletes and the Republic of Sports* [is] a provocative and lively collection of lectures and essays. It's a welcome addition to the elite sports shelf... [Early] displays the grandiosity of the critic and the passion of the fan. (Robert Lipsyte *New York Times Book Review* 2011-07-10)

[A] powerful book... Early illuminates in great detail the inner collisions of African-American athletes as they find their way in the (mostly white) public sphere. His is a valiant?and largely successful?attempt to explain what it's like to be an African-American athlete today... *A Level Playing Field* makes an excellent template from which to work when we want to look beyond the platitudes that mark the dialogue about race and sport. But it also reminds us how far we've come. (Doug Glanville *Wall Street Journal* 2011-08-06)

Early is still opening eyes with unexpected, edgy insights about race and sports. This happens on every page of his new collection of essays, *A Level Playing Field: African American Athletes and the Republic of Sports*... What really unifies [these essays] is Early's piercing, unpredictable intelligence... Whether Early is writing about a recent racial flap, Jackie Robinson's testimony about Communism before Congress or the myths of the black quarterback, he offers up a neglected or forgotten fact?and an insightful way of conceptualizing race, sports and how they intersect that will leave you rethinking things. This book stretches the mind of a sports fan the way a brilliant coach expands the game of an athlete. (Chris King *St. Louis American* 2011-08-01)

Early examines the contradictions of the sporting world for African Americans: they are lauded for their athletic prowess but denied social honor for their accomplishments. He is especially concerned with understanding the invisible contests that unfold when people watch sports and how the public's fascination with sports heroes reflects desires and anxieties. The topics covered include integration, focusing on Jackie Robinson; the use of performance-enhancing drugs; the struggles of Curt Flood, whose lawsuit against the reserve clause ended up in the Supreme Court; and Rush Limbaugh's bashing of Philadelphia Eagles quarterback Donovan McNabb... Early gives each topic his own unique twist. (S. A. Riess *Choice* 2011-09-01)

Gerald Early is not only the smartest person I know, he is also a constantly surprising thinker. This wonderful series of lectures and essays about the African American experience in sports teaches, challenges, and entertains?with Gerald, that's a given?but most of all, takes us places we never expected to go. There was a moment on every page when I found myself thinking: 'Wow, I never thought about it like that before.' (Joe Posnanski *Sports Illustrated*)

When are sports not 'just sports'? Always, argues Gerald Early, and this fine collection of essays demonstrates why he, perhaps more than anyone else, can make this point most persuasively and most elegantly. Here, with pieces that range in topic from path breakers such as Jackie Robinson and Curt Flood to modern battles between figures such as Donovan McNabb and Rush Limbaugh, Early further solidifies his place as a founding voice in the cultural analysis of American sports. (Amy Bass, The College of New

Rochelle)

Gerald Early is one of the great cultural critics of our time, and a collection like this one here is long overdue. These essays circle around a common question: what other, invisible contests unfold as we regard a sporting event? And what desires, dreams, anxieties, and insecurities are encoded in our worship of (or disdain for) the high-performance athlete? (Hua Hsu, Vassar College)

About the Author

Gerald Early is Professor of English, African and African American Studies, and American Cultural Studies at Washington University in St. Louis.

## **Users Review**

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