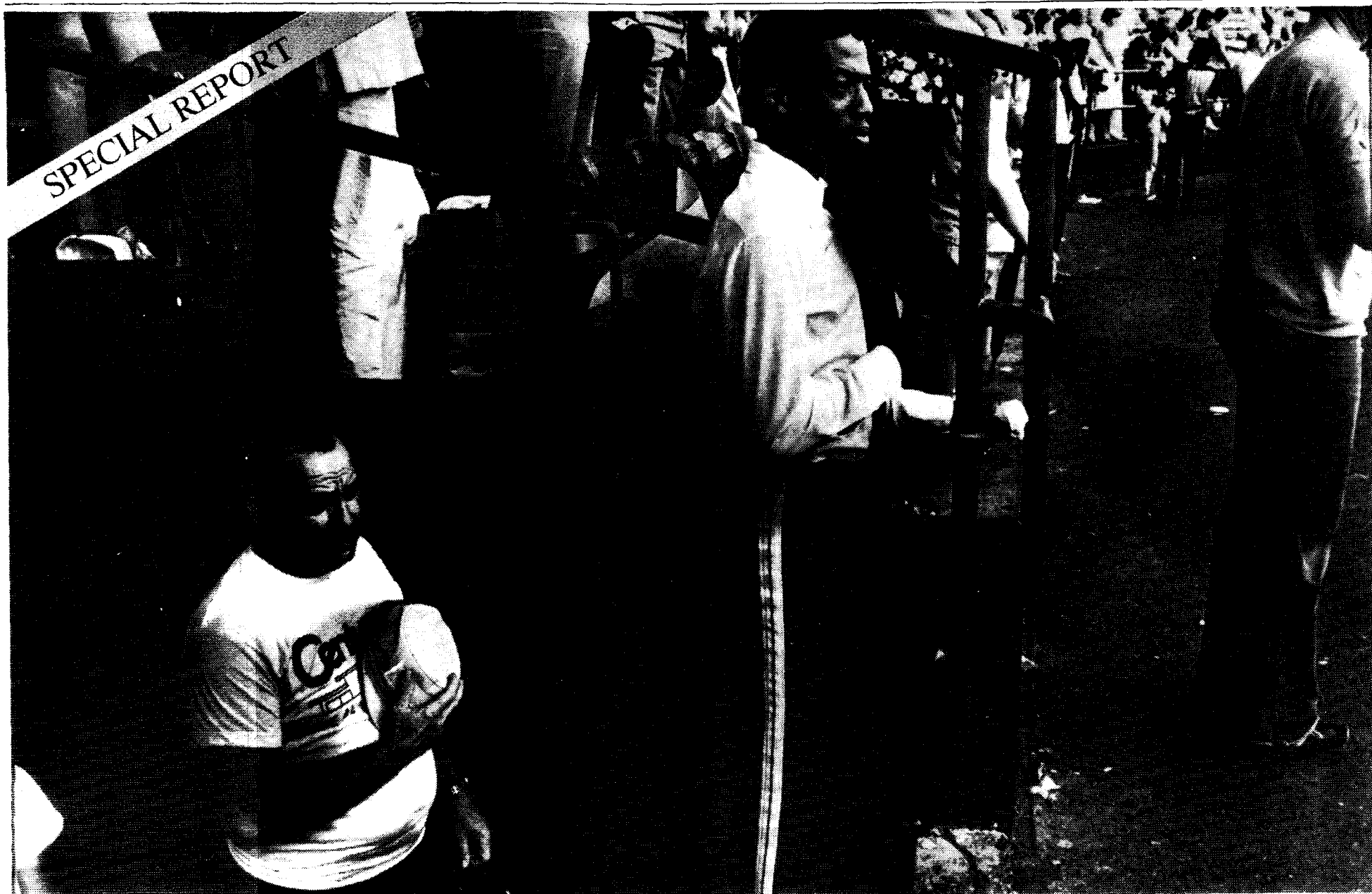


LIFE IN THE U.S.



Meg Gerken

A Consumers' Guide for Sports Activists

By Jim Ford and Mark Naison

RARELY BEFORE IN AMERICAN history have sports been the subject of such widespread controversy and political debate. From the Little Leagues to college campuses to Congressional corridors, battle lines are being drawn that will determine the shape of American sports for years to come—battles concerning the rights and opportunities of women, the training of amateur athletes for international competition, the financial and legal status of professional sports franchises, and the balance between spectator and participatory sports.

Concerned citizens and political activists have usually left the task of confronting the sports establishment to sports reformers. Until recently, owners of sports franchises, heads of athletic departments and administrators of amateur athletics have run their "fiefs" virtually free from public scrutiny and control. Fiscal management, profit grabbing, and exploitation of athletes, fans and taxpayers have thus reached crisis proportions, enough so that publications like *Sports Illustrated* have called for limited government regulation of the sports business.

Political activists have a rare opportunity to help influence the future of American sports by joining sports reform efforts in their communities, schools and workplaces, and by seeking membership in bodies that control the distribution of athletic resources.

The following "Citizens' Guide to Sports Activism" suggests some practical ways to do this.

THE NATIONAL ARENA

Several key issues in sports are currently being debated in Congress or are proper targets of action for national coalitions of sports activists—the enforcement of Title

IX, the legislation providing for equal opportunity for women in intercollegiate and interscholastic sports; the implementation of the President's Commission on Olympic Sports, which has evolved into Senate Bill 2727; and the extension of public control to the financial and administrative practices of professional sports franchises.

THE ENFORCEMENT OF TITLE IX

Since the enactment of Title IX in 1972, coaches, athletic departments and NCAA officials have carried on a well-financed and successful lobbying effort to limit the effect of the legislation. Until recently, HEW public information officer Larry Veniro admits, HEW's Office of Civil Rights—the federal arm authorized to implement Title IX—tacitly aided stonewalling efforts because the Nixon and Ford administrations "weren't sufficiently enthused about Title IX."

Resistance to HEW's malingering on Title IX, both federally and locally, was initially led by NOW's Task Force on Women and Sports, the Women's Equity Action League Education and Legal Defense Fund, and the ACLU's Women's Rights Projects. These organizations initiated lawsuits and lobbied extensively for enforcement of Title IX.

At present, legal, lobbying and research efforts in support of Title IX are coordinated by the National Coalition for Women and Girls in Education (American Council on Education, Office of Women in Higher Education, 1 Dupont Circle, #831, Washington, D.C. 20036). The coalition includes:

- Project on Equal Education Rights, NOW Legal Defense and Education Fund, 1029 Vermont Ave., N.W., Suite 800, Washington, D.C. 20005. PEER monitors enforcement of Title IX in public schools, publishes a free quarterly newsletter *PEER Perspective*, and has published a Resources and Publications List.
- Women's Equity Action League, 805

15th St., N.W., Suite 822, Washington, DC 20005. The SPRINT project of the WEAL Education and Legal Defense Fund publishes a free quarterly newsletter, *In the Running*, issues a sports resource kit for women (\$4.00), and offers a Materials and Publications List.

- Project on the States and Education of Women, Association of American Colleges, 1818 R St., N.W., Washington, DC 20009. PSEW focuses primarily on women in sports at the collegiate level, publishes a free quarterly newsletter, *On Campus With Women*, and offers a Project Materials and Publications List.

- American Association of University Women, 2401 Virginia Ave., N.W., Washington, DC 20037, which lobbies on behalf of Title IX and has prepared the report *Monitoring Title IX: A Guide to Action for the Voluntary Organization* (\$1.50).

- Center for Women and Sport, the Sports Research Institute, White Building, University Park, PA 16802. The Center is expanding research interests in all areas relating to women involved in physical activities.

- Women's Sports Foundation, 1660 South Amphlett Blvd., Suite 266, San Mateo, CA 94402. The foundation is working to involve women in athletics on local and national levels, and publishes the free *Women's Sports Foundation Newsletter*.

Inconsistent lower court rulings have muddled legal efforts to ensure compliance with Title IX. Until a test case is decided by the Supreme Court, there is no certainty that law suits filed—and won—by individuals and organizations will have any impact, nor is it certain whether the complaint procedures available to individuals and organizations through HEW's Office of Civil Rights are concerned citizens' only means of recourse. For information or legal assistance pertaining to Title IX and women in sports contact:

- Women's Rights Project of ACLU, 22 E. 40th St., New York, NY 10016.
- Women's Law Fund, 1621 Euclid Ave., Cleveland, OH 44115.

THE PRESIDENT'S COMMISSION ON OLYMPIC SPORTS: THE AMATEUR ATHLETIC ACT OF 1978

The President's Commission on Olympic Sports was formed in response to the deteriorating performance of American athletes in international competition. Upon termination, it issued a report that criticized existing structures for training amateur athletes, and (implicitly) the absence of public facilities and programs for mass sports participation.

The Commission's report concentrated on improving opportunities for world-class athletes and called for greater corporate involvement in the financing and promotion of amateur sports. It helped pave the way for legislation recently passed by Congress.

The Amateur Athletic Act of 1978 empowers the U.S. Olympic Committee to serve as the coordinating arm for the Olympics and the Pan-American games. Other amateur organizations—the AAU, the NCAA and the AIAW—will have to be certified by the USOC to represent and administer U.S. participation in specific sports and events.

The Act also gives the American Arbitration Association the authority to settle disputes arising between the groups wishing to serve as the national governing bodies in sports such as track and field—where the NCAA and the AAU have locked horns (to the detriment of the sport and the athletes involved)—as well as to resolve athletes' complaints against the governing organizations.

In addition, the Act appropriates \$16 million in federal funds—\$10 million for development programs and \$6 million for Olympic training centers and the creation of a sports-medicine program, both to be administered by the USOC. Not surprisingly, the NCAA at first opposed the law; executive director Walter Byers de-

Continued next page.

clared that "our members will countenance no more federal intervention."

The Act isn't perfect, but it is a first step toward the development of better programs and facilities for sports participation by the general public, if not a prelude to federal regulation of amateur athletics. The bickering between national sports governing bodies over how to divide and spend the money has already started. It is, therefore, important that individuals and organizations monitor the administration of the Act by the USOC and its implementation locally.

THE CONTROL OF PROFESSIONAL SPORTS

For almost a year, the effort to force greater accountability of professional sports franchises has been led by the Ralph Nader spin-off organization, Fight to Advance the Nation's Sports (FANS).

FANS reports the average ticket prices for the four major professional sports—NFL (\$9.67), NBA (\$6.76), NHL (\$7.87) and Major League Baseball (\$3.98)—as well as individual average ticket prices for all of the teams in each league. Its researchers have determined that: the average per team profit in the NFL in 1978 will be \$3.9 million or more and that it will be impossible for any team to lose money this season; ticket prices in all sports bear little or no relation to team costs or player salaries; teams that pay the highest salaries in pro sports are generally the most profitable franchises in their respective leagues; the more equitable a league's revenue sharing, the more financially stable and competitively balanced the league is as a whole; the total public cost for municipal stadiums used by NFL teams is \$837.3 million. Not a single municipal stadium or arena is self-supporting.

In March, FANS proposed new legislation for an anti-blackout law that was subsequently introduced verbatim in both houses of Congress. Other lobbying efforts have included: supporting President Carter's tax reform bill that would eliminate the business tax write-off for purchase of tickets to sports events; calling for full financial disclosure by all professional sports teams; demanding that NFL teams reduce ticket prices, hold the line on present prices and end season-ticket only sales policies; initiating an FCC inquiry into various aspects of sports broadcasting; and prompting support on Capitol Hill to conduct a full investigation into pro sports' anti-trust status.

FANS has studied operations of community-owned teams. It concludes that publicly-owned franchises are financially solvent, unlikely to be uprooted and may be the only way to sustain fan interest and ensure the long range survival of professional sports.

Moreover, in recent months FANS has shed its consumerism-only image by supporting the rights of women as fans and sports participants. It has documented the exploitation of athletes in intercollegiate sports, criticized the lack of adequate intramural programs and recreational facilities available to the non-scholarship-athlete student populations, called for sweeping reforms (read that federal regulation) in intercollegiate athletics, and presented a 14-point "Bill of Rights" for children's participation in sports. FANS has argued that expenditure of public funds would be better used for facilities for the general public than for construction and subsidizing of stadiums for pro teams.

The long-range thrust of FANS is to supplement publicizing of abuses with organizing; it seeks to create a network of autonomous local chapters throughout the country that will provide sports activists an opportunity to become a power on national and local issues.

While FANS has participated in or contributed to local movements in Buffalo, Minneapolis-St. Paul and Los Angeles, the most immediate prospects for viable local FANS organizations exist in the New York City metropolitan area (persons interested should contact: Richard Kessel, 412 Midwood Ave., Belmore, NY 11710) and in the San Francisco Bay area.

Because of inadequate financial support, the Washington, D.C., headquarters of FANS suspended operations at the end of August. The Bay area chap-

ter, however, has begun operations and is assuming the national coordination of FANS. It hopes to continue publications of its monthly newsletter, *LeftField*.

Despite its problems, FANS has had a real impact on sports operations and sports culture. If it falls by the wayside it will be a major setback for the sports reform movement.

Persons who are interested in joining, supporting or working with FANS should

athletic departments determined to field a major college football team at the expense of all else, have met with some success. But without direction from faculty—and the involvement of outside groups such as NOW, the NAACP, Sports for the People, FANS, etc.—campus efforts inevitably die out because the denizens of the athletic departments simply outlast the university life-span of student sports activists.



Meg Gerken

Despite its commercialization, sports is a touchstone of cooperation and creativity for millions of people.

contact: FANS, c/o Ted Vincent, 2333 Fulton, Berkeley, CA 94704, or FANS, P.O. Box 19312, Washington, DC 20036.

THE COLLEGE SCENE

Among the most important sports issues at colleges and universities are: the exploitation of scholarship athletes; the lack of opportunity for women to participate in intercollegiate and intramural sports; the exclusion of blacks, women and other minorities from administrative positions in athletic departments; and required payments by students of inflated "activity fees" that subsidize intercollegiate sports programs.

Sports reform movements on campus have not made much progress. Almost every student, scholarship athlete and faculty member interviewed in the preparation of this guide pointed out that anyone who challenges the college sports establishment faces the threat of expulsion, loss of scholarship or denial of tenure. The following, therefore, is recommended for tenured faculty members or those with a strong campus political base, as it is almost certain to drive powerful alumni and coaches into fits of rage.

As a first step, concerned faculty should seek appointment to "athletic advisory committees" established at most universities to facilitate relationships between the faculty and the athletic department. Many who serve in these positions are "jock sniffers," people who like being around athletes and enjoy the perquisites of friendship with coaches—prime location tickets to games and access to the locker room.

Once gaining an appointment, the position can be used as a forum for greater opportunity for women, to take coaches to task for pushing athletes into non-degree programs and to lobby for the selection of delegates to governing bodies such as the NCAA and the AIAW that are representatives of the university as an educational institution rather than the athletic department solely.

It is essential to unite established campus organizations—black and women's caucuses, student governing groups, campus publications, socialist organizations—into coalitions pressing for the reform of athletic programs. Athletic departments are vulnerable to publicity and pressure since their recruiting and hiring practices are often questionable. Campus-wide campaigns may bring concessions; recent efforts by student governments and senates at various universities, especially schools like Colorado State University where funds are systematically drained from other intercollegiate programs and all intramural programs by

Activists should also seek membership on college admissions committees. This is an excellent way to monitor recruiting policies of athletic departments and to find out if—and how—athletes who have little hope of graduating are being brought in. Information gathered through this channel can be useful in public campaigns.

Since many colleges are publicly supported, pressure should also be brought upon state officials to regain financial and policy control of university athletics from their athletic departments. A pacesetter in this regard is the Student Committee for Educational Equity (SCEE), a state counterpart program to the Massachusetts Department of Education.

Having completed its second year of funding, the SCEE project is focused primarily on the implementation of Title IX. SCEE has started to develop student training materials as well as to establish a model network of student involvement programs designed to bring students into educational decisions at all levels—state, local and regional.

Although SCEE now functions only on the high school level, the concept could easily move beyond that of Title IX and be implemented across the country on college campuses. The SCEE program is worth monitoring as a structural device to create viable college organizations where students would play direct decision-making roles in all sports program policy determinations. (Those who want information about SCEE should write: SCEE, c/o Massachusetts Department of Education, 31 St. James Ave., Boston, MA 02116.)

SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY—THE LOCAL SCENE

Sports provide an excellent nucleus to make questions of democracy and social justice concrete in relation to people's daily lives. Local efforts can be focused on virtually every community governing body—school system and city councils, in particular—all of which make decisions that affect sports participation and programs.

As a first step, concerned citizens should seek election to local school boards using sports reform as a platform. Title IX or not, in most metropolitan areas—and in many small or rural communities—there simply aren't recreational facilities and sports programs available to children of either sex.

With financing problems mounting in public school systems, sports programs have been the first to be slashed or eliminated. This trend should be resisted.

"It's fallacious to think that all child-

ren are motivated to learn through books and classroom instruction alone," says Washington, D.C., school board member Alaire Reifferl. "Without athletics as a stimulus, there is the danger that many kids could be lost to the educational process—especially at the secondary level—and as a result forced into a job market that can't or won't accommodate them, denied any real chance for upward mobility, and abandoned to the Russian Roulette of the streets."

Former NAACP executive secretary Joe Madison struck an analogous chord last fall during his campaign for a seat on the Detroit city council. Sports were one of Madison's major campaign issues, specifically the Detroit Pistons' plans to follow the Lions to the Silverdome in Pontiac. Madison said the move would "feed white suburban fears about downtown Detroit [and] take jobs and revenue out of Detroit." During his campaign Madison spearheaded a group of 25 community organizers representing neighborhood clubs, the Detroit chapters of PUSH and the NAACP, U.S. Reps. John Conyers and Charles Diggs, the head of the Inner City Business Improvement Forum, more than half of the city's public school league's basketball coaches, and other civic leaders into forming the Coalition to Protest the Pistons (COPP).

COPP initiated a petition and letter-writing drive and picketed Pistons' home games. Despite its efforts, however, the Pistons have deserted Detroit, following in the footsteps of a growing number of professional teams that have fled their traditional homes for suburbia.

A similar situation now exists in Minneapolis-St. Paul where the community has been warned that the Minnesota Vikings might leave unless the team gets better facilities—preferably a new domed stadium. Led by stadium vendor Julian Empson, a grass-roots organization called Save the Met Committee has sprung up in the Twin Cities. The Save the Met Committee (P.O. Box 4462, St. Paul, Minn. 55104) favors renovation of the existing Metropolitan Stadium—with limits to be placed on the expenditure of public funds—and is calling for guarantees that will also provide for construction and maintenance of facilities that are used by the public.

Regardless of the outcome in the Twin Cities, the efforts of COPP and the Save the Met Committee point to the need to build community bases for sports-related movements. One of the most effective local sports activist groups is Sports for the People—a New York-based organization which has had spinoffs in Washington, D.C., Pittsburgh, and the California Bay area.

Sports For the People "believes that the beauty, healthfulness and opportunity for self-realization which can be found in the sports experience should be within reach of everyone—young and old, male and female, black and white." The organization has conducted lectures at churches, colleges and community centers; organized a People's Opening Day at Yankee Stadium in which 1,000 people protested the closing of hospitals, schools and the deterioration of parks in the South Bronx; helped organize anti-apartheid demonstrations at the U.S. Open and the Davis Cups; coordinated New York City's first Senior Olympics involving over 1,000 senior citizens; and sponsored a job-a-thon in conjunction with the 11th International Youth Festival which raised nearly \$1,000 for scholarships to send young people from across the U.S. to this year's festival in Havana, Cuba. (Those who wish to contact Sports For the People should write: Sports For the People, 533 W. 134 St., NY, NY 10031.)

CONCLUSION

The activities described here constitute only a first step in what can be an important movement for the democratization of American sports. Despite the corruption of its current forms, sports serve as a touchstone of neighborliness and personal creativity for tens of millions of people, and the ability to incorporate such values into other movements might be a source of great energy and political strength.

ART «» ENTERTAINMENT



The defense attorney (Mike Nussbaum) pleads, and Bigger (Mesach Taylor) rages.

THEATER

Native Son haunts theater

Native Son, Richard Wright's celebrated novel about black life in America, is being staged by Chicago's Goodman Theater as its season's opener. And the question is: why?

Wright based his novel in part on the Robert Nixon murder case, which became a *cause celebre* in Chicago in 1938. Nixon and another young black were accused of beating a white woman to death. They were also accused of rape, although there was no evidence of sexual assault.

The *Chicago Tribune*, in a series of sensationalist articles, depicted Nixon as a "rapist slayer," "jungle beast," and "sex moron." By implication, the black community of Chicago, and indeed the entire race was on trial. The trial was typically brief, the jury deliberating for only one hour. Nixon was sentenced to death in the electric chair. By the time he died, on June 16, 1939, Wright had completed *Native Son*.

The impact of the novel was immense. No more could white Americans look at housekeepers and see the face of a Hattie McDaniel. Bill "Bojangles" Robinson could be smiling and dancing with Shirley Temple, but what was really lurking behind that grin?

Violent truth.

Bigger Thomas, protagonist of the novel, had his roots in the Southern soil, the South that Mississippi born Wright knew all too well and described in *Black Boy*. Bigger was, like Wright himself, a Southern migrant to Chicago. (Wright's bitter experiences there he recalled in *American Hunger*.)

Native Son opens with an act of violence. Bigger kills a rat gleefully, and then threatens his sister with it. The novel then rushes to Bigger's accidental killing of his white employer's daughter, and to his execution. Throughout, one senses a man imprisoned, within a hostile white society and within himself. Violence is the only way he can obtain freedom.

The original version of *Native Son* was produced largely by whites. Orson Welles directed *Native Son* on Broadway. The script was written by white dramatist Paul Green, who had won a

Pulitzer Prize in the '20s for another black drama. He invited Wright down to North Carolina to collaborate with him for only one month, claiming that Wright did not understand stagecraft and therefore should have a limited role in the adaptation.

The reviews of the time recount the amazing impact the play had on the public. Audiences trembled, and membership in interracial societies increased. Unfortunately, critics also noted that the script lacked much of the novel's impact because much of Bigger's motivation could not be translated to the stage. Yet the play, with the novel, ushered in a new era of black protest art.

Native Son as a play has not attracted any major attention since then, until this season's revival at the Goodman. Why was it revived in 1978 in the post-Civil rights era?

Black theater sells.

One answer may be that black theater sells these days. *Ain't Misbehavin'* and *The Wiz* are smash hits on Broadway and *Eubie* (based on the music of Eubie Blake) is settling in for a comfortable run. *Timbuktu*, *For Colored Girls...*, and Sammy Davis Jr.'s *Stop the World...* are doing quite nicely, too. There have also been the black versions of *Guys and Dolls*, and soon to come is a black version of *Pal Joey* with Lena Horne.

Regional theaters depend on less expensive dramas. Chicago, after the resounding success of last season's *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead* by South African dramatist Athol Fugard, is caught up in a kind of Fudarditis. No less than three of his plays are being staged, two by the same theater.

While Fugard is a dramatist of considerable power, and his subject matter—racism and apartheid—is more than worthy, his plays are mainly rooted in the African experience. His locales and circumstances are still far enough away to make us comfortable and smug about the racial situation in America. And *Ain't Misbehavin'* is that old staple of Broadway, the "darky musical." Everyone wants to capture the potentially lucrative black audience. There's gold in them there ghettos.

Although the musicals are brisk, irreverent and fun, they can also be destructive; they destroy the market for work that deals with the reality of black life today. *Mighty Gents*, a play that dealt with black New York street gangs, opened and quickly closed on Broadway. Audiences, blacks and whites alike, have come to expect something with a little bit more finger poppin'.

No longer timely.

One major factor in the impact of Welles' production of *Native Son* was the relevance of the story to its times. The play is firmly grounded in the experience of post-migration blacks, a people confronted with an alien environment. And although the Goodman production is mounted with much skill and concern, *Native Son* is dated in many ways.

Credit must be given to director Gregory Mosher, who has mercifully pared down much of Green's script. He stages the play on a heroic scale, making it appear allegorical. The acting, especially Mesach Taylor's portrayal of Bigger, exactly matches Mosher's vision. The play works because he makes us stand back from it and, at the same time, lets his (mostly white) audience know that the issues in this play aren't as far removed from the present as they would like them to be.

Yet *Native Son* is not meant to be looked at from a distance, to be scrutinized like some rare old jewel that still retains some of its brilliance. *Native Son* was written for its time and in its time by a man burning with the desire to right the injustices that he saw.

And there's the problem. Do you sigh in sadness because things have not changed that much? Do you squirm in boredom? Or do you scratch your head in wonder?

Aren't there more contemporary dramas that deal with the same issues, that hit home and don't allow us to evade the facts in an outdated play? Aren't black writers writing good theater? Or aren't theaters producing them? Is there a black renaissance in the theater or are we going backward?

—Bonnie Greer

Bonnie Greer is a Chicago freelance writer and playwright.

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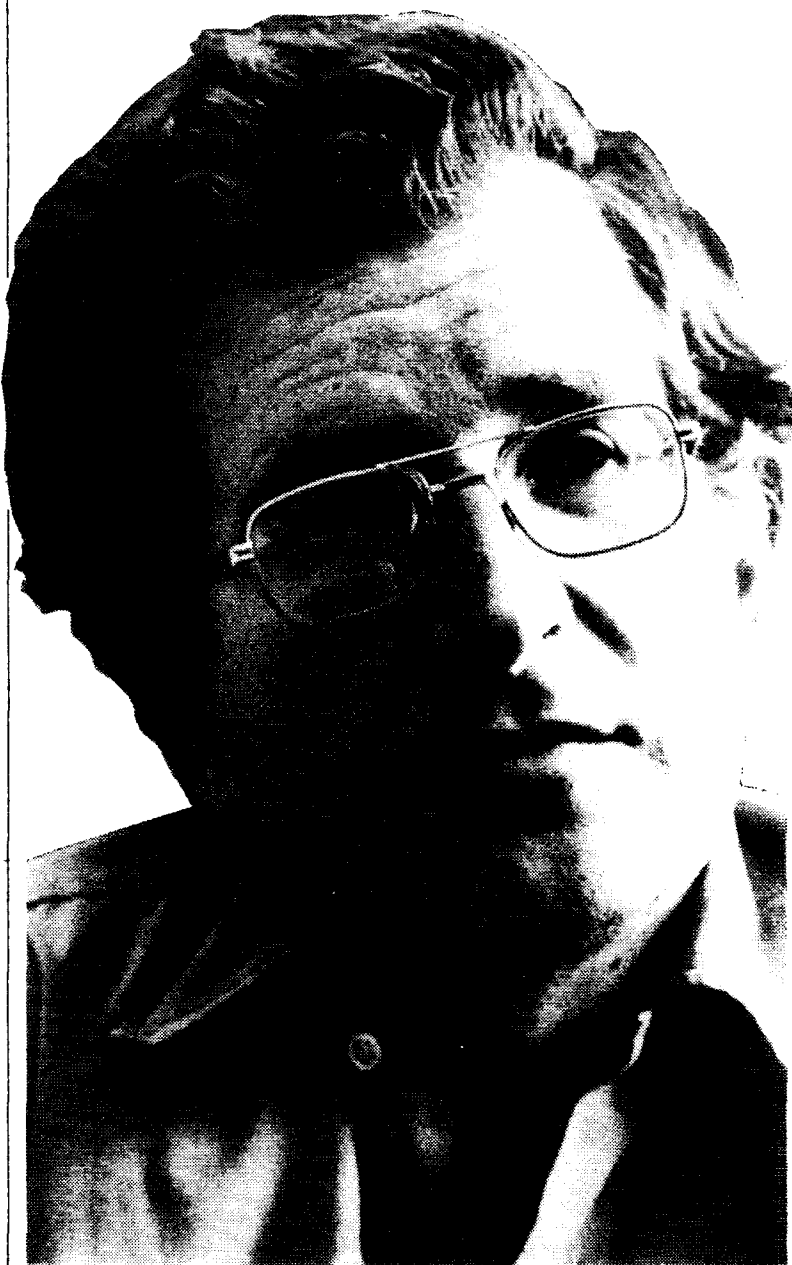
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