Articles

Before the Gold: Connecting Aspirations, Activism, and BIPOC Excellence Through Olympic Skateboarding

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ABSTRACT: *Although scholars have focused on the racial politics of popular and Olympic sports (particularly in the US context), few have addressed issues of race in action sports like skateboarding. Those who do consider race in elite skateboarding broadly frame skaters of color (SOC) as "tokens" with little to no agency. Furthermore, the scholarly literature theorizes skateboarding culture as a space of whiteness, with a limited capacity to act as a contested site of racial politics and fails to include and consider the voices and experiences of elite SOC. This article's interviews with SOC offer firsthand accounts and analysis of the racial politics encountered by elite SOC from the 2020–2021 US Olympic team ahead of skateboarding's Olympic debut in Tokyo. Informed by the activism of critical race theory (CRT), this article gives voice to the previously voiceless. Privileging the stories of elite SOC at the formation or nexus of Olympic skateboarding, the Black Lives Matter Movement (BLM), and rising Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) violence, this research clarifies how elite US Olympic SOC contest racism and stereotypes while navigating "otherness" and "double consciousness" in their role as historic spokespeople for skateboarding, their families, and US communities of color.*

KEYWORDS: skateboarding, racial politics, action sports, social change, athlete activism, Black Lives Matter, sports protests

Recently, US-based media have begun discussing what skateboarding's debut at the 2020ne Tokyo Olympics may mean for disrupting popular US representations of the activity mainly through the lens of "white men." Noting that the US Olympic team consisted of several "minority skaters," or more appropriately skaters of color (SOC), ABC News posited that the Tokyo Olympics offered a more racially diverse crop of skateboarders than typically associated in popular media: "For decades [action] sports were largely represented in the US by white and male superstars—including skater Tony Hawk, . . . but the games have the potential to change that narrative going forward for millions of minority and female fans around the world."[1] This idea of the increasing diversity of elite US skateboarding is also present in articles in the *New York Times* and *Forbes*.[2] These mainstream media outlets chose to represent the future of elite US skateboarding through interviews with SOC, including Nyjah Houston, Heimana Reynolds, Samarria Brevard, and Dashawn Jordan. These athletes, as Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) Olympic hopefuls and members of the elite US skateboarding team, were presented in those publications as representing a counter to stereotypical notions of skateboarding as primarily the space of "white" males.[3]

Investigating the claims of the appearance of greater diversity within elite US Olympic skateboarding, this article engages three SOC from the US Olympic skateboarding team and examines their various experiences. In so doing, it asserts that their presence within the unit is not due to tokenism but athletic ability. Furthermore, the article argues that these SOC reflect deeply upon their place as Olympic team members. It reveals how they utilize their journey toward Olympic gold and their experiences of otherness to counter stereotypes of skateboarding as a space of whiteness while creating space for increased BIPOC presence in elite skateboarding.[4]

In studying these athletes' attempts to create space for BIPOC communities, this research contends that skateboarding culture acts as a site of "contested racial politics" and presents the multiple levels of oppression and agency encountered by BIPOC athletes pursuing Olympic skateboarding.[5] Utilizing CRT's essential component of providing counter-narratives to destabilize racialized beliefs, this research conducts semi-structured interviews with elite Olympic SOC while placing their tales in the context of more significant US movements for racial and social justice.[6] Highlighting the personal thoughts, values, and responsibilities of these SOC follows CRT's tenet of giving "voice to the voiceless."[7] This approach allows SOC to discuss their pursuit of agency and the reality of race and racial stereotypes in their lives before their efforts to participate in the most important sporting exhibition and performance of the sports world, the Olympic Games.

Skateboarding's Early Origins

Skateboarding's entrance onto the Olympic stage is not an accident. International Olympic Committee (IOC) president Thomas Bach declared skateboarding's

inclusion as part of a wider strategy to broaden the appeal of the Olympics Games by reaching younger audiences through the sports they most enjoy.[8] The Olympic stage represents a substantial rise of visibility for an activity with humble provenance. Skateboarding historians largely agree that the genesis of contemporary skateboarding extends from the boredom of California surfers waiting for surf-able waves. At some undisclosed point in their downtime, these innovators affixed various configurations of four wheels to a wooden plank. In their attempt to emulate their favorite surfers, they inadvertently sparked a global sporting revolution.

Finding a new home in the concrete waves of California, they explored the city, playgrounds, and backyard pools with the primary goal of expressing their style in their movements. Their do-it-yourself (DIY) aesthetic, and the pursuit of expression through fluid movements, became a trademark of the fledgling sport and remains an integral component of skateboarding culture. Niche media publications developed to keep the nascent skateboarding community informed—early magazines included *Skateboarder* (founded in the 1970s), *Transworld Skateboarding Magazine*, and *Thrasher* magazine (from the 1980s, though it remains highly valued and continues to circulate globally).[9] Since the early 1990s, there has been an explosion of skateboarding culture into the mainstream consciousness. Skateboarding and skateboarders held prominent positions of visibility in popular television culture, including television shows dedicated to skateboarders on MTV.[10] Sporting events explicitly created for skateboarding and action sports, including ESPN's X-Games, the Dew Tour, and the Street League Skateboarding, are seen in households around the globe.

US institutions such as the Smithsonian and the Kennedy Center have recognized skateboarding as a valuable cultural activity. The US Department of State now utilizes skateboarding as a tool for cultural and sport diplomacy.[11] The number of skateboarders is currently close to 22 million worldwide, with research showing the cottage industry expected to reach a value of $2.4 billion by 2025.[12] Skateboarding's rising popularity and place at the intersection of sport and popular culture continues to drive many non-endemic brands such as Nike, Adidas, Louis Vuitton, and Hermes to enter the market by creating artifacts endorsed by professional skateboarders or reflective of skateboarding culture. It suffices to say skateboarding's multifaceted growth in popularity has enticed many institutions. The IOC, for one, hopes to pique the interests of a youthful multiracial audience who might grow Olympic viewership if they see themselves reflected in the new roster of Olympic sports.[13]

Exploring the Critical Race Theory Framework

CRT (originally US critical law theory) is now used in sport as a tool for interrogating systemic racism and determining how marginalization and discrimination are

reproduced within formal and informal structures.[14] In brief, CRT assumes that racism exists and is not an aberration or the actions of an unruly few, but (consciously or unconsciously) is built into all of the systems within the lives of POC and affects them whether or not they are aware.[15] While there are several tenets of CRT, this research draws from the centering of the BIPOC voice and the social justice element of creating research that highlights how BIPOC people face intersectional oppressions and challenges to reveal how their attempts to address racism are not monolithic.[16]

Following CRT, this research moves beyond a notion of sport as solely "colorblind" or the "great equalizer" and center of meritocracy.[17] This article argues that even when there is a visual representation of BIPOC athletes, these competitors may experience their visibility and time in sport in ways that differ from their white counterparts. Research by Wiggins argues that they, in the terms of Said and Du Bois, may recognize themselves as the racialized "other" and face a notion of "double consciousness," that is, they are both BIPOC *and* athletes operating in a racialized context.[18] The literature suggests this positionality creates different levels of responsibility to their communities of color beyond simply demonstrating their ability to perform.[19] By contributing the stories of BIPOC elite Olympics skaters through semi-structured interviews, this research extends the scholarship on race in sport and the limited research on race in skateboarding culture. In so doing, it follows CRT's goal of contributing to an anti-racist agenda by providing new inclusive perspectives from BIPOC athletes currently marginalized in sports scholarship by arguing that Olympic skateboarding acts as a site of contested racial politics.

Another essential component of CRT resides in its ability to provide counternarratives that disrupt stereotypes.[20] By placing the thoughts, values, and responsibilities of SOC in conversation with larger movements of social justice, this investigation gives "voice to the voiceless" and offsets prior research framing elite POC in skateboarding culture as "dupes" or "tokens."[21] This research allows them to explain their moments of agency and constraint in their own words, prior to the Olympic Games.

Defining Action Sports and Skateboarding's Olympics Development

Skateboarding's Olympic debut in Tokyo represents the labor of multiple skateboarding elites, influential skateboarders, and the IOC working in unison and across interests to implement "Agenda 2020."[22] Compared to heavily regulated Olympics sports such as gymnastics or swimming, skateboarding has primarily operated as an informal sporting culture. It shares a heritage with other action sports (the most widely used name within sports scholarship) or lifestyle sports and will make

its debut alongside surfing and mountain climbing.[23] The action "board" sports (i.e., surfing, snowboarding, skateboarding) are primarily individual, DIY activities emphasizing personal satisfaction through participation rather than competition.[24] Many participants, particularly in skateboarding, view their activity as a form of self-expression, often beyond competition, as part of a community-based practice, and read their involvement in the sport as a central component of their identity.[25] Therefore, their pursuit of the activity often reflects a "lifestyle" choice (such as moving to available snow, surf, or urban environments) that allows them to operate in unison and conversation with the sport and other practitioners for much of their life.[26] In skateboarding, like other action sports, the core businesses, media, events, and contests that serve the global community were developed by participants with deep "insider" knowledge of the norms and values of the culture.[27] Although there is an extensive history of televised skateboarding events since the 1995 ESPN X-Games, professional skateboarding's relationship to formal organizations or non-skateboarder-led competitions continues to operate tenuously at best, with skateboarders' prior aversion to governance well-documented by scholars worldwide.[28]

The Process of Olympic Admission

The IOC was aware of these tensions in skateboarding and how it might affect the sport's reception among both its partners and the skateboarding community. After facing similar challenges in the alignment of values when bringing snowboarding into the Olympics (initially leading to athlete boycotts), the IOC sought to understand how best to present skateboarding and involve skateboarders in the process.[29] In preparation, the IOC conducted research and staged numerous exhibitions and global events, including presentations at the Youth Olympics in China in 2014 and Brazil in 2018.[30]

Most important to this article is the research by Wheaton and Thorpe, which revealed mixed feelings about skateboarding's inclusion in the Games, with more negativity ascribed by mainly white, western male skateboarders.[31] In addition, they noted a small but vocal minority also signed an online petition to keep skateboarding out of the Olympics. Their argument echoed the sentiments from previous scholarship that skateboarding is more akin to a "lifestyle" than a "sport" or competitive activity; therefore, it did not belong in the Olympics.[32] Wheaton and Thorpe also noted that the Olympics offered a unique opportunity to create gender equity within skateboarding culture for women and girls because of the enforced gender equity of Olympic events.[33] Despite the conflicting viewpoints, an overwhelming majority of those surveyed, particularly those from outside the US, stated they would tune in to watch Olympic skateboarding.

To ensure that those interested might enjoy the Olympic skateboarding experience, the IOC worked with several organizations, including USA skateboarding,

to facilitate the sport's debut.[34] However, several power struggles occurred in acquiring the official sanctioning body title for skateboarding.[35] The IOC would eventually recognize an unprecedented partnership of multiple countries, region-specific skateboarding entities, and the Federation de Roller Sports (FIRS). United, the group formed World Skate.[36] The new organization created an unprecedented sharing of power, where experienced skateboarding entities would continue to organize and facilitate the skateboarding contests already in place, like the Dew Tour. FIRS (who held no previous experience in staging major skateboarding events) would lead athlete compliance and doping. These became qualifiers for the Olympics, with competitors earning points toward their country's Olympic team.[37]

Each of the participants in this study—African American female Sammaria Brevard, African American male Dashawn Jordan, and Asian American Pacific Islander Heimana Reynolds—earned their spot as US Olympic team members through points from multiple skateboarding events. At the time of writing, each member held a place on the team, although there were still several contests left for final qualifications. US skateboarding also introduced a "Golden Ticket" system. The winners of those final contests would automatically head to Tokyo regardless of their previous standings. This element could ultimately affect the seven BIPOC athletes currently among the twenty-one members of the Olympic team and the final Olympic representation.[38]

While the skateboarding community writ large grappled with these fundamental changes to what has been an unregulated sport, the IOC moved ahead to create Olympic skateboarding for the Tokyo Games. Skateboarding is part of the list of sports at Paris 2024, and with California being the ancestral home of skateboarding, it is likely to be added to the schedule in Los Angeles 2028.

Athletes Making Meaning of Olympic Skateboarding

In what follows, I present interview data organized into three themes: legitimacy, respect, and the expression of joy. For each participant, I interweave the data with close analyses of its pertinence to the theme and its theoretical relevance using CRT.

Earning Legitimacy

African American female Sammaria Brevard grew up skateboarding in Riverside, California, among her brothers and a community of Black skateboarders. Brevard's account provides an example of how membership to the Olympic team reframed how professional skateboarding might be interpreted as being as "serious" or legitimate as other contemporary Olympic sports: "My mom was excited about me being on the Olympic team, but my *brother—he* was the most excited! He's a *real* sports fan. He can name other Olympians in tennis, track—all sports, so for him, it's huge! He tells me how big it is and what it means to be part of the Olympics! It's a real

moment and accomplishment to him."[39] Brevard's statement shows that the Olympic skateboarding phenomenon is still becoming understood as an important new marker of an elite skateboarder's identity. The "realness" or "validity" of skateboarding stems from its newfound association with other established athletics. In this case, the symbolic representation of the sport under the Olympic heading positively changes perceptions and adds legitimacy.[40]

Remarks by Heimana Reynolds also support the theme of gaining legitimacy by participating in the Olympics. Reynolds, an Asian American Pacific Islander, grew up skateboarding in Hawaii with a family lineage in action sports. In his words: "If we want skateboarding to continue to grow, I think that the Olympics is a perfect platform for that. It'll show the public and the Olympic community—that this is a beautiful sport. Growing up skating, my goal was the X Games. I made it, and I wanted to make the Dew tour. I made it. Next up is the Olympics."[41] Reynolds's anecdotes demonstrate that the Olympics represent the chance for skateboarding to be taken "seriously" and appreciated while also serving as a natural evolution for skateboarding culture. Attending the Olympics also serves as an opportunity for Reynold's continued personal growth.

Similarly, African American Deshawn Jordan, who grew up skateboarding among only a handful of Black skateboarders in Arizona, noted that he and his family intrinsically understood that his place on the Olympic team conferred a new level of professionalism and credibility: "For my family, just being on the team in general, they were super stoked, especially for a sport where they obviously didn't even see it coming. They are still learning about skating and what skateboarding is, but as far as joining the Olympic team? *That* accomplishment—they were super stoked and beyond supportive of it."[42] Jordan's reflection points to his family's familiarity with the Olympics and recognition of team membership as the pinnacle of the sport—thereby creating validity even when derived from an unfamiliar sport. This finding suggests that traditional sports still hold a degree of influence (however complicated) within African American communities.[43] Close reading also indicates that Jordan experiences a degree of "disconnect" and "dual consciousness" between himself, his family, and their understanding of skateboarding culture. Here, Jordan is the pioneer in the family entering the unfamiliar territory of skateboarding, which is often stereotypically depicted as a "white space" in media.[44] Despite this, Jordan's family celebrates his privileged position, viewing his placement on the Olympic team as a familial success.

Respect and Joyful Creativity

Another theme reflected in the Olympic meaning for SOC appeared as "joy" in exposition. Reynolds envisioned the Games as an entry point to skateboarding culture for the uninitiated spectator. A place where one might be inspired by witnessing

young contestants reveling among themselves during a contest. He elaborated: "Some parents know nothing about skateboarding other than 'delinquent kids' that trespass. Once they see it in the Olympics and that we are real 'athletes,' we 'train' *and* we have fun and love it—they're going to want their kids to try this amazing sport we call skateboarding. We will show them a lot of creativity behind it. Even when we compete, we are all friends. It's why we love the sport. We want to try to bring [that] all out [of] the other sports."[45] In this statement, Reynolds alludes to the documented negative stereotypes often ascribed to skateboarding and hopes that the Olympics would allow audiences to interpret Olympic skateboarding as more than "competitive athleticism" but as a physical manifestation of individual and communal joy and triumph.[46]

Moreover, Reynolds's statements suggest that skateboarding might offer a commodity to the Olympic viewership—a palpable demonstration of spontaneous creativity resulting from having genuine fun even during competition. Upon examination, this can be interpreted as an attempt to reframe future tournaments and deflate the perceived value of competition. Theoretically, this attitude could provide inroads toward new narratives of athlete enjoyment and positive mental health at the Olympics.

Dashawn Jordan also spoke of the Olympics as a highly visible gateway for neophytes to view skateboarding as joyful self-expression: "I definitely think [the Olympics] is a great foundation, an opportunity for people to get into it [viewing it] at a higher level, so that they become attached. Then [they will] just dig into skateboarding even deeper. That's where the other half of skateboarding is revealed."[47] Beyond competition, the other "half" for Jordan was the joy of self-expression: "Skateboarding was fun first and foremost, and the more I was into it, *then* I entered contests, but it always comes down to expressing yourself first as a skater in your [personal] skateboarding. I want people to see that at the Olympics; that's what's important."[48] Jordan's statement demonstrates that even amid the most significant athletic competition, having fun and expressing joy remains at the core of effectively communicating skateboarding culture on the Olympic stage. Applying a critical examination to Jordan's and Reynolds's statements speak to the original DIY ethos and informality, which has kept all of these Olympic SOC engaged.

The need for "joy, fun, and self-expression" during the Olympics may sound simplistic; however, as documented, there is a substantial decline in young people (pre-COVID) who participate in youth sports. A key reason is the lack of fun experienced by young people due to external pressures placed on the athletes.[49] In contrast, during this research, each skater spoke of the ability to express joyfulness in their skateboarding, which remains a central component of their continued experience and love of professional skateboarding and their willingness to participate in the Games.

Carrington's and Shropshire's scholarship postulates that the freedom to "enjoy" participation in a sporting activity rather than feeling the pressure to appear "superhuman" while engaged in elite level sport is a rarity for POC.[50] As CRT's application in sport suggests, formalized US sports exist within a racialized context, with many born and competing within a history of US segregation and complex racial politics. Their work notes that there is often additional pressure for BIPOC athletes to perform and remain a positive "racial" ambassador. Thus, the mention of any level of "freedom" or the "joy" in participating in a new "sport" where competition is not the sole focus, or value of one's contribution, indeed signifies a radical potential site of change for the sporting lives of POC.

Together, the interviews demonstrate that SOC recognize skateboarding's Olympic debut as a new global platform to legitimize skateboarding culture and inspire and inform multiple audiences. These SOC hope that non-skateboarding communities might be moved by the creativity and physicality of skateboarding, which might encourage participation and exploration of the culture. Additionally, these SOC recognize there is a level of dissonance between skateboarding's informal past and the formality of the Olympics. However, they believe the Olympics offer a global outlet for skaters to celebrate the joy and fun of competition. With this movement, the skateboarding community continues to gain value and legitimacy under a new banner of respect commanded by its appearance alongside other Olympics sports. This section fills a gap in the literature by utilizing CRT to allow SOC to speak to how they made meaning of skateboarding under the Olympic banner.

The previous scholarship that framed skaters of color as "dupes" or "tokens" with limited agency within skateboarding culture perpetuates the myth of BIPOC skaters as anomalies.[51] The following section argues that the narratives of Black Power and Black agency have resided within professional skateboarding since the 1970s. This Black Power framework continues in a contemporary setting among SOC. It includes the iconography of the raised Black fist as a tool used by Olympic team SOC to demonstrate their agency and connection to the Black community.

Exploring Racial Pride and Politics through the "Z-Boys" Experience

To understand how BIPOC skaters envision utilizing the impending Olympics to elevate skateboarding as a space that challenges racial oppression involves investigating an origin story for an agent of change—Skateboarding Hall of Fame (SHOF) member and African American Marty Grimes. Through the incorporation of CRT and close analysis, this section outlines three significant themes that provide evidence of the historical foundation for skateboarding as a site of social change: navigating everyday racism, developing allyship, and interpreting lessons from the Olympic

Project for Human Rights (OPHR) movement, which influences the contemporary group of Olympic SOC.

Navigating Everyday Racism

Marty Grimes lived through the United States' tumultuous civil and racial unrest of the 1970s as part of the much-lauded "Zephyr" competition skateboarding team, or "Z-Boys" (later Z-Flex). Their efforts were featured in the films *Dogtown and Z-Boyz* (2001, dir. Stacy Peralta) and *Lords of Dogtown* (2005, dir. Catherine Hardwicke).[52] This early pioneering multiracial, multigendered, group-initiated backyard "pool" skateboarding inspired early "street" skateboarding. Their innovations live on as the Olympics skateboarding disciplines of "park" (a more muscular version of pool skating) and "street" (obstacles based on the urban environment), the most widely practiced types of skateboarding. Before joining the professional ranks, Grimes and his crew of African American skaters were well known throughout LA as a talented group—breaking racial barriers and the norms of "segregated" or "white" space long before becoming professional. SHOF member and "Z-Boy" Stacy Peralta spoke of Grimes's prowess and the racialized nature of 1970s LA: "Marty and his crew were ripping, and we knew each other's skating before we really knew each other. I was always in awe because they were Black skaters in 'white' neighborhoods in LA—trespassing to skate. That was very dangerous for them. Who knows what could have happened with them and the police? Or the owners? Back then, even our schools had race riots. They were incredibly brave."[53] Peralta's description highlights the racial tension of that era and the precarious environment for young Grimes and his cohort's pursuit of skateboarding. Grimes describes how race and the prevalence of racism informed his experience in the concrete jungle of LA: "It was the '70s! Racism was EVERYWHERE. You couldn't escape it. But we were going to be skateboarders no matter what. No one was going to stop us. It was our city as much as anyone else's. We stood our ground and got into fights when we had to. If white people were cool with us, then we would be cool. But even if not, we were going to skate—REGARDLESS."[54]

Grimes's statements underpin an understanding of racism as simply part of life for Black people during the 1970s. As CRT posits, BIPOC communities in the US operate in a fundamentally racist world that impacts their pursuit in all avenues of their lives, including leisure.[55] Grimes's experience demonstrates how the quest to create space for themselves became hazardous because they were young Black people. The group encountered racism and placed themselves at substantial risk beyond the physicality of the activity; in this regard, they differed from their white counterparts. Despite the dangers, Grimes would not let racism deter himself or his band of Black skaters in their pursuit of skateboarding in Los Angeles.

Allyship, Agency, and Outcomes

Skateboarding did not simply bring separation and antagonism for Grimes—it also planted the seed for allyship. After joining the "Z-family" at the behest of "white" skater and legendary "Z-Boy" Jay Adams, Grimes became their first African American professional and team member, skating alongside two SHOF members: Asian American Shogo Kubo and Jay Adams.[56] In conversation, Grimes elaborated on the process of this foundational union and his excitement in seeing similar diversity within the US Olympic team: "Jay was more concerned with seeing what skateboarding could be as a space for "everybody." My skills were there, but companies were not sure if they could make that leap. Jay stepped in and said, '[Marty] He's a great skater—he's with "Z-Flex" [skateboards]! That started it all—and we never looked back. We [POC] earned our place in skateboarding and have always been here if people cared to look. Seeing all the POC [now] on the Olympic team is as it should be. It's a beautiful thing."[57] Grimes's comments point to how racism initially affected his mobility in professional skateboarding. Here, Grimes is fully aware of his positionality, as both Black *and* an athlete, and therefore the "other" attempting to create power and a strategy to thwart racism. Yet the unique "informality" of skateboarding culture allows Grimes to generate power and move beyond the racial norms of the time. This subsequently transforms skateboarding into a contested site of racial politics. In bonding together through a shared love of skateboarding culture, their developing allyship allowed Grimes, Adams, and Kubo to dismantle anti-Black norms and extend the possibilities of elite skateboarding to include African Americans.

Grimes's ability to counter racism and develop partnerships was visibly represented in niche media, like *Skateboarder* magazine, which encouraged other POC.[58] Cofounder of lauded skateboarding publication *Transworld Skateboarding Magazine*, African American Bryan Ridgeway felt heartened by the multiracial unit: "As a young Black kid in Virginia, seeing [Marty] Grimes in *Skateboarder* magazine as part of the great 'Z-Boys'—amazing—inspirational. Here is a Black guy—ripping with Shogo [Kubo], Alva, Peralta, Jay Adams! I showed my parents his pictures as proof that I wasn't the only Black skateboarder and that Black people were right alongside the greats. It showed us the possibility that we could all be together. [Later] that's what I showed in the magazine [*Transworld*]. That's what I'm excited to see in the Olympics—our legacy."[59] Ridgeway's quote frames Grimes's board prowess and his alignment in a racially integrated team as positively contributing to his understanding of the racial potential of skateboarding culture beyond his local perspective. This example evidences a direct connection between the actions of Grimes and Ridgeway's future development of a pro-BIPOC agenda within his position at *Transworld Skateboarding Magazine*.

Prior CRT-based sports scholarship makes clear that positive representation matters for BIPOC communities.[60] These challenges to racial norms in the 1970s created the opportunity for skateboarding culture to be envisioned as an inclusive, inspiring environment that recognized BIPOC skateboarding identities. It also reveals the powerful potential of informal sporting cultures to act as a platform for change. Furthermore, this analysis maintained that contrary to prior research, historical struggles for racial justice, rather than tokenism, laid the groundwork for the diversity represented within the current US Olympic skateboarding team.

The informal structure of skateboarding culture created space to challenge racism. The following section argues that the anti-racist tactics evoked during the formal system of the 1968 Olympics may offer insights to SOC in the Olympic arena.

Lessons from the OPHR Movement

As a sports veteran, Grimes witnessed African American athletes engaged in acts of symbolic and defiant protest at the 1968 Olympic Games in Mexico City as part of the OPHR movement. Grimes reflected on the differing contexts for the 1968 Olympics and current racial injustices. He also afforded advice on how BIPOC Olympians might best negotiate the Olympics as a station for activism: "At that time [1960–1970s], it was the raised 'Black fist'—but maybe it's time to raise the American flag [as] a better reflection of the current climate! To remind people that America is made up of a diverse group—including Black people. The Olympics are a platform to engage the world. It is going to take real thinking through to get it [the tactics] right. No matter what, Black and Brown skateboarders in the Olympics will make people do their research. We were always here."[61] Grimes's ruminations speak to the importance of understanding that historical symbols may have less usefulness in the current environment. Grimes's observations also situate the need to capitalize on Olympic visibility. The flag is a compelling signifier capable of calling attention to the duality of the US BIPOC identity. It capitalizes on the narrative of America as an "all-powerful" sporting body—while demanding viewers dare not turn away from the reality of US diversity.

These comments suggest to Olympian SOC that "we POC are you, America, and you are us—meaning there is no mistaking the "double consciousness" experienced by athletes of color. As W. E. B. Du Bois posits, for the experience of Black and POC, they are both Black *and* American, an unerasable reflection. Seizing upon a moment of Black excellence in sport at the Olympics may provide the opportunity to deliver a transformative message of racial justice that connects the history of SOC and the US BIPOC experience.

Grimes spoke candidly about the realities of the cost to Tommie Smith and John Carlos for their raised fist protests during the 200-meter medal ceremony at

the 1968 Olympics.[62] Grimes elaborated: "It was hell for those guys returning from the Games. They made a stand, and it was an important one, but it wasn't easy to do, and they paid the price. We always do. For us [Black skaters], it meant we had to [physically] fight racist skaters at the skateparks. [Olympic skaters] need to do what makes sense for them. Black people and skaters have always found a way to make things change, [protest] even if it's under the radar."[63] Grimes alludes to the historical price paid by athletes of color who have stood for racial and social justice, from Muhammad Ali[64] to Colin Kaepernick,[65] Arthur Ashe, and other BIPOC athletes.[66] As a participant mentally and physically engaged with creating change and racial justice in skateboarding, Grimes's concerns also highlight the need to make the most impactful and meaningful moment based on positioning and grasping the "right" moment.

Explored through CRT, Grimes's warnings support Hill-Collins's contention that POC live within a "web" of systemic racism, which consistently oppresses BIPOC people and attempts to limit their agency.[67] Moreover, POC experience lives "constrained" by racism and oppression in an intersectional manner because racism exists in every facet of US life.[68] Due to this, in short, POC must operate aware of the "right" moments to demonstrate agency because there are few "safe" spaces free from repercussions that might affect them in the future.

Adjusted for SOC at the Olympics, the lack of safety when voicing concerns in the past hypothetically generates a real-world scenario of potential harm for BIPOC people. Although the image of Tommie Smith and John Carlos represents an enduring moment of protest, only now do we acknowledge the Herculean effort it took to accomplish the demonstration and navigate the fallout.[69] As presented by Wiggins, the dual-consciousness of being an athlete and a Black athlete nearly always requires numerous negotiations of identities, which remains a salient part of the experience of BIPOC people in sport.[70] This dual consciousness reflected in Grimes's comments reminds us that moments of agency must be negotiated. POC are not free to simply act as they want to and to protest, yet they do—-even when the action goes unnoticed by non-BIPOC audiences. Despite this, as CRT posits, change can occur incrementally, and even small challenges to power are worthy of examination in the search for an anti-racist agenda.

Finally, Grimes's musings serve as a reminder that representation matters. As discussed by Sanders and Bajo, Black visibility and positive representation of the community and its members help improve the self-image of Black people: positive depictions "have the potential to shape these different aspects of self-concept, namely African Americans' self-esteem and self-efficacy or group vitality."[71] SOC at the Olympics will force the audience to rethink notions of skateboarding as a solely white space, thus disrupting previous narratives and furthering the discussions of missing representations of SOC in media.

With this analysis concluded, the following section argues that skateboarding continues to serve as a platform to link Olympic SOC to struggles for BIPOC communities. Furthermore, past efforts influence new strategies which might create protest and resistance as they head to the Olympics.

Establishing the Black Power Narrative in Skateboarding Graphics and Culture

The raised-fist Black Power salute is one of the most well-known sports protests.[72] Long a symbol of the Black Power movement, it symbolizes solidarity for Black and African American people in the US.[73] The 1968 Olympic images represent a fixture in protest in traditional sport and have influenced skateboarding iconography since the mid-1990s.[74] Although multiple companies used different images to speak to the identity of BIPOC skaters, this discussion maintains that skateboarding culture created avenues for discussions of racial politics and inclusion through art influenced by the OPHR. Building upon that connection, history bridges the BLM movement and a pro-BIPOC agenda for Olympic SOC.[75]

In the simplest form, the board graphic (the image on the underside of a skateboard) is most readily associated with the elite skater and their choice of image or icon to represent themselves in their signature professional skateboards.[76] One of the first images of the representation of Black skate identity belongs to Marty Grimes. His signature board graphic featured an image of a Black Panther atop the Z-Flex team logo. During one of our interviews, Grimes recalled the meaning of the image: "It was an ode to my Black heritage and my cat-like reflexes at the time."[77]

In later eras, companies like American Dream Skateboards, co-owned by African American skaters Ron Allen and Alysha Owerka-Moore, would appropriate Tommie Smith and John Carlos's image and likeness as their company logo (see figures 1 and 2). Previous research spoke of their brand's "pro-Black agenda" and focus on images of Black Power and BIPOC icons during the mid-1990s.[78] Although many skateboarding companies embraced a similar pro-BIPOC strategy, the image from the 1968 Olympics produced a foundational ad campaign and board graphics that continue to influence contemporary skateboarding culture.

Contrasting current scholarship, which suggests that action sports like skateboarding are a space of either white males fleeing a multicultural society or limited agency for POC, further examination suggests otherwise.[79] Women's Olympic team member African American Samarria Brevard, through her history as an agent of change and her recent board graphic, provides the latest example of a counter-narrative that I argue continues the legacy of advocacy and activism in skateboarding.[80] Brevard announced her introduction into the professional ranks by explicitly using the raised Black fist. In conjunction with the art department, Brevard

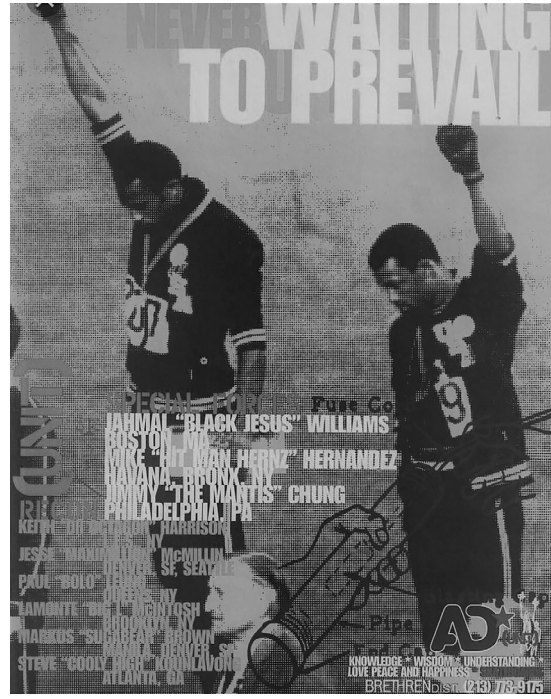

Figure 1. American Dream skateboards advertisement. Black Activism, skateboarding, and sports history intersect in this advertised reinterpretation of Tommy Smith and John Carlos at the 1968 Olympics for American Dream Incorporated (ADI). ADI used its branding, marketing, and iconography to advocate a pro-BIPOC agenda through skateboarding culture.

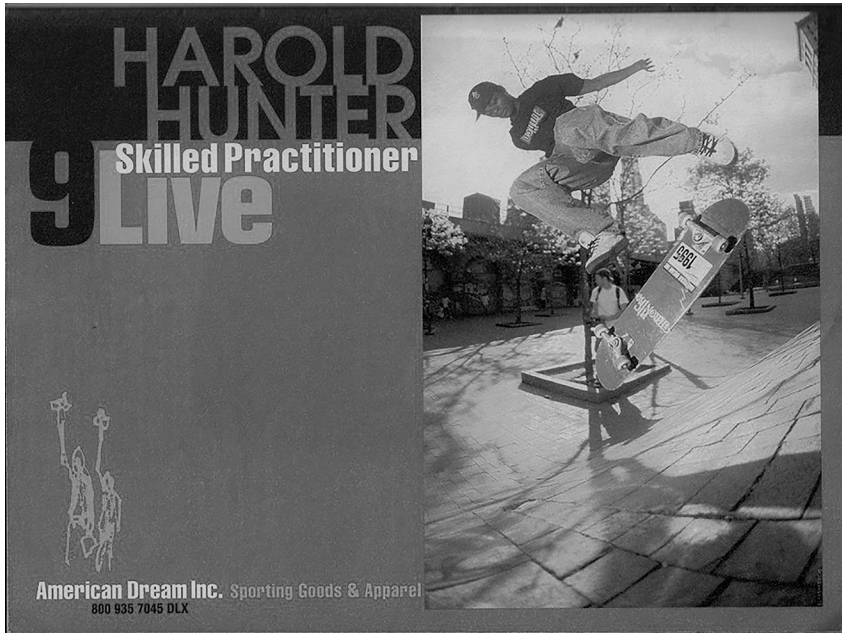

Figure 2. African American pro skater Harold Hunter featured skateboarding at the Brooklyn Banks in a 1995 ad by the African American–owned skateboarding company American Dream Inc., whose logo is an illustration paying homage to John Carlos and Tommy Smith's raised Black fist during the OCHR protest in 1968.

developed a signature board graphic that reflected her ideals and values (see figure 3), signifying her arrival as a professional while quietly speaking to her politics and identity as a Black person. During our interview, Brevard reflected on the significance of the image: "It was all about change. I felt like it [the raised Black fist] was a powerful symbol of uprising, and when he showed me [the final graphic], I thought . . .Yeah, I'll back that graphic 100%! They [my family] liked it a lot. They were stoked about it."[81]

Although it might seem intuitive to celebrate one's identity and Blackness amid growing social justice movements, Brevard's graphic arrived *before* the global protests sparked by the murder of George Floyd.[82] However, in the wake of the BLM protests, Brevard's iconic image took on an even more salient role. Moving from graphic design toward action to create change, Brevard and her sponsor funneled portions of the sale of items with the graphic to a non-profit educational organization to support BIPOC students in marginalized communities in Los Angeles. As Brevard elaborated, "We're about to re-release them and have some of the proceeds go to this organization that helps children that don't have proper school access. To help enrich their brains for the future."[83] Brevard's use of the Black fist iconography plays a dual role. It first acts as a sign of personal representation. Second, it draws a new line between iconography and skateboarding by providing connective tissue between her skateboarding and education in the Black community. Moreover, it also connects to the lineage of BIPOC elite skaters like Grimes, who utilized board graphics to signify their identity to the public or to bring their racial politics into skateboarding culture. Brevard's actions and responses to the Black fist also play a further role—it sets the stage for skateboarding as a site of resistance for Brevard and other Olympians heading toward the sport's debut at the Tokyo Olympics.

Figure 3. African American pro skater Samarria Brevard's use of the raised Black fist during her professional debut contributed to a pro-Black agenda in skateboarding and broader historical movements for racial justice. Image Courtesy of Bod Boyle and Steve Douglas.

The Impact of the 1968 Olympic Protests on Olympic SOC

This section asserts that, with Olympic skateboarding entering the sporting zeitgeist, there are multiple ways skaters internalized the 1968 Olympics protest. Each plays a significant role in the way SOC approach the Tokyo Olympics as a site of protest. Analysis revealed the major themes of their agenda for the Olympics involved resistance, advancing communal knowledge, and rebuilding familial legacy. For the sake of brevity, one example is afforded to the generalizable findings from all participants.

Resistance

Samarria Brevard intimated, precisely because of the 1968 Olympics and her new role as an Olympic team member, that the Olympics operated as a place of protest: "I'm *definitely* thinking about my potential role and position in the Olympics. I've seen the photo of Tommie Smith and John Carlos and watched the documentary. It's a big moment to be on the podium. I've thought about where we are now and what should I do? Could I have done what they did? That was a big moment for them. [I think] What should I do?"[84] Brevard's situational awareness of past protests and their influence on her thinking demonstrates that the resistance of the 1968 Olympics still holds resonance among the new BIPOC Olympian community. For Brevard, potentially tackling the Olympic arena also means grappling with the possibility of an additional responsibility of protesting for her community of color. When queried about a specific plan for the Olympics, Brevard stated it was unneeded. Brevard claimed, "I haven't made a decision yet, but I know that when the moments there, I'll know what to do. I don't feel any pressure.[85]

Upon examination, the concept that whatever action generated will be "correct" is a powerfully mature statement by Brevard. It seems to reflect faith in herself and her own identity as a person of color and confidence in her ability to assess any situation properly. Regardless of Brevard's final tactics or ability to implement them at the Olympics, her comments highlight an understanding of the need to demonstrate solidarity or resistance as part of a recognition of past and present struggles of POC. The line of discussion firmly reflects the seriousness of Brevard's thinking surrounding the Games and her role as an ambassador for BIPOC and skateboarding communities.

Advancing Communal Knowledge

Olympic team member Dashawn Jordan is also deeply aware of his place as a Black athlete and the history of Black people as advocates during the Olympics. Disclosing that he always "loved the photo [of the 1968 black power salute] and its importance to the Black community," Jordan noted that his family had not pressured him to devise a plan of protest were he to make it to the Olympic stage.[86] Still, particularly

after the death of George Floyd and amid the global BLM movement, he expressed that the entire family understood the potential power of the Olympics as a platform for protest. However, Jordan denied that it posed an extreme burden" "No, not really, but my family, of course, we know what's happening [BLM]. We're in the mix, culture-wise, with everything. My family has always done a great job and wanted me to look at things in a very positive way, [saying] 'African Americans at the Olympics is huge' [historic]—you have to realize it and [that] everything is a little different for you' [being Black]. You had to do it on your own."[87] When examined through CRT, this anecdote supports the notion of dual consciousness present in sports and the reality of the BIPOC experience as the other.'[88] Jordan's family recognized him as a pioneer. Jordan's efforts create space and future communal knowledge for the BIPOC communities in sport and could increase the visibility of Black people at the Olympics. Moreover, the family recognized that his presence as an African American male would be a sign of change and lead to potential disruption of the perception of skateboarding as a stereotypically white space.

Jordan acknowledged the magnitude of representing skateboarding in its fledging stage at the Olympics and the shifting insider-outsider relationship that comes with his status as an elite athlete and his identity as an African American male.[89] In his push toward the Olympics, Jordan acknowledges that he does hold a decidedly pro-Black agenda: "As an African American, I want to motivate other Black people and people of African American descent to want to do it [skate] and believe they can feel comfortable. It's kind of my overall goal—use my skating to make the 'un-do-able' the 'do-able.' The Olympic team is a platform for that.'[90] Jordan's clarifications point toward a plan to act as an agent of change, to be socially and culturally accepted as a Black man in skateboarding and the Olympics. The possibility of his presence in the Olympics and his place as a Black man in skateboarding acts as a form of resistance because his place on the team represents African American excellence in sport.

Furthermore, upon examination, Jordan's racial background and agenda are not open to interpretation. This example is important because, in other research concerning prominent athletes like Michael Jordan, scholars often question the relationship of Black athletes to the Black community through their interpretations of a "floating signifier" of his Blackness.[91] Utilizing CRT's tenet of giving voice to the lives of BIPOC individuals, this example leaves little room for misinterpretation. Jordan is indeed a young Black man trying to inspire other young Black people to pursue skateboarding. His actions should not be judged through the lens of historic Black people seeing as how their actions and representations at the Olympics can contribute to the struggle of Black people and create change.

Echoing his counterpart Brevard, Jordan also began formulating a strategy of charity events focused on communities of color. "I'm just doing little give-backs, and

I hope that keeps people hyped and inspired."[92] The Olympics also fit into Jordan's plan to build upon and augment his current non-profit efforts into a sustainable future. In combination, the stories of Brevard and Johnson offer perspective into the experience of African Americans transferring communal knowledge in sport and the mindset employed by elite SOC hoping to add to the legacy of the Olympics as a site of protest for African Americans.

Rebuilding Familial Legacy

While the previous skaters' opinions focused on the African American perspective, discussions with AAPI skater Heimana Reynolds revealed that the Black Power salute and the Olympics as a site of resistance resonated across racial lines. For Reynolds, the George Floyd murder, BLM movement, and increasing AAPI violence aroused alarm, which struck him on a visceral level: "When I think about it all, it hurts me. All the protests worldwide stem from people putting down people of color, Asians, and others. Why? Why is this [racism] even an issue in this day and age? I can't believe it's happening, and we aren't past the divisions."[93] Reynold's plea speaks to how he believed overt racism was a relic of the past but became aware of the structural racism in the US. Furthermore, he learned how quickly any marginalized group like the AAPI community could become the target of racial violence. Reynolds understood that the Olympics might offer him a chance to represent the AAPI community proudly: "My dad grew up skating in Hawaii with his brothers and cousins, and they'd have ramps in the driveway his entire life. Coming from Hawaii, skateboarding and surfing go hand in hand. My family are super excited for me to hopefully make the [final] Olympic team. These sports are part of everyone's lives in Hawaii. I represent that history."[94] These statements point to the skateboarding identity as part of a familial legacy of BIPOC sporting lives in Hawaii. Reading these statements critically reveals skateboarding and surfing exist as essential components representing an important lineage within the AAPI community. The Olympics play an integral part in Reynold's plan to promote this history. Olympic skateboarding allows for an amplification of the idea that skateboarding does not exist as a solely white space. Through this program, Reynolds contributes to the legacy of BIPOC athletes attempting to use the Olympics as a site of resistance and social change.

Pushing Forward

This article offers a multigenerational, multiracial perspective of how the 1968 Olympic protests remain relevant to BIPOC elite skaters and inform the best strategies to address racial and social justice issues at the Olympics. Through the use of CRT for critique and analysis, these stories offer unique insight into the lives of elite SOC and how the impact of dual consciousness impacts their influence, agency,

and opportunity to add to the Olympic legacy in ways not discussed in current scholarship on skateboarding. As shown, there is a deep resonance with the 1968 Olympic protest, even while it exists as an archived moment of Black resistance and excellence. A future research agenda might examine if these SOC could integrate their plans and their future aspirations for Paris 2024. Ultimately, this article reveals how skateboarders see themselves and their ability to create change within their own lives and the lives of future SOC by exposing how race affects their experience and their identities as skateboarders *and* POC through the emerging platform of Olympic skateboarding.

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