Game of Privilege
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Although there is no complete account of African American golf and its history, the subject has yielded a number of important studies, including some non-scholarly works and a few produced in disciplines other than history—notably journalism, sociology, and media studies. Several books were published shortly after Tiger Woods won the Masters Tournament in 1997, which sparked a brief, intense flurry of publications related to race and golf. Yet interest in the topic seemed to fade as quickly as it flourished, along with prophecies that Woods foreshadowed a flood of minority golfers around the world poised to take up the game and forever erase its elitism. (Another reason why the Jackie Robinsonization of Woods is itself now a historical phenomenon of the 1990s, one in need of the same kind of context and analysis recent history textbooks provide events like the O. J. Simpson trial and the beating of Rodney King.)

The literature that emerged alongside Woods includes a few introductory histories of African Americans in golf, most written by professional journalists and dedicated enthusiasts. One of the best is Calvin Sinnette’s *Forbidden Fairways: African Americans and the Game of Golf*. Sinnette, an emeritus professor of pediatrics at Howard University, first took up the game in the 1950s while serving in Germany with the U.S. Air Force. Another scientist and frequent player, M. Mikell Johnson, published two titles on black women in the game, *Heroines of African American Golf* and *The African American Woman Golfer*, including background on several important female golf clubs founded by African American women around the country, as well as biographical portraits of prominent black female professionals. Also significant is *Skins & Grins*, by Lenwood Robinson Jr. Two journalists, Pete McDaniel and John Kennedy, also produced short titles for popular readers. McDaniel’s *Uneven Lies: The Heroic Story of African-Americans in Golf*, a large-format hardcover full of excellent images, is particularly successful as a showpiece work on the history of black golf. McDaniel wrote for *Golf Digest* and worked closely with Woods on other publications; Woods even provided a foreword to *Uneven Lies* when it was published in 2000 (see Kennedy, *Course of Their Own*). While important works, none of these titles are comprehensive, and they tend to focus primarily on the biographies of black professional players. A few additional books probe unique, regional examples of African American contributions to golf, including Ellen Susanna Nösner’s *Clearview*, a short biography of William J. Powell—the only African American to design, build, and operate his own golf course—and Robert J. Robertson’s *Fair Ways*, a study of the legal battle to desegregate municipal golf courses in Beaumont, Texas.
Scholars from various academic disciplines have also weighed in on the subject of race and golf. Sociologists Marvin P. Dawkins and Graham C. Kinloch published *African American Golfers*, a helpful study of black golfers during the age of segregation, one of the few that tries to address the game’s appeal to the broader black public alongside the stories of professional players. The two best comprehensive golf histories produced by historians, George Kirsch’s *Golf in America* and Richard Moss’s *The Kingdom of Golf in America*, both manage to devote several passages to African Americans but are understandably limited in their ability to go into greater detail. Finally, biographies of professional black golfers have proven popular with readers. There are over a dozen on Woods alone, but others were published as well. The earliest, Linda Jacobs’s *Lee Elder: The Daring Dream*, is a 1976 biography of Elder meant to inspire young adults. The most important, Charlie Sifford’s “Just Let Me Play”: *The Story of Charlie Sifford* (1992), is highly underrated and should rank among the best memoirs from any black athlete in American history; it stands alongside influential biographies like Bill Russell’s *Go Up for Glory* (1966) or Jackie Robinson’s *I Never Had It Made* (1972).

In addition to this existing literature, the narrative also draws from a range of archival, newsprint, film, and manuscript collections. NAACP and American Committee on Africa organizational archives include stand-alone files on golfing figures and golf-related civil rights disputes. By the 1910s many African American newspapers featured weekly golf columns and covered black professionals and all-black golf clubs in Chicago, Pittsburgh, Baltimore, and Cleveland. From newspapers like the *Chicago Defender* and *Baltimore Afro-American* at the turn of the twentieth century to magazines like *Jet*, *Ebony*, and *Sports Illustrated* in the 1970s, the narrative draws heavily on the very same popular literature that most everyday fans and players used to frame their own understandings of the game; the intention is thus to introduce readers to black golf primarily with the same sources, and the same words, the black community first used to confront the issue. Along with the popular press, sporting archives such as those of the Amateur Athletic Foundation yield thousands of pages of evidence, ranging from comprehensive records of UGA-sponsored tournaments to short-lived black golf periodicals. Archived interview transcripts available in the National Visionary Leadership Project files and the Federal Writers’ Project repository, both housed at the Library of Congress, as well as interview transcripts published in *Golf Digest* magazine, yield unique, rare stories of black Americans who encountered and shaped the game.

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