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## I Am a Citizen of the World: Constructing the Public Memory of Arthur Ashe

Kristen Norton



THE FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY  
COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

I AM A CITIZEN OF THE WORLD: CONSTRUCTING THE PUBLIC MEMORY OF  
ARTHUR ASHE

By

KRISTEN NORTON

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The members of the committee approve the thesis of Kristen Norton defended on April 1, 2010.

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Jennifer Koslow  
Professor Directing Thesis

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Andrew Frank  
Committee Member

---

James Jones  
Committee Member

The Graduate School has verified and approved the above-named committee members.

For my madre and padre...

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis analyzes the construction of the public memory of Arthur Ashe, well known African American tennis player, breaker of racial barriers, activist, and humanitarian, through a discussion of a sampling of public displays that present his life and legacy. In particular, it analyzes two of the most prominent commemorations: the Arthur Ashe exhibit at the International Tennis Hall of Fame and Museum and the Arthur Ashe monument in Richmond, Virginia. Using newspapers, unpublished manuscript material, oral histories, and material culture, this thesis illustrates that both sport and society remember and memorialize Arthur Ashe the man, not the athlete. In doing so, this thesis explores how Arthur Ashe, himself, played a role in shaping the public dynamics of his legacy.

## INTRODUCTION

“He was just a tennis player.”<sup>1</sup>

“He was a man that just transcended the sport.”<sup>2</sup>

“He was black.”<sup>3</sup>

“He was an activist.”<sup>4</sup>

“[He] was a gift.”<sup>5</sup>

“He was the first free black man I ever set my eyes upon.”<sup>6</sup>

“He was looked up to.”<sup>7</sup>

“He was a remarkable athlete.”<sup>8</sup>

“He was a man without equal.”<sup>9</sup>

### **He was Arthur Ashe.**

These are personal memories about Arthur Ashe, an accomplished athlete, activist, mentor, hero, father, and husband whose life was tragically cut short by his contraction of the AIDS virus. As these quotes illustrate, Ashe is remembered for a variety of reasons; his success on the court, his ability to break color barriers, and his social activism. His public memory speaks volumes of his work off the court. In fact, public memory defines his accomplishments in the sport as means to make a difference to those outside it. For a man whose tennis achievements and triumphs were great, his image and memory as an accomplished athlete is often overshadowed by his recognition as a great humanitarian. His memory as defined by public institutions and monuments is as someone whose historical importance transcends the sport, and whose impact reached far beyond the painted lines of the tennis court.

Throughout his tennis career Ashe accomplished a great deal, becoming the first African American man to win the United States Open (US Open), Wimbledon, and the Australian Open.<sup>10</sup> In 1975, the United States Tennis Association (USTA) considered him to be the number

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<sup>1</sup> Marty Dummett, interview by author, December 7, 2009, Richmond, VA, cassette recording in author's possession.

<sup>2</sup> “Martina Navratilova on Arthur Ashe,” *Kraft Tour Media Information*, February 8, 1993.

<sup>3</sup> “On Street Where Confederates Reign, Arthur Ashe May Too,” *New York Times*, June 18, 1995.

<sup>4</sup> “Home town gives Ashe his due recognition,” *The Sun*, July 12, 1996.

<sup>5</sup> “To America and the World, Arthur Ashe Was A Gift,” *Washington Post*, February 11, 1993.

<sup>6</sup> “I Remember Arthur Ashe; He Once Saved My Life,” *Greensboro News and Record*, February 28, 1993.

<sup>7</sup> “Despite his celebrity, Arthur Ashe has a right to privacy, too,” *Hartford Courant*, April 15, 1992.

<sup>8</sup> “Naming Stadium After Ashe is as rare as he was,” *Dallas Morning News*, August 27, 1997.

<sup>9</sup> “Ashe was a true champion, but not for his tennis skills,” *Providence Journal*, March 8, 2002.

<sup>10</sup> The US Open lacks the typical abbreviation for United States [U.S.] so as to avoid confusion with golf's United States Open, which takes the abbreviation U.S. Open. For the purpose of this paper, it will adhere to the abbreviation put forth by the tennis community.

one player in the world. He was the first African American member of the United States Davis Cup team. He also became the team's first African American captain. His accomplishments within the sport were impressive, but his work off the court left a deeper impression in the public's memory.

Public memory as evidenced by exhibits, monuments, movies and books characterizes Ashe as a civil rights activist in the United States and abroad. He is often remembered as a man who fought with grace and dignity. The public also remembers him as a man who valued learning and whose service activities emphasized the importance of education for young students. After Ashe was diagnosed with AIDS in 1988 and after his condition was made public in 1992, he became an advocate for AIDS education and awareness.

After his passing, the communities, societies, and organizations in which he was involved during his lifetime chose to commemorate and recognize his tennis achievements and his social activism. The United States Tennis Association erected a statue in his memory at the home of the US Open, dedicated a stadium in his name, and established an annual Arthur Ashe Kids Day in his honor. Another way in which the sport recognized Ashe was through his induction in the International Tennis Hall of Fame and Museum. This institution also maintains a large display case in its museum, devoted to interpreting his history. Communities as well have gone to great lengths to commemorate his life, including his hometown of Richmond, Virginia, which erected a statue illustrating his lifelong commitment to education, the city's youth, and tennis.

The public constructs the memory of Arthur Ashe, as they would any memory, through discussion, acceptance and refusal of interpretations and presentations of the past. Museums, monuments, commemorative sites and other historical displays facilitate our remembrance of Ashe. These public displays of history are a means through which history is transformed into memory. At times construction of memory is not an easy task, as memories are often contested. This thesis is a study of the representation of Arthur Ashe's legacy as a pioneer in the sport of tennis as defined by the sport's official history museum and by the commemorative actions of his hometown of Richmond, Virginia. It is these constructions of his public memory that will ultimately shape the way in which future generations will interpret and construct their own memories of his life, his accomplishments, and his efforts to better the world.

While the venues for these public displays of history are very different, they carry a consistent message: Arthur Ashe's most important accomplishments were his humanitarian activities. This thesis intends to address the reasons why the public memory of Ashe heavily favors his role as an activist. One potential reason is that despite his role as the breaker of racial barriers, and the active position he took in attempting to increase African American involvement in tennis, tennis has not seen a tremendous influx of African American players since his passing in February of 1993. This situation affects how he is remembered because it is easier to emphasize his successful humanitarian accomplishments as opposed to the effect of his legacy on the sport. A more important factor, however, is that Arthur Ashe never wanted to be remembered as just an athlete. Ashe played a significant role in shaping how he would be remembered before he died. He wanted his memory to reflect the work he did off the court, his contribution to society, and his role as a "citizen of the world."<sup>11</sup> And his public memory reflects this.

### *History and Memory: A Historiography*

This discussion fits into a larger conversation: that of the creation and acceptance of public memory. Public memory in this case is defined as the collective manner in which public institutions such as museums, monuments, statues, public commemorative sites, and historical displays define and portray history and our past. This narrative adds to the dialogue of the role of the museum and other public displays of history in constructing and shaping public memory, and how this memory is at times contested. By examining how the public memory of Arthur Ashe is constructed and reinforced through monuments, public displays of history, and other public acts of commemoration, this thesis analyzes how Ashe's memory has come to recognize his humanitarian efforts and activism.

This historiography traces the discussion of the role of history and memory in society. Moving chronologically through a collection of scholarly works on the place of the past in American life, it begins first with an introduction of the relationship between history and memory, as well as the role of the past within the present. Scholarship on this subject focuses on

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<sup>11</sup> Stan Smith stated in an interview for the *New York Times* after Arthur Ashe's passing that "I remember his favorite T-shirt. It read 'I Am a Citizen of the World.'" Ira Berkow, "A 'Good Man' Transcending Sport," *New York Times*, February 2, 1993.

the official agents who control and construct historical memory in public spheres, such as the museum, monuments, and commemorative events. In assessing the controversies over public displays of history that occurred in the 1990s, the most famous being the proposed Enola Gay exhibit at the Smithsonian, scholars have expanded the discussion to include an analysis of the public's participation in shaping public memory.

The relationship between history and memory has long been intertwined. The scholarly discourse on memory began early in the twentieth century with Maurice Halbwachs' publication, *The Social Frameworks of Memory*. Published in 1925, Halbwachs' work explores individual, collective and historical memory. Part sociology, philosophy, and psychology, Halbwachs contended that collective memory is a construction. He argued that it is a reconstruction of the past that is created in consideration of the present. While Halbwachs wrote this in the 1920s, the majority of work on the relationship between memory and history has been written since the 1980s.<sup>12</sup>

David Lowenthal's *The Past is a Foreign Country*, first published in 1985, has become one of the most influential works on this discussion. He states that the past is ever present in our society, and yet is becoming increasingly foreign to us. The past, Lowenthal argues, is alive and present in our monuments, artifacts, museum objects, relics, and memorabilia. This material culture shapes our memory and, in turn, informs our interpretation of the past.<sup>13</sup>

He illustrates this point by using a diversity of evidence, ranging from comic strips to monuments. Lowenthal separates this massive work into three parts: wanting the past, knowing the past, and changing the past. His last section on "changing the past" is the most applicable portion to this discussion about Ashe's public memory. Lowenthal states that the past surrounds us and constantly confronts us. He argues that monuments, memorials, and other commemorative sites act as tangible pieces of history, reinforcing and embellishing narratives of the past.

In 1989 David Thelen continued this conversation in his article published in the *The Journal of American History* entitled "Memory and American History." He argued that the

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<sup>12</sup> Maurice Halbwachs, "The Social Frameworks of Memory," in the *On Collective Memory*, ed. Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992).

<sup>13</sup> David Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

historical study of memory analyzes not only what is remembered, but why it is remembered, and what purpose that memory serves. He goes on to question how recollections of the past are used to meet the present needs of a society, and why. Similar to Lowenthal, Thelen discusses how the past is present in society by looking at memorials and other presentations of popular history. In contrast to Lowenthal, Thelen discusses how certain aspects of a memory become moot over time, while others become louder. What is stressed and what is silenced influences historical interpretations.<sup>14</sup>

These two works were written before the outbreak of the Culture Wars in the 1990s. Throughout this decade, Americans witnessed intense disagreement over the appropriate ways to present American history in museums and in school curriculums. In 1991, for instance, the National Museum of Art presented an exhibit titled *The West as America: Reinterpreting the Images of the Frontier, 1820-1920*. Alongside iconic images, the curators placed interpretive labels that discussed artistic intent, public opinion, and racial attitudes that placed these classical images into an historical context. Offensive to some, too politically correct for others, and insightful for many, the exhibit was controversial. In the end, the curators rewrote a number of the labels in response to the public outcry. Three years later, an exhibit proposal at another national museum, the National Air and Space Museum, resulted in even greater debate.

Between 1994 and 1995, the National Air and Space Museum (NASM) faced heavy opposition for its proposed exhibit to mark the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of World War II, which was to include the restored *Enola Gay* in one room and images and artifacts from Hiroshima and Nagasaki after the release of the atomic bombs in another. The public controversy began after the Air Force Association, who was allowed to look over an early draft of the exhibit text, excerpted some contentious statements and leaked them to the media. Based on these reports, many veterans and the general public came to believe that NASM's curators were taking a too sympathetic approach to the Japanese. By displaying artifacts such as a charred lunchbox, and other objects evocative of the death that occurred, NASM stood accused of insulting America's World War II veterans. The debate became so great, that the exhibition

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<sup>14</sup> David Thelen, "Memory and American History," *The Journal of American History* 75, no. 4 March 1989, 1117-1129.

was cancelled and the director of the museum resigned. In the end, NASM crafted a less-interpretive exhibit using the nose-section of the *Enola Gay*.

The Culture Wars that arose during the 1990s, especially the controversies that erupted over the portrayals of history in museums, affected the way in which memory and its constructions were discussed in scholarly works. The overall narrative on the history of memory shifted from a general analysis of the construction of memory to the examination of specific contested memories, and the role of power in constructing memory. In particular, scholars asked about the part citizens, organizations, politicians, and historians played in writing history for general audiences.

Michael Kammen's *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture*, set the parameters of the debate. Kammen divided his discussion on the creation of collective memory into four subsections. Each section begins and ends when America was at a crossroads: from nationhood to its reorganization in Reconstruction; from Reconstruction to World War I; from World War I to World War II; and from World War II to the present. In each case he found that there was a general shift from acceptance to denial of memories. Kammen explored this process by studying the use of tradition, nostalgia, commemoration, patriotism, heritage, and myth in constructing historical memory. Although this work is one of a four volume series, it stands alone as an incredibly detailed discussion on the varied forms of American memory.<sup>15</sup>

Published the following year, John Bodnar's *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* expanded the discussion of how commemoration is used to instill loyalty and patriotism, national or social unity, and order and civic duty. In particular, he looked at the question of intention. He argued that shifts in the public memory of an event were caused by negotiations between the general public and government.<sup>16</sup> He described this process as a dialogue between official (i.e. the government) and

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<sup>15</sup> Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991).

<sup>16</sup> John Bodnar, *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

vernacular (i.e. local people) culture. Bodnar argued that public memory is the product of compromise between official and vernacular culture.

Mike Wallace's *Mickey Mouse History and Other Essays on American Memory* continues to analyze the role that power plays in the construction of memory. He explores the way in which Americans approach, preserve, alter, and portray their history through public displays. Memory, he argues, is a battlefield. Who holds power, controls how the American past is interpreted and preserved. His collection of essays looks at these questions in terms of history museums, historic preservation, and places of mass entertainment, such as Epcot and Disneyland, to illustrate how corporations and those with political power shape our everyday encounters with historical interpretations. In 1996, Wallace saw no end to America's history wars.<sup>17</sup>

Sanford Levinson's, *Written in Stone: Public Monuments in Changing Societies*, provides a legal scholars view on the relationship between memory and history. He explains how monuments and other permanent displays of history act as public symbols of our history. Monuments, he argues, carry along with them messages of the society that erected them. Through this act of commemoration, Levinson contends that society is declaring a particular person, group of people, or event worthy of remembrance. Using global examples, Levinson illustrates how community and state leaders constructed and deconstructed monuments based on whether a regime believed the monument contributed or conflicted with its claims to legitimacy. The irony is that even though monuments are built to last, their political nature makes them vulnerable to change, which in some cases Levinson suggests is not necessarily a bad thing.<sup>18</sup>

Building on Wallace's broad definition of what constitutes a public presentation of history, Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen conducted a study in the mid-1990s to quantifiably and qualitatively assess the general public's everyday engagement with history. They summarized and analyzed their findings in the *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life*. Through extensive surveys, they found that although most of the general public fails to connect with the term history, they consistently connected to the terms

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<sup>17</sup> Mike Wallace, *Mickey Mouse History and Other Essays on American Memory* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996).

<sup>18</sup> Sanford Levinson, *Written in Stone: Public Monuments in Changing Societies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998).

heritage, tradition, and the past. Based on their findings, Rosenzweig and Thelen argued that the past is present in our communities not only in historic sites and museums, but in family reunions, family photo albums and so on. Rosenzweig and Thelen reasoned that there was a common interest in investigating the American past.<sup>19</sup>

In addition to asking about daily practices of engagement, Rosenzweig and Thelen scrutinized the issue of trust. They asked participants in the survey from whom and where did they believe they could obtain the most trustworthy source of information about history? They used this data to construct a hierarchical scale of trustworthiness. In comparison to movies, books, high school teachers, college professors, relatives, and museums, museums came out on top, except in the case of Native Americans. Hence, museums play a major role in the construction of public memory, and legitimizing a particular interpretation of history. As Rosenzweig and Thelen convincingly illustrate, museums are perceived as places of authority, and this is why, other scholars argue, they logically became places of controversy in the 1990s.<sup>20</sup>

Memory, whether it is collective or individual, can be contested. Steven C. Dubin's *Displays of Power: Controversy in the American Museum from the Enola Gay to Sensation* is one of the most recent works that studies the culture wars within the context of museums. Stepping back to the 1960s, Dubin explains how and why the museums became spaces for public discourse and battlegrounds over American public memory. He found that as curatorial approaches changed in the twentieth century in response to calls for these institutions to more greatly reflect and embrace social diversity, that museums were drawn into controversies over what and how to display the past.<sup>21</sup> Dubin uses examples from both art museums and history museums to present his point. Where his work differs from previous scholarship is in his

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<sup>19</sup> Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen, *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

<sup>20</sup> Another book that continues this discussion of how the present engages the past is David Glassberg's *Sense of History: the Place of the Past in American Life*. Published in 2001, Glassberg continues the discussion of how Americans connect their personal memories, recollections and experiences to that of a larger historical narrative. Much like Rosenzweig and Thelen, Glassberg argues that Americans engage and understand their history, and states that the past does have a place in present society.

<sup>21</sup> Steven C. Dubin, *Displays of Power: Controversy in the American Museum from the Enola Gay to Sensation* (New York: New York University Press, 1999).

extensive use of interviews with museum professionals, activists, and other prominent figures in the debates. He concluded that in each case, mass media was culpable for fostering controversy.

Two other recent books that continue the discussion of the role of the museum in constructing memory are *Dream Spaces: Memory and the Museum* by Gaynor Kavanagh and *Museums and Memory* edited by Susan Crane. Susan Crane examines the ways in which the museum and memory shape one another, arguing that the museum and memory are intertwined. Similarly, Kavanagh argues that over time the main mission of museums has shifted from the collection of objects to the interpretation of objects in order to present social, cultural, and industrial histories. Both of these books emphasize the public nature of museums and the role it has on affecting our personal and collective memories.<sup>22</sup>

This thesis adds to this discussion of how memory is constructed by analyzing the institutions, organizations, and people who have participated in creating a public memory of Arthur Ashe. It analyzes a broad array of public displays of history, including museums, public monuments, and art pieces, that memorialize his life. It also illustrates why his memory is, at times, contested. In studying the relationship between history and memory, this thesis explains why certain aspects of Arthur Ashe's life are emphasized and others forgotten in the public presentations of his life.

### *The Memory of Arthur Ashe*

The public displays of history that are addressed in this work represent an official interpretation of Arthur Ashe. They are tangible legacies of commemorative activities. The public memory of Arthur Ashe as represented in museums, monuments, and artistic display does not focus on his tennis achievements. Instead it is focused on presenting his humanitarian efforts around the world, his work domestically for advancing African American's civil rights, and his endeavors to improve educational opportunities for financially disadvantaged youth. The reasons for this are complex but, in general, are the result of Arthur Ashe's wishes.

The first chapter places Arthur Ashe's tennis accomplishments into historical context by providing a brief history of the integration of professional sports, particularly tennis, and compares and contrasts the public memory of Althea Gibson to Arthur Ashe. The second chapter

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<sup>22</sup> Gaynor Kavanagh, *Spaces: Memory and the Museum* (New York: Leicester University Press, 2000); Susan A. Crane, ed., *Museums and Memory* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000).

analyzes how Arthur Ashe's memory is presented in the International Tennis Hall of Fame and Museum, the sport's official institution for preserving its history. The third chapter examines the creation of public art in honor of Arthur Ashe's memory in his hometown of Richmond, Virginia and the various controversies that ensued over these actions. These displays of history described throughout this narrative are representative of how we choose to remember Arthur Ashe.

This thesis used a variety of sources, including Arthur Ashe's memoir and autobiography, interviews with Arthur Ashe's fellow tennis players, museum objects and holdings, as well as documentaries and tributes created after Arthur Ashe's passing. However, this thesis heavily relied on three types of sources. First, news articles relating to the monuments and commemorative activities mentioned. Second, primary source material related to the construction of commemorative sites, such as board minutes and reports. And third, interviews conducted by the author with key members of the construction of Arthur Ashe's memory in the International Tennis Hall of Fame and Museum as well as Richmond, Virginia.

Public institutions, public art, monuments, and other commemorative sites view Arthur Ashe as a champion. He is remembered as a champion of the sport, but more importantly he is remembered as a champion of humanity. The statue on Monument Avenue is meant to inspire African Americans to feel that their stories and heroes are now a part of the city's official history. The display at the International Tennis Hall of Fame, which includes artifacts related to Ashe's travels to South Africa to protest apartheid, is meant to show how African Americans viewed their struggle for civil rights as part of a global struggle. These public presentations display Arthur Ashe as a role model for anyone, whether someone struggling with AIDS, facing injustice, or battling society's inequities. Uniformly, and without exception, public venues remember Arthur Ashe the man, not the athlete. As Arthur Ashe's favorite shirt so proudly declared, "I Am a Citizen of the World," representative of not only how he viewed himself, but how we now view him.

## CHAPTER 1

### BREAKING THE COLOR BARRIER IN TENNIS: RECOGNIZING ALTHEA GIBSON AND ARTHUR ASHE

If the field of sports has got to pave the way for all of civilization, let's do it. At this moment tennis privileged to take its place among the pioneers for a true democracy, if it will accept that privilege. If it declines to do so, the honor will fall to the next generation, perhaps—but someone will break the ground. The entrance of Negroes into national tennis is as inevitable as it has proven to be in baseball, in football, in boxing; there is no denying so much talent...<sup>23</sup>

Alice Marble, a tennis champion in her own right and the author of these words, spoke clearly and defiantly against the current practice of racism in her sport in the tennis publication *American Lawn Tennis*, the sport's major magazine. She spoke out against the treatment of African Americans, stating that equal opportunities should be bestowed upon everyone. At the time of publication, the United States Lawn Tennis Association (USLTA) had not yet allowed African Americans to participate in the United States Nationals, and limited their ability to compete in USLTA sanctioned events.

By July of 1950, when *American Lawn Tennis* published Marble's editorial, several successful African American athletes had shattered the color barriers of different sports including baseball, professional basketball, and bowling. Most famously, Jackie Robinson integrated Major League Baseball in 1947. Following in the footsteps of his success were several other African American athletes, such as Earl Lloyd, the first African American to break the color barriers of the National Basketball League.<sup>24</sup> The question for tennis in 1950, as Marble posed it, was whether the sport would accept the inevitable.

*Setting a Historical Precedence: Breaking the Color Barrier in Baseball, Basketball, Boxing,  
Football and Track, 1900-1950*

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<sup>23</sup> Alice Marble, "Editorials," *American Lawn Tennis* July (1950), 14.

<sup>24</sup> Sundiata Djata, *Blacks at the Net: Black Achievement in the History of Tennis, Volume 1* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2006), 30.

Marble based her challenge to the United States Lawn Tennis Association (USLTA) on a long history of African American athletes who struggled, persisted, and triumphed in battling exclusion from other white-dominated sports organizations. While, segregation found legal validation in the case of *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896, many African Americans used sports as a means of contesting the morality and logic of Jim Crow. For athletes like William Henry Lewis and Paul Robeson their respective sports became a means to prove their equality at the turn-of-the-twentieth century. As the *Zion Quarterly Review* declared in reference to William Henry Lewis, a football player who rose to fame during the early 1890s, “Our race is proud of him because in all his success he stands for us, and the higher he goes in the physical field of athletics...he must necessarily open the way for others, and lift us all up at the same time.”<sup>25</sup> This quote could easily refer to several African American athletes from this time period and it fit with the civil rights strategy of Booker T. Washington.

In the post-Reconstruction era, Booker T. Washington became an esteemed leader for African Americans, respected by those in both black and white circles. He argued that blacks should spend their energies on creating their own opportunities as opposed to battling for integration. He believed that by demonstrating excellence, African Americans would prove their equality. As a major supporter of athletes like football stars Paul Robeson and William Henry Lewis, Washington was partly responsible for the acceptance of these athletes by both blacks and whites. Yet, the world was quickly changing from the agrarian and Southern setting Washington knew.

The early 1900s saw a tremendous influx of African Americans to the North, which has become known as the Great Migration. Between the years of 1915 and 1918 alone, over half a million African Americans migrated to escape the racial tensions of the South in the hopes of accessing new economic opportunities in northern cities. In the 1920s, this was followed by the movement of nearly 700,000 African Americans.<sup>26</sup> However, they did not find a land of opportunity. Instead, public expressions of racial tension rose. In 1915, for instance, the release

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<sup>25</sup> Quoted in Russell T. Wigginton’s *The Strange Career of the Black Athlete: African Americans and Sport* (Westport: Praeger, 2006), taken from a 1900 edition of the *AME Zion Quarterly Review*. “Lewis’ Great Work,” *Review* 10 (October-December 1900), 63-64.

<sup>26</sup> Wigginton’s, *Strange Career*, 12.

of D.W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* inspired a revival of the Ku Klux Klan.<sup>27</sup> The end of the decade was punctuated by an eruption of race riots. In the midst of these changes, sport associations placed greater restrictions on African American participation in sporting competitions, often excluding them.<sup>28</sup> In response, African Americans created their own opportunities, setting up successful "negro" leagues. Still, despite the increased limitations, a number of African American athletes are remembered for their attempts to challenge the status quo.

By the time Arthur Ashe won his first Grand Slam in 1968, roughly one-half of all professional basketball players, one-third of all professional football players, and one-fourth of all professional baseball players were African American.<sup>29</sup> The trend towards integration in baseball, basketball, football, boxing and track largely began in the early to mid-twentieth century. Unlike golf and tennis, which have remained fairly exclusive practices, reserved for those of a certain class who possess the funds to afford the expensive equipment and club fees to access the spaces professionals use for training and practice, the general opportunity to play these other sports increased during the twentieth century. The following is a brief discussion of a notable few, who are often cited alongside of Ashe for their significance to their sport and activism.

Paul L. Robeson was a successful athlete who matched his achievements in football with the accolades he earned outside of the sport. Robeson gained his notoriety as a collegiate athlete. A student and football star at Rutgers (1915-1918) he was the first Rutgers player to gain All-American status in 1918. He also earned 12 letters, participating in four different sports throughout his time at the school. Robeson also excelled intellectually, joining several academic societies and social clubs and was accepted into the elusive Cap and Skull honor society. Not only was he asked to address the graduating class at commencement but he was Valedictorian. After he finished his college career he went on to play professional football and became a big

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 40.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 12.

<sup>29</sup> Damion Thomas, "'The Quiet Militant': Arthur Ashe and Black Athletic Activism," in *Out of the Shadows: A Biographical History of African American Athletes*, ed. David K. Wiggins (Fayetteville: The University of Arkansas Press, 2006), 293.

name in the newly formed National Football League.<sup>30</sup> Yet, it was still unclear whether anyone could make a living playing football and, hence, while pursuing his football career he also studied law, receiving his law degree from Columbia University in 1923. Instead of practicing law, however, he went on to pursue a career in singing and acting. Robeson was successful in what he achieved, overcoming and breaking the racial and color barriers not just in the sport, but in academia, and later in his career in the arts.<sup>31</sup>

Robeson's success was forgotten later in his life, after his radical, leftist beliefs during the 1930s brought suspicion that he was a communist, as did his support of socialism and the Soviet Union.<sup>32</sup> However, after his passing he was again recognized and his memory restored. Today, it is argued that his success acted as an inspiration and African Americans admired him greatly.<sup>33</sup>

Unlike football, boxing held greater promise for African Americans seeking to earn a living by their sport. Arthur John Johnson, better known as Jack Johnson, became the first African American to win the world heavyweight title. At a young age, Johnson had to abandon pursuing his education in order to help contribute to his family's income. He worked a string of menial jobs. At the age of 16 he was introduced to boxing and shortly after began participating in the "Negro boxing league circuit." At the age of 25, he won the "Negro heavyweight title." Five years later he earned the title of heavyweight world champion after defeating Tommy Burns in Australia.<sup>34</sup> Upon hearing the news, race riots broke out in cities throughout the United States. Johnson's private life caused controversy, especially his relationship with white women. Today, however, public memory commemorates his defiant behavior.<sup>35</sup>

The 1930s witnessed the achievements of Joe Louis and Jesse Owens. Known for his humility, Joe Louis provided a counter image of an African American athlete to that of Jack

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<sup>30</sup> Wigginton, *The Strange Career*, 43.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Tony Monteiro, "Review [of *Paul Robeson* by Martin B. Duberman]," *Journal of Black Studies* 20, no. 3 (1990), 364.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 36.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

Johnson. His victories in the ring, however, were no less important in demonstrating the senselessness of the color barrier. He beat the former heavyweight champion Primo Carnera in 1935. In 1938, he defeated Max Schmeling. His triumphs proved inspirational to more than African Americans. In the eyes of many Americans, both Carnera and Schmeling represented the fascist regimes of Italy and Germany and, consequently, many viewed Louis' victories as international victories for the United States.<sup>36</sup>

Similarly, Jesse Owens represented triumph over not only American racism but Nazi ideas of white superiority as well. Owens was most well known for his success in the 1936 Summer Olympics in Berlin. He left those Olympic Games with four gold medals in track and field. His success embarrassed Adolf Hitler by contradicting the idea that the Aryan race was superior, at a time when rising tensions were mounting between world powers. Owens success in arguably the largest stage in sports was yet more dramatic evidence of the injustice of Jim Crow.<sup>37</sup> The events of World War II continued to foster a climate in which segregation would no longer be deemed acceptable.

In 1947, one of the most notable acts of integration within a national sports league occurred. Jackie Robinson integrated baseball with his acceptance into the Brooklyn Dodgers, becoming the first African American to participate in the Major Leagues in the sport's modern era. He became the Major League Rookie of the Year. Many African American athletes after him, including Arthur Ashe, who broke through the respective color barriers, were often referred to as the "Jackie Robinsons" of their sport.

Basketball also saw integration in the mid 1940s, with the acceptance of William "Pop" Gates and William "Dolly" King into the Basketball Association of America (BAA) in 1946. They only played, however, for one season. Their short career can be blamed on tense race relations and a fight in the middle of a game between William Gates and Chick Meehan. Although a difficult situation for Gates and King, their athletic talent opened the doors for six African American pioneers to join the sport two years later, in 1948. Henry Blackburn, Leonard

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<sup>36</sup> Patrick B. Miller, "Muscular Assimilation: Sport and the Paradoxes of Racial Reform," in Charles K. Ross, ed, *Race and Sport: The Struggle for Equality on and Off the Field* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2004), 163.

<sup>37</sup> Rufus E. Clement, "Racial Integration in the Field of Sports," *The Journal of Negro Education* 23, no. 3 (1954), 222-230.

Jordan, George Raby, Irving Ward, Arthur Wilson, and Leon Wright, joined the Basketball Association of America, and so began the great integration of the professional game of basketball.<sup>38</sup>

According to historian Russell Wigginton, these first steps towards integration provided tremendous moments of hope for African Americans. Any time an African American athlete was able to overcome the color barrier, and grasp often an unprecedented opportunity, it provided hope to those still struggling under the burden of racial prejudice. The question remained, however, would the sport of tennis see the same level of success in integration and participation?<sup>39</sup>

*The American Tennis Association and the United States National Lawn Tennis Association*

Integrating tennis came with its own set of barriers and obstacles. Unlike basketball and baseball, which were community sports, tennis was only easily accessible to the elite because of the expense necessary to maintain a career. Racism and economics kept African Americans out of the private clubs that served as the spaces of competition for these events, a scenario familiar to African American golfers as well.<sup>40</sup> In the late twentieth century, Arthur Ashe felt that African Americans still had to battle discrimination in the world of tennis. In an interview in 1990, Paul Fein asked Arthur Ashe if clubs still tried to prohibit African American involvement, to which Ashe responded, “Oh, sure! The tennis world has quite a few clubs like that...if you look at a USTA (United States Tennis Association) Yearbook and look at the member clubs that make up the 17 sections, there are a lot of clubs in there that have discriminatory membership policies.”<sup>41</sup> As a result of these barriers, middle-class and elite African Americans began forming “Negro” tennis clubs in the early part of the twentieth century. They also established their own permanent sporting association, the earliest of its kind, known as the American Tennis

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<sup>38</sup> Arthur Ashe and Kip Branch, Oania Chalk, and Francis Harris, *A Hard Road to Glory: A History of the African-American Athlete since 1946* (New York: Warner Books, 1988), 50-51.

<sup>39</sup> Wigginton, *Strange Career*, 37.

<sup>40</sup> E. Digby Baltzell, *Sporting Gentlemen: Men's Tennis from the Age of Honor to the Cult of the Superstar* (New York: Free Press, 1995).

<sup>41</sup> Paul S. Fein, “We’ve Come a Long Way, Racially – or Have We? Ashe on Tennis’ Shoal Creeks,” *Tennis Week*, October 18, 1990.

Association. Despite the breaking of the color barrier in the 1950s and 1960s, the sport has yet to see a major African American presence in the professional arena.

Tennis formerly arrived in the United States in 1874. A sport known for its exclusivity, it was originally reserved for the rich. An expanding middle-class, however, soon latched onto the sport as a leisure activity. By the 1880s its popularity prompted the establishment of the United States National Lawn Tennis Association (USNLTA). This organization later became known as the United States Lawn Tennis Association (USLTA) and eventually became the current United States Tennis Association (USTA) that oversees professional tennis in the United States. The USNLTA was the governing body of the sport and restricted its membership based on race.<sup>42</sup>

Despite the USNLTA's exclusivity, African Americans did not need inclusion in this association to participate in the sport. In 1898, the first competitive African American tournament was held in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; yet it took another two decades before various representatives from several African American tennis clubs from across the nation joined together on November 30, 1916 and officially declared the creation of the American Tennis Association (ATA). The oldest African American sport association, this was the first permanent association created for African American athletes. In August of the following year the association held its first National Championships. For the next several decades, the ATA was the only association to provide tournaments on a regular basis in which African Americans had the ability to compete.<sup>43</sup> By the mid-twentieth century, however, the ATA transformed its mission and focused on helping players fight for inclusion in major USLTA events.<sup>44</sup> The stories of Althea Gibson and Arthur Ashe show that transition.

#### *Successful Predecessors*

There are several African American tennis players who achieved a great deal in their sport but remain relatively invisible in the larger history of tennis because they were excluded from participating in the most public tennis competitions. Some of the early African American pioneers included Tally Robert Holmes, Ora Mae Washington, and Lucy Diggs Slowe. They

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<sup>42</sup> Wigginton, *Strange Career*, 23.

<sup>43</sup> "R. Walter Johnson, Doctor, Who Helped Tennis Stars, Dead," *New York Times*, July 1, 1971.

<sup>44</sup> Djata, *Blacks at the Net*, Vol. 1, 181.

were all champions in ATA events and were responsible for the organization's initial success. Tally Robert Holmes was a founding member of the ATA, and the first National Champion in the ATA. In addition, he was a World War I veteran and Howard alumni; he fought for equality until his passing in 1969. Ora Mae Washington was a winner of eight ATA women's singles titles and an undefeated doubles competitor for several years. Her talents, however, were not limited to tennis. She was also a very talented basketball player and acted as a coach and player for the Philadelphia Tribunes, a woman's African American basketball team. Lucy Diggs Slowe was a winner of the ATA National Championships twice; however her real battle was off the court, where she fought for educational equality for African American women. She sought to address inequities in education as the Dean of Women for Howard University until her death at the age of 52.<sup>45</sup>

There were a few attempts in the 1940s to illustrate that integration was possible. Jimmie McDaniel was a superb African American tennis player and dominant in ATA tournaments. He played against Don Budge in an open exhibition match on July 29, 1940.<sup>46</sup> Despite his loss, McDaniel paved the way for others to follow. The next open match between an African American and white player happened nearly a decade later. Oscar Johnson was the first man to compete in the USLTA National Indoor Junior's Championships in 1947 in Griffin Park, Los Angeles. He lost in the quarters to Tony Trabert, who became one of the most successful tennis players in the history of the sport. The next year, however, Oscar Johnson won that same event. Finally, Dr. Reginald Weir, five time ATA Champion, was the first African American man permitted to compete in a USLTA men's event, competing in the U.S. Lawn Indoor Tennis Championship in 1948.

*Integrating a White Game: A Comparison of Great Pioneers, Althea Gibson and Arthur Ashe*

On September 29, 2003, in East Orange, New Jersey, the world witnessed the quiet passing of a great American athlete. It was just 53 years earlier that she broke tennis' color barrier and was the first African American to participate in what would become the United States

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<sup>45</sup>These players are recognized in the Breaking the Barriers exhibit at the International Tennis Hall of Fame and Museum, located in Newport, RI. It is both a temporary exhibit and traveling exhibit with the Hall of Fame.

<sup>46</sup> Diata, *Blacks at the Net*, Vol. 1, 9.

Open. Althea Gibson, born August 25, 1927, died at the age of 76, considerably overlooked as a significant pioneer of her sport, her era, and her race.

One can consider Althea Gibson the Jackie Robinson of the tennis world. Just as Jackie Robinson integrated the Major Leagues in 1947, Gibson integrated the lily-white sport of United States Lawn Tennis. The year was 1950. Tennis clothes were white, tennis balls were white, and every player to participate in any major USLTA was white. In a sport dominated by whiteness, Althea Gibson was a pioneer for minorities.

Gibson's entrance into the 1950 United States Lawn Tennis Association National Championship was only the beginning of what would become several years of major achievements and accomplishments. She was the first African American to win the U.S. Nationals, the first African American U.S. Amateur Champion, the first African American to win the French Open, and the first African American to compete at Wimbledon as well as the first African American Wimbledon Champion. Over her successful career Gibson won 11 Grand Slam titles.<sup>47</sup>

Althea Gibson was born in Silver, South Carolina on August 25, 1927. She was the daughter of struggling sharecroppers. After a bad cotton crop, Gibson, then three, her parents and her four siblings moved to New York City to live in Harlem. Life was difficult for the Gibsons. Money was always an issue, something that would remain a challenge throughout Gibson's life.<sup>48</sup>

Gibson's tennis career began in New York City, at the Police Athletic League (PAL), strangely enough, with a game of paddle tennis. The PAL, as Gibson put it, "set up these play streets to keep the kids or the youth on the courts instead of in the courts."<sup>49</sup> Gibson's second summer at the PAL shaped the beginning of her tennis career,

I think it was the second summer, that one of the supervisors of the play street, a gentleman named Buddy Walker, who in those days was a band leader... and in the summer he would take this recreational job. One summer day he came to

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<sup>47</sup> "'Her legacy will live on' Althea Gibson, pioneering tennis great, dies at 76," *Philadelphia Daily News*, September 29, 2003.

<sup>48</sup> Althea Gibson, *So Much to Live For*. (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1968), 12.

<sup>49</sup> Althea Gibson, Oral History, 1 (available through International Tennis Hall of Fame and Information Research Center, Newport, RI Museum [hereinafter ITHF&M]).

me—I suppose in his own mind me must have seen raw talent, so...he gave me my first tennis racket. Started me hitting against the handball court in one of the playgrounds in Harlem. After hitting balls of the wall for some time, and practicing how to keep your eyes on the ball, he later introduced me to a member of the Cosmopolitan Tennis Club. And in those days the Cosmopolitan Tennis Club was the elite black tennis club in New York City.<sup>50</sup>

Juan Serrell, a school teacher who saw Gibson at the Harlem River Tennis Courts, arranged for her to play at the Cosmopolitan Tennis Club. It was at this club that she saw Alice Marble's exhibition match, a woman who would later play an integral role in Gibson's tennis career.<sup>51</sup>

Gibson rose in the ranks of the American Tennis Association. At the young age of fifteen the Cosmopolitan recognized her talent and made her an honorary member. Later that year she made it to the finals of the ATA's New York State Junior Girls Championship.

The made me an honorary girl member of the club. In other words, they took me as one of theirs. And the very first year, they entered me in the New York State championship, under the auspices of the ATA...And that started my rise in ATA tennis. And from then, when I became of age to get in the women's division, I won the championship in 1947 as the women's ATA national singles champion. And I held that championship for ten consecutive years.<sup>52</sup>

And indeed, Gibson's tennis career had taken off after her entrance into the Cosmopolitan Tennis Club.<sup>53</sup>

It was through her connections at the club that she met one of the most influential men of the time in the African American tennis circuit, Dr. Robert Walter Johnson. Johnson was instrumental not only in Gibson's career, but in Arthur Ashe's career as well. He knew to make integration happen he needed to create a support system, and so he established a tennis camp at his home in Lynchburg, Virginia for up and coming African American tennis players. Upon seeing Gibson play at the Cosmopolitan Tennis Club, Dr. Hubert Eaton and Johnson decided that she could progress to be the next champion, and as a result they asked her to train in Wilmington, North Carolina. These two men were not only responsible for propelling Gibson into a

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<sup>50</sup> Gibson. Oral History. ITHF&M, 1-2.

<sup>51</sup> Djata, *Blacks at the Net*, Vol. 1, 28.

<sup>52</sup> Althea Gibson .Oral History. ITHF&M, 2.

<sup>53</sup> Djata, *Blacks at the Net*, Vol. 1, 29.

flourishing tennis career, but they also provided her with the opportunity to obtain a college education as well.

I had education, thanks to the magnificent kindness of Dr. Eaton and Dr. Johnson...these gentlemen had enabled me to get my high school diploma in Wilmington, North Carolina. Then Dr. William Grey, president of Florida A&M, on the recommendation of Walter Austin, the tennis coach there, had awarded me a scholarship to help get my degree.<sup>54</sup>

It was Johnson who supported Gibson and helped her achieve one of the greatest accomplishments of not only Gibson's life, but of the sport as well.

Johnson spoke to E.T. Penzol, the chairman of the USLTA Interscholastic Committee, arguing for the USLTA to include more African American players from the ATA in their athletic events. Penzol responded with a suggestion. He told Johnson to establish an ATA Qualifying tournament, and he would allow the winners and runner-ups to become eligible for participation in a USLTA event. This provided the incentive for young ATA players, and ultimately allowed Althea Gibson and Arthur Ashe to rise in the ranks of tennis.<sup>55</sup>

Gibson described her relationship with Johnson in a letter published to Alice Marble in the February 1951 issue of *American Lawn Tennis*. She described her feelings just after her loss in the ATA National Championship back in 1946. At the time she was 18 years of age,

It was life's darkest moment—I was sitting in the grandstand alone when a man came up to me and asked: "How would you like to play at Forrest Hills?" I couldn't believe my ears and naturally thought it was a joke until I looked at the expression on his face, then I knew he meant what he was saying. My answer was, and I'll never forget it: "Of course I would like to play at Forest Hills, but you know that is impossible." He replied: "It is impossible now, but if you are willing to work hard enough, I believe you are the key to unlock the door." I told him I would do anything to be able to play at Forest Hills. I was talking to Dr. R. Walter Johnson of Lynchburg, Virginia.<sup>56</sup>

Johnson was correct, Gibson was the key. Something the world would soon find out only four years later at the U.S. Nationals in Forest Hills.

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<sup>54</sup> Gibson, *So Much to Live For*, 68.

<sup>55</sup> *World Tennis*, July (1965), 33.

<sup>56</sup> *American Lawn Tennis*, February (1951), 15.

As a result of efforts on behalf of the ATA, Johnson, Alice Marble, and countless others, Gibson found herself in the main draw of the 1950 U.S. Nationals, the only African American player in the draw, and the first African American, man or woman, to be entered in the event.<sup>57</sup> This was not the first time Gibson accomplished something of this magnitude. She was entered the Eastern Indoors in 1949, becoming the first African American to do so, and she was the first African American to reach the final round of a USLTA championship tournament.<sup>58</sup>

In winning the French Open in 1956, Gibson became the first African American to win a Grand Slam. She made the finals of the U.S. Nationals in 1956, a runner up to Shirley Frye. The following two years Gibson won Wimbledon and the US Open twice. She was the first African American to reach the world ranking of number one, and the first African American tennis star in 1958 to be voted the Female Athlete of the Year by the Associated Press.<sup>59</sup>

Gibson was a force to be reckoned with in the late 1950s. By the time of her retirement in 1958 she had 11 Grand Slam titles under her belt, not to mention 10 consecutive wins in the ATA National Championships. In the 1950s, Gibson was widely celebrated, having proven her dominance repeatedly throughout the decade. Her home city of New York honored her with a ticker-tape parade, and presented her with the medallion of the city of New York. Her face framed the cover of *Time* magazine. The Queen of England congratulated her as well, which was just one of the many honors bestowed upon Gibson in the 1950s. However, after her retirement, very little was done to honor Althea and her accomplishments.

Gibson overcame several barriers and obstacles related to her race. And while Arthur Ashe has and will always be associated with the Civil Rights movement in America and abroad, one cannot forget the impact Gibson left on the sport. She paved the way for not only Arthur Ashe, but Zina Garrison, Lori McNeil, Leslie Allen, James Blake, and Venus and Serena Williams.<sup>60</sup> However, by comparing her legacy and memory as an integrator of the sport to that of Ashe's, it is evident how greatly Ashe is remembered and Gibson is not.

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<sup>57</sup> The United States Nationals was the precursor to the open era's US Open.

<sup>58</sup> *World Tennis*, April (1969), 68; *American Lawn Tennis*, July (1950), 6.

<sup>59</sup> Gibson, *So Much to Live For*, 9.

<sup>60</sup> Billie Jean King, "Tennis Great Althea Gibson Was a 'Force to Behold,'" *Wall Street Journal*, October 2, 2003.

Arthur Ashe was a successful athlete and activist. He pushed for civil rights and equal treatment not just in the United States, but abroad as well, drawing attention to apartheid in South Africa and the treatment of Haitian refugees in America. He fought for better education and healthcare in our communities, and he worked hard to combat misconceptions regarding AIDS. These are memories that we hold of Arthur Ashe first and foremost because he wanted us to remember him as an advocate against all forms of injustice and inequality. However, we also emphasize these memories of activism because despite Ashe's desire to increase African American participation in the sport, this goal has not been fully realized.

Arthur R. Ashe, Jr. was born on July 10, 1943, in Richmond, Virginia, to Arthur Sr. and Mattie C. Ashe. Raised in the segregated South, Ashe constantly struggled against the limitations of Jim Crow. For instance, at the age of 12 he was denied the opportunity to participate in a tennis tournament in Richmond's Byrd Park because he was black. It was only through serendipity that he had unique access to the facilities and equipment to practice. His father, Arthur Sr., was the caretaker at Brook Field park, which was the largest park open to African Americans in Richmond. Their home, situated in the middle of Brook Field, exposed Arthur Ashe to tennis at a young age.

Ashe showed tremendous promise as a child. When he was 10, Ashe won the American Tennis Association's 12 and under boys National Championship. Under the tutelage and coaching of Dr. Robert Walter Johnson at his tennis camps in Lynchburg, Virginia, Ashe flourished. Despite his successes as a teenager, he remained unranked in Richmond. As a result, Ashe decided to leave his family and move to St. Louis, Missouri before his senior year in high school so he could practice his tennis year-round.<sup>61</sup> As Ashe stated in his autobiography *Off the Court*, "When I decided to leave Richmond, I left all that Richmond stood for at the time—its segregation, its conservatism, its parochial thinking, its slow progress toward equality, its lack of opportunity for talented black people."<sup>62</sup> From St. Louis, he was recruited by the University of California, Los Angeles, on a full scholarship and graduated in 1966. His role on UCLA's tennis team brought Ashe increased recognition in the sport. As a result, he joined the United States

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<sup>61</sup> Dr. LaVerne Spurlock, interview by author, December 7, 2009, Richmond, VA, cassette recording, in possession of the author.

<sup>62</sup> Arthur Ashe, *Off the Court* (Boston: Dutton Books, 1981) 52.

Davis Cup team, becoming the first African American to grace the team in its history. It was also during this time that he volunteered to join the United States Army (1966-1968).

1968 marked an important year for Ashe. On September 9, 1968, Ashe became the first, and only, African American man to win the United States Open (US Open), defeating Tom Okker in the finals. Earlier in the year, Arthur also won the United States National Amateur Championship, defeating Bob Lutz. Ashe has the distinguished title of the only man, African American or otherwise, to have won both the National Open and Amateur titles in one calendar year.<sup>63</sup>

This same year, however, marked a tumultuous year in American history. The struggle for equal rights resulted in a rise of black power. The assassinations of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert Kennedy, race riots, the Vietnam War and other events and factors led to this being a turbulent era. Ashe, himself, remained a quiet protestor. When asked about his position on sports and politics, as well as militancy, Ashe responded by stating that he himself was not one to take up militant actions: "I'm not a rock-thrower. I never will be. I think rock-throwing, riots, burnings and lootings are ridiculous."<sup>64</sup> However, he also went on to say that he supported the motives of those advocating black power.

During this period in Ashe's life his acts of protestation were by no means militant, and hardly vocal. He never had an outburst on the court, a product of both his upbringing and influence of his father, as well as that of Johnson, his coach and mentor. He was taught that behavior like that would hurt him more than assist him, a view that Ashe carried with him. As he stated, "You can scream and holler all you want—as most civil rights groups are doing now—but it falls on deaf ears... We're outnumbered in this country. That's the main reason I don't throw rocks. Ten rocks would come back for everyone that I threw."<sup>65</sup>

Despite his lack of rock throwing, Ashe still caused uproar in the civil rights arena. Upon learning about apartheid, for instance, he applied for a visa to participate in the national tennis tournament in South Africa in 1969. At the time, South Africa denied African American players

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<sup>63</sup> David Gray, "The U.S. National Amateur Championship," *World Tennis*, October (1968), 18.

<sup>64</sup> Neil Amdur, "Conversations with Lt. Arthur Ashe: Part II," *World Tennis*, May (1968), 28.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

the ability to participate in the tournament, to which Ashe responded, “This time I won’t be silent. I’ll go right to the South African embassy in New York. If they want to turn me down, they’ll have to do it right there in front of you.”<sup>66</sup> Although South Africa rejected his visa request, he continued to press. After his sustained success on the court, South African granted him a visa in 1973 and permitted him to compete. However, he accepted under the condition that the audiences would not be segregated. At the time, Ashe’s acceptance in this South African tournament was seen as a positive step toward the eroding of apartheid.<sup>67</sup> Throughout the remainder of his life, Ashe continued to make South Africa a priority, to the extent that he lied on his passport application about having AIDS, just to gain admittance into the country. He also spoke out against the treatment of Haitian refugees and a protest in D.C. over this topic would ultimately to his arrest.<sup>68</sup>

The name Arthur Ashe conjures up images of civil rights, of one man’s restrained opposition and quiet struggle for equality in the sport and society. It is only appropriate that Ashe receive recognition as a man who fought against inequity. As a successful African American athlete in a sport that often discouraged African Americans from participating, it is only fair that he is viewed as a pioneer, as a man who forged a path that African American men and women would follow. However, why is this aspect of his memory emphasized? Why does public memory favor Arthur Ashe’s activism over his athleticism? And why does Althea Gibson’s legacy not hold a similar message of integration?

*The Legacy and Memory of Althea Gibson and Arthur Ashe*

At the dedication of Arthur Ashe Stadium in Flushing Meadows on August 25, 1997 dozens of former US Open champions graced the court. Margaret Court, Billie Jean King, Rod Laver, Martina Navratilova, John McEnroe, and Don Budge, to name a few of the sport’s greatest champions, were all present to honor tennis’ lost hero and pioneer, Arthur Ashe. However, one person was blatantly missing. It was not only her 70<sup>th</sup> birthday, but the 40<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Neil Amdur, “Ashe to Test So. African Policy: Negro Star Says He’ll Seek Visa, Will Apply to Play in Open Tennis Tourney and Force Decision on Color Ban,” *New York Times*, July 30, 1969.

<sup>67</sup> Peter Hawthorne, “Ashe Match and Foster Bout Mean More Erosion of Apartheid,” *New York Times*, November 10, 1973.

<sup>68</sup> Both Arthur Ashe’s passport and arrest citation are on view at the ITHF&M as a testament to his activism.

Anniversary of her historic win at what would become the US Open in 1957. Althea Gibson, the first African American to participate in what would become the US Open and the first African American to know the feeling of success and triumph as the United States Champion, was not in attendance at the ceremony, nor were her accomplishments recognized.

The tennis community as a whole overlooked this great champion and her accomplishments in the sport. Ashe is seen as the sport's instrument of integration, not Gibson. By the time Gibson made her way into the USLTA events and accomplished a great deal of success in the late 1950s, America was just on the verge of social revolution, but had not yet reached the culmination of the Civil Rights movement. Ashe on the other hand won the first US Open in 1968, at the height of not only athletic protest but the height of the black social revolution.

In Ashe's own words, he describes the tumultuous year of 1968 and the role of being a well known African American figure during the Civil Rights movement,

Well, in the late 1967 I could see the Olympic boycott starting to mushroom...and then Dr. King was assassinated, then Bobby Kennedy was assassinated, and then you had the Mexico City Olympics, and then you had President Johnson coming on TV saying I will not run....and I try even today when I speak at college campuses explain to college students what happened in 68, and as detailed as I can get, I can't do justice to that year...I don't think I had that freedom. In the 60s there weren't too many of us, especially athletes who were well known...who could escape being an integral part of the black social revolution or the movement, or the civil rights movement...there was such pressure in the African-American community to do something.<sup>69</sup>

The era in which Ashe was a tennis star has a lot to do with why he is viewed as an instrument of integration and Gibson is not. Gibson retired from amateur tennis in 1958 just as controversies over civil rights were beginning to erupt. A decade later, when Ashe took the main stage in tennis, racial tensions were exploding.

Gibson's early retirement also affects how society remembers her. She retired in 1958, the same year she won Wimbledon and what became the US Open for the second time. It was at the height of her career. This raised a great deal of questions among the tennis community. Why did Gibson retire? There were multiple reasons. For one, Gibson was not just accomplished in

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<sup>69</sup> "Arthur Ashe," *The Charlie Rose Show*, videocassette, October 28, 1992. VHS available at the ITHF&M Information Research Center, Newport, RI (Reference Number: AVM.1992.27).

tennis, she went on to tour with the Harlem Globe Trotters, pursued a singing career, and was the first African American to join the Ladies Professional Golf Association (LPGA).

However, these were not just other interests; instead they represented potentially better ways to earn money. Ultimately, as Gibson explained in her autobiography, she retired from tennis due to a lack of funding.

“Being a champ is all well and good,” I would tell the well-meaning people who asked me about my retirement, “but you can’t eat a crown. Nor can you send the Internal Revenue Service a throne clipped to their tax forms. The landlord and grocer and tax collector are funny that way: they like cold cash. I may be the Queen of Tennis right now, but I reign over an empty bank account, and I’m not going to fill it by playing amateur tennis, even if I remain champ from now until Judgment Day.”<sup>70</sup>

One of the barriers that existed for Gibson was maintaining the financial means to carry out her tennis career. At the time there was no professional tour for women, and professional players and amateur players were not competing in the same tournaments. Amateur players, like Gibson, did not receive significant prize money to sustain their careers, unlike the professional players. This is something that would change by the time Arthur Ashe won his first Grand Slam.

In 1968 Arthur Ashe won his first Grand Slam, the US Open. That year was the beginning of Open Era tennis, a year which marked a change in the sport forever. As of 1968, professionals and amateurs competed together in the same tournaments. This essentially divided up the sport into two separate historical periods: before the Open Era and during the Open Era. Ashe was the first champion of the Open Era. The fact that Gibson was not a part of this era plays a major role in how the tennis community remembers, constructs her legacy, and memorializes Gibson. Today, commemorative events only tend to focus on the Open Era players and often overlook those whose successes occurred before the Open Era.

This is evident, for instance, in the September/October USTA Magazine’s list of the greatest achievements in US Open history.<sup>71</sup> Arthur Ashe’s 1968 win is clearly listed within this magazine’s pages, as is Pancho Gonzales’ US Open triumphs. Pancho Gonzalez, similar to Ashe and Gibson, did not fit the mold of the average tennis player. He was the first Hispanic man

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<sup>70</sup> Gibson, *So Much to Live For*, 15.

<sup>71</sup> “Greatest Achievements in US Open History,” *United States Tennis Association Magazine*, September/October (2009).

to win the US Open, and deemed the “first minority champion” of the sport.<sup>72</sup> However, one person is clearly missing from this narrative: the first African American to win the US Open. It was not Arthur Ashe, it was Althea Gibson. She is overlooked, again, lost in the shadow of a greater figure of integration, Arthur Ashe.

All of these factors play a major role in how society and the sport construct Gibson’s memory and legacy. However, one final factor, probably the greatest factor, affects how we remember Gibson: her gradual disappearance from the tennis scene. As stated earlier, Gibson chose not to attend the 1997 dedication of Arthur Ashe Stadium. Instead, she stayed mere miles away at her home in New Jersey. However, this was not unusual behavior for her but rather indicative of a trend that formed toward the end of her life.

A great woman of pride, Gibson’s ailing health kept her from attending several functions such as this, even when it meant losing recognition for her accomplishments. Her twilight years were not spent actively protesting issues, generating support for causes, or establishing non-profits like Ashe’s were. Instead, Gibson kept herself locked up in her New Jersey home, even from her closest friends. “She’s embarrassed about how she is now,” her friend and former pro, Betty Hicks stated, in an article in the *Sunday Star-Ledger* in 1997 entitled “Behind her door hides an ailing tennis great.”<sup>73</sup> As a result of her seclusion, her accomplishments in the sport are often overlooked; credits which should rightfully be hers are often bestowed upon others.

Because Arthur Ashe maintained public view after the conclusion of his athletic career he is remembered as greatly, if not more so, for the work he did outside of the sport and the differences he made after tennis. As Harry Belafonte states when asked about Ashe,

When you just look at what it was that Arthur achieved, people continue to love him, people continue to care for him. His voice I think became more powerful as a matter of fact after his tennis days had ended because of his human commitment and the dignity and the integrity that he brought to that commitment.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Dave Anderson, “A Star Player Who Lived By His Own Rules,” *New York Times*, September 5, 2009.

<sup>73</sup> “Behind her door hides an ailing tennis great,” *The Sunday Star-Ledger*. August 31, 1997.

<sup>74</sup> *Arthur Ashe: Citizen of the World*, videocassette (HBO, 1994). VHS available at the ITHF&M Information Research Center, Newport, RI (Reference Number: AVM.1994.30).

This, however, begs the question, why is Arthur Ashe's public memory so heavily swayed to present him as an activist and humanitarian, and not a champion athlete?

Throughout his life, Arthur Ashe tried to engage African American youth with tennis. Ashe used tennis as a means to increase education and participation among inner-city students. He set up tennis programs geared towards inner-city children in New York and other locations throughout the country, to make tennis more accessible.<sup>75</sup> And yet, today, there still is this need and want for greater African American participation in tennis, especially in regards to men's competition.

African Americans have yet to see the same success in terms of the careers of Althea Gibson and Arthur Ashe reflected in the current world rankings. As of March of 2010, the top 400 players worldwide illustrate this point. Taken from the official men's and women's international professional tennis associations, The Association of Tennis Professionals (ATP), and the Women's Tennis Association (WTA), are the following statistics on current international rankings. Of the top 400 men competing in the singles tour, 31 are Americans. Of those 31, three are African Americans: James Blake, Donald Young, and Scoville Jenkins. Women, on the other hand, have seen significant participation. Of the top 400 women competing in the singles tour, 31 are Americans and of those, nine are African Americans: Serena Williams, Venus Williams, Shenay Perry, Angela Haynes, Alexandra Stevenson, Mashona Washington, Jennifer Elie, Megan Moulton-Levy, and Asia Muhammed.<sup>76</sup>

The influence of women like Althea Gibson and more modern influential African American tennis players like Zina Garrison, have left an impression on the tennis stars and prospective players of today. As Serena Williams stated in an interview on NPR's Morning Edition with Terry Gross, Althea Gibson was and is someone she continues to think about and respect. When Serena Williams was a young teenager on the tennis circuit, she played in the Indian Wells tournament in Palm Springs, California. Venus Williams, her older sister, had dropped out of the tournament after the quarter finals due to injury. When Serena Williams

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<sup>75</sup> Michael Madden, "Inside, the fires burned for many causes," *Boston Globe*, February 8, 1993.

<sup>76</sup> Statistics taken from the ATP and WTA website, where they list current world rankings: ATP Tour, Inc., "South African Airways 2010 ATP Rankings," ATP World Tour, <http://www.atpworldtour.com/Rankings/Singles.aspx> (accessed March 5, 2010); WTA Tour, Inc., "Sony Ericsson WTA Tour Singles Rankings," Sony Ericsson WTA Tour, <http://www.sonyericssonwtatour.com/page/Rankings/0,,12781,00.html> (accessed March 5, 2010).

stepped on court to play Kim Clijsters in the semi-finals she received not only boos from the crowd but racial epithets as well. Serena Williams detailed the experience to Terry Gross of NPR,

I was crying in my towel, at the changeover I would cry. And you know, I knew that I had to go on. I got strength from you know a lot of the situations like Althea Gibson who ended up having to sleep in her car because of the color of her skin...and I thought wow, this is nothing compared to what...[she] went through. And I was able to draw strength from that and finish the match.<sup>77</sup>

As Serena Williams indicated, Althea Gibson is still remembered by African American women players today, and her influence is evident on this women's sport.

Despite the increase in women's participation over the years, and evidence that current professional women remember Althea Gibson, out of these 12 athletes, both men and women, ranked in the top 400 of their sport, only three are ranked within the top 100: James Blake, Serena Williams, and Venus Williams. For this reason, these three names are the most recognizable to the casual viewer and fan. And although other African Americans participate in the sport today, they receive limited exposure, as the press and television networks are occupied with only those players who are high-ranking professionals.

This problem concerned Arthur Ashe. He recognized that the sport was expensive and often inaccessible. When asked by Charlie Rose during an interview where all the other Arthur Ashes and young African American tennis players were Ashe responded with, "I think there will be quite a few emerging when tennis is able to attract more of our best athletic talent...but the sport now is not that accessible or even hospitable in some place to our best black athletic talent."<sup>78</sup> Instead, he argued it was other sports that attracted children: "You want a black kid in any particular place to equally weigh well should I be a basketball player or a tennis player? And right, it's just no contest. So the best athletes play basketball...not too many Americans athletes have played very well and played tennis."<sup>79</sup> Today, the USTA is taking steps to create a more inclusive sport.

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<sup>77</sup> Terry Gross, "Serena Williams Puts Emotion Into Game, Memoir," *NPR Morning Edition*, September 23, 2009, <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=113090963> .

<sup>78</sup> "Arthur Ashe," *The Charlie Rose Show*.

<sup>79</sup> "Arthur Ashe," *The Charlie Rose Show*.

The USTA is on a mission to diversify the sport. It is the association's obligation as the sport's official and national association to ensure that all barriers are removed. Diversity and inclusion, the association declares, is their "strategic priority."<sup>80</sup> Towards that goal the USTA has hired Rodney Harmon, to serve as the director of multicultural development for the USTA. He works to recruit athletic talent that might otherwise ignore the opportunities available in tennis, to try and guarantee that the sport will be reflective of all of America.<sup>81</sup> Arthur Ashe would have approved.

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<sup>80</sup> The United States Tennis Association, "Diversity," The Official Website of the United States Tennis Association, <http://www.usta.com/AboutUs/Diversity.aspx> (accessed March 5, 2010).

<sup>81</sup> George Vecsey, "Where Are Next Gibsons And Ashes?" *New York Times*, August 29, 1997.

## CHAPTER 2

### CITIZEN OF THE WORLD: LOOKING AT THE LIFE AND LEGACY OF ARTHUR ASHE THROUGH THE LENS OF THE SPORT

The public presentations of Arthur Ashe's life are as varied and as different as the venues within which his memory is enshrined. The International Tennis Hall of Fame and Museum in Newport, Rhode Island presents their own interpretation of Ashe's legacy. Mainly a site for the presentation and preservation of tennis history, the International Tennis Hall of Fame and Museum takes a step outside its mission to tell the story of Arthur Ashe's life and memory. Focusing on Ashe's humanitarian efforts and contributions to society, the Hall of Fame highlights not Ashe's tennis career, but his role as a "citizen of the world."<sup>82</sup>

There are two stories to this narrative through which the Hall of Fame impresses its interpretation upon its public. Ashe is present not only within the hallways of the exhibitions and galleries of the Museum, but he is present in the Woolard Family Enshrinement Gallery of the Hall of Fame. Both the Museum and the Enshrinement Gallery emphasize different aspects of Ashe's life. The museum exhibition galleries focus on Ashe's role in society and the affect he had upon it. The Enshrinement Gallery, stresses his accomplishments within the sport itself.

The museum heavily emphasizes Ashe's humanitarianism and activism. The question in this case is whether this site is the appropriate place for a commentary on one tennis player's social activism? Does this discussion on Ashe's role outside the sport fit into the museum's larger narrative of sport history? Regardless of whether or not this site is the appropriate forum to discuss these aspects of Arthur Ashe's life, one cannot disagree with the fact that the museum takes a position. Although the museum acknowledges that Ashe was a tremendous athlete, it argues that it is more important to see him for his ability to transcend the sport. In the eyes of the sport, Arthur Ashe was, most significantly, a great humanitarian.

#### *The International Tennis Hall of Fame and Museum*

Before discussing the interpretation of Ashe's life and accomplishments through his exhibition within the Hall of Fame's exhibit gallery, one must first understand the history,

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<sup>82</sup> Museum label for Arthur Ashe exhibit case in the Open Era (1968 to present) Gallery, ITHF&M, Newport, RI.

mission, and collection policy of this museum. The International Tennis Hall of Fame and Museum (ITHF) calls the Newport Casino home. Constructed in 1880 and designed by Stanford, Mead and White, it is an ideal example of shingle-style, wooden architecture. In 1881, the Newport Casino held the first United States Lawn Tennis National Championship.

It was not until nearly 70 years later that James Van Alen declared the Newport Casino as home to the Tennis Hall of Fame. In 1954 the governing body of tennis, the United States Tennis Association (USTA), established the Newport Casino as the official home of the Tennis Hall of Fame. Over three decades later, in 1986, the International Tennis Federation (ITF), agreed to also make the site the home of the International Tennis Hall of Fame. One year later, in 1987, the National Landmark Program, under the National Park Service, deemed the Newport Casino a National Landmark.

Today, as the International Tennis Hall of Fame mission stands, it exists to perpetuate the history and legacy of the sport of tennis. The exhibitions span the different eras of tennis history from its inception and introduction to North America to the Open Era beginning in the 1960s. Artifacts and objects from athletes across the nation, and across the world, from all occupations related to the sport and all time eras are displayed. The ITHF also highlights dozens of its greatest Hall of Famers throughout its galleries. It is “dedicated to preserving the history of tennis, inspiring and encouraging junior tennis development, enshrining tennis heroes and heroines and providing a landmark for tennis enthusiasts worldwide.”<sup>83</sup> A major part of the ITHF is its museum. The mission of the museum is as follows:

The International Tennis Hall of Fame & Museum is a not-for-profit education institution dedicated to fostering an appreciation of the historical development of tennis and its impact on our culture, as well as the history of the Newport Casino. The Museum accomplishes these goals by collecting, preserving, exhibiting and interpreting its collections for a diverse audience. The Museum also celebrates those persons who have exceptional records or who have made outstanding contributions to the sport of tennis.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> International Tennis Hall of Fame, “About Us,” International Tennis Hall of Fame and Museum, <http://www.tennisfame.com/tennisfame.aspx?pgID=866>.

<sup>84</sup> Nicole Markham, interview by author, November 19, 2009, Newport, RI, cassette recording, in possession of the author.

As indicated in the mission, the main purpose of the exhibitions in the museum is to preserve the history of the sport, and the legacy of the major contributors and athletes of the sport. The focus of the mission is, appropriately, sports-related.

The collection policy fits with the mission statement. The museum staff, as stated by the museum's curator, "seek out artifacts that are relevant to the history, artistic traditions, and interpretation of the game of tennis and the Newport Casino."<sup>85</sup> They strive to collect objects that document the lives, accomplishments, and careers of the Hall of Famers enshrined in the ITHF and Museum. In the past, the objects and artifacts the museum collected related almost solely to the history of the sport and memorabilia related to the tennis careers of its Hall of Famers.

Currently, however, there is a deliberate shift in the collection policy, not documented in the above statement from the museum's curator, Nicole Markham. Recent acquisitions, specifically the objects in Ashe's exhibition case, "branch-out" beyond the original collection policy of the museum, acting as a means to expand beyond the typical sports memorabilia.<sup>86</sup> As the curator stated, "we want to be able to tell the full story of our Hall of Famers and other significant figures in the game."<sup>87</sup>

In order to depict the lives and tell the stories of the Hall of Famers, the ITHF and Museum creates interpretive displays in both their Enshrinement Gallery, which houses the Hall of Fame plaques, and their exhibit galleries located beyond the Enshrinement Gallery. When it was originally constructed the Hall of Fame's Enshrinement Gallery held 207 plaques. The text, written by Steve Flink, a long time contributor to such tennis presses as *World Tennis Magazine* and *Tennis Week Magazine*, included the research done by the International Tennis Hall of Fame and Museum's International Research Center.<sup>88</sup> Each plaque hones in on the athletic career and sport accomplishments of the Hall of Famers. In addition to Enshrinement Gallery, the museum highlights some players further in their exhibition gallery, which traces the development and evolution of the sport. One of the significant figures in the game that the ITHF and Museum

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<sup>85</sup> Markham, interview by author.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Steve Flink, "Steve Flink – Tennis Correspondent," Steve Flink, <http://steveflink.com/>.

chose to single out in both their exhibition gallery and Hall of Fame Enshrinement Gallery is Arthur Ashe.<sup>89</sup>

*Arthur Ashe, Hall of Famer*

On July 13, only three days after his 42<sup>nd</sup> birthday, 1985, the International Tennis Hall of Fame inducted Arthur Ashe into the Hall of Fame. He was the first African American man to be inducted into the Hall. Selected by a group of tennis media members from a nomination list, by which the nominees were selected by a two-thirds vote from the ITHF's nominating committee, Ashe was only the second African American to be inducted. He was second only to Althea Gibson.<sup>90</sup>

Ashe was one of only a handful of inductees to be honored with a spot in the Hall of the Fame the year they were eligible to be nominated. An athlete or contributor nominated for inclusion in the Hall of Fame must be retired from their involvement with the sport for at least five years before consideration. Ashe, who retired late in 1979 due to heart conditions, was inducted into the Hall of Fame in July of 1985. Ashe stated what an honor it was to be elected to the Hall of Fame the first year he was eligible for nomination, "that doesn't happen to many people in any sport. All the names would make a very short list."<sup>91</sup> Indeed it does not. A true testament to the legacy Ashe left, and the impact he had on the sport and society.

The Museum limits the amount of text found in the Enshrinement Gallery about each Hall of Famer. They predominantly focus mostly on the accomplishments of these athletes in the sport. Ashe's plaque reads as follows:

He won the first US Open in 1968, captivating a nation in the process. He captured Wimbledon in 1975 with a cerebral dismantling of the heavily favored Jimmy Connors in the final. He led the United States to victory for three consecutive years (1968-70) in the Davis Cup. *But Arthur Ashe was much larger than an accomplished tennis champion. An incomparable ambassador without portfolio for the sport, an impeccable sportsman, a towering statesman, Ashe passed away too early at 49 in 1993, but four years later the USTA appropriately named its new stadium after him.*<sup>92</sup> [emphasis added]

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<sup>89</sup> Joanie Agler, interview by author, October 1, 2009, Newport, RI, cassette recording, in possession of the author.

<sup>90</sup> Barbara Lloyd, "Ashe is Inducted into Hall of Fame," *New York Times*, July 14, 1985.

<sup>91</sup> Fred Waterman, "Arthur Ashe entering Tennis Hall of Fame: Black star recalls his historic career," *United Press International*, July 13, 1985.

<sup>92</sup> Steve Flink, "Woolard Family Enshrinement Gallery," ITHF&M, Newport, RI [plaque text as of July 17, 2009].

The text, in the case, is split between a discussion of his accomplishments in the sport and his work beyond the tennis court. This is the only area within the Museum that focuses so heavily on Ashe's accomplishments in the sport, as his other exhibit outside the Enshrinement Gallery emphasizes his activism and humanitarian work. In comparison, other plaques in the Enshrinement Gallery, with the exception of Billie Jean King, focus almost entirely on the accomplishments within the sport, even including Althea Gibson's. It is incredibly rare to see text describing other accomplishments beyond the realm of tennis. This makes Arthur Ashe's plaque stand out significantly from the others.

Out of all the spaces within the museum, this space defines why the Nominating Committee of the Hall of Fame selected these particular men and women as inductees. In a way, these plaques act as justification for their inclusion in the Hall of Fame. By pure common sense, these plaques should focus entirely on sport achievements, but in the case of Arthur Ashe this is not so. As Doug Stark, the director of the museum states, the Woolard Family Enshrinement Gallery is meant to discuss and focus on their athletic careers,

...the plaques in the Enshrinement Gallery really discuss their tennis careers and what they've done on the field and the exhibits are a way to—discuss some things that would not necessarily be...in the [museum exhibits]...It's probably a place where we can talk more about the individual, and the Enshrinement Gallery are on your tennis accomplishments.<sup>93</sup>

This speaks volumes on how the museum has chosen to interpret the life and legacy of Arthur Ashe. His role off the court is tremendous enough that a site, sacred to the sport of tennis, has elected to not only highlight this aspect within its galleries, but has chosen to include that he was “much larger than an accomplished tennis champion” on a plaque meant to illustrate the reasoning behind his addition to a sports Hall of Fame.<sup>94</sup>

*Arthur Ashe, Citizen of the World*

The museum gallery maintains the original floor plan of the casino. Each of the individual club rooms is broken into exhibit space, which is then divided into several themes and time periods. Found in the beginning of the “Open Era Timeline (1968 to present)” gallery is a

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<sup>93</sup> Doug Stark, interview by author, October 04, 2009, Newport, RI, cassette recording, in possession of the author.

<sup>94</sup> Flink, Enshrinement Gallery, ITHF&M.

lone case of Ashe's artifacts. The case is comprised of a number of non-tennis related objects. There is a letter from Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. from February 7, 1968 that conveys their shared aims: "I would like to express my personal appreciation...for your expression of support and solidarity in the fight for justice, freedom and dignity for all people in this country."<sup>95</sup> Also in this case is the telegram he received from Jackie Robinson just after his US Open win in 1968, which also speaks to Ashe's accomplishments within a civil rights context: "Proud of your greatness as a tennis player / prouder of your greatness as a man / your stand should bridge the gap between races / and inspire black people the world over / and also affect the decency of all Americans."<sup>96</sup> Sitting nearby is the final passport Arthur Ashe applied for, which is open to his photograph. This object, more than the rest, provides tangible evidence of Ashe's commitment to humanitarian work around the globe. The museum makes a similar point by including an arrest citation issued to Ashe on February 5, 1985 for his protest against the American policy directed towards Haitian refugees. Lastly, there is a *Newsweek* inscribed with a thoughtful note from Nelson Mandela's wife, Winnie Mandela. As one can see from the artifacts listed there is not a single piece of sports memorabilia in Ashe's case. The focus of his case is entirely on his work as a humanitarian and an activist. By selecting solely these objects to display in Ashe's case, the museum is constructing this particular legacy of Arthur Ashe for the public.

It is evident looking at Figure 2.1 below, taken from the International Tennis Hall of Fame's exhibit gallery; Arthur Ashe's exhibit case focuses on the life and work he did outside and beyond tennis.

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<sup>95</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr. Letter to Arthur Ashe in exhibit: "Open Era Timeline (1968 to present)," ITHF&M, Newport, RI.

<sup>96</sup> Jackie Robinson Telegram to Arthur Ashe in exhibit: "Open Era Timeline (1968 to present), ITHF&M, Newport, RI.



**Figure 2.1 Image of Arthur Ashe's Display Case in the International Tennis Hall of Fame and Museum**  
**Source: Picture taken by author**

The museum acquired the objects in 2005, as a result of an auction, and put them on display by the spring of 2005.<sup>97</sup> This recent exhibition is indicative of the shift the museum is actively making in its collection policy to create a broader, more inclusive story of its Hall of Famers. Typically, the collections created before this period reflected the mission of the museum. They very clearly reflect the history and evolution of the sport and the men and women involved in its growth as well as who contributed to its development. However, this exhibit, created after the installment of the permanent collection, represents an idea within the museum to present stories about the athletes that give the visitor a greater perspective of that person's life and achievements.

Almost just as telling as what the museum staff chose to place in the exhibit case is what they chose to leave out. Not a single object within Ashe's case represents his tremendous tennis career. Arthur Ashe earned three Grand Slam titles during his tennis career, he won the Wimbledon Championships in 1975, and he was the first player to win both the Amateur and

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<sup>97</sup> Markham, interview by author.

National Championships in the same year in 1968. In addition, he represented the United States in Davis Cup and later acted as Davis Cup captain. These are no small accomplishments in the eyes of the sport, and yet no objects remain in this case to represent these accomplishments.

Expanding the stories of their Hall of Famers, however, has problems and concerns of its own. One of the challenges museum staff at the ITHF face is the ever growing number of Hall of Famers, and the ever stagnant size of the museum galleries. With just over 200 Hall of Famers, and growing, the space available to display objects regarding their lives and careers, which is small to begin with, becomes smaller and smaller over time. As the Hall of Fame grows, the space to expand and broaden the narrative of their Hall of Famers diminishes. As a result the museum staff must chose their display pieces carefully and thoughtfully.

So far, only two athletes in the ITHF have their successful sports careers overshadowed by discussion of their social impacts: Arthur Ashe and Billie Jean King. The director of the museum at the ITHF stated very clearly the intentions behind these particular exhibits,

...we're really discussing Arthur Ashe and...the impact he had on society...it's less about his, sort of, day to day tennis career. I think the other individual who we discuss outside of tennis is Billie Jean King. You know those are two athletes who transcend the sport. And every sport will have those athletes that transcend their sport and their not defined solely by their accomplishments on the field but by what they've done off of it and tennis was certainly very important to Arthur Ashe but his accomplishments include so many other things.<sup>98</sup>

Where the Hall of Fame recognized Ashe for his civil rights work, they recognized Billie Jean King for advancing the rights of women in the sport. She was instrumental in pushing for equal prize money for women and men at tennis tournaments. She also worked to develop greater opportunities for the female professional tennis player by creating the Women's Tennis Association, the Virginia Slims women's tour, and World Team Tennis.

#### *Honoring Arthur Ashe after His Passing*

Immediately after Ashe's passing in 1993 the ITHF planned to pose a tribute to Arthur Ashe during that year's induction ceremony. Arthur Ashe was both a 1985 inductee of the Hall of Fame as well as a member of the Board of Directors. He played a significant role in the development of the Hall of Fame, and was described as an ever-supportive member and

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<sup>98</sup> Stark, interview by author.

contributor of the Hall of Fame. The President of the International Tennis Hall of Fame at the time of his passing, Jane Brown, clearly spoke of the relationship between Ashe and the ITHF, “Arthur was an extraordinary human being. His victories at Wimbledon and the U.S. Open were only the beginning of a remarkable life. We salute him as a hero and we will miss him as a friend.”<sup>99</sup> In addition, the ITHF responded with a new exhibitions and donations in his honor.

The Hall of Fame would not only hold a tribute to Ashe during the ceremonies in July of 1993, they also planned to contribute to the charities and organizations under the Arthur Ashe foundation, which Ashe established before he died. These foundations were set up to provide funding to research and combat the AIDS virus. When Arthur Ashe passed away the sport suffered a tremendous loss, and the Hall of Fame struggled to provide the proper honor to their fallen hero.<sup>100</sup> Acquiring the humanitarian objects the museum now displays was one way the ITHF sought to preserve his memory.

#### *The Overall Message of the Museum*

In using these objects the Hall of Fame is presenting a story of Arthur Ashe that speaks very highly of his off-court accomplishments. And by excluding sports-related objects from his exhibit case they are stressing the role Arthur Ashe played in society, not just in the sport. The curator’s belief that the museum’s audience is already familiar with Ashe’s tennis accomplishments is one reason the ITHF selected these objects. As Nicole Markham, the museum’s curator, states, “It was a story that I feel many had an inkling about, but did not really know about...in order to accurately explain how these people fit into the larger picture of the human culture, we need to be able to tell more than just what tournaments they won and how long they played.”<sup>101</sup> They wanted to highlight that Arthur Ashe, like many of the other Hall of Famers, did more than just play tennis.

The museum presents this message through the objects, but they also emphasize this narrative on their guided tours as well. As Joanie Agler, one of the museum’s regular docents and the Information Research Center’s librarian, states,

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<sup>99</sup> Jane Brown, press release, February 06, 1993, ITHF&M Information Research Center, Newport, RI.

<sup>100</sup> “Hall of Fame plans July tribute to Ashe,” *The Newport RI Daily News*, February 8, 1993.

<sup>101</sup> Markham, interview by author.

I think appropriately in many ways...the display is predominantly made up of different items...praising his off court accomplishments, and that's the way that the Hall of Fame has predominantly chosen to, I guess, kind of portray Arthur Ashe. And I had been told back when I was learning how to give tours, to point that out in his particular case, and I don't know if it was at his request or not, but it's always kind of been presented to me as the way he wanted it or would've wanted it because he was very proud of his off court accomplishments and that what he did on the court was just a means to an end to do what he did off the court.<sup>102</sup>

The museum is constructing this particular memory of Arthur Ashe for the visitor. The visitors are informed of Ashe's humanitarian efforts by the tour guide and the interpretive text, and through the limited objects on display. It is through all of these mediums that the ITHF emphasizes Ashe's civic role.

*Why the Focus on Ashe's Activism and Humanitarian Work?*

Why would a sports museum, whose mission so clearly focuses on interpreting and presenting the history of the sport and the participants within it, create an exhibition that includes no serious mention of a Hall of Famer's athletic career? Before the museum acquired the humanitarian-related and activist-related objects on display in 2005, it did display a few items of sports memorabilia related to Ashe's tennis career. Visitors could see Ashe's Davis Cup captain jacket, which was donated by John McEnroe. They could also see one of Ashe's two Grand Slam winning racquets. Each was removed in the new display. It seems relatively clear that the curators intention was, and is, to favor presenting the objects of Ashe's that represent him as an activist rather than an athlete.

Still, even if the museum wanted to include more items to speak to his tennis career, the museum's collections are quite limited for telling this aspect of his story. The museum has six vaults filled with tennis records and memorabilia regarding their Hall of Famers. Using the museum's database, a search of material regarding Arthur Ashe recalled 245 records. These are not just objects, but include a variety of materials and mediums, such as film, magazine articles, artifacts, and material from the museum's research library. Out of these 245 items, however, very few are sports memorabilia that could be displayed,

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<sup>102</sup> Agler, interview by author.

We do not have a lot of physical memorabilia directly related to Arthur's tennis career, such as trophies, equipment, and clothing. We do have two tennis racquets used by Ashe—one from the 1968 US Open...and another from the 1975 Wimbledon Championships; the 1975 racquet is currently on loan... We do not have any trophies that were won by Arthur where he got to take home...the physical trophies won...by Arthur are owned by his widow and daughter. We have his 1992 Davis Cup Vest...but it was recently removed from display to ensure its long-term preservation as it had been on view for almost 10 years.<sup>103</sup>

Issues of preservation and conservation are significant concerns in displaying what little material culture the museum has from Ashe's tennis career.

In regards to the existing Arthur Ashe collection, it is important to know that the Museum intends to collect more objects about Ashe that will broaden his story for visitors. In particular, the curator would like to add more information on the people in Ashe's life that influenced him the most, including Dr. Robert Walter Johnson. However, due to the spatial constraints of the gallery, and over 200 Hall of Famers to interpret, the museum must currently limit the amount of interpretive material and objects displayed.<sup>104</sup>

#### *Location and Appropriateness of the Exhibition*

For a museum, whose mission is to emphasize the importance of preserving the history of the sport and its figures, public historians need to ask whether it is appropriate for this museum to house objects and artifacts dealing with the Civil Rights movement. Are these objects better interpreted and placed in a museum devoted to Civil Rights history of the history of African Americans? How far can a museum stretch beyond its stated collection policy?

As mentioned previously, the International Tennis Hall of Fame and Museum is housed inside the old Newport Casino. An elite social club for New England, the Newport Casino followed the standard of the time. Constructed in 1880, the club held the first United States National Tennis Championships in 1881. At the time that this championship was held, African Americans were not allowed to compete freely with whites.

The International Tennis Hall of Fame exists in an intimidating Victorian style architectural piece. A structure, indicative of the gulf that existed between African Americans and whites, now houses the artifacts of a man meant to bridge that divide. The artifacts and

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<sup>103</sup> Markham, interview by author.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

exhibits are set among preserved club rooms. The layout of the Newport Casino appears relatively undisturbed. Arthur Ashe's case, which houses the objects relating to the Civil Right movement, apartheid, and his social service, is right outside the preserved Peggy Woolard Library. This library is a perfectly preserved image of 19<sup>th</sup> century social clubs. This creates a glorious contradiction between the objects and the structure in which they are housed. One represents the equality Ashe strove for all his life, the other an exclusive retreat for whites.

Ashe recognized the elitism that came with the Newport Casino, how it represented a particular community with certain standards and behavior. It represents a certain history of sport and its society, one that no longer fit with the sport Ashe knew. At his induction to the International Tennis Hall of Fame, Arthur stated as he stood on the grounds of the Newport Casino, "tennis, as this place epitomizes, once had a Victorian sense of behavior that has nothing to do with modern athletics, especially at the professional level,' he says looking out over the storied Newport Casino grounds."<sup>105</sup>

In addition, a definite disconnect exists within the gallery. The visitor is confronted with sports history throughout the museum, and then suddenly, midway through the gallery, the narrative shifts dramatically to present Ashe's story, which remains unrelated to the sport. This is something that the museum's director recognizes and comments on,

...I don't think we do a good enough interpretive job. So, it's sort of not set within a larger context in the gallery...there's no cohesive narrative and I think it's important to have a case there but it's not, to my liking, it's not part of something larger.<sup>106</sup>

This exhibit does create a definite break in the narrative of the museum. The only other figure to include aspects such as these that branch outside the sport so greatly is Billie Jean King. As mentioned previously, as a museum whose focus is sports history, it seems oddly out of place to include such a strong commentary on an athlete's work separate from the sport.

If this is representative of the shift in collection policy, the museum must be careful not to overstep its boundaries. As the collection policy and mission stand, the museum should highlight the tennis career as well as the work outside of it. They must be careful not to over

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<sup>105</sup> "Arthur Ashe remains active in tennis on many fronts," *New York Messenger*, July 26, 1985.

<sup>106</sup> Stark, interview by author.

collect this aspect of any player's history, for should the museum collect more objects of this nature one might argue that they would be better suited in a museum that has the appropriate means to accurately interpret the objects.

However, one cannot accurately portray the story of Arthur Ashe without mentioning heavily his humanitarian work and activism. As Ashe stated, "I believe I was destined to do more than hit tennis balls," and it is clear that this exhibition would please him tremendously.<sup>107</sup> This aspect of Arthur Ashe's life must be told, must be portrayed, to accurately present his life, his accomplishments, his work, and what was, ultimately, meaningful to him.

### *Conclusion*

Arthur Ashe was and always will be larger than the sport. The Hall of Fame Museum illustrates this. They define him as a man who transcended the sport. Through their commemorative actions, such as exhibitions, Hall of Fame plaques, and tours, the museum presents a narrative that focuses heavily on his humanitarian work and activism. It is obvious what the sport recognizes as his truly significant work and occupation. Arthur Ashe was not just a tennis player; he was an activist.

Members within the greater sport community mimic this, and choose to recognize and remember Ashe as a man, not an athlete. At the time of his passing, focused not on his achievements within the sport but his achievement among all humanity, Martina Navratilova, an accomplished tennis champion, stated after winning the Pan Pacific Open,

Ladies and gentleman, I'd like to pause for a moment now to remember someone special. Arthur she passed away in the United States. He was a remarkable man... While we here in this arena are separated by many cultural differences, I ask that we stop for a moment of silence to remember an extraordinary human being who transcended his sport, his race, religion and nationality, and in his own way helped to change the world.<sup>108</sup>

In a way, Martina Navratilova represents how the sport in general, whether athletes, institutions like the Hall of Fame, or the United States Tennis Association, choose to remember Arthur Ashe: as a man, as humanitarian, but even more so, as an extraordinary citizen of the world.

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<sup>107</sup> "An Ace Vs. Aids: Ailing Tennis Great Arthur Ashe Embarks On World Tour To Raise Money, Awareness," *The Seattle Times*, April 12, 1992.

<sup>108</sup> "Martina Navratilova on Arthur Ashe," *Kraft Tour Media Information*, February 08, 1993.

## CHAPTER 3

### CONTINUING THE LEGACY OF A VIRGINIA HERO: CONSTRUCTING THE MEMORY OF ARTHUR ASHE IN RICHMOND, VIRGINIA

Towards the end of Arthur Ashe's life, local Richmonders began to take notice that little had been done within in his own hometown to commemorate his life and accomplishments. Several took it upon themselves to create public art to preserve the memory of Arthur Ashe and his dedication to Richmond's community. Paul DiPasquale, sculptor of the Arthur Ashe monument, Louis Briel, painter of Arthur Ashe's portraits, and Marty Dummett and Tom Chewing, of Virginia Heroes, Incorporated, among many others, were responsible for the creating these physical memorials. They reached out to Arthur Ashe and secured his input in helping to construct these tributes. Through their actions, and the actions of similar minded people in Richmond, they presented Arthur Ashe as a true "Virginia Hero."<sup>109</sup>

In what was once the capital of the Confederacy, on a street unquestionably overflowing with Civil War history, now rests the humble figure of Arthur Ashe, Jr. Ashe stands on Monument Avenue, his back facing downtown Richmond, Virginia. Behind him rest the intimidating and towering figures of Matthew Fontaine Maury, Jefferson Davis, Robert E. Lee, and J.E.B. Stuart. All of these monuments were erected at the start of the twentieth century to celebrate the Lost Cause. By adding Ashe's figure to this famous street, Richmond is attempting to redefine who and what should be remembered.

Ashe's presence, however, was not always welcome on Monument Avenue. Many felt a park was a more appropriate place for his monument, others felt Ashe's old neighborhood was the correct location. A few argued that the artistic merit of the statue itself made it ill suited for

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<sup>109</sup> The term "Virginia Hero" is used here partly because of Ashe's role in the creation of Virginia Heroes, Incorporated, a group that recruits successful Virginians to come to Richmond and mentor at-risk, middle school aged children in the community. Ashe is also described as a "Virginia Hero" because the Virginia Heroes, Incorporated Board Members responsible for the construction of his monument often referred to Arthur Ashe as their "Virginia Hero;" meaning he acted as a role model and mentor not only to Richmond students through his involvement with the Virginia Heroes program, but in their mind, his actions of service throughout his life spoke to his role as a hero.

placement on the prestigious Avenue. The struggle to place a monument dedicated to the life and work of Arthur Ashe in Richmond, Virginia speaks to the issue of contested memory.

*Using Virginia Heroes to Memorialize a True Virginia Hero*

Virginia Heroes, Incorporated, a non-profit organization that provides mentors to middle school-aged children throughout Richmond by inviting back successful men and women who graduated from Virginia schools to act as counselors, was integral to these various public art efforts. This organization was formed in response to a speech Arthur Ashe gave at the Richmond Urban forum in 1989. In a letter addressed to Ashe on January 16, 1990, Pauline R. Elmore, the first President of the Executive Board of Virginia Heroes, wrote,

I heard you speak at the Richmond Urban Forum in November and was taken with your idea for an alumni weekend and festival for Richmond's successful graduates. I wonder if you could tell me the name of the city where the event you mentioned took place. Some friends and I are talking about a similar event for Richmond, and we hope to put a proposal together. Any information or input you could provide would be helpful.<sup>110</sup>

Virginia Heroes, Incorporated became dedicated to working in Richmond's at-risk schools.

The President's report for Virginia Heroes, Incorporated from 1989 to 1991 states how the organization came into being. After speaking with Arthur Ashe and gaining his approval for the creation of Virginia Heroes, Pauline Elmore contacted Lynn Harkins to discuss the homecoming Ashe described. She suggested speaking with Mary Tyler Cheek, "the lady who knows how to get things done in Richmond." Cheek introduced Elmore to Jackie Epps who was an advisor to Governor Wilder of Virginia. Throughout the summer and fall of 1990 people interested in creating this organization gathered for a series of steering committee meetings.<sup>111</sup>

Virginia Heroes grew and by fall of 1990 had created a Board of Directors. By this time, Virginia Heroes had secured the support of several important members of the community, such as Dr. LaVerne Spurlock, who acted as a mediator between Virginia Heroes and Richmond Public Schools. In addition, Arthur Ashe agreed to become an honorary chairman and upon his

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<sup>110</sup> Letter from Pauline Elmore to Arthur Ashe, Jan 16, 1990, Virginia Heroes, Incorporated records in possession of current board member, Dr. Raphael Seligmann (Virginia Heroes, Incorporated hereafter cited as Virginia Heroes, Inc.).

<sup>111</sup> Pauline Elmore, How Virginia Heroes Came into Being: President's Report, 1989-1991, Virginia Heroes, Inc. records in possession of current board member, Dr. Raphael Seligmann.

suggestion Virginia Heroes began the process of incorporation, which it completed on February 4, 1991. Later that year, in May, Virginia Heroes, Incorporated also applied for non-profit status.<sup>112</sup>

In these early years Virginia Heroes, Incorporated applied for, and received, grant money. They also began fundraising efforts. This hard work culminated in the first celebration of Virginia Heroes on November 11, 1991. As stated in the President's Report, "The rest is history. Fifty-four heroes participated in our event...Arthur Ashe was in Richmond to chair the event, and Governor Wilder attended the welcoming reception for the heroes...Six hundred sixth graders from Richmond's middle schools participated."<sup>113</sup>

However, the responsibilities of Virginia Heroes, Incorporated do not stop there. Virginia Heroes monitored, supported, and sponsored the creation of the Arthur Ashe statue on Monument Avenue in Richmond, Virginia. In addition, Louis Briel, a participant in Virginia Heroes, Incorporated's mentor program, offered his assistance in perpetuating the memory and legacy of Arthur Ashe by painting his official portrait. Hence, Virginia Heroes, Incorporated is responsible for shaping the public memory of Arthur Ashe in Richmond .

#### *A Portrait in Motion*<sup>114</sup>

Late in 1992, Louis Briel and Virginia Heroes, Incorporated discussed the creation of a portrait of Arthur Ashe, by which to honor his participation and devotion to Virginia Heroes, Incorporated. Briel was a participating mentor with Virginia Heroes and had come to know Arthur Ashe through his work with the organization. It came to his attention that as of 1992 there had been no official portrait created of Arthur Ashe. Briel knew of Ashe's struggle with AIDS and approached this as a "tribute portrait," as he described it,

I guess, I mean, I hate to put it this way, but I guess we sort of assumed since he had AIDS that he was not going to be around forever. I don't think anybody knew how, how soon he was at the time. So I suppose the idea of it from the beginning was as a tribute portrait but we certainly hoped that he would you know be there to present it to wherever it went and to unveil it and all of that. As it turned out he

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Also the title of an autobiographical book, a journal of the years Ashe was in the tournament circuit.

actually died when I was halfway through the painting. So, a little sadder than maybe even we thought.<sup>115</sup>

Briel's portrait acts as a piece of public art that perpetuates the memory of Ashe as a mentor and as an educator. His role as a tennis player, while still present in the visual representation, takes a back seat to this other story.

Briel spoke with President of Virginia Heroes, Incorporated, Marty Dummett, about the idea of creating portraits of Ashe. She conferred with other members of the Board of Directors on Virginia Heroes and they decided that Virginia Heroes would contact Ashe about this proposition. On September 30, 1992, Marty Dummett approached Ashe and he responded well. He agreed to sit for the portraits and granted Marty Dummett permission to distribute reproductions of the "Hero and Mentor" portrait to local middle schools involved with the Virginia Heroes' Role Model Mentor Program.<sup>116</sup> On October 8, Ashe contacted Briel. They conferred on possible attire and props. Briel suggested casual dress. The prop would be a Head tennis racquet.<sup>117</sup>

Briel was aware that Ashe had what he referred to as good days and bad days, a result of his struggle with the AIDS virus. Maintaining a pose for an extended period of time, long enough for a portrait painter to grasp an image for their painting would be without a doubt a tiresome chore for Ashe. So, to accommodate Ashe, Briel requested his photographic assistant, Barry Fitzpatrick, document the session, and allowed for a sixth grade student, Daryl Goode, from the Virginia Heroes mentoring program to sit in on the appointment. Briel felt that the presence of this young man would "animate" and "relax" Ashe.<sup>118</sup> Their meeting was set for October 22, 1993.

Ashe arrived promptly in Richmond at Briel's study at two o'clock. Louis Briel recounts the session,

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<sup>115</sup> Louis Briel, interview by author, December 8, 2009, Richmond, VA, cassette recording, in possession of the author.

<sup>116</sup> Marty G. Dummett, 1992 Special Events Committee Final Report, Annual Meeting, February 27, 1995, Virginia Heroes, Inc. records in possession of current board member, Dr. Raphael Seligmann.

<sup>117</sup> Louis Briel, "Portrait of Arthur R. Ashe, Jr. Chronology and Comments," provided by Louis Briel.

<sup>118</sup> Briel, "Portrait."

The pose which I selected was struck midway through our session. I had actually suggested that we break for a few minutes from photographs. The tennis racquet became a support, as Arthur Ashe gracefully turned it downward and leaned on it. ‘I hate to impose your rest period,’ I said, ‘but don’t move.’ He looked directly and intensely at me, with a hint of a smile, and said, ‘Okay.’ The portrait was set. I knew that the pose was important because it happened so naturally. The combination of the shirt, tie and racquet, while unexpected, is so typical of the last days of Arthur Ashe’s life – on the lecture circuit to promote the causes in which he believed, in a hurry, yet serene, always supported by his acclaim from the tennis days. The painting is squared up – straight on – direct – like Ashe. It is the portrait of a gentleman.<sup>119</sup>

Ashe left that day, never to return to Briel’s studio again. He passed away the following February; however, the memory of Arthur Ashe lives on in Briel’s portrayal of him.

Briel decided to alter the portrait, dimming the blue background to a more somber tone after Ashe’s passing. It was a difficult task to finish as Briel, like many other members of Virginia Heroes, felt a tremendous sense of loss after Ashe’s passing. Briel describes his struggle,

People are moved by the look in Arthur’s eyes that perhaps reflects the sadness I felt during the months following Arthur’s death. I couldn’t shake my feelings of grief, and I wished more than once to have him there again to lead my brushstrokes with his grace. In an attempt to soothe myself, and get working again, I repainted the brilliant background color a soft, almost ethereal blue-violet. I liked it when someone called the painting “Arthur’s bench in heaven.”<sup>120</sup>

However, this portrait, along with the other Louis Briel painted and donated to Virginia Heroes, Incorporated, contributes to the construction of the public memory of Arthur Ashe.

The Smithsonian Institute acquired Briel’s original portrait in July of 1993 and it is now housed in the National Portrait Gallery in Washington, D.C. Both Virginia Heroes and the Commonwealth of Virginia presented the painting to the Gallery as a gift in memory of Arthur

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Louis Briel, “A Phone Call from New York,” provided by Louis Briel.

Ashe.<sup>121</sup> It remained on display in the first floor lobby of the National Portrait Gallery through May 1, 1994 and has continued to hang in the Gallery alongside other well known athletes.<sup>122</sup>

Briel's second portrait of Arthur Ashe included a young student, Daryl Goode, from the sixth grade. Daryl was a participating student in the Virginia Heroes' Role Model/Mentoring Program in Richmond. Briel discussed the interaction between the two, "Right at two, there he was, Arthur Ashe, right on time, with a big smile, for me and for Daryl...Daryl was thrilled to meet his hero, and Arthur Ashe got to do what he loved most to do...talk to a kid about whatever the youngster wanted to discuss."<sup>123</sup> The portrait shows Goode sitting on the floor, legs crossed, sketch pad in hand. He is looking up towards Ashe, seated on a bench above him, grasping his tennis racquet. Goode is actively sketching his mentor, clearly admiring him. This portrait truly captures the hero-like quality that Ashe possessed.<sup>124</sup>

This particular portrait was donated to Virginia Heroes by Briel. Marty Dummett, chairman of Virginia Heroes at the time, stated in the Addendum of her Special Events Committee Final Report that "Virginia Heroes, Incorporated, is most appreciative of the kindness shown by Louis Briel through these gifts. He, in his own life and work as an artist and mentor, represents a true 'Hero.'"<sup>125</sup> On November 15, 1993 at the Virginia Heroes, Incorporated celebration, A Celebration of Virginia Heroes, they unveiled the portraits of Arthur Ashe, presented by both Louis Briel and Jeanne Moutoussamy-Ashe. Dr. LaVerne Spurlock discussed the significance of this event in her Presidential Report, "A real highlight of the year was the unveiling of the portrait of Arthur Ashe and Mentee at the fall event at the Richmond Centre...Each Hero received a gift, a framed reproduction of the portrait; each student received a

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<sup>121</sup> Commonwealth of Virginia, Office of the Governor, Advisory to the Media, "Governor Wilder Announces National Portrait Gallery's Acceptance of Richmond Artist's Arthur Ashe Portrait" July 8, 1993, Virginia Heroes, Inc. records in possession of current board member, Dr. Raphael Seligmann.

<sup>122</sup> Virginia Heroes, Inc., Minutes of the Board of Directors Meeting, February 1, 1994, Virginia Heroes, Inc. records in possession of current board member, Dr. Raphael Seligmann.

<sup>123</sup> Briel, "A Phone Call."

<sup>124</sup> Arthur Ashe, Hero and Mentor, 36" x 40", Painting by Louis Briel

<sup>125</sup> History of 1992 Special Events Committee Addendum, Special Events Committee Final Report, Marty Dummett. February 27, 1995, Virginia Heroes, Inc. records in possession of current board member, Dr. Raphael Seligmann.

copy also.”<sup>126</sup> His role as a mentor within their community and his work as the founder, honorary co-chair, and participant in the mentorship program were formally recognized. Virginia Heroes, Incorporated presented a copy of the portrait to attendees of the ceremony and later distributed it throughout the city.

Virginia Heroes, Incorporated placed the portrait in public places. First it hung in the lobby of the Richmond Centre, a major shopping center.<sup>127</sup> It would later be moved to its current location in the Virginia Historical Society. The goal, however, was to reach an even wider audience.

Ashe had agreed before the painting began to give reproductions to those middle schools participating in the Virginia Heroes Model Mentor Program. On February 1, 1994 Marty Dummett announced the beginning of funding for “Project II,” which was the creation of 11 copies of Briel’s original oil painting, Hero and Mentor.<sup>128</sup> At the time Dummett intended to give a copy to eight participating local schools, one copy to Daryl Goode’s family, another copy to Governor Wilder and a final copy to Louis Briel. A year later, Ashe’s original wish was fulfilled and the nine participating schools in the Virginia Heroes project received copies. At a ceremony hosted by Thompson Middle School, Briel and Goode, the student pictured with Ashe, unveiled the portraits and Dr. LaVerne Spurlock presented the portrait to each of the nine administrators from participating schools.<sup>129</sup>

By presenting replicas of this portrait to schools throughout Richmond, Virginia Heroes distributed the image of Ashe as a hero and as a mentor. These public displays guaranteed the perpetuation of this memory to children who attended these schools, and participated in the program Briel’s portraits, however, were not the only public displays of Ashe to portray him as a

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<sup>126</sup> Dr. LaVerne Spurlock, President’s Report, February 26, 1994, Virginia Heroes, Inc. records in possession of current board member, Dr. Raphael Seligmann..

<sup>127</sup> Marty Dummett, Virginia Heroes Inc., Fundraising Report 1992-1993, Special Events, Virginia Heroes, Inc. records in possession of current board member, Dr. Raphael Seligmann..

<sup>128</sup> Virginia Heroes, Inc., Minutes of the Board of Directors Meeting, February 1, 1994, Virginia Heroes, Inc. records in possession of current board member, Dr. Raphael Seligmann..

<sup>129</sup> Marty G. Dummett, 1992 Special Events Committee Final Report, Annual Meeting, February 27, 1995, Virginia Heroes, Inc. records in possession of current board member, Dr. Raphael Seligmann..

hero and mentor. Paul DiPasquale's controversial public art was another form in which Richmonders shaped Ashe's memory.

*Recognizing and Memorializing a Hometown Hero: the Beginnings*

When Arthur Ashe was a young tennis protégé, those outside of Richmond's African American community often ignored his accomplishments. This was the result of the segregation that persisted in Richmond throughout his youth. Tom Chewning, a fellow competitor and friend of Arthur Ashe, also grew up in Richmond but lived in a world separate from Ashe. Chewning described the race relations in youth tennis when both he and Ashe were growing up,

Well, Arthur Ashe and I were born probably within a couple miles of each other. He was born about a year and a half before I was and it's kind of ironic that he was playing tennis and I was playing tennis as young people in the community, but because of segregation we had never met. And frankly, when I was 14 years old and playing in regional tournaments, middle Atlantic tournaments, I had never heard of Arthur Ashe or, for that matter, any African American player, as embarrassing as that is to admit.<sup>130</sup>

He continued to discuss the particular instance, in which he first met Arthur Ashe,

So, I wound up playing in the Middle Atlantic Junior Tournament, which in 1959 was held in Oglebay Park in West Virginia...And one of the top seeds, I think the top seed, was Arthur Ashe, Jr. from Richmond, Virginia. And I went to the tournament director and I said, "this is strange, there is no such person from Richmond, you got the city wrong." And he said, "no, I don't." And I said, "yes, you do." And he said, "why do you think so?" And I said, "because I play tennis in Richmond and I know everybody in Richmond who plays tennis, and there's no Arthur Ashe." And he said, "let me introduce you to Arthur Ashe." And that was my introduction and when I met him, of course, I immediately saw that being an African American, the reason that I didn't know him was because *I hadn't been permitted to know him. We hadn't been permitted to be playing together.* So he was playing in his part of town and I was playing in my part of town.<sup>131</sup> [emphasis added]

This is truly a testament to the mindset of the era. African American tennis players were not publicized in a similar fashion, nor were their accomplishments recognized or placed within the

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<sup>130</sup> Tom Chewning, interview by author, December 8, 2010, Richmond, VA, cassette recording, in possession of the author.

<sup>131</sup> Chewning, interview by author.

same arena as white athletes. Chewning's story provides evidence of two Richmonds, one black and one white.

While in attendance with his daughter at one of Arthur Ashe's tennis clinics, Paul DiPasquale, a local Richmond artist, realized that there was often more media present at Ashe's functions in Richmond than there were interested Richmond residents. It was Paul DiPasquale's recognition of this anomaly that inspired him to approach Ashe about creating a monument in his honor. In Paul DiPasquale's view, Ashe was a hero who "[didn't] get any glory in his hometown." Six months after this clinic, DiPasquale decided to write a letter to Ashe to express his interest in creating an "authorized autobiography" in the form of a statue.<sup>132</sup> In looking back, DiPasquale said,

I wanted it to be like a biography, an authorized biography. And that's how I explained it in my letter. And I said if he approved my work than I would seek to get it cast in bronze and put up in Richmond, or if not in Richmond, then New York or another place where his message would be carried forth.<sup>133</sup>

About a month later, Paul DiPasquale received a phone call that, little did either know, would shape the image of Richmond's historic Monument Avenue and forever alter the public memory of Arthur Ashe in his own hometown.

*"Hello, this is Arthur Ashe. I'd like to talk to you about your proposal."*

"It was January 23, 1993," Paul DiPasquale stated that Ashe called to discuss the creation of the monument. It was an easy date to remember because it was the same day as his daughter's birthday. They discussed the design of the monument, the elements Ashe wanted to see included on the monument, and even the look of his clothing and the state of his shoes. DiPasquale stated that Ashe wanted "his shoelaces..[to] be untied" to capture his casual nature. The conversation went on for half an hour and DiPasquale kept notes of everything Ashe desired to see in this permanent representation of himself.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Paul DiPasquale, interview by author, January 16, 2010, Tallahassee, FL, digital recording, in possession of the author.

<sup>133</sup> DiPasquale, interview by author.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

Arthur Ashe and Paul DiPasquale discussed the message behind the monument, which was that the pursuit of education and knowledge was the key to success. It was important to Ashe that children be a part of the monument in some way. In addition, he wanted books to be a compelling facet of the monument,: “One of the first things he said was I’d like to have books involved in the monument in some way...because *books are the keys to knowledge and to success in your life. Knowledge and success in your life.*” [emphasis added]<sup>135</sup> DiPasquale rendered Ashe’s wishes into bronze and marble.



**Figure 3.1 Image of the Arthur Ashe Monument, Viewed from Base at Roseneath and Monument Avenue**  
**Source: Photograph taken by author**

Ashe stands in the center of the monument holding high above his head books in one hand a tennis racket in the other. The books, however, are raised higher than the tennis racket, portraying their importance over anything else. Ashe is surrounded by young children, all of whom look up to him in adoration. It presents Ashe as a hero, as a mentor, and as a man who supported education. However, this monument also represented another major trend in Ashe’s

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<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

public displays. Often his narrative mentions tennis, but only as a means for him to support the humanitarian efforts and activism he pursued later in his life. Tennis is present in this monument because it acted as a means for Ashe to promote such issues as human rights, public health, and education. Much like Ashe's other portrayals in public spaces, his role in tennis and the work he did for the sport, take a back seat to the work he did for his community.

The phone call between DiPasquale and Ashe took place less than two weeks before Ashe's death. While planning a trip to New York City, DiPasquale intended to meet with Ashe to further discuss some concepts and show him some preliminary sketches. Unknown to DiPasquale, however, was how sick Ashe had become. The morning DiPasquale planned on contacting Ashe he opened the paper only to find news of his passing.

DiPasquale, along with thousands of other Richmond residents, attended Ashe's memorial service the following Wednesday. When he returned home from the service he saw a small manila envelope waiting for him. Inside was a note from Arthur Ashe, which stated, "Paul, I wanted you to have these. Let's talk soon. Arthur Ashe."<sup>136</sup> Enclosed in the envelope were some photographs Ashe wanted DiPasquale to have while creating and planning the monument.

The unique circumstances surrounding the project solidified in DiPasquale the need to carry on and continue with the plans he and Ashe had made. He felt he had an obligation to complete the monument. And so DiPasquale waited briefly before continuing on with the project he and Arthur Ashe had discussed.<sup>137</sup>

After a few weeks, he contacted Arthur Ashe's wife and widow, Jeanne Moutoussamy-Ashe, explaining to her the conversation he had with her late husband. She faxed him back, stating that she knew of the project. Upon her return home from the hospital, after her husband's passing, she saw the manila envelope on his desk. Knowing what it was, she mailed it the following Monday. Jeanne Moutoussamy-Ashe met with DiPasquale four times over the next ten months to discuss and approve various parts of the project.

It was at this point that DiPasquale began his search for, what he referred to as, the perfect "publisher" to his "book," by which he meant the fundraiser for his memorial. Knowing that the monument would cost an estimated \$400,000 to create he knew it was critical for him to

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

solidify a patron if he had any hope of completing the monument. Since he was aware of the work Arthur Ashe had done with Virginia Heroes, Incorporated, he began his search with this particular organization.<sup>138</sup>

#### *Virginia Heroes and the Arthur Ashe Monument*

On December 2, 1993, not even a year after their founder's passing, the Executive Board members of Virginia Heroes, Incorporated met to discuss a variety of issues: upcoming programs and receptions, mentor activities, and so on. It was at this meeting that Marty Dummett, the president of the organization, introduced DiPasquale to board members. The two had met previously to discuss the proposal, and it was at this meeting DiPasquale proposed Virginia Heroes sponsor the monument to commemorate Arthur Robert Ashe, Jr.

The monument would consist of a figure twelve feet high of Mr. Ashe dressed in sweats and holding a tennis racket and a book. There will be the figures of four children sitting at his feet. All the figures will be resting upon a stone pedestal, also approximately twelve feet high.<sup>139</sup>

Virginia Heroes accepted the invitation to fund the project, illustrating their willingness to support this "extraordinary attainment."<sup>140</sup>

Upon approval of funding, Dummett and DiPasquale developed a plan of action. They met with corporate leaders and interested parties, presenting the plans for the monument. In doing so, they attempted to deduce the general attitudes regarding the proposed monument. Assessing concerns, opinions, suggestions, opposition, and gauging possible controversy became their priority. It was time-consuming work, but was a necessary step in the long process of getting the Arthur Ashe monument completed.<sup>141</sup>

In early February of 1994, Dummett, who was the Fund Raising Committee Chairman at the time, invited senior members of the board of directors to see the statue that DiPasquale was

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Virginia Heroes, Inc., Minutes, Dec 2, 1993, Virginia Heroes, Inc. records in possession of current board member, Dr. Raphael Seligmann..

<sup>140</sup> Virginia Heroes, Inc., President's Report, February 26, 1994, Virginia Heroes, Inc. records in possession of current board member, Dr. Raphael Seligmann.

<sup>141</sup> Marty G. Dummett, Virginia Heroes, Inc., 1994-95 Annual Report, Virginia Heroes, Inc. records in possession of current board member, Dr. Raphael Seligmann.

creating at this studio in Richmond. On February 8, DiPasquale gave the presentation of the Arthur Ashe monument to the Corporate Advisory Council. They were impressed. As work progressed, the next question was installment. On June 27, 1994 the board of directors began discussing the possible locations to place the monument. Present at the meeting was Randy Ashe, representing Ashe's family, and Laurence T. Vetter, chairman on the committee established by the Richmond City Council to assist with the creation and placement of the Arthur Ashe monument.<sup>142</sup>

On July 26, 1994, the board of directors decided that the working model of the Arthur Ashe monument would be unveiled at the Virginia Heroes annual "A Celebration of Heroes" event in December of that year. Discussion of the progress of the monument continued into the next board of directors meeting. According to the board minutes from August 23, 1994, four serious locations were listed for the placement of the Ashe monument; Monument Avenue was not on the list.<sup>143</sup>

In their first conversation, Arthur Ashe and Paul DiPasquale discussed a possible location for the Ashe monument. At the time, Ashe was working with the city to create a Black Sports Hall of Fame, and it was expected that this monument would be placed at the Hall of Fame.

Well, initially the discussion was that the monument would go at the Black Sports Hall of Fame...Mr. Ashe was working with the city, economic development department, and the black sports hall of fame was planned to be put up in Richmond, And it's something Arthur Ashe was very keen on doing.<sup>144</sup>

However, after Ashe's passing his wife Jeanne Moutoussamy-Ashe decided not to pursue the Black Sports Hall of Fame but rather to only push forward with a monument. The Black Sports Hall of Fame never did come to fruition despite the efforts of the Mayor of Richmond, Leonidas Young.

Several other locations were discussed besides the Black Sports Hall of Fame by Virginia Heroes, Incorporated and members of Ashe's family. The Virginia Heroes Board of Directors

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<sup>142</sup> Virginia Heroes Inc., Minutes of the Board of Directors Meeting, February 1, 1994, Virginia Heroes, Inc. records in possession of current board member, Dr. Raphael Seligmann.

<sup>143</sup> Virginia Heroes, Inc., Minutes of the Board of Directors Meeting, August 23, 1994, Virginia Heroes, Inc. records in possession of current board member, Dr. Raphael Seligmann.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

held a meeting on June 27, 1994 to discuss the selection of a location for the monument. Present at the meeting were Randy Ashe, representing Ashe's family, Virginia Heroes members, including president Marty Dummett, and Laurence T. Vetter from the city's council. One popular site was the intersection at Broad and Belvedere but it turned out that plans existed for Virginia Commonwealth University to expand to this location.<sup>145</sup> Another suggestion, discussed by Randy Ashe and the Ashe family, was the possibility of locating the monument in relation to a local sports complex. However, Randy Ashe stated that if they failed to construct a sports complex he supported the location at Broad and Belvedere. The group also discussed placing the monument at an Olympic facility instead of Richmond.<sup>146</sup>

On August 23, 1994, the Virginia Heroes Board of Directors was still contemplating where to place the monument. They continued to think about the intersection of Belvedere and Broad. They also thought about the Byrd Park tennis courts, which Arthur Ashe was not allowed to play on when he was a child due to segregation. The third was on the grounds of the proposed Arthur Ashe Sports Complex, an idea the Ashe family initially supported. The fourth was on a particular area of Brown's Island that was undergoing development by the Valentine Museum.<sup>147</sup> What is evident is that discussions of Monument Avenue do not appear in the board's minutes. Instead, that story is only captured in oral histories. While discussions of placement continued, so too did the creation of the statue.

Ashe's family was invited to participate in the artistic process. Jeanne Moutoussamy-Ashe visited DiPasquale several times throughout the construction of the working model. In addition, Ashe's relatives who lived in Richmond, Virginia stopped by DiPasquale's studio at various points of production. DiPasquale recalled the reaction of Johnnie Ashe, Arthur Ashe's brother,

Johnnie Ashe came up the year after his death. And he saw it, he was the last person to see it and approve it. And when he saw it his comment was, "I just never thought it would be this close." And it brought tears to his eyes. So it was

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<sup>145</sup> Virginia Heroes, Inc., Board of Directors Meeting, Minutes, June 27, 1994, Virginia Heroes, Inc. records in possession of current board member, Dr. Raphael Seligmann.

<sup>146</sup> VA Heroes, Inc, Minutes, June 27, 1994.

<sup>147</sup> Virginia Heroes, Inc., Minutes of the Board of Directors Meeting, August 23, 1994, Virginia Heroes, Inc. records in possession of current board member, Dr. Raphael Seligmann.

happy for me that I had done a good job and it was difficult to witness this as well, but that's the job.<sup>148</sup>

With approval from the family, production moved forward.

*"A Hard Road to Glory"*<sup>149</sup>

*Controversy Involving the Creation and Placement of the Arthur Ashe Monument*

In early 1995, the Virginia Heroes Board of Directors voted Dummett, then President of the Board of Directors of Virginia Heroes, become the organization's first Executive Director. On February 27, 1995, Dummett, no longer president of the organization, took on the role of the Executive Director of the Virginia Heroes Arthur Ashe Monument Project.<sup>150</sup> In March of 1995 plans were made to place the memorial to Arthur Ashe at the intersection of Roseneath and Monument on July 10, 1996. There are no Virginia Heroes documents, however, that trace the committee's decision to place the monument on Monument Avenue. Rather, the testimony of the struggle to place the Ashe monument at this location comes from the testimony of Virginia Heroes board members, and is a story, or perhaps struggle, that was highly publicized in the national news.

At a Virginia Heroes event in March of 1995, Governor Douglas Wilder publically announced that the location of the Arthur Ashe monument would be on Richmond's historical and coveted Monument Avenue. This marks the beginning of the controversy over the monument's location. The public outcry to Governor Wilder's announcement was immense. Prior to Governor Wilder's statement, DiPasquale explained, Virginia Heroes discussed the possibility of Monument Avenue. However, it was one of many possible locations discussed, and it was their intention to keep that information quiet until they possessed the ability to form a site committee to weigh thoroughly all the possible locations. In fact, DiPasquale was not supportive

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<sup>148</sup> DiPasquale, interview by author.

<sup>149</sup> Title taken from Ashe's writings about the African American athlete, a three-volume work he composed towards the end of his life.

<sup>150</sup> Virginia Heroes, Inc., Minutes of the 1994 Annual Meeting, February 27, 1995, Virginia Heroes, Inc. records in possession of current board member, Dr. Raphael Seligmann.

of this decision at first, feeling as though the controversy would be so great that the monument would never be completed.<sup>151</sup>

It was at this point Virginia Heroes, Incorporated essentially lost control over the location of the monument, as Governor Douglas Wilder, Richmond City Council, and the Richmond Planning Commission all declared, through rulings and presentations, that despite immense public opposition to the monument, Arthur Ashe was the newest addition to Monument Avenue. Governor Wilder's public announcement in March of 1995 marked that this was no longer an issue of solely Virginia Heroes, Incorporated recognizing their local hero, but rather an act by the government, both local and state, to construct a more inclusive historical narrative in Richmond. Arthur Ashe's monument and, more importantly, its location represent a means to reconcile two competing narratives in Richmond, that of white history and that of African American history. Its approval by both Wilder, the planning commission and City Council despite its disapproval is indicative of this.<sup>152</sup>

By March 20, 1995 the Site Location Committee of the Arthur Ashe Monument Project had met several times to view and discuss several possible sites for the Ashe monument. By this point there was public outcry over the proposed Monument Avenue site; however, Marty Dummett reported that "the impetus to have public hearings regarding the site has been quashed."<sup>153</sup> It would only take a matter of months for this momentum to build again, and the Arthur Ashe Monument project team would have to face several hours of public proceedings and deliberations before the Richmond City Council and the Richmond Planning Commission.

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<sup>151</sup> DiPasquale, interview by author.

<sup>152</sup> This is discussed in greater detail in Mary Tyler-McGraw's article, "Southern Comfort Levels: Race, Heritage Tourism, and the Civil War in Richmond," in *Slavery and Public History: The Tough Stuff of American Memory*, eds. James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton (New York: The New Press, 2006). Tyler-McGraw discusses the environment in Richmond at the time of the creation of the Arthur Ashe monument. Richmond faced several issues that would ultimately help motivate the acting local and state governments to approve Ashe's monument and presence on Monument Avenue, the greatest of which was the inclusion of African American history into the larger Richmond narrative. Tyler-McGraw discusses the history of memory in Richmond, particularly that of the Lost Cause, and how memory was at times segregated within the city. A similar example she discusses was the creation of the River walk or canal walk in Richmond and the compromise made over an image of Robert E. Lee.

<sup>153</sup> Virginia Heroes, Inc., Minutes of the Meeting of the Virginia Heroes Board of Directors, March 20, 1995, Virginia Heroes, Inc. records in possession of current board member, Dr. Raphael Seligmann.

On June 19, 1995, Richmond officials on the city's Planning Commission unanimously approved the Monument Avenue location for the Arthur Ashe monument. This occurred after hours of debate during which not a single person from the community spoke out in support of this location. The Planning Commission, however, was not swayed to change their minds. The original groundbreaking date was set for of July 10, 1995, Arthur Ashe's birthday. Less than a week later, the Richmond City Council announced a postponement. The council publicly questioned the Planning Commission's decision and delayed the groundbreaking to discuss and consider other possible locations. Whether it had to do with finding a more suitable location for him, or maintaining the historical integrity of the avenue, everyone seemed to have their own opinion. This discussion of whether or not to place Arthur Ashe along the same row as Confederate leaders became a focus of national and international debate.

Objections came from all directions. Some people did not want a statue of Ashe because they felt that Ashe had abandoned Richmond when he left the city as a teenager. Others viewed him as solely an athlete. Repeatedly, Dummett stated that people approached her stating that Ashe did not belong on Monument Avenue because he was "just a tennis player."<sup>154</sup> This however, presented a reason for Virginia Heroes and Paul DiPasquale to work harder to get the monument erected. They wanted to alter the personal memories of Arthur Ashe by presenting a clear narrative of his life, his accomplishments, and what he desired to achieve throughout his life. As Henry W. Richardson, one of the nine members on the City Council, said, "Arthur didn't ride a horse, and he didn't shoot a gun. But Arthur Ashe was a hero."<sup>155</sup>

Some people believed Arthur Ashe's monument should be placed in a more appropriate location, not in "a neighborhood where he once would not have walked," but rather the area in which he spent his youth. For instance, many expressed the belief that the park he played in during his childhood that his father operated, Brook Field Playground, would be a more fitting site for the athlete. Some felt as though Arthur Ashe's presence should be in his childhood neighborhood, the Brook Field area. This was Gene Price's sentiment, who attended junior high

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<sup>154</sup> Dummett, interview by author.

<sup>155</sup> "Race-Tinged Furor Stalls Arthur Ashe Memorial," *New York Times*, July 9, 1995.

with Arthur Ashe, “they should make a park here, so poor kids coming up could see where he came from...folks on Monument Avenue don’t need to be encouraged.”<sup>156</sup>

Others felt Ashe should not be placed on Monument Avenue to preserve the historical integrity of the street. The street was nominated in 1969 to be placed on the National Register of Historic Places as a historic district between Stuart Circle and Roseneath Road.<sup>157</sup> Because the intersection of Roseneath and Monument was the possible location of the Arthur Ashe monument, opponents argued that its placement would radically alter the historic character of the avenue. The National Park Service described the avenue as “the South’s grandest commemorative precinct dedicated to the heroes of the Lost Cause.”<sup>158</sup> People who wanted to maintain the historical integrity of the street opposed any additions. However, it is interesting to note that a year after the monument’s unveiling on July 10, 1996; the National Park Service designated Monument Avenue Historic District as a National Historic Landmark, which is a more exclusive list than the National Register. Quite clearly, NPS did not believe the historical integrity of the area was damaged by the addition of the Ashe statue.<sup>159</sup>

Lastly, some people felt that Monument Avenue was a memorial to only one historic event: the Confederacy. As the capital of the Confederate states, Richmond, Virginia, held very strongly onto its Confederate heritage and history. To any visitor it is apparent that Monument Avenue is the pinnacle of Confederate remembrance in the city. As Arnold C. Moore, Jr., a man who spoke out against the placement of the Ashe statue on Monument Avenue, stated, “Every city has streets with monuments. Monument Avenue is known all over the country because the statues are dedicated to one cause.”<sup>160</sup> The question before Richmond was whether the city could

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<sup>156</sup> “On Street Where Confederates Reign, Arthur Ashe May, Too.” *New York Times*, June 18, 1995.

<sup>157</sup> The nomination form has been digitized by the Virginia Department of Historic Resources and can be found at this website:  
[http://www.dhr.virginia.gov/registers/Cities/Richmond/1270174\\_Monument\\_Avenue\\_HD\\_1969\\_Nomination\\_final.pdf](http://www.dhr.virginia.gov/registers/Cities/Richmond/1270174_Monument_Avenue_HD_1969_Nomination_final.pdf)

<sup>158</sup> “Race-Tinged Furor Stalls Arthur Ashe Memorial,” *New York Times*, July 9, 1995.

<sup>159</sup> National Park Service, “WEEKLY LIST OF ACTIONS TAKEN ON PROPERTIES: 1/05/98 THROUGH 1/09/98” <http://www.nps.gov/nr/listings/980116.htm>

<sup>160</sup> “Ashe Joining Dixie Heroes,” *New York Times*, June 20, 1995.

now alter what had been set in stone. Did Monument Avenue have to represent only the heroes from one specific era? As DiPasquale explained,

Monument Avenue is an avenue for heroes...and of course the avenue is three miles long and only...three quarters of a mile, less than a third of it, has Civil War heroes on it. And so in my opinion, Monument Avenue has plenty of room for more heroes. But we've run out of Civil War heroes and the time for Civil War heroes has also run out. It's appropriate for the time they were put up for that culture to celebrate its heroes but it's a different culture and different heroes. So should Monument Avenue has present day heroes on it, then why shouldn't one of those heroes be Arthur Ashe?<sup>161</sup>

As DiPasquale's testimony suggests, there came a moment during the discussions over the location and placement of the Arthur Ashe monument when the issue shifted. The question was no longer why did Arthur Ashe belong on Monument Avenue with these Confederate heroes, but became why would he not belong on Monument Avenue. People felt empowered to participate in constructing a new public memory.

As the controversy over the location of the monument continued, it received international attention. Dummett stated that there was interest from some contacts overseas that if Virginia Heroes was unable to find a suitable location for the Ashe monument in Virginia or the United States that they wanted to have the opportunity to take and use the monument.<sup>162</sup> In addition, DiPasquale hinted in an interview with the *New York Times* that perhaps Ashe's international fans had a better understanding of him and his life than his own hometown, "I think the world has a better understanding of Arthur Ashe than Richmond does."<sup>163</sup>

On July 18, after nearly seven hours of debate, the hearing before the Richmond City Council ended at 1 o'clock in the morning. Despite heavy opposition to placing the Ashe's statue on Monument Avenue from both black and whites, the council approved the Planning Commission's decision. With a vote of 7 to 0, with one council member abstaining, it was

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<sup>161</sup> DiPasquale, interview by author.

<sup>162</sup> Marty Dummett, interview by author, December 7, 2009, Richmond, VA, cassette recording, in possession of the author.

<sup>163</sup> "Race-Tinged Furor Stalls Arthur Ashe Memorial," *New York Times*, July 9, 1995.

decided that Arthur Ashe would stand on Monument Avenue.<sup>164</sup> Arthur Ashe would, once again, break a color barrier.

Yet, the controversy did not end. On January 1, 1996, Jeanne Moutoussamy-Ashe, Ashe's widow, published a shocking article in the opinion section of the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* stating her current disapproval of the location of monument. In the article she described Ashe's belief that the monument would be placed at an African American Sports Hall of Fame that he was proposing be built in Richmond before his passing. In addition, she stated that Ashe had once discussed bitterly Monument Avenue in his memoir published after his passing. His memoir reads,

Every Sunday morning I could see and hear on television Dr. Theodore F. Adams, minister of the huge, white First Baptist Church. That church confirmed its domination and its strict racial identity by its presence on Richmond's Monument Avenue, the avenue of Confederate heroes, with its statues of Stonewall Jackson, Jefferson Davis, J.E.B. Stuart, and Robert E. Lee. Didn't we in the black churches read the same Bible as the whites in First Baptist? Didn't whites know how Jesus felt about the equality of human beings, about justice, and about meek inheriting the earth?<sup>165</sup>

Arthur Ashe was a man who always attempted to avoid controversy or conflict during his life, and yet the controversy that erupted as a result of the creation of his monument forced him to have it surround him after death as well. This led Jeanne Moutoussamy-Ashe to believe that Arthur Ashe would not have wanted this monument, at least not in this manner.

Once Jeanne Moutoussamy-Ashe objected to the erection of the Ashe monument on Monument Avenue, concerns regarding its design and artistic value arose. Many in the art community felt as though the monument design was not acceptable. A group formed, the Citizens for Excellence in Public Art, and they felt the desire to sponsor a competition.<sup>166</sup> By early 1996 it was publicized that a collection of art patrons was actively trying to replace the Ashe statue by establishing an international competition for a new statue and design.<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> "Richmond Approves Monument to Ashe," *New York Times*, July 18, 1995; "Richmond Council Endorses Statue of Arthur Ashe," *New York Times*, July 18, 1995.

<sup>165</sup> Arthur Ashe and Arnold Rampersad, *Days of Grace: A Memoir* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1993), 317.

<sup>166</sup> DiPasquale, interview by author.

<sup>167</sup> "Integration Must Wait on Dixie Heroes Avenue," *New York Times*, January 4, 1996.

Paul DiPasquale faced tremendous criticism on a design both he and Arthur Ashe had discussed. Ashe looked too thin, his positioning too stiff, his arms rose too high, his attire inappropriate. By far, the greatest complaint was the thin stature of Ashe. However, DiPasquale addressed this, stating that this was as much a statue about a Richmond hero as it was about a dying man,

In the case of the Ashe monument there were numerous changes that needed to be made along the way...Arthur...said he wanted to be portrayed “as I am today,” that’s what he said in our conversation. And that’s when I asked him how much he weighed because I knew he was six feet one but I needed to know what his physique looked like. And that’s when he told me he weighed 128 pounds. So he was very thin at that time. So, in a sense it’s as much a statue about a man who was dying in the last months of his life as it is about a champion, a word champion athlete, which has a definite irony about it.<sup>168</sup>

In addition, the family commented repeatedly that Arthur Ashe’s figure needed to be thinner. And in a way Paul DiPasquale had a greater commitment to listening to the family’s concerns than the public’s. However, ultimately, in the end, as DiPasquale stated, “Politics is art, art is politics.”<sup>169</sup>

As the sculptor, DiPasquale made significant changes to his original design to appease both the public and the Ashe family. He filled out Ashe’s figure some, lowered his arms, and shifted his once distant gaze down towards the children sitting at his feet.<sup>170</sup> DiPasquale was able to create these modifications because the physical process of monument making is long. It goes through several stages; first it is molded in clay and changes and alterations are still possible. Then it is cast into plaster, and again, at this stage compromises are still able to be made. Then finally a wax mold is made. This is the final alterable stage. After all changes are made then the model is cast into bronze.<sup>171</sup>

DiPasquale also had to make alterations related to the accessibility and visibility of the monument. In order to place the monument in an intersection, he changed the original design.

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<sup>168</sup> DiPasquale, interview by author.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

<sup>170</sup> “Integration Must Wait on Dixie Heroes Avenue,” *New York Times*, January 4, 1996.

<sup>171</sup> A more detailed description is available in the transcript of the interview with Paul DiPasquale.

What stands now on Monument Avenue at the intersection of Monument and Roseneath is a bronze figure of Arthur Ashe standing atop a cylinder base. Prior to the confirmation of this location the base was intended to be rectangular, set up more like bleachers. As of March 20, 1995, Virginia Heroes, Incorporated expected the monument to have a plaza surrounding it as well as parking spaces available for long visits.<sup>172</sup> Currently the monument has no such plaza, clearly an indication of the alterations both Paul DiPasquale and Virginia Heroes had to face throughout this long process.

Throughout the process, Virginia Heroes and Paul DiPasquale worked with the city of Richmond. Although the city was at first unwilling to raise funds, it eventually provided \$100,000 for the monument project. In the beginning, the city took a back seat to the project and allowed Virginia Heroes and DiPasquale to take the lead. Speaking at a Virginia Heroes board meeting, Laurence Vetter stated that once the city's committee regarding the project made its recommendations, their work would be done and the committee would then be dissolved. Vetter maintained that he and his committee were willing and able to provide services to Virginia Heroes but would play a secondary role.<sup>173</sup> Just a month after this declaration, however, Virginia Heroes and Paul DiPasquale found that they not only had to battle the public for support but the city as well to maintain their control over the Ashe Monument Project.

At the August 23, 1994 Board of Directors meeting, Vetter suggested he and his committee take over the monument project as a city sponsored memorial to Arthur Ashe. As stated in the minutes, the Board of Directors responded in a decided manner against this, "Mr. Vetter tried to tell us that he and his committee would take over the planning and placement of the monument as well as any fund raising necessary. Virginia Heroes... explained to Mr. Vetter that we did not wish to participate in this plan."<sup>174</sup> Virginia Heroes followed this up by resolving that Virginia Heroes will offer to be a part of a committee of nine people, of which they should be able to choose five of the said nine committee members. This would allow them to essentially

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<sup>172</sup> Virginia Heroes, Inc., Minutes of the Meeting of the Virginia Heroes Board of Directors, March 20, 1995, Virginia Heroes, Inc. records in possession of current board member, Dr. Raphael Seligmann.

<sup>173</sup> Virginia Heroes, Inc., Board of Directors Meeting, Minutes, June 27, 1994, Virginia Heroes, Inc. records in possession of current board member, Dr. Raphael Seligmann.

<sup>174</sup> Virginia Heroes, Inc., Minutes of the Board of Directors Meeting, August 23, 1994, Virginia Heroes, Inc. records in possession of current board member, Dr. Raphael Seligmann.

control that particular committee, while most importantly, maintaining control of the Arthur Ashe Monument Project.<sup>175</sup>

It is evident from this narrative that both DiPasquale and Virginia Heroes had to overcome a great deal to get the Arthur Ashe monument placed at the intersection of Monument and Roseneath. Despite acceptance from various Richmond councils, on numerous occasions, the city often revoked their approval, bowing to public pressure. Ultimately, however, Paul DiPasquale and Virginia Heroes prevailed.

### *Unveiling a Hero*

Last July we all stood with awe as the statue of Arthur Ashe was unveiled on Monument Avenue. This was a feat second to none and it was only because of the interest, drive, determination, grit and generosity of Marty, Tom and Paul that this happened. We need to rise to a standing vote of gratitude and appreciation to these giants among us who just could not let go until what some thought was an “Impossible Mission” was completed. The whole world benefits from their accomplishment.<sup>176</sup>

After literally years of struggle to complete, place, and unveil the Arthur Ashe monument, this quote from Virginia Heroes President illustrates the sense of accomplishment they felt, as well as a sense of tremendous struggle and devotion. On July 4, 1996 a crane lowered the Arthur Ashe monument onto Monument Avenue but it was still yet to be unveiled.<sup>177</sup> That event would take place six days later, on July 10, 1996, on what would have been Arthur Ashe’s 53<sup>rd</sup> birthday. Arthur Ashe joined the other heroes and leaders of Richmond on Monument Avenue. Ashe was able to do in death what he had done in life, break through the color barrier.

The following photos, taken by the author, are taken of the statue in its current state as of December, 2009.

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<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

<sup>176</sup> Virginia Heroes, Inc., President’s Report, End of Year, 1996-97, Virginia Heroes, Inc. records in possession of current board member, Dr. Raphael Seligmann.

<sup>177</sup> “Arthur Ashe Statue Set Up in Richmond at Last,” *New York Times*, July 5, 1996.



**Figure 3.2 Image of the Arthur Ashe Monument at the Intersection of Rosemeath and Monument**  
**Source: Photograph taken by author**



**Figure 3.3 Image of the Front of the Monument**  
**Source: Photograph taken by author**



**Figure 3.4 Image of the Back of the Monument**  
**Source: Photograph taken by author**

It is worthy to note that the direction in which Arthur Ashe is facing was also considered controversial. Many have a misconception that Ashe is facing away from downtown, with his back turned towards the city of Richmond as a means of representing the disgust he once had with the racist attitude and prejudice he faced as a child. The other monuments either face

downtown Richmond, or their sides are to the city center. Visitors to the site can easily construe Ashe's position to mean something significant. This was not, however, the artist's intention.

Originally, DiPasquale planned for Ashe to face in the opposite direction, with his figure looking towards Richmond. He felt that this would provide the visitor with a clearer photograph of Ashe. In addition, if the monument faced in DiPasquale's intended direction, then the sun would shine for a greater period of time on the statue, illuminating Ashe's face but leaving the children largely in the shadows. However, now that the monument faces the opposite direction, Ashe's face is largely in the shadows and the children are highlighted. It is clear in the images shown above that the sky behind Arthur Ashe is filled with trees, whereas the sky facing Ashe is clear. Currently, when taking a photograph of the monument from the front the background is cluttered with flora.<sup>178</sup>

The idea to switch Arthur Ashe's direction came from Will Scrittner, the chairman of Richmond's Planning Commission. It was not an intentional statement made by Virginia Heroes, Arthur Ashe, or Paul DiPasquale about Richmond's racist past. Rather, it was done so as a means of creating a statue at one end of the avenue to greet those driving into the city.<sup>179</sup>

#### *Altering Memory and Constructing Public Memory*

Without a doubt, Arthur Ashe's accomplishments went largely unrecognized in Richmond until the erection of this monument. This recognition marked an important turning point in Richmond's public portrayal of history. No longer did Confederate heroes control Monument Avenue, nor did Confederate history control Richmond. Mayor Leonidas B. Young of Richmond said "A city has been healed. I hear voices crying graves, and I feel the spirit of people who have never been properly recognized."<sup>180</sup> With the placement of Ashe's statue on Monument Avenue came the belief that finally African Americans could feel as though they were included in their city's historical narrative. The monument expanded the possibilities of declaring who was important in this city and impacted other cultural representations.

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<sup>178</sup> DiPasquale, interview by author.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

<sup>180</sup> "Richmond Approves Monument to Ashe," *New York Times*, July 18, 1995.

An example of this transformation occurred at the Virginia Historical Society. The Virginia Historical Society's original mission was to present the Confederate past of Richmond. However, the Virginia Historical Society reached out to the Arthur Ashe Monument Project and Virginia Heroes in 1996. Dr. Charles J. Bryan, the Director of society, offered to house a memorial service in memory of Arthur Ashe in the Virginia Historical Society before the unveiling of the Ashe monument.

On July 9, 1996 Virginia Heroes, Incorporated and Dominion Resources presented *The Life of Arthur Ashe* in celebration. Marty Dummett, Executive Director of the Arthur Ashe Monument Project began the ceremony, followed by Dr. Charles Bryan. Later Arthur Ashe's friend and supporter, Thomas Chewning, fundraiser for the Ashe monument and President of Dominion Energy, Incorporated spoke. The last speaker of the night was Johnnie Ashe, Arthur Ashe's brother. The event closed with a concert, showcasing the Boys Choir of Harlem. Overall, it was an event in celebration of Arthur Ashe, an African American hero—Richmond's hero.<sup>181</sup>

The monument altered the public memory of Arthur Ashe. Ashe received little public recognition, at least in this form, during his lifetime. There was an athletic center named after him in Richmond, but that would just come to perpetuate his memory as an athlete. It would not present him as a humanitarian and activist as well. The monument presented Ashe as a mentor, as a hero, and like the other presentations of his life, portrayed him as more than just an athlete. This narrative also represents the difficulty that comes with trying to alter the personal memory of events or people. Virginia Heroes, Incorporated and Paul DiPasquale tried tirelessly to prove Arthur Ashe was more than an athlete, that he was a great humanitarian as well, and a citizen of the world.

#### *Continuing the Legacy of Their Virginia Hero*

Virginia Heroes, Incorporated's work did not end with the completion and erection of the monument. They worked long after to continue the legacy of Arthur Ashe. Through the continuation of the mentorship programs he inspired and felt so passionate about, as well as through care, protection, and maintenance of the monument, they preserve his memory. To the world Ashe was, in every sense of the word, a true champion, but to Richmond he was their hero. Despite Richmond's treatment of Arthur Ashe as a youth, he always considered himself a

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<sup>181</sup> Copy of program available through the ITHF&M Information Research Center in Arthur Ashe Reference file.

Richmonder, and he would continue to do what he could to better his hometown, and what he considered to be his community. As Ashe so clearly put it on his televised interview with Charlie Rose, “I’m very much a Virginian.”<sup>182</sup> And it was his wish that the work he had done for the Richmond community through Virginia Heroes, Incorporated continue after his death.

The President’s Report for Virginia Heroes, issued by Dr. LaVerne B. Spurlock, in early 1994 summarized the difficulties and responsibilities the organization felt following Ashe’s death in 1993, as well as their tremendous efforts to perpetuate his memory and dedication to the city.

I hesitate to offer this report because I feel certain that I will not do justice to the many details which truly indicate all of the hard work, sincere interest and dedication extended during the passing years to maintain Virginia Heroes Incorporated as a recognized, quality program. This continues to be a program which represents..*the person whose memory we continue to honor through the activities and exposure offered to the students whom we serve.*<sup>183</sup> [emphasis added]

She goes on to describe the mission after Ashe’s passing,

We all felt a terrible sense of loss and at the same time *a real feeling of commitment to strengthen and expand the Virginia Heroes Incorporated program. It became even more clear that Arthur’s desire was to engage young people in ways to assure a better future for them and thus improve communities as well.*<sup>184</sup> [emphasis added]

It was Ashe’s mission to improve Richmond, and what way to better honor his goal then by guaranteeing the continuation of his memory through a program which offered to perpetuate his life’s work within the Richmond community.

Marty Dummett, who had held the role of Executive Director of the Arthur Ashe Monument Project as well as President of Virginia Heroes, Incorporated, discussed her last meeting with Ashe, “He grabbed my hand...he told me, ‘You have to keep Virginia Heroes

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<sup>182</sup> “Arthur Ashe,” *The Charlie Rose Show*.

<sup>183</sup> Dr. LaVerne Spurlock, President’s Report, February 26, 1994, Virginia Heroes, Inc. records in possession of current board member, Dr. Raphael Seligmann.

<sup>184</sup> Spurlock, President’s Report, February 26, 1994.

going. You must keep Virginia Heroes going.”<sup>185</sup> And so they did. By continuing the program that he founded they are continuing the legacy of their founder by helping, mentoring, and educating Richmond’s at risk youth.

In Virginia Heroes records, following the creation of the monument, it is clear there was a definite effort to preserve and maintain the monument out of fear it may be vandalized or harmed, a result of the controversy that raged during the monument’s creation. They maintained a fund for the Arthur Ashe Monument Project and added to it years after the Monument was unveiled on Monument Avenue.

Virginia Heroes Board of Directors Meeting, May 13, 1997, Minutes: The amount of \$695.00 should be added to the Arthur Ashe Monument Project amount of \$3,709.83.

Virginia Heroes Board of Directors Meeting, October 14, 1997, Minutes: Additionally, there is \$5300 in the Arthur Ashe Monument fund, which is being held to enhance the Monument’s aesthetics. It was stressed that each Board member must continue to diligently see out funding.

Virginia Heroes Board of Directors Meeting, March 10, 1998, Minutes: Tom Chewning reported that there is \$32,597 in the treasury and \$5,200 in the Ashe Monument account being held as needed for Monument maintenance.

Maybe the efforts of the public against the monument in earlier years to eradicate the Arthur Ashe Monument Project instilled a fear in Virginia Heroes, Incorporated directors that the monument might be damaged or harmed in some way led to the creation of a maintenance fund. Or, perhaps, a fear that the city would not maintain the monument led to fundraising to preserve and maintain the monument. Or even scarier, perhaps a growing concern that Virginia’s youth would not come to know Arthur Ashe led to an increased need to secure funds to maintain the monument. Either way, Virginia Heroes, Incorporated planned on continuing the legacy and memory of Arthur Ashe through that monument.

### *Conclusion*

On February 9, 1993 Arthur Ashe, who once went unrecognized by his hometown, lied in state at the Governor’s Mansion in Richmond, Virginia, an honor reserved only for those with great significance to the city. Arthur Ashe was the first to lie in state in 130 years, the last being Confederate General Stonewall Jackson. A few days later, over 6,500 people gathered at the

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<sup>185</sup> Jim Memmott, “Hard road to glory: More than a year after his death, Arthur Ashe’s legacy lives on,” *Democrat and Chronicle*, July 3, 1994.

Arthur Ashe Jr. Athletic Center for his memorial service in Richmond, Virginia. He had been added to the list of Virginia's official heroes.<sup>186</sup>

The actions of Virginia Heroes, Incorporated and Paul DiPasquale have constructed a public memory of Ashe as a mentor, and as a humanitarian, in addition to his importance as a tennis champion. Because of them, Ashe's statue on Monument Avenue still stands; its bronze figure and marble base remain unharmed. After the threats subsided and the controversy ended, Arthur Ashe remained. Today, this monument stands as a testament to a true Virginia hero and recognizes his presence in and contribution to his hometown of Richmond, Virginia.

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<sup>186</sup> "Frank Deford Remembers Arthur Ashe," *NPR Morning Edition*, February 8, 1993; "A Cold Day to Say a Last Farwell," *New York Times*, February 13, 1993.

## CONCLUSION

### “THE REST BEYOND THE RIVER”<sup>187</sup>

What I don't want is to be thought of when all is said and done as a great tennis player. I mean that's no contribution to make to a society because that is purely selfish. I did it for me. I haven't helped anybody else by winning Wimbledon or the US Open. But now, if I could discover some new vaccine for sickle cell anemia or cystic fibrosis, now that's what a role model should be.<sup>188</sup>

Museums and monuments perpetuate the image of Arthur Ashe as that of a man larger than sport of tennis, whose life was not defined solely by his success on the court but by his actions off of it. Our public memory of Ashe is not that of an athlete, but that of a humanitarian. Throughout his life, Arthur Ashe struggled to gain recognition in the tennis world, battled prejudice and racism, and eventually AIDS. Arthur Ashe could take solace in knowing that the sport and society have memorialized him as he wished to be remembered, as a champion of humanity.

Arthur Ashe is recognized for his activism and protest during the Civil Rights movement, despite his rejection of militant action. He chose to use a calm but resolute demeanor to protest against discrimination, inequities, and mistreatment. By comparing his memory as a breaker of the color barrier to Althea Gibson it is evident how greatly society and the sport remembers his activism and humanitarian efforts to bridge the divide between races; however, perhaps, at the expense of the memory of Althea Gibson.

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<sup>187</sup> Ashe, *Days of Grace*, 331.

Arthur Ashe speaks very poignantly to his daughter in the final chapter of his memoir. He speaks of the “rest beyond the river.” This is an excerpt from a church hymn he heard often growing up. It was meant to represent the freedom for slaves that existed after they passed away. The passage is as follows: “When I was a boy not much older than you, one of the most haunting spirituals I heard on many a Sunday morning in church spoke movingly of a ‘rest beyond the river.’ These words and music meant that no matter how harsh and unrelenting life on earth may have been for us slaves or in what passed for our freedom, once we have crossed the river—that is, death—we will find on the other side God's promise of eternal peace. The river is death and yet it is also life. Rivers flow forever and are ever-changing. At no two moments in time is a river the same. The water in the river is always changing.”

<sup>188</sup> *Arthur Ashe: Citizen of the World*, videocassette.

Both Althea Gibson and Arthur Ashe rose to tennis stardom during the Civil Rights movement; however, Gibson reached her peak in 1958, a decade before Ashe won his first Grand Slam. Over this decade, tensions heightened in America over Vietnam, Civil Rights, and Black Power, and this affected the creation of public memory of Arthur Ashe and Althea Gibson. The historical context surrounding their accomplishments ultimately affected their representation in public presentations of their historical significance. They are both memorialized as pioneers and barrier breakers in the sport, and yet Arthur Ashe's memory is far more apparent and permanent than that of the pioneer and woman who came before him.

Well recognized by the sport, the United States Tennis Association named the largest public tennis facility in the world in honor of Arthur Ashe. Arthur Ashe Stadium, in Flushing Meadow, New York, home of the US Open, was dedicated in 1997 to their fallen champion. The US Open holds an annual Arthur Ashe Kid's Day, in remembrance of the work Ashe did for youth, using tennis as a means to improve education for children. Despite the fact that these are tennis organizations, both of these institutions choose to focus on his accomplishments off the court in justifying why Ashe should be honored.

This is most evident in the International Tennis Hall of Fame and Museum display. The Hall of Fame and Museum, with its limited exhibition space, and strict mission, focused not on Arthur Ashe's tennis record but emphasized his role as a humanitarian and "citizen of the world," as stated in their interpretive text. His successes on the court are presented as part of a continuous story about Ashe's fight for racial equality and the other causes he dedicated his life to changing. By looking at this particular public display of history it is evident that the sport officially views him as a champion, but more importantly, the sport views him as a man whose impact was felt far beyond the game of tennis.

It is also evident in the story of how the city of Richmond, Virginia, which once discriminated against Arthur Ashe, now honors his memory. Through the public presentations of history, such as the Arthur Ashe memorial on Monument Avenue and Louis Briel's portrait that now hangs in the Virginia Historical Society, Ashe's public memory is that of a hero. Local Richmonders took it upon themselves to change the meaning of Monument Avenue and construct a more inclusive historical interpretation of who to include in the city's pantheon of heroes.

It is through these public displays of history, the monuments, the art, and the exhibitions, that Arthur Ashe is presented as a man who was greater than the sport. It is a unified message. While, one cannot discuss the life and accomplishments of Arthur Ashe without mentioning tennis; he is remembered not for what he added to the sport, but for what he added to society and to the world.

The legacy of Arthur Ashe will live on through the work he started in his life, and that which is done in his name and memory. He devoted his life to causes like public health and education, inspiring the youth through tennis, and defeating AIDS through awareness. He will live on through the work of his own organizations, Virginia Heroes, Incorporated and the Arthur Ashe AIDS Foundation for the Defeat of AIDS, as well as through the organizations named in his honor, Arthur Ashe Kids Day, the Arthur Ashe Student Health and Wellness Center at UCLA, and the Arthur Ashe Youth Tennis and Education center in Philadelphia. It is through these organizations that his legacy will continue.

Public memory defines Arthur Ashe as a champion. He was not just a champion of the sport, or a champion for African Americans. He was a champion to the young African American boy who felt as though he could walk down Monument Avenue for the first time because Arthur Ashe was there to watch him. His actions presented him as a champion to the South African child who watched for the first time a free, confident black man. He was a champion to the Masters student who learned a great deal more about the tremendous ability human spirit than she ever thought possible. He is recognized as a tremendous athlete, but most importantly memorialized as a tremendous man.

In this racial divide, I often find myself critical of both whites and blacks. In the end, I am not black or white, nor even for the United States of America, but for the whole of humanity. I can't define myself finally as an African American, or an American. My humanity comes first. I have felt that way since I have known myself, and I hope to die that way.<sup>189</sup>

And so shall he be remembered. Arthur Ashe, a citizen of the world.

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<sup>189</sup>Ashe, *Days of Grace*, 153.

## APPENDIX A

### HUMAN SUBJECTS COMMITTEE APPROVAL NOTICE

Human Subjects Application - For Full IRB and Expedited Exempt Review

PI Name: Kristen Elizabeth Norton

Project Title: Soul in Flight: Remembering Arthur Ashe in Sport, Life, and Society

HSC Number: 2009.3394

Your application has been received by our office. Upon review, it has been determined that your protocol is an oral history, which in general, does not fit the definition of "research" pursuant to the federal regulations governing the protection of research subjects. Please be mindful that there may be other requirements such as releases, copyright issues, etc. that may impact your oral history endeavor, but are beyond the purview of this office.

## APPENDIX B

### COPY OF CONSENT FORM FOR INTERVIEWS

#### **CONSENT FORM**

**Title of the Study:** Independent Research on the Public and Collective Memory of Arthur Ashe in Life, Sport, and Society

**Principal Investigator:** Kristen Norton (Phone: 407-325-3555) (Email: [ken04d@fsu.edu](mailto:ken04d@fsu.edu))

**Mailing Address:** 1573 Fernando Drive, Tallahassee, FL 32303

#### **INVITATION**

You are invited to participate in this research study about the construction, creation, presentation, and interpretation of Arthur Ashe in public spaces. You are invited to take part because of your professional, personal, or community's experience with Arthur Ashe and the causes he supported during his lifetime. Approximately 10 to 15 individuals will participate in this study.

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. If you decide not to participate the research will not be affected in any way.

#### **WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY?**

The purpose of this research is to construct an understanding of our collective and public memory of Arthur Ashe.

#### **WHAT WILL MY PARTICIPATION INVOLVE?**

If you decide to participate in this research study you will be asked to complete an interview, which will inquire into your occupation, your opinion on the memory of Arthur Ashe, and how your professional experience, duties, and responsibilities shaped or limited his memory.

You will be asked to complete one interview or survey, which will require one research session that will last an unknown amount of time.

#### **ARE THERE ANY BENEFITS TO ME?**

You are not expected to benefit directly from participating in this study. Your participation in this research study may benefit other people in the future by helping us understand how we construct memory, and in particular the memory of Arthur Ashe.

If you wish, you may receive a copy of the audio of your interview and/or a written transcript.

### **WILL I BE PAID FOR MY PARTICIPATION?**

You will not receive any compensation for your participation in this study .

### **ARE THERE ANY RISKS TO ME?**

There are no physical risks in taking part in this study. All personal information will remain confidential, unless direct permission is given otherwise, and NONE of your contact information will be included in the research paper.

### **HOW WILL MY PRIVACY BE PROTECTED AND WHO WILL USE MY INFORMATION?**

All research data will be kept confidential unless otherwise specified.

The information collected from you during this study will be used by the researcher to complete their Masters Thesis.

### **IS MY PERMISSION VOLUNTARY AND MAY I CHANGE MY MIND?**

Your permission is voluntary. You do not have to sign this form and you may refuse to participate in this study at any time. If you refuse to sign this form, however, you cannot participate in this research study.

You may withdraw from the study at any time. In addition, you may skip any questions you do not feel comfortable answering.

**If you decide not to participate in this study, or if you stop while the study is underway, it will not disrupt or hurt the research in any way.**

### **HOW LONG WILL MY PERMISSION TO THIS RESEARCH LAST?**

By signing this form you are giving permission for your interview information to be used by and shared with the researcher described in this form. You may withdraw your permission at any time by contacting the primary researcher listed below:

**Kristen Norton**

1573 Fernando Drive,  
Tallahassee, FL 32303  
(407) 325-3555  
[ken04d@fsu.edu](mailto:ken04d@fsu.edu)

Beginning on the date you withdraw your permission no new information about you will be used. If you withdraw your permission, you can no longer actively take part in this research study.

### **WHO SHOULD I CONTACT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?**

Please take as much time as you need to think over whether or not you wish to participate. If you have any questions about this study at any time, do not hesitate to contact the Principal Investigator and Researcher Kristen Norton.

For information on the rights of research subjects you may contact the Human Subjects Committee at Florida State University at (850) 644-8673.

**AGREEMENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY AND PERMISSION TO USE  
AND/OR DISCLOSE MY INFORMATION**

I have read this consent and authorization form describing the research study procedures, risks, and benefits, what information will be used, and how my information will be used. I have had a chance to ask questions about the research study, including the use of my information, and I have received answers to my questions. I agree to participate in this research study, and permit the researcher to use my information as described above.

**Name of Participant (please print):** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_ I give my permission to be quoted directly in publications.

**YOU WILL RECEIVE A COPY OF THIS FORM AFTER SIGNING IT.**

**Signature of person obtaining consent and authorization:**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

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## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Kristen Elizabeth Norton was born and raised in Central Florida. She attended Florida State University for her Bachelors degree, graduating *cum laude* with honors in the Spring of 2008 with a degree in History and a minor in Philosophy. After receiving her BA from Florida State, she decided to continue her education at the University, pursuing her Masters. She will graduate from Florida State University in the Spring of 2010 with her Masters in Historical Administration and Public History and a certificate in Museum Studies. She plans on beginning her career in the exciting field of historic house museums after graduation.