

Left: Washington Football Team wide receiver Terry McLaurin celebrates a touchdown against the Philadelphia Eagles, Jan. 3, 2021.

PHOTO BY ALL PRO REELS (VIA FLICKR)

that continues to this day. To the members of the committee, outlawing end-zone celebrations was a matter of maintaining decorum on the playing field—that is, maintaining the kind of “sportsmanlike” behavior exhibited by White players.

In other words, Andrews writes, “[Black athletes] should not do things—like use expressive forms of behavior that are foreign to the Rules Committee—that might upset traditional White people, like those folks who impose rules on expression.”

For Andrews, it’s personal, of course. He grew up, he says, surrounded by “a large Bay Area family of roughly 80 Black cousins, aunts, uncles, nephews, nieces, and siblings that has shown me by example the complexity of everyday Black life.

“Blackness was the water I swam in for years until arriving in nearly all-White Chico” to attend its university.

For 30 years, he writes, he has been cataloging the multiple ways White Americans study—and, yes, police—Black athletes in the desire to control them. He reminds readers of what happened to Muhammad Ali when he refused to be drafted into the Army: He was found guilty of breaking draft laws and sentenced to five years in prison. (A series of court appeals kept him free and, ironically, enabled him to become a powerful spokesman for the anti-war movement.)

After earning bachelor’s and master’s degrees from Chico State, Andrews earned a doctorate from the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 1996, after which he taught for 14 years at the University of Canterbury in Christchurch, New Zealand.

That last school was his launch pad for travels around the world, during which he studied the many ways Black people used their expressiveness to establish a sense of style that appears in nearly everything they do.

Take church, for example. It’s always been a place where Black folk feel empowered and safe, and it’s also a place that elicits stylistic creativity—in its powerful, hand-clapping gospel choirs, its

preachers’ chanted call-and-response sermons and its attendees’ colorful outfits. (In his Chico home, Andrews has a display of nearly a dozen of his late mother’s gorgeous Sunday go-to-meeting hats.)

Church is just one of the many arenas in which Black people have had a profoundly enriching influence on American society. Andrews’ main interest is in the conjunction of Black expression and sports, but he’s similarly interested in Black expression as it’s manifested in music, food, clothing styles—you name it.

Policing Black Athletes is a remarkably comprehensive work filled with valuable insights into the relationship between White and Black Americans as seen primarily through the lens of sports.

Andrews, 63, worked on the book for more than 30 years. Most of that time was spent researching Black expression—its manifestations not only in the United States, but also elsewhere around the world.

He’s traveled extensively, and the more he’s learned about Black expression, its history and complexities, the more he’s wanted to know. In that time, he’s written dozens of scholarly papers while maintaining a teaching career at Chico State and San Jose State.

For Andrews and most African-Americans, it’s important to keep an open mind in dealing with White people. He tells, for example, about a night when he stopped for coffee in a Nebraska diner on his way back to graduate school in Wisconsin. When the White cashier took a long time to come up with his brew, he became suspicious, thinking that maybe the fellow was consciously ignoring him.

Then two Black men passed the counter on the way out and greeted the White cashier warmly. He answered back with a smile, addressing both of them by their nicknames.

The men were good friends, and the cashier was not a racist: “The White guy had no problems with Black people, as it turns out. As they walked out and he handed me my change, he said, ‘Sorry I took so long—I made you a fresh pot.’”

Still, the brief encounter reminded Andrews once again that “the stress of figuring out White people’s intentions takes an emotional toll [on African-Americans] even after decades of social contact.” □



Dr. Vernon Andrews
PHOTO: DRVANDREWS.COM

KZFR 90.1 FM CONCERT CALENDAR

FRIDAY OCT 22	PARADISE PERFORMING ARTS CENTER TODD SNIDER With Special Guest: Lilly Winwood
SUNDAY OCT 31	HALLOWEEN PARTY LOW FLYING BIRDS SMOKEY THE GROOVE BLU EGYPTIAN CHICO WOMEN'S CLUB
FRIDAY NOV 12	JOHN CRAIGIE WITH SPECIAL GUEST CHRIS PUREKA ... KEEP IT WARM 2021 EL REY THEATER
FRIDAY DEC 31	NEW YEAR'S EVE WITH DEAD AWAKE MORE TO BE ANNOUNCED CHICO WOMEN'S CLUB
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