

The Passion of Tiger Woods: An Anthropologist Reports on Golf, Race, and Celebrity Scandal by Orin Starn.

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The Passion of Tiger Woods: An Anthropologist Reports on Golf, Race, and Celebrity Scandal by Orin Starn (review)

Thabiti Lewis

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REVIEW

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

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Making effective use of online discourse and other electronic arenas to learn the truth about Tiger Woods and celebrity in the modern world, Orin Starn gathers anthropological data from social media to evaluate race in post-civil rights America. Starn offers an entertaining approach to the everyday and mundane societal patterns and social perceptions of celebrity. Adroitly recognizing that “community” has ceased to be a neatly circumscribed entity, Starn tracks blogs, chat rooms, message boards, and news sources like ESPN.com to accurately hear the tenor of twenty-first century voices in an age of political correctness. Of particular concern is how scandal in an unprecedented era of social media raised a new set of issues about Tiger Woods. His unlikely popularity was due to his golf prowess, his unracialized status, and the nature of celebrity in modern America.

However, this is also a book about golf and its place in American society where there are over twenty million golfers. Starn also is philosophical in his discussion of how the chance involved in golf and the opportunity “for a more genuine outdoor experience” draws “the loner” who “finds a hermit’s solace in [the] pastime” (20–21). After a brief but solid overview of the history of golf and its connection to “the very ideal of American power, prosperity, and luxury,” Starn discusses the history of golf, its rise in the United States of America, and the fascination with Tiger Woods (9). He outlines Woods’s blueprint to displace racial memory and the immense pressures of being a golf prodigy.

When Tiger Woods was lured out of college in 1996 with a \$40 million dollar endorsement contract from Nike, he was already an icon. Indeed, as Starn explains, Woods’s entire life has been about juggling the enormous responsibility being a winner, icon, entrepreneur, and corporate athlete. Woods is the first athlete to earn **[End Page 96]** \$1 billion, his wife is blond-haired, he has two dogs and two children, and as Starn points out, he and Elin are “the poster couple for a shiny new

postracial America” (xi). At the ripe young age of twenty-one he won the coveted Augusta National Masters Championship, which was immediately followed by racial controversy about what would be on the awards dinner menu. Tiger, foretelling the compromise and effort to take race off the table that would define his career, promptly settled the matter by crafting a race-neutral menu of hamburgers and hot dogs.

In his attempt to dissect notions of post-race America, Starn does a good job of detailing how Woods successfully navigates his career, at one point paralleling him to President Obama, identifying both men as global offspring of mixed marriages; both transcendent in traditionally white professions: politics and golf. In fact, Woods, he explains, diverges from the “one drop rule” of race to reposition himself as Cabalasian. And, as Starn points out, Woods pulls it off, until the night after Thanksgiving in 2009 when it all came crashing down as his Cadillac Escalade destroyed a fire hydrant and out spouted tales of women “trusting with Tiger” (xii).

What is so intriguing about *The Passion of Tiger Woods* is that it is an adroit exploration of the pace of news in the internet age. Indeed, when Woods crashed his car, news spread faster than the water from the hydrant, and Woods became “fodder for countless jokes, blog-posts, chat-room debates . . . generat[ing] over one million hits” (xii). Finally, *The Passion of Tiger Woods* is a wonderful example of the types of anthropological studies that are necessary and possible. Despite the obvious pitfalls of the anonymity of his subjects, the approach lends itself to useful, fresh, honest tracking of *true* public perception that ensues in the social media world, which cannot be ignored.

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provided a more holistic and complicated understanding of the entirety of black women's labor market experiences.

Nonetheless, Branch's thesis remains a powerful one. The lives of those at the upper strata are far and away from the majority of black women in the U.S. Despite an emphasis on the declining jobs and wages of black men, the fact is that black women's relative earnings are also eroding. Furthermore, the black/white ratio in job loss is larger among women than men.¹ Even the growing gap between African American haves and have nots does not reduce the significance of persistent intersecting gender and racial discrimination and inequities.

What does opportunity and economic progress really mean for black women as mothers, sisters, partners, and caretakers? For Branch, and the majority of black women, it indicates an occupational structure that maintains and protects the status quo and offers little promise of change.

1. "Employment Gains and Wage Declines: The Erosion of Black Women's Relative Wages Since 1980," by Becky Pettit and Stephanie Ewert in the latest issue of *Demography*.
University of Kansas
Jennifer F. Hamer

THE PASSION OF TIGER WOODS: An Anthropologist Reports on Golf, Race, and Celebrity Scandal. By Orin Starn. Durham: Duke University Press. 2011.

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Response to Orin Starn: Here come the anthros (again): the strange marriage of anthropology and native America, geode forms a mannerism.

The Passion of Tiger Woods: An Anthropologist Reports on Golf, Race, and Celebrity Scandal, by Orin Starn, Duke University Press, 2011, the perception of co-creation projects a quasar

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