

## Republican Perspective

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### Diversity Uber Alles

Summer 2016

This is not about either of two fine athletic competitors, Ibtihaj Muhammad and Simone Manuel. It is about the press coverage of their respective achievements.

A pre-competition CNN headline read: "Muslim fencer Ibtihaj Muhammad set to make U.S. Olympic history in Rio." Reading the story which followed that headline, you would have to reach the *twelfth* paragraph before finding out anything about her ability or achievements as a fencer. The entire rest of the article exalted her for wearing the hijab.

After the individual saber competition, the ABC News headline was: "Fencer becomes first American Olympian to compete in hijab." Like the earlier CNN article, this one focused almost entirely on the great breakthrough in American athletics: having a hijab-wearer compete on Team USA. A single brief paragraph told of her performance (she was eliminated mid-way through the event, as were the other Americans).

Ah, but in the team saber event, a medal for America! Here is the New York Daily News headline: "Ibtihaj Muhammad, U.S. teammates win bronze in sabre fencing at Rio Olympics." The article began: "U.S. fencer Ibtihaj Muhammad came to the Rio Games determined to show the world that Muslim-American women can excel in sports." Deep into the article you will discover the names of her co-medalist teammates, including one who had been a two-time gold medal winner in a previous Olympics---and whose performance in Rio likely saved the bronze for Team USA.

Muhammad's teammates' performance, their names, even their very existence were just not the story the press was interested in covering. It was all about the wearing of the hijab.

(Update: In November 2017, Mattel announced the launch of its hijab-wearing Barbie, "modeled after Olympic fencer Ibtihaj Muhammad." This further celebrates her astounding athletic achievement.)

So onward to Simone Manuel.

The headline in the San Jose Mercury News read: "Phelps shares historic night with African-American." Say what?

Manuel won Olympic gold in the 100 meter freestyle event. Rather than honoring her by announcing her name in its headline, the newspaper instead identified her only by her race.

With her performance in Rio, Manuel became the first African-American woman to win an individual gold in any Olympic swimming event. Earlier in the day Michael Phelps had taken his

22nd gold by winning the 200 meter individual medley. Thus the two were tied together in the Murky News headline.

The swift social media backlash caused the paper to rewrite its headline to "Stanford's Simone Manuel and Michael Phelps make history." (Never mind the obvious ambiguity in *that* re-write--the cleanup squad was surely rushed.) The paper also offered this apology: "The original headline on this story was insensitive and has been updated to acknowledge the historic gold medal wins by both Simone Manuel and Michael Phelps. We apologize for the original headline."

But the cat was out of the bag. The Murky News had divulged to readers that in their mindset the most important thing was not the champion herself, or even her performance, but that she was African-American.

The press treatment of these two Olympic stories betrays an obsession with race, gender, diversity--at the expense of the actual athletic news. But perhaps that obsession is just a reflection of the diversity uber alles mindset of academia, the media, and other opinion shapers in today's America.