

## **Renaissance man**

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The National Basketball Association took public-relations hits during its recent all-star break. The game itself received less attention than the circumstances surrounding it. What happened in Las Vegas did not stay in Las Vegas. Several notorious fights have affected the NBA during recent seasons as well. The mayhem on Vegas' streets and in its nightclubs seemingly reflected a league and a sport afflicted by violence and chaos. Kareem Abdul-Jabbar tells another side of basketball's story. Perhaps the greatest collegian ever, Jabbar won six most-valuable-player awards in the NBA. He led the Milwaukee Bucks and the Los Angeles Lakers to championships. The sky hook remains basketball's most lyrical shot.

Jabbar's productivity continued after his retirement -- and in crucial respects increased. Jabbar has written books -- important books, serious books, books about history and human accomplishment. His writing reflects scholarship. "Brothers in Arms: The Epic Story of the 761st Tank Battalion, Way's Forgotten Heroes" told the saga of an African-American unit that contributed to the victory over totalitarianism.

His newest effort, "On the Shoulders of Giants: My Journey Through the Harlem Renaissance," has won rave reviews for its treatment of the creative flowering in the Harlem of the early decades of the 20th century, when the neighborhood became a literary capital. Its poets, writers, artists, and musicians, too, sang America. The review in The Washington Post quotes Jabbar:

"If the Harlem Renaissance teaches us anything, it is to see each of [the Harlem artists] as a human being, not just as an icon of color. And to marvel that sometimes human beings can translate into words the chaos of passions, frustrations, and hopes we hold for the future."

Jabbar loves history. He loves a future that builds on its past. His excellent career combines athletics and art. The sky hook took basketball to new heights. Jabbar raises basketball's sights far beyond the Strip.

-- *Richmond Times-Dispatch*