BLACK BALL: THE EXPLOITATION OF BLACK ATHLETES THROUGH MAJOR REVENUE-PRODUCING SPORTS

BY

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A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of WAKE FOREST UNIVERSITY GRADUATE SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCE in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of MASTERS OF ARTS Liberal Studies

May 2017

Winston Salem, North Carolina

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DEDICATION

This is dedicated to my Creator, family, friends, coaches, teammates, teachers and colleagues. All of which have helped mold me into the person I am today. Without your love, guidance and support, I’m not sure I am the man I claim to be today. (WAS)

Thank you for boosting my confidence when it was in the dumps and keeping me humble when my head was in the clouds. It was all needed. To all the athletes that are working hard to reach their goals, keep working it will pay off.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to acknowledge John T. Llewellyn, Ph.D., who assisted me in countless hours of approving and editing materials for this project. It took some time but we got it done and I think it is a success.

I would also like to acknowledge Anthony Parent Ph.D., and Todd A. McFall Ph.D., for your part in the completion of this project. Deepest gratitude to all three of you men.
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ABSTRACT

Delon Lowe

BLACK BALL: THE EXPLOITATION OF BLACK ATHLETES THROUGH MAJOR
REVENUE-PRODUCING SPORTS

Thesis under the direction of John T. Llewellyn, Ph.D., Professor of
Communication.

The aim of this thesis is to examine the exploitation of black male athletes
in major revenue-producing sports; and why they continuously allow themselves
to be exploited. For this reason the author will look into different aspects of life for
black male athletes, with the aim to reveal why black male athletes have become
objects of much exploitation.

This thesis examine how black male athletes have become immune to
such exploitation; by looking at black American families' median household
income, choice of extracurricular activities for children of black American families
based off of median household income, and lack of educational resources for
most school districts that prominent black male athlete reside. The thesis then
identifies the use of exploitation of black males athletes in major collegiate
revenue-producing sports, and gives a comparison to slave methods.

The hope for this thesis is that facts about the exploitation of black male
athletes, and college athletes in general surface, so our society may move to
eventually allow collegiate athletes to profit from their talents
INTRODUCTION

In America, competitive athletics offer young children a wide variety of opportunities. They provide children the chance to make friends and explore different extracurricular activities. While at younger ages, the focus is to engage in friendly competitive sports, that changes when certain children who excel in athletics are given the opportunity to receive an education from some of the most competitive and elite colleges and universities in the country. Athletes who prove to be superior are likely to be offered what is described as the chance of a lifetime for a chance to become a professional athlete and make unimaginable amounts of money, which in most cases comes in addition to a free college education.

What price do these athletes pay for these opportunities? What unforeseen risks are athletes taking for a chance to achieve these opportunities? For many of the athletes who are part of the billions-of-dollar-per-year-producing American sporting institutions of college basketball and football, being exploited from many directions is the price of admission for a chance to pursue the career of a lifetime. The main characters who pursue these opportunities are, in many cases, black male athletes. The athletic framework under which the athlete participates (i.e., the National Collegiate Athletic Association) is set up on the premise that it will allow black male athletes the opportunity to compete and profit from their athletic abilities; in fact, the black male athlete is the one who will be profited from. In the two major revenue-producing sports of basketball and

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football black athletes make up 57.1% of football and 64.3% of basketball participants; and while the NCAA boasts about having a record percentage of its athletes graduate at 71 percent, only half of its black athletes in the two revenue sports mentioned are receiving their degrees. In an interview on National Public Radio with Renee Montagne, Washington Post sports columnist Kevin Blackistone states:

Black males make up less than 3 percent of undergraduate enrollments. Yet, when you look at their numbers or percentages on the revenue-generating sports teams of football and men's basketball, they make up well into 50 and 60 percent of those teams. So the idea is that they are really there to be part of the revenue-generating working class of athlete on campus and not necessarily there to be part of the educating class as most everyone else is.

This paper will explore the many realms in which black males are exploited through athletics. To gain a better understanding of how this occurrence takes place, one must first look at a statistical comparison of income and lifestyles between black families and white families in America. One must then look at the actual amount of opportunity for many of the black male athletes who have come from the families in the statistical comparison. Thirdly, this paper will examine the dearth of educational resources provided for many of the black male athletes by schools in their communities, a trend which also stems from the statistical comparison due to difference in economic lifestyles between black and white groups. Fourthly, this paper will look at the root of the exploitation of black

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male athletes, followed by an examination of the phenomenon of exploitation in major collegiate athletics; and lastly compare the collegiate model of using black male athletes for profit to the historic institution of American slavery. This paper will inventory the toll of exploitation that black male athletes endure, all for the sake of chasing a dream.

Going back to Roman times, the sports arena has been a place where many amazing spectacles of athleticism are revealed. Today, in a day and age where money and status determine the types of jobs that are sought after, the black American male is often caught between a rock and a hard place when trying to choose at an early age what profession he wants to pursue. While sport plays an important role in the development of many young children in America, they often leave many black American males behind academically due to the lack of educational resources within those systems where they live and learn. As a consequence, these young athletes lack the life skills necessary to succeed and thus are stripped of the chance fully grow into their potential academically. In the United States of America, the illusion that there are ample opportunities for success in its capitalistic culture regardless of ethnicity is a myth sold to everyone; yet the country continuously and constantly struggles to confront its corrupt and racist history. Karen Fleshman and her series of articles in the

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Huffington Post about racism in America illustrate the continued struggle for the country to address racism. She writes:

Many people of color are reeling from a series of events that they interpret as evidence that American society finds them of no value. They are exhausted of pointing out the abundant evidence of institutionalized racism that is all around us, tired of calling for a national dialogue on race that has gone unanswered, and exasperated of white people’s inability to empathize and recognize that change is needed.6

Fleshman’s statement and numerous events of institutionalized racism are examples that hidden racism is still prevalent in America’s fibers. Cases of racial prejudice economically stifle black culture in an already sluggish market. Two excellent written examples of racism in sports are articles that were published around the same time. Both of these articles were written in reference to the then-current controversy of Donald Sterling, professional basketball team owner, and his girlfriend V. Stiviano, when she recorded his racist rant over the phone. Two news sources, The Root and the New York Daily News, reported on their respective websites articles citing ten examples of racism in sports. Sterling was featured in both lists.

On April 29, 2014, The Root’s Diana Ozemebhoya Eromosele listed and discussed individual examples of racism in sports, the list-included Sterling’s remarks and a host of other racist events. One of those events includes a white player for the NFL Philadelphia Eagles named Riley Cooper, whose 2013 drunken racist outburst was captured on film at country singer Kenny Chesney’s concert, in which Cooper stated, “I will would jump that fence and fight every single nigger here bro.” American radio host Don Imus’s comments were also

included in Ozemebhoya’s list when he derided on Rutgers University’s Women’s Basketball team, calling them “nappy headed hoes.” Following The Root’s article, on May 3, 2014, the New York Daily News similarly reported ten current instances of racism in sports. One of the examples reported in this article was the poor graduation rates among black male athletes, which was illustrated by the forty-three percent graduation rate gap between black and white players participating in the 2014 sweet sixteen. The articles mentioned perfectly highlight of how pockets of racism still exist in America, even in athletics, which is often publicly viewed as racially progressive.

Americans view competitive athletics as an equal opportunity setting where everyone who devotes himself or herself will have the chance to participate. It is traditionally believed that, given the dedicated energy, athletic ability, and necessary skills, a person of any race, gender or social class can achieve athletic success, if they believe. However, with athletic success for many individuals comes a greater opportunity for exploitation. In the major revenue-producing American sporting institutions of higher education, football and men’s basketball, no group of individuals is exploited more often and more thoroughly than the black male athlete.

According to bestticketsblog.com, the 2014 racial demographics of both the National Basketball Association (NBA) and National Football League (NFL)


show a heavy saturation of black athletes. The NBA has sixty-nine percent of its players who are black American,\(^9\) and the NFL has sixty-eight percent of its players who are black American.\(^10\) Blacks make up 14.1 percent of the American population. While these statistics indicate it is not impossible for black Americans, who make up a small percentage of the American population, to find success in professional sports, it suggests there may be a fixation in the venue of sports as the best path to success within black American culture.

Nevertheless, in many cases, the individuals who beat the odds and make it out of their childhood environment through sports face large amounts of exploitation as they walk the path to becoming a professional athlete. Exploitation can mean a multitude of things, but utilizing an individual for profit without them sharing in a portion of that profit is the core concept of the term. Two examples of the many ways in which athletics exploit the black male athletes who participate in them are by not offering them an even playing field or any opportunity to participate at all due to lack of resources as they grow in their respective environments. More accurately it is due to many black male athletes not being given many other choices athletic-wise than to play sports that are publicly funded.\(^11\) This lack of opportunity in other athletic programs outside of the publicly funded ones, is due to the disenfranchisement of Blacks in the American socio-economic infrastructure continue to preclude large percentages

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of black families from securing or retaining any type of financial stability due to the history of how this country was established. The same socio-economic injustices will continue to allow black male athletes to be used while chasing acceptance and success only through sports.

While many black male athletes are celebrated in their respective sports for their athletic achievements. There are startling numbers that indicate that from the beginning, many black families cannot afford to provide their sons with the same number of athletic opportunities as the majority of white families can provide.\footnote{Poverty in the United States: A Snapshot. nclej.org, 2014, http://www.nclej.org/poverty-in-the-us.php} This is the genesis from which the dichotomy in income and lifestyles between black American families and white American families begins to fuel the cycle of exploitation for the black male athlete. This is because the passing down and maintenance of wealth to the next generation in white American communities benefits them in more comfortable living conditions.\footnote{Luhby, Tami. "Whites have 12 times the Wealth blacks." CNN Money. Money.cnn.com. 18 February 2015.}
CHAPTER ONE: TALE OF TWO DIFFERENT LIFESTYLES

America’s socio-economic system is the first level of systematic disadvantage and profiteering from the black male athlete. Black Americans make up about 14.1 percent of the 319 million people that makeup the American population, this totals to approximately 45 million blacks that populate America, according to blackdemographics.com. According to data from 2014, 27.2 percent of black Americans currently live below the poverty line. These numbers mean that, out of the approximately 45 million black Americans in this country; over 12 million live under the poverty line. Looking deeper into the 27.2 percent, almost half of that number – 12.7 percent – live in what is known as “deep or extreme poverty,” according to the National Center for Law and Economic Justice. The Urban Institute defines deep or extreme poverty as a yearly income that falls below half of the federally established poverty line. This definition means that the children who are among those 12 million black Americans living well below the poverty line must forfeit the chance to experience the finer side of sports and thus enter the athletic arena disadvantaged before they have ever played a game.

Another repercussion from this lack of opportunity is that those same children have no choice but to participate in the specific sport activities that are publicly aided such as basketball and football. They lose a chance to participate

in stereotypical “country club” or “white” sports such as golf, tennis or aquatics. These athletic programs being publicly funded means that the sports equipment and facilities, which are often minimal, are usually provided and maintained through taxpayer dollars by way of either recreational departments or public school systems. The sports that are most commonly publicly funded are baseball, basketball, football and track. The stereotypical “country club” or “white” sports’ equipment and facilities (golf, tennis, swimming, lacrosse) are provided and kept up by private donations, representing the racial divide in sports participation.

In today’s culture the public sees professional sports players making large and enviable sums of money. The average annual salary among the three major professional sports is 3.57 million dollars according to forbes.com. In addition, these athletes now have access to unlimited resources to help them perform better in their particular sport as well as the best coaches money can buy at their disposal to guide them. The professional athlete seems to have everything that is needed in order to be the best that they can possibly be and live a lifestyle that many in America can only dream of living. The three sports mentioned before are the top revenue-producing professional sports in America. However, basketball and football are also extremely lucrative collegiate sports and these are the two sports that the vast majority of black male athletes pursue. There are many reasons black male athletes pursue basketball and football; in many

cases, the initial reason is the narrow access to sports options as they mature in their respective socio-economic environments.

As of 2013, the U.S. Census Bureau reported that the median household income for white Americans was $58,270.\textsuperscript{19} In the same year, the median household income for black Americans was just $34,598.\textsuperscript{20} As previously established, 27.2 percent of the black American population lives right at, or deep under, the poverty line which, according to the National Center of Law and Economic Justice, was set at $23,492 in 2013.\textsuperscript{21} This means that even for those who are not already living under the poverty line, a vast majority of black American families are only about eleven thousand dollars a year away from being classified as impoverished citizens since the median household income for black Americans is roughly $35,000.\textsuperscript{22} The differences in median household income between races alone show the more difficult choices that many black American families have to make when it comes to how and where to spend their money as compared to their white counterparts. These numbers provide reference point about what types of sports black and white children may have access to and choose to pursue due to the difference in income. Just as in any other facet of life, sports require different levels of resources for a person to be successful in them. Looking solely through the scope of the 2013 income

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid.
numbers, one can question how the large percentages of black athletes even manage to persevere at all.
CHAPTER TWO: OPPORTUNITIES IN SPORTS

The large disparity in the 2013 median household incomes shows that the socio-economic status within American culture plays an important role in black American children becoming athletes in sports that do not require extensive private resources. In his book *Fair and Foul: Beyond the Myths and Paradoxes of Sport*, D. Stanley Eitzen explains this difference in athletic opportunities for children in less fortunate homes:

Children from families with limited economic resources tend to participate in sports that require little equipment and are publicly funded, such as community youth programs and school sports. Thus they tend to excel in football, basketball, baseball, track and boxing. Children of the affluent, on the other hand, have access to golf courses, tennis courts, private gymnasiums, and swimming pools, as well as coaching in those sports, through private country clubs, neighborhood associations, and parental subsidies.  

As children grow up in their respective environments, they begin to become conscious of what they can enjoy due to the resources provided to them, and perhaps more importantly what they cannot enjoy due to the absence of the resources needed. This gap is the largest contributing factor for young black males pursuing a profession in basketball and football. These children decide to chase this lifestyle simply because they lack the resources to explore other sports that require more than the bare minimum given to the publicly-aided programs. Young impoverished black men cannot afford sports that require equipment such as golf clubs, expensive turf and special venues for gymnastics.

While barriers in sports like golf or gymnastics may render them economically out of reach for many black American children, they are not...

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impossible to attain. Tiger Woods and Gabby Douglas are great examples of successful black athletes, albeit both athletes were raised in families well above the poverty line in the middle to upper class. The very small, well-recognized representation of black athletes in more exclusive sports such as golf, gymnastics and tennis is just an example of what can be achieved given the resources. It also demonstrates that their athletic prowess can be just as worthy of attention and praise in those sports as in the typical success routes of football and basketball. After examining this information, it can be argued that socio-economic status plays a major role in what sports are pursued by the less fortunate black male athlete, which is just the beginning of the black male athlete’s exploitation.

Socio-economic status not only leads to different sporting activities being chosen between black American children and white American children, it can also lead to different experiences for children due to those different sporting activities. Sports in many ways can build character in areas of the personality through the traits and skills they teach; but they can also hamper character development of an individual in other areas in the same instance because of the aggression that can seep in. If a person grows up playing sports and develops poor winning habits that person can potentially continue to be too boastful when they succeed in other areas of life. In similar cases, if a person grows up playing sports and develops poor losing habits, that person can potentially not understand how to handle adversity in other areas of their life. Sports provide many great opportunities for achievements and building positive character
development in the youth who participate in them; however sports, if not taught properly, can also do as much harm in building negative character development. Author Michael W. Austin describes this event well in Psychology Today:

> It seems to me that participation in sports can build character, but it doesn’t just happen, we must be intentional about it. Parents and coaches need to demonstrate through their words and actions the values of sports that translate well into daily life, including respect for oneself and others, fairness, grace in defeat, humility in victory, and the virtue of self-denial.\(^{24}\) Character flaws can be especially problematic for the black male athletes who participate in the aggression-driven sports that so many of them play.

America was built on capitalistic principles; it is competitive, which resulted in an aggression-driven country, and every aspect of life in American culture oozes with competition; and these principles are not limited to social life, academics, politics, and economics. Nearly everything in America is about climbing the corporate ladder and doing whatever it takes to remain there as long as possible. In this regard, athletics holds no difference; whether it is an individual or team sport, competition to be the best you can be within that sport is a constant factor in the underlying fibers of American society. While it can add to positive character building within sports, competition can also build and bring out negative traits. It is easy to see why sports appeal to the youth who participate in them.

In individual sports, one is taught the value of dedication, perseverance, work ethic, mental and physical toughness, self-reliance and self-confidence. From a negative perspective, a person involved with individual sports has the potential to

become arrogant, display poor sportsmanship, doubt themselves and lack the ability to get along with others to achieve a common goal.

Team sports, like individual sports, can also teach positive characteristics. However, every positive characteristic listed as an attribute for individual sports can be listed as the same benefit for team sports. Every negative characteristic attributable to individual sports can be listed for team sports as well. The factor that makes team sports arguably better than individual sports from a character-building standpoint comes from the element of team. Learning to work with others to achieve a common goal – even if team members may not have the same athletic ability, work ethic, skin tone, or socio-economic class – is a top reason many push team sports as being a microcosm of American culture. The ability to put aside all differences, regardless of what the issue may be, is a great skill for any child to learn as they grow up. The value of this trait is especially great in a country such as America – rich in diversity yet constantly dealing with internal instances of racism within the culture.

With all of the great components of positive character building that both individual and team sports offer for the maturation of young athletes across America, the black male athlete is the one who comes up with the short end of the deal in terms of how they are able to apply the tools they learned in sports to other areas of their life. The data from 2013 suggest that a little more than a quarter of the black American ethnic group struggled to make ends meet month
after month. It is clear that this same percentage of people, most likely a much higher figure, simply cannot afford to provide their children with the same opportunities of any type, not exclusively in athletics, as many white Americans. This fact is evidenced by FeedingAmerica.org reporting in 2015 that thirty-six percent of black American children live in “food-insecure households,” indicating the proportion of those groups which cannot invest in their kids’ lives in general, let alone athletically. Understandably, their top priority is to figure out where they all are going to get their next meal. In the same 2013 study, the National Center for Law and Economic Justice reported only 9.7 percent of white Americans lived in poverty. This statistic shows that 9.7 percent of white Americans out of the 72 percent is the proportion of Whites in which make up the American population fall into the same boat as the 27.2 percent of black Americans living in poverty. So while a quarter of black families struggle, it is the same for only 13 percent of the white population affected. In absolute numbers, this means that more than three times as many white Americans than black Americans have opportunities to indulge in other activities, including those sports that are not publicly funded (tennis, golf, swimming and equestrian.)

Therefore, due to the lack of access to other more privatized sports, many black American males begin to idolize the athletes in whom they see the greatest

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comparison to themselves. The athletes they admire may come from similar backgrounds or represent themselves in ways with which the black male athlete can identify, as this is a popular trend that stems from urban culture. In his book, Darwin’s Athletes: How Sport has damaged Black America and Preserved the Myth of Race, John M. Hoberman states:

The black male style has become incarnated in the fusion of black athletes, rappers and criminals into a single menacing figure who disgusts and offends many blacks as well as whites. The constant haunting presence of this composite masculine type is maintained by news coverage and advertising strategies that exploit the suggestive mixture of black anger and physical prowess that suffuses each of those roles.  

Summarizing Hoberman, the synonymous exploitation and veneration of professional athletes, rappers, criminals and black culture by the mainstream media has become the sought-after image by black males in America. The urban culture persona, which they view in magazines, newspapers and television, is what they aspire to. This pattern leads another generation to fall into the trap of mainstream cultural manipulation. These types of imagery, along with limited resources and options, walk the black male athlete down a path toward greed, aggression and arrogance.

Due to the financial gap between white and black racial groups in America, the two groups may use sports differently as teaching tools. As Rudy Washington, former Black Coaches Association president, stated in an article in Sports Illustrated, “The fundamental problem is the home life in the black

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community, because in no other race is sport such a dominant factor of everyday life as it is in the black community."³⁰ Sport activities become problematic by bringing out negative characteristics among black athletes. This result is strictly due to the amount of pressure that is placed on "most black" male athlete within their homes and communities, because as they grow in age it often times becomes taken for granted that sports are his only way out. Therefore, it is perceived that the black male athlete must excel in sports in order to do better for himself.

In many low-income black communities, when the black male athlete is believed to be extremely gifted, he is heavily praised by his community, due to the belief that he is on his way not only out of the perceived hell of many black low-income communities, but also possibly headed to hefty paychecks. Many of his surrounding community members are proud of his accomplishments but they also may see this athlete as a way to piggyback their own way out of difficulties. The heavy praise he receives causes the black male athlete to adopt a sense of invincibility inside and outside of his community, which may cause him to abuse his local stardom. Examples of this behavior are found in the countless young once-prominent black athletes who are charged with crimes such as rape, theft, possession of narcotics, and so on each year.

The black male athlete can also face heavy backlash from his community, causing him to feel as if sports are his only true purpose. Commonly, this effect would mean the black athlete focuses solely on how to become better at the

sport he plays and makes no effort to better himself in other areas of life. This singular focus means the athlete risks being deemed academically ineligible to move to the next level of play. In many instances, the black male athlete feels sports are his only true path out of his environment and into a life full of lavishness, as already mentioned. Everything else begins to slip because all of his energy and concern is devoted to his sport.

Academically, he may feel there is not even a point in trying because no matter how hard he tries, he will be destined to fail because some authority figure stereotypes him as a thug incapable of quickly and effectively learning the concepts to excel beyond athletics. Therefore, he is mentally defeated and feels his success academically is out of his hands. Socially, the black male athlete may lack the ability to articulate his thoughts due to being under-educated in how to carry himself in different life scenarios. This under-education can also be correlated to the lack of exposure to experiences such as those of the majority of his white counterparts. Sports become his only outlet to express himself with confidence in a manner in which he can learn, create and express how he feels. These circumstances are why both praise and scrutiny can cause the black male athlete much difficulty within his community. If he is not level-headed, the praise can cause him to believe he is invincible and the scrutiny can cause him to feel that he has no purpose other than sports.

As a superior black male athlete grows and begins to gain public attention for his athletic ability, the pressures coming from his direct and immediate

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environment cause him to become more concentrated on his sport. What was self-confidence can now become arrogance or self-pity. What was selflessness can now become selfishness and greed, as well as possibly added hostility learned from the aggression-driven sports that many play. Dealing again with the financial gaps between the majority of black Americans and white Americans, schools are oftentimes still economically segregated purely because of the amount of wealth a family may possess. As D. Stanley Eitzen writes:

Economically privileged children are also advantaged in sport over their less advantaged peers by schools they attend. They either attend private schools or public schools in wealthy districts. Wealthy districts provided more sports opportunities, more coaches, and better facilities and equipment than do poorer school districts. Many poor school districts, in sharp contrast, must cut back or eliminate sports programs because of budget limitations.32

Eitzen’s statement rings true. The cutbacks or elimination of sports in the poorer school districts basically funnels athletes into limited athletic options by only funding sports that are most profitable. This limit in resources means that lower-income schools may not offer the sports that affluent schools can afford to offer, such as aquatics, golf and tennis. Even poorer schools are not going to eliminate the revenue-producing sports of basketball and football because in most cases those are the programs that keep the athletic budget barely afloat for the entire school. Those are sports enjoyed by the entire community thus bringing in the most ticket sales, profit from merchandise sales and even concession funds. By trying to simply keep these few programs afloat, the poorer schools cannot afford to pay reasonable coaching stipends, keep up

facilities or regularly pay for new equipment. There are many components to this divided system that contribute to the black male athlete’s potential character flaws; the components deal with the lack of funds and his surrounding environment. The good characteristics often outweigh many of the bad characteristics learned from being exploited for their talents in their adolescent years. Yet with many high profile minority athletes in the news for the irresponsible decisions they make, it seems as if the negative characteristics that may have been learned through sports outweigh the positive.

Once the black male athlete begins playing sports, his parents are simply attempting to involve him in some constructive activity that will assist them with building important positive characteristics they are will more than likely try to instill in their child and give him a physical outlet. This is more than likely just like every other child of any other racial demographic in America. Yet, exploitation from the black male athlete’s family is usually their first encounter with this type of manipulation. In most instances, the black athlete does not recognize that his family may be using him for their own gain until money or public recognition is involved. When money or recognition is introduced into the equation, the black athlete only sees his family as supportive in their constant encouragement for him to excel in sports. Yet, in actuality when money and recognition are introduced, the favors that were done for the athlete when he was younger are brought back up and the importance of family relationships is reinforced to the athlete.
Many may wish to deny the fact that mistreatment occurs within the family but it is hard to argue against this reality when many black professional athletes file bankruptcy year after year as a result of making bad investments and giving extensively to support their immediate and extended family members. Television documentaries like *ESPN’s 30 for 30 Broke*\(^{33}\) elaborate on this point heavily as well as countless other documentaries and articles\(^{34}\). There is a fairly good chance that some of the black Americans who are attempting to raise children in poverty were themselves raised in poverty, which results in the chain of unfortunate circumstances being passed from one generation to the next. This history is why many black American family members will go to drastic measures in order to break that chain. Much like the athlete himself, the parents’ and other older family members’ desires to obtain upward social mobility and relief from their current environments can be as focused upon in those respective family members as in the aspiring athlete. In most cases, the family members do not see the potential long-term effects or understand that sports are strictly a potential avenue to help the athlete by helping him get an education.

Ideally, the athlete will go professional and be a multi-millionaire but, if not, they are still advantaged if they have utilized sports to position themselves to be better educated in order to obtain a decent job and sustain a better life than he had growing up. The family that surrounds the young black male athlete in most cases views athletics in the same manner that many in the community view it; therefore, when their son, their brother, their cousin, or even their nephew shows


promise in sports they push him to keep his focus completely there, and not in many other areas. Unfortunately, this influence sometimes leaves schoolwork to be a forgotten responsibility. The athlete’s way out is now also seen as his family’s way out -- its only way out -- of their economic situation. Greed has now infested the minds of the promising male athlete’s family and their hidden agendas begin to fester as motives develop\textsuperscript{35}. These observations are not suggesting that the members of the family are malicious people; they are just tired of living in the difficult circumstances that they have grown accustomed to. They want a better life for themselves and see the black male athlete as an opportunity to obtain it.

Similar types of opportunity and exploitation come directly from the athlete’s youth and high school coaches. Youth and high school coaches oftentimes exploit players in order to leverage their upward movement in the coaching ranks or to get money for helping to develop the player once he makes it professionally. Sometimes they even accept money while major universities are recruiting the athlete. The coaches feel justified in these actions because they may have spent an astronomical number of hours teaching the athlete skills and drills, hauling athletes to different camps, or even allowing the athlete stay at his home with him and his family from time to time when family life became especially tense for the athlete. Lower level coaches are normally underpaid and overworked for the time they spend with athletes. These lower level coaches see coaches at Division I schools and in the professional ranks being paid millions of

\textsuperscript{35} Thomas, Isiah and Saud Nasir, Na’ilah. Black Males, Athletes and Academic Achievement. The Huffington Post. thehuffingtonpost.com. 7 July 2013.
dollars for performing similar jobs with better athletes and they envision themselves making that type of salary. They may feel they are entitled a cut of that black male athlete's potential earnings for focusing on and training the athlete's talents. Therefore, exploiting the athlete is merely a small fee for services rendered that is expected in return for what the coach sees as time spent developing an athlete who will hopefully one day become a household name like Cam Newton or Stephen Curry.

Peer interactions for the majority of black athletes in impoverished communities are a struggle. The types of environment that a majority of them grow up in are hotbeds for drug use and violence. The black male athlete oftentimes does not see a choice other than to participate in similar types of activity as their peers or stay away from those activities and run the risk of being labeled a “Sell Out.” Hoberman writes, “Apart from maintaining their prosperity and emotional health, the most important problem affecting middle class blacks today is what to do about the influence of rappers and athletes who teach their children not to ‘act white.’”

The analogy of crabs in a bucket is ever-present in many black communities across America. In these communities, many of the black male athletes have peers who may have ruined their own chances of doing something positive with their life by becoming involved with negative influences and not focusing their efforts in the right places. For their shortcomings and poor decisions, they attempt to hold back others who try to make vertical life changes.

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by seeking to involve them in their negative activity. While this circumstance is not always the case within the black community, the fear of getting left behind and jealousy from some of the black male athlete’s friends cause them to try to sabotage their friend with no apparent rewards for doing so.

Finding success in professional sports is not a result promised to the vast majority but it seems to be the most socially prominent route for the black American culture to find upward mobility. The reasoning for this judgment can be found in numerous places but mainly by examining the cultural norms of the black male athlete. American society tells black American males that they can find great success through achievement in sports and entertainment and perhaps only there. This concept is based on examples visible and presented to the black American youth on a daily basis. Just as an earlier quotation from John M. Hoberman’s book, *How Sports Has Damaged Black America and Preserved the Myth of Race*, expressed, rappers and athletes are prominent figures in the black community. Rappers and athletes are the roles that today kids view as successful. Therefore, youngsters are inspired to be just like the people they idolize on a daily basis in newspapers, magazines, and radio and television. Prior to the 1970s, young black Americans had only a handful of prominent black public figures and heroes to look up to. Even though many of the earlier black athletes were suppressed and tormented by fans in their respective leagues, they nevertheless represented great opportunity and inspiration to the black American culture because of their ability to cross the race line, integrate sports, and gain notoriety and wealth. Many white Americans did not share the positive view of
black athletes during the integration era as they do today; therefore, black athletes were not as widely celebrated then as they are now.

Leaders such Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X were direct reminders of slavery and oppression because of their fight against discrimination and inequalities in America. Both King Jr. and X were dominant, well educated and outspoken public figures that the black American population could look up to while they were both fighting for the same goal to overcome racial discrimination and injustice, yet taking different approaches in achieving it. Both were figures who spearheaded the growth of black American culture and gave many black Americans and their youth aspirations of what they could emulate in their communities. However, the assassination of those two leaders – in 1965 for Malcolm X and 1968 for Martin Luther King Jr. – also wounded the dreams of the post-Civil Rights black American culture. To black Americans, especially young black male Americans, it appeared that being a strong figure and standing up for what you believe to be right in America, standing up for a greater good and being black will get you killed. The dreams of being informed and empowered died alongside those two great leaders in black American culture. Just as a popular military tactic is to take out the leadership to deny the masses any true united direction, this is how black culture was affected when those two civil rights leaders were assassinated.

To stand alongside Dr. King, Jr. and Malcolm X as prominent black leaders, the only other inspirational national figures in black American culture who did not directly represent oppression were black athletes and entertainers.
This listing included names like Jackie Robinson, who broke the color barrier for professional baseball in 1947; Jesse Owens, who was an Olympic gold medalist in 1936; Wilma Rudolph, who also was an Olympic gold medalist in 1956; Jim Brown, the running back who wreaked havoc in college and the NFL during the late 1950’s and early 60’s; Hank Aaron, who was National League MVP in 1957, and the greatest boxer of all time Muhammad Ali in the 1960s. These athletic figures were all household names that black Americans could look to for inspiration and as great role models of successful people who looked like them.

The black athlete has always been a centerpiece the black American community could look to and see excellence. While black athletes may have been tortured and heckled, they were not assassinated as were Dr. King, Jr. and X, so sports became a fixation for the African American community. Hoberman states, “The most important factor in the development of the sports fixation is that athletic achievement has served the clan pride of African Americans in an absolutely unique way, to the point where it is embraced as a foundation of black identity.”

Sports for the African American community became a thing of pride, a compensatory fixation on being superior. Not only were black athletes given a chance to compete alongside white athletes, they were being celebrated by white America too. With newfound glory in athletics for the black athlete, many black Americans saw this avenue as a way out, a way to level the playing field, regardless of the type of field. Large portions of black American males took to

37 Ibid.
playing sports, attempting to find respect and a new life with the earnings they would receive if they were to make it professionally:

In 2011 with blacks about 12 percent of the general population, they were 77 percent of the players in the NBA, as were 68 percent of the NFL players and 8 percent of those in major league baseball (Latinos made up 29 percent of baseball players). In big-time college men’s basketball 61 percent of the athletes were black and in football, 46 percent are African Americans. For all sports in Division I, blacks constitute 24.9 percent of the athletes.38

The numbers mentioned by Eitzen about black athletes’ disproportionate presence in sports compared to their actual representation among the population bring to light many socio-economic problems in America that focus on and are rooted in race. This concept is also mention by Jon Entine in his book Taboo: Why Black Athletes Dominates Sports and why We’re Afraid to Talk about it, “Even in the sports in which blacks are not a majority – baseball, soccer, rugby, cricket, even bobsledding in some countries – blacks are represented in greater number than their share of the population.” Now more than ever, the black male athlete is heavily displayed as the centerpiece of success in the sports industry. Today’s mainstream media glorify the many perks of being an extremely sought-after and nationally ranked high school football player who has his pick of any school in the country but not the kid who, for whatever reason, did not receive an offer to play college ball. The television network ESPN, one of the worst offenders, presents day-long broadcasts on signing day and entire programs dedicated to watching a

seventeen-year-old boy sign his Letter of Intent smiling as he envisions four
years from that moment when he’s a top ten pick in the NFL Draft, once again
being praised nonstop. If he is really lucky, his hometown’s team will draft him so
he can stay local and stay close and connected to all the family members and
friends he will be financially supporting. While the viewers at home watch
however, they envision how much money the athlete is going to make them once
the season starts at the betting pool at work. The media cover all the benefits
with viewers: playing contracts, endorsement deals, mingling with top political
figures and movie stars. Becoming the black athlete is seen as the surest way
out for many of the black American male youth.
CHAPTER THREE: LACK OF EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES

Education is tolerated in order to continue to climb the hierarchal ladder to get to the lucrative professional contracts and endorsement deals. However, the time spent on education is always trumped by the amount of time the black male athlete spends practicing in his sport. In athletics the black male athlete finds a place of superiority and praise in a society in which he otherwise feels cheapened. As Hoberman writes, “The entrapment of African Americans in the world of athleticism is the result of a long collaboration between blacks seeking respect and expanded opportunity and whites seeking entertainment, profit, and forms of reconciliation that do not challenge fundamental assumptions about racial difference.”

In some instances, education is not completely pushed to the side for athletic promise, especially with the emergence of the black American female in the work force, but to the black American male, athletics is just an undeniable opportunity for upward movement and success. In his book, *Race, Sport and the American Dream*, Earl Smith quotes Harvard Professor Henry L. Gates:

Too many of our children have come to believe that it’s easier to become a black professional athlete than a doctor or lawyer. Reality check: according to the 2000 census, there were more than 31,000 black physicians and surgeons, 33,000 black lawyers and 5,000 black dentists. Guess how many black athletes are playing professional basketball, football and baseball combined. About 1,400. In fact, there are more board-certified black cardiologists than there are black professional basketball players.

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Black American males can turn on the television at any given time and see an athlete who looks like them, runs and jumps like them. This evidence adds to their fixation that becoming a professional athlete is a more tangible goal to them than anything outside of sports. Even if professional athletic positions have far fewer opportunities than medical, educational, or political positions, that is not how it is perceived by the black American youth consuming media sports images. Rather than looking in magazines and seeing others who look just as they do in various professional careers such as doctors or lawyers, they see white doctors, white lawyers and successful white businessmen.

Fame also plays a role in the pursuit of these professional athletic positions and the downplaying of other positions outside of athletics. We as an American society, not just black Americans, may not be able to name a successful doctor, lawyer or dentist other than our own right off hand, but can certainly point out LeBron James, Cam Newton, Tiger Woods, and Floyd Mayweather: “Many black children grow up assuming that they were simply born with athletic ability, and some coaches encourage them in the belief. Some black boys are told by black coaches that they have no future if they do not develop their athletic talent.”

The constant highlighting of sports to the black male athlete in society will continue to demean the importance of academic success and other viable professions, not only in the black communities, but also eventually in all other ethnic groups as high paid sport contracts are seen to be the proverbial lottery ticket out of tough circumstances in America. However, no

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ethnic group will see sports as the absolute way out of their abysmal situation more often than the black American culture.
CHAPTER FOUR: THE ULTIMATE EXPLOITATION

If family, community and other systems are the detonator that initiates the trend of exploitation to the black male athlete, then the collegiate sports level has to be perceived as the explosion of exploitation for the black male athlete. Perhaps no system has exploited the black male athlete more than the collegiate level of competition, which almost all who participate in the sports of men’s basketball and football have to enter before they attempt to go professional. The National Collegiate Athletic Association, henceforth referred to as the NCAA, is an institution that many of the today’s elite young athletes train most of their lives to gain access to. The top level of this system is major Division I and its Power 5 conferences. If an athlete can produce good results at college’s top tier, professional scouts can more easily determine if the athlete is worthy of becoming a professional player, due to the level of competition the athlete will face at this tier. This system is believed to be corrupt and exploitive to all of its student-athletes by many scholars across the country, but especially to its major revenue-producing sport athletes who participate in basketball and football.43 At this level and within these two sports is where the exploitation truly intensifies, and scandals are generated44, recently becoming an issue in the opinion of most of the public.45

Each year the best high school athletes are enrolled at major universities around the country to begin being exploited for their talents in order to gain the school more national recognition. The more success schools have athletically, the more television time they may get from the networks. The more national television time a school receives, the more non-athletic high school prospects may notice the school and want to apply to attend. Therefore, colleges are motivated to attract the best athletes they possibly can in order to ensure they have some of the nation’s top athletic programs and are constantly competing for bowl games and championships. This is also why the school’s football and basketball coaches are fired with no regard for average records. The school’s sporting teams are essentially its marketing tools in order to get prospective students to consider attending. Therefore major chunks of school budgets are placed on athletic programs and in particular, recruiting. The constant arms race among schools to build better facilities, have better equipment and have the most prominent coaches are attempts to draw the best athletes to that school, while at the same time an attempt to increase the enrollment and quality of prospective students applying. The university’s need to compete in this arms race initiates the exploitation of the black male athlete in the sports of basketball and football.

Stereotypically, black athletes are considered to be the better athlete among other ethnic groups. With the majority of black athletes participating in the revenue sports of basketball and football, it becomes clear who is really being exploited when looking at where a majority of the school’s athletic budget, is
produced\textsuperscript{46}. Therefore, to increase the chances of having the best athletes in those sports, many of the black male basketball and football athletes are highly recruited to college campuses that have strong reputations in those respective sports. Winning recruiting battles over athletes usually translates into wins during the season; those wins and a possible appearance in the postseason usually translate into a boost in applications to attend and enrollment, which increases the amount of dollars the school brings in from application fees, tuition, room and board, etc.\textsuperscript{47}

In recent years, major collegiate athletics has become big business. The two sports that are deeply submerged in producing large amounts of revenue for the NCAA and its Power 5 conferences are basketball and football. One of the leading activists against the NCAA’s practices is Taylor Branch. In an article titled \textit{The Shame of College Sports} in the October 2011 issue of \textit{The Atlantic}, Branch writes, “According to various reports, the football teams at Texas, Florida, Georgia, Michigan, and Penn State – to name just a few big-revenue football schools – each earn between $40 million and $80 million in profits a year, even after paying coaches multimillion-dollar salaries.”\textsuperscript{48}

The amount of revenue produced for universities even after paying the high dollar contracts of their coaching staffs is the final product of what is now the big business of collegiate sports. But how did it occur? How did this boom in revenue happen? How is the revenue produced? This requires a rather complex


answer, especially considering the schools mentioned by Branch are some of the schools that already have high enrollment and high capacity football stadiums. Nevertheless, the trend of high revenue for universities and colleges alike, both big and small in the ever-lucrative, ever-corporatized model that is now the NCAA, has never become more prevalent due to the large sums of money given by television networks and corporations.

In an article published in the Journal of Sports Economics entitled, *Big-Time Pigskin Success: Is there an Advertising Effect?*, Dr. Irvin B. Tucker discusses finding a positive correlation between successful football programs and a higher quality of incoming freshmen, alumni donations and graduation rates. Tucker found this correlation through a series of data analyses that indicate a robust advertising tool was created for schools that had a successful football program and bowl alliance between the years of 1990 and 2002. Tucker’s study indicates that the year following a successful football season, SAT scores for incoming freshmen increased and donations to the school increased by significant amounts. These findings by Tucker through studying the data of multiple successful football schools and the trends that occur in the following school year are clear indicators that schools are aware that success athletically, and in these cases just in football, is a sure way to increase enrollment and donations for the school. Awareness of this effect is evident by schools frequently hiring and firing coaches with well-above-average winning percentages, as well as frequently upgrading their athletic facilities to portray the

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image of constant forward movement. This system requires schools to locate the best athletes possible to help gain notoriety with tuition-paying students.

An analysis performed by Assistant Professor of Agriculture and Economic Resources at the University of California at Berkley, Michael L. Anderson, indicates that winning can help the university’s perceived reputation. Anderson finds that in the Football Subdivision a one-win increase on a season in football is associated with:

1. $74,000 in increased giving to athletic programs, but no statistically significant giving increase in non-athletic donations.
2. Modest increases in academic reputation (as measured by surveys by U.S. News and World Report).
3. 104 additional applications for admission.
4. A drop in the acceptance rate of applications of 0.2 percentage points.
5. An in-state enrollment increase of 17 students (with no statistically significant increase in out-of-state enrollment).

Anderson also finds in his analysis that the impacts of wins are greater in donations especially when the wins come unexpectedly. Harvard Business School Assistant Professor Doug J. Chung has deemed this phenomenon “The Flutie Effect.” This is in reference to Boston College’s Doug Flutie, whose miraculous pass in a 1984 football game contributed to a dramatic win over the University of Miami that will forever be remembered by college football fans. The play resulted in large increases in applicants to Boston College the following year. Chung states, “School’s fame athletically increases the awareness of

those institutions – brand awareness, if you will. Football, and sports in general, play an important role in the psyche of alumni feeling good about the direction in which their “alma mater” is headed. The better the school is doing in sports, football to be most specific, depending on the alumni, the more money they may be inclined to donate to the school. If the school’s sports programs are not doing well, the alumni of the school may be more reluctant and hold on to their donations. Using athletes to construct the best athletic teams, in order to then utilize them as marketing tools is just phase one of how exploitation at the collegiate level explodes for the black athlete.

Once collegiate universities allowed sports clothing and shoe corporations to enter the equation, the revenue for collegiate sports skyrocketed. Their agendas were simple; get their brand on the televisions of the millions of viewers who watch every collegiate sporting event and further elevate their brand awareness. While viewing your favorite college team, the viewer cannot help but notice all aspects of the viewing experience that are intertwined during the game. Television networks created alliances with conferences in order to give the American public the sports that it craves to see from the top conferences. Food brands market their products with commercials during the timeouts on the networks. Athletic apparel brands pay the universities and coaches in order to be the exclusive brand and athletic wear of the university. Perhaps no one knows this scenario better than Sonny Vacarro. Vacarro was the one who initiated the program to have Nike to be worn exclusively by college teams back

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in the 1980s. In a statement from a hearing cited by Taylor Branch’s article, The Shame of College Sports, Vacarro stated, “We want to put our materials on the bodies on your athletes, and the best way to do that is to buy your school. Or buy your coach.” Vacarro speaks about a culture that is welcomed by all universities these days – paying universities to use their athletes as marketing tools.

Ultimately, it is not just any athlete that the corporations are interested in having their materials worn by; they are more interested in having their materials on the athletes who actively participate in basketball and football. These are the sports that will have the most viewers; these are the sports that gain the most attention from the public. Therefore, these are the sports and the athletes that corporations are most interested in having their materials and their products represented by. Year after year, the landscape of the big-season ending events in both basketball and football reveals the trend of corporations’ names and ads intertwined seamlessly with the event.

When basketball’s March Madness kicks into gear, you have numerous corporations paying hundreds of millions of dollars to be labeled as official sponsors of the NCAA tournament. Northwestern Mutual would be an excellent example of official corporate sponsors during tournament time. Football’s bowl games have official sponsors for each game that includes having their name in the title of the bowl game. This marketing effort costs the corporations hundreds


of millions of dollars. An example of this phenomenon would be Tostitos’ continued sponsorship of the football bowl game in Arizona formerly known as the Fiesta Bowl, now the Tostitos Bowl. All of this corporate sponsorship and corporate involvement is intended to create more brand awareness via using the athletes in each sport. The corporations give their money to the NCAA, which has opened its arms to the money it is receiving for the efforts of the athletes it does not have to pay due to the amateurism rule established by the NCAA.

The increased brand awareness gained by the schools’ athletic success is associated with other ways in which schools are able to produce revenue based on their athletic programs. Television contracts are one of those ways that conferences and universities use. According to Forbes.com, the NCAA’s Power 5 conferences of the Atlantic Coast (ACC), the Big Ten (B1G), the Big Twelve (XII), the Pacific 12 (Pac 12) and the Southeastern (SEC), made a combined 1.1 billion dollars from football television contracts alone in 2014.56 On average, those conferences will receive 220 million dollars annually, which allows each of the conferences’ member schools to annually receive about 20 million dollars.57

In order for the Power 5 conferences to be able to negotiate these extremely lucrative contracts with the American Broadcasting Company Family of Networks (ABC), which includes Entertainment and Sports Programming Network (ESPN), Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS), National Broadcasting Company (NBC) and Fox Broadcasting System (FOX), the conferences have to produce a product that is sought after and wanted, in order to be televised on

57 Ibid
various days in the fall. Former University of California at Berkley President Dr. Clark Kerr once wryly stated, “Students want sex, faculty want parking and alumni want football.”\(^{58}\) The popular need for the sport of football to be broadcast across the country is high. After college, many alumni from their respective schools disperse across the country but still want the opportunity to view their “alma mater’s” football games every Saturday. Therefore, the demand for college football on Saturdays is at an all-time high.

The money that trickles down from television networks to conferences and to schools and to coaches never finds its way into the hands of the athletes who are on display every weekend. Yet, college institutions do not want to accept the blame for the model of exploitation, which they have created. Instead, they pass the blame back up to those corporations from which they accepted money. Former president of North Carolina’s university system William Friday stated in an interview with Taylor Branch, “We do every little thing for them. We furnish the theater, the actors, the lights, the music and the audience for drama measured neatly in time slots. They bring the camera and turn it on.”\(^{59}\)

This system is similar to the racist pastime of plantation owners passing blame to the corporations to whom they sold their raw material for them owning slaves; in fact it was the plantation owners who captured the slaves to work, in order to produce the raw materials and generate a profit with money from the corporations. The workers who farmed the raw materials on those plantations did not receive any monetary compensation for their work. They were only given


the bare essentials in order to allow them to continue to work and produce the raw materials for the plantation. In an interview with New York Times reporter Joe Nocera, Brit Kirwan, Chancellor at the University of Maryland system says, “The huge TV contracts and excessive commercialization have corrupted intercollegiate sports.” Again Kirwan’s statement is an example of officials at universities passing the blame for the corruption that was created when conferences and universities began accepting the marketing dollars from major corporations. It is the collaborative effort between the universities, who needed to increase their athletic budgets and brand awareness, and corporations, who needed to increase brand awareness for their products, that produced the recent ballooning effect of commercialization in intercollegiate sports. The constant tension of that ballooning effect continues to expand each year. Each year money seems to continue to escape the hands of the “student-athletes.” Therefore, the current climate within collegiate athletics among the “student-athletes” who hold this model together is that it will only be so long before that balloon will burst.

In his article, “The Shame of College Sports,” Taylor Branch carefully dances around the taboo discussion of slavery when trying to describe collegiate sports and its two heavily commercialized giants: men’s basketball and football. Branch states, “Perhaps a more apt metaphor is colonialism: college sports, as overseen by the NCAA, is a system imposed by well-meaning paternalists and rationalized with hoary sentiments about caring for the well-being of the

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Branch’s colonialism metaphor gets as close to slavery as possible, without actually making the statement. Colonization in the American colony’s brought slavery to the southern states; colonization in the Americas saw massive imports of African slaves expend large amounts of blood, sweat and tears working for owners who used their labor to generate a product that was beneficial to the owner and the plantation on which they worked. Therefore, Branch draws as close a parallel to slavery as he could get without blatantly disrespecting a model that has been accepted for many years. It is a model that, because of the significance of sports in America, has made for an excellent sale to the American public due to the passion and pageantry of college sports.

With his sentiments about colonialism, Branch is not alone when it comes to tiptoeing along this fine line in trying to figure out which metaphors and terms to use when describing the model that is the NCAA. Many scholars and writers like Branch have also taken a look at what the NCAA has become and uttered terms of negativity and pointed out the unfair treatment of one group by another. The term that seems to consistently surface when exploring the exploitation of college athletes is “indentured servants.” Dictionary.com defines the term “indentured servant” as “a person who signs and is bound by indentures to work for another for a specified time especially in return for payment of travel expenses and maintenance.”

In order to understand why the term “indentured servants” is a suitable description for the collegiate model, one must first understand what binds the

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“student-athlete” to the universities. When a school’s coaching staff sees a “student-athlete’s” talent as him worthy of attending their school, (i.e., helping the football/basketball program) they recruit that “student-athlete” and offer him a scholarship. This scholarship may vary in what is covered during the “student-athlete’s” attendance, but in terms of men’s basketball and football, the most common scholarship issued is a fully-covered scholarship. This scholarship includes tuition, room and board, meals and athletic apparel. Once a “student-athlete” decides which school he will attend based on the scholarships offered to him, he will sign the documents that will bind him to that school for at least a year.

Once the documents are signed, the “student-athlete” is both paraded around the country and paraded by the media for the purpose of entertainment and competition on the school’s behalf. Scholarships are time-based, which until just recently were only guaranteed annually and not for the length of time it takes to successfully fulfill the expectation of a degree. The purpose of an annual scholarship renewal term is for the situations when coaches deemed a “student-athlete” no longer worthy of the scholarship athletically, to easily remove the athlete from the roster and locate someone else who could help the team the following year. This action would also take away the “student-athlete’s” chance to pursue a degree. To the average sports college fanatic, this arrangement seems to be an even trade; the athlete is granted access to a prestigious university, if worthy of the scholarship, and allowed to continue to have access to that education and play the sport which they have spent much of their life
playing. The “student-athlete” is also given the opportunity to hone his skills in preparation of potentially moving into the professional ranks.

Before collegiate sports became so popular and so commercialized, the model of allowing “student-athletes” access to education even though they may not otherwise be qualified to attend in exchange for playing sports would have been widely accepted. But now that collegiate revenue sports are in the state that they are, bringing in billions of dollars annually, this model of exploitation can no longer the accepted without scrutiny. For the “student-athlete’s” athletic talent, the school takes on the responsibility of allowing the athlete to play sports under its name and transport the athlete around at its expense. The education that will make the “student-athlete” more successful in a competitive job market upon completion of their degree requirements is what they will receive in return. The problem with this model is that it now no longer holds weight for the “student-athlete.” The Power 5 conferences sign multi-billion dollar contracts with television networks, schools receive multi-millions annually from the conferences and clothing suppliers and coaches receive millions annually from the school for their services. It is just not fair that the people creating the product on the court or playing field do not directly receive a cut of the money that they helped to create. The “student-athlete,” the human production element that keeps the NCAA marketable, sees everyone else benefiting from their work, but because of a stipulation that was established by the governing body of the NCAA, which labels them “amateurs,” they cannot accept so much as a cheeseburger from anyone not a family member. Therefore, “Indentured servitude” is a term that fits
perfectly for the way the NCAA exploits its major revenue-producing “student-athletes.”

Many promises are made to the “student-athlete,” the first being an education that will prepare him for life after sports. This proves to be an afterthought in many instances when the “student-athlete” enrolls in school. School becomes the sideline, a secondary term, when it is the first in the term “student-athlete.” Bear Bryant, former University of Alabama coaching great, observed:

I use to go along with the idea that [athletes] on scholarship were “student-athletes,” which is what the NCAA calls them. Meaning a student first, an athlete second. We were kidding ourselves, trying to make it more palatable to the academicians. We don’t have to say that and we shouldn’t. At the level we play, the boy is really an athlete first and a student second.63

This is the hypocrisy of much of major collegiate sports: the education that is promised, the preparation for life after sports for many of its “student-athletes,” simply does not happen. Black male athletes are promised an education by the universities that recruited them and label them as “student-athletes.” The education that many of them are promised is more difficult than expected, due to the fact that many athletes are not properly prepared for the type of work that is asked of them due to the lack of resources provided by the “student-athlete’s” community school systems. The “student-athletes” are also placed in classes selected just to keep their grades up and keep them eligible to compete in their respective sports, and not to prepare them with the credentials needed to have any type of value in a competitive job market:

63 Earl Smith, Race, Sport, and the American Dream. (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic, 2007) pg. 104.
After 5 or 6 years on campus, having won games and some cases championships, having brought in money, in many cases millions of dollars, they leave without the possibility of entering their profession. These student-athletes very often leave the university without a degree, and worse, completely unprepared for life after college. What makes this worse is that this situation is not what they were promised when they were being recruited.\textsuperscript{64}

For the simple reason that almost 50 percent of black “student-athletes” are not receiving a quality education, or even their diplomas, many critics are now questioning whether “student-athletes” should not at the very least be compensated for their services in college.\textsuperscript{65} According a study performed by the University of Pennsylvania’s Center for the Study of Race and Equity, only one participant school out of the ten involved in the 2014 BCS bowl games would graduate more than 60% of its black athletes.\textsuperscript{66} The athlete does not receive sufficient help or time to allow them to really excel academically in the classroom.

The athlete is helped just enough to keep him eligible. They are placed under rigorous physical training schedules that fatigue them and stretch them thin and add constant pressure on them each day to meet the many academic and athletic requirements asked of them. Many “student-athletes” are worn out both mentally and physically before ten o’clock each morning.\textsuperscript{67} It becomes apparent to the “student-athletes” that they are not really there for school due to the emphasis on athletics throughout much of their schedule. Therefore, the “student-athlete” begins to slack off in the classroom, usually causing academics

\textsuperscript{64} Ibd pg. 113.
\textsuperscript{66} Ibid
to become second fiddle and athletics becoming the top priority due to the fact that it got the athlete to his current position.

Due to lack of academic care by both the “student-athlete” and those in charge, their preparation for success academically is minimal and statistics indicate exactly that. According to University of Pennsylvania’s Center for the Study of Race and Equity in Education, between the years of 2007 and 2010, black male athletes in the Division I’s major conferences graduated in six years at a 50.2 percent rate as compared to 66.9% of all student-athletes.\textsuperscript{68} This study not only shows that a majority of black male athletes are missing the boat when it comes to graduating, it also shows that athletes in general are not grasping the concept of success in both school and athletics. Or are they? Have many “student-athletes” come to the conclusion that the current model of the NCAA is no longer feasible for them? Do they see the constant sacrificing of their bodies, others benefiting from their hard work and their receiving nothing in return as a sign? Only time will show the true impact.

Current “student-athletes” will not join the class-action suits against the NCAA for fear of ruining the remainder of their college careers. Many do wait to enter their names into class-action suits immediately after completing their collegiate careers. Collegiate athletes fresh off of exhausting their eligibility who enter their names into the class-action suits are direct examples of a growing

epidemic within the current NCAA model. Many feel that this system is broken
and, because of the continuous coverage of it by the media to keep the topic
relevant, both players and the average fan are beginning to see the unfairness of
the model and shift their opinion on the student-athletes’ treatment.

In a CNN article entitled, “Amateurism is a Myth: Athletes file Class-Action
against NCAA,” released on April 5, 2014, attorney Jeffrey Kessler, who has won
multiple sports anti-trust class-action suits, observed, “The reality is that it is
already pro sports for everybody but the athletes.” Kessler’s quotation speaks
to the truth of all parties involved in the NCAA equation benefiting from the work
they contribute except for those who contribute perhaps the most vital element:
its athletes. Kessler’s comment also represents the thoughts of the former
collegiate athletes he represents in the class-action suit against the NCAA and its
five major conferences, referring to them as a “cartel.”

Athletes are seeking to be treated fairly. They want the ability to receive
compensation for the use of their likeness, which is a small portion of what the
NCAA makes in revenue total annually. In the current NCAA model they cannot
receive any type of compensation or endorsement for the use of their likeness or
name. A joint study produced by Drexel and the College Athlete Players
Association found that during the years 2011-2012 the annual fair market values
of a Division I basketball and football player during those years were $239,031
and $137,357, respectively. The same study found the average tuition annually

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69 Ganim, Sara. “Amateurism is a Myth’: Athletes file a class-action against NCAA.” CNN, 5 April,
for a “student-athlete” is $23,204.70 Therefore, on average annually, male “student-athlete” basketball and football players do not receive the equal value of their worth through the education promised to them.

This study is to combat the argument of those who claim that the “student-athletes” receive an education, which is “payment enough” for their ability to compete. Yes, the “student-athletes” will benefit from the education they receive at some point, if they are focused on taking advantage of that opportunity. The reality is that many of them are not there to take advantage of the education presented to them and coaches tell them as much, either verbally or through allocation of their time; and also the constantly portrayed reminders of their perceived only path to success for black American males in the media. Others around them in the world of college athletics are able to benefit from monetary compensation, why should they have to accept an education as their only compensation for their contribution? The education that the athlete receives does not guarantee them a means of tapping into the true value of their current worth as an athlete for the school.

Basketball and football are the two sports most heavily saturated by black athletes. Attending college is the only major way that an athlete can make it to the professional level due to the age restrictions that both professional leagues have in place. No other sports leagues apply age restrictions beyond having the

minimum of the age of eighteen. The NBA was also once part of the group of leagues that did not require athletes to wait until a certain age to enter. After the “must be nineteen years of age or one year removed from high school in order to sign a contract”\(^{71}\) restriction was adopted in 2005 after a lockout and a new collective bargaining agreement, that freedom no longer applied to the league.

For much of the 20\(^{th}\) century and continuing until the present, the NFL has maintained an age restriction to enter its league, ostensibly for protection of underdeveloped prospects and avoidance of severe injury.\(^{72}\) The age restrictions in both sports, but more especially basketball, have benefited the collegiate game. The collegiate level has piled in the revenue because of the age restriction decision of the NBA; the decision guarantees at least a year with young promising stars to be marketed at various universities. Sonny Vacarro again speaks about the possible ills of the decision made by former NBA Commissioner David Stern, when \textit{GQ} magazine’s Myles Brown interviewed him:

\begin{quote}
They keep them extra years from earning their second contract. The second contract is the big contract. When they were coming out at seventeen years old, they were getting their second contract at 22 years old. Now they’ll get it at 25. Now they’ve saved three years on maximizing their ability. It’s a financial thing. Stern knew what he was doing. It wasn’t that they were afraid to go in high school gyms. They were in there from 1993 to 2005. These guys talk in riddles and the public is blinded by it.\(^{73}\)
\end{quote}

What Vacarro speaks about is the reality of the current situation. Owners of NBA teams do not want to have to continue to pay big contracts to players over long


periods of time, but want to benefit from the talent that players provide for the advantage of the franchise and team branding.

There is much debate about the purpose of the NBA’s decision to change its age restriction from eighteen to nineteen. The NFL has maintained its age restriction at twenty-one. Most of the debate against the restrictions stems from possibilities of racially charged views. On a panel for college athletics in Boston, NBA Players Association lawyer Gary Kohlman stated in regard to the NBA’s age restriction:

If they were white and hockey players they would be out there playing. If they were white and baseball players they would be out there playing. Because most of them are actually African-American and are in a sport and precluded from doing it, they have to go into this absurd world of playing for one year. That's just total complete hypocrisy.74

Whether the true reason for the NBA implementing an age restriction is because of race -- after excellent examples of great players entering the league at the age of eighteen, such as Kobe Bryant and LeBron James proving it can be done -- will continue to be debated. The fact that both the NBA and NFL are the only leagues to have age restrictions on them when both leagues also have the highest percentages of black males participating in them is cause enough to start a public discussion on the subject.

Another justification for the exploitation of many black “student-athletes” in collegiate sports is the black male athlete has no other choice but to enter the collegiate ranks in hopes of remaining healthy enough to make it professionally and receive what their skills are worth monetarily. They have to settle for

74 Ibid.
sacrificing their bodies for at least three years on the promise that the education they are receiving will greatly benefit them in the future when, in fact, statistics have shown that many of them are not graduating. Knowing this, the NCAA establishes the athlete as a “student-athlete,” an “amateur” who cannot be paid and is also not a university employee. These titles relieve the universities governed by the NCAA of any obligation to pay the athlete or even give them workman’s compensation when they are injured through the sport they are recruited to play. Still the NCAA’s revenue increases year after year.

In regard to the NCAA as an institution, how can one not look at this model and see it as illegitimate? It is an institution that parallels a form of modern day slavery. The first executive director of the NCAA Walter Byers was quoted in 1995 drawing parallels from the NCAA model to slavery. Byers states, “Firmly committed to the neoplantation belief that the enormous proceeds from games belong to the overseers (the administrators) and supervisors (coaches). The plantation workers performing in the arena may receive only those benefits authorized by the overseers.”

In their legal studies research paper series for Michigan State University College of Law entitled, “Major College Sports: A Modern Apartheid,” Robert A. and Amy Christian McCormick look at early models of slavery in various societies where slaves were exploited for entertainment. In the chapter entitled, Exploitation for Profit and Entertainment: Historical Precursors to Amateurism, the McCormicks look at early exploitation societies before linking these examples

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to practices allowed by the NCAA. Examples of exploitative societies that were used by the McCormicks were: Ancient Roman, early America, Great Britain and Amateurism, and South Africa and Apartheid. All examples listed were of slaves being utilized for profit and entertainment, lower class citizens being utilized for work to make profit for higher-class citizens, or black citizens for white citizens. The current NCAA model follows closely in line with the examples presented by the McCormick’s, “Most gladiators were slaves selected from the ranks of captured military personnel. In these contest, gladiators were rented out by their owners to fight animals or each other in an arena or coliseum before large crowds.”

If these types of governance were allowed in any other aspect of American culture rather than the NCAA model, it would not be tolerated in the slightest; protest against this unjust model would continuously pop up all over America because of the unfair treatment of those who produce the labor. An example of this type of protest would be the Occupy Movement that occurred in 2011. The ideological basis of this movement was to protest the social and economic discrepancies that occur in American culture, but also on a global scale in the actions of major corporations. The occupy movement’s main focus was protesting against major corporations controlling the decisions that favor a small portion of people, place the majority at a disadvantage and undermine much of what America stands for. “The one thing we all have in common is that

77 Ibid
78 Ibid
we are the 99% that will no longer tolerate the greed and corruption of the 1%,” which was the rationale quoted in the Washington Post covering the Occupy event.⁷⁹ The difference between the model that Occupy protestors are fighting against and the NCAA model is that while 99 percent of the American population are not making the type of money that those in the one percent are, they still receive some type of monetary reward for their time spent on the job. The laborers in the NCAA, which are its “student-athletes,” receive no monetary reward for their time spent doing what most consider work.

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CHAPTER FIVE: A COMPARISON OF SLAVERY

Therefore, the NCAA model must be looked at closely in regard to a system of modern day slavery when speaking of the athletes who perform much of the labor that sustains their model. Universities’ athletic programs even practice concepts that are similar to the practices within the institution of slavery.

First, when considering purchasing a slave, slave owners would request to view the slave performing the jobs that they would be performing once the slave was purchased; slaves were usually weighed and measured, oftentimes naked.\(^80\) This practice was performed in order to determine the slave’s value, ability and workload. Similarly, and more practiced by football programs, university athletic programs request that athletes who they are interested in, attend camps where they can evaluate the abilities of the athlete performing drills that simulate some scenarios he would be performing in games; athletes are weighed and measured, often in next to nothing. Much like the practices of slave owning, this review is performed in order to determine the athlete’s ability, workload and whether the athlete is worthy of a scholarship.

Secondly, once a slave is purchased he basically has no rights. He is given the bare essentials of food, housing and clothing to survive and produce for the slave owner and the plantation on which he works.\(^81\) Again much like the slave practices, once an athlete signs the letter of intent, he waives his rights to obtain any type of monetary compensation for his ability. He is given the bare essentials of food, housing, apparel and an education, where he is asked to


\(^{81}\) Ibid.
perform the minimum just to stay eligible, all of which is ultimately for the benefit of the university. The university and athletic department use the revenue received for the efforts of the athlete to pay coaches, support administrative staff, to fund other athletic programs and to build facilities.

Finally, the amount of destruction that slaves constantly place on their bodies while performing their laborious jobs on a daily basis with nothing in return for the labor provided is simply unjust. Once the slave has passed his prime or can no longer work, it is up to the slave owner what happens to the slave, since he is considered property and not a human. 82 “Student-athletes” too are placed under laborious conditions that stress their bodies for the sports in which they participate; the only difference is, if they take advantage of the education granted to them, they will have a diploma to show for their efforts. If a “student-athlete” is not performing up to par athletically or academically, it is up to the coaches whether the “student-athlete” will remain. These are just a few comparisons of concepts that are similar to slave owning practices that are performed around the country at university athletic programs. The first concept is also practiced professionally; the NFL Scouting Combine is an example of this function each year.

82 Ibid.
Despite the negative publicity major revenue-producing sports at the collegiate level receive, these executives are not malicious people determined to ruin these young men’s lives. Most, if not all of the individuals, who rule over players have good intentions and are not in any way meaning to be modern slave owners or masters. They too are trapped in a system that most of them feel is unfair in its treatment of its “student-athletes” and it needs to be adjusted to reflect the times. It is the institution that is corrupt, not the people. There is only one way the black male athlete can eliminate the exploitation that he faces, and that is to allow education to become more of a primary concern for him and his culture. According to a study performed by the NCAA, the likeliness of an athlete making it as a professional in the respective sports of football and basketball are, only about 1.6 percent for football and 1.1 percent for basketball. 83 Add to these odds the fact that the average playing span for the two sports is 3.2 years for football and 4.8 years for basketball and it becomes evident that knowledge and the ability to have the necessary skills to secure a post-sports job are desperately needed.

The fixation that sports and entertainment are the only viable ways out of his circumstances has to be disproven or overthrown. The black male athlete must not be merely fixated on sports; he must take advantage of both of the opportunities presented to him by college. Once he enters the system that will exploit him, it is up to him to get as much out of it as he possibly can before he is

spit out and replaced by another. The black male athlete does have an opportunity to alter his life and the direction in which his family tree will grow through education, even -- and perhaps most especially -- if he does not find success in professional athletics.

The sports fixation and lavish lifestyle paradigm in black culture have to be let go and more obtainable standards of success have to be established. The image of success in the American culture -- not just black American culture -- is a skewed one. For so long, American culture has praised individuals making large amounts of money and living big lifestyles that currently if a person does not make millions of dollars, have a lavish wardrobe, drive a certain type of car or live in a million-dollar home, he is not deemed as successful. That is an absolutely absurd image that has been misrepresented. Instead, images of a person who earns an honest living, takes care of his responsibilities and has the capability to do and buy most of what he desires should be the standard, for real success.

Until these realistic images are painted in the minds of middle -- and lower -- class black American families, the black male athlete will continue to be exploited by those who will use his abilities to profit for themselves. This is because until these images change, the black male athlete will forever chase the ultimate acceptance from both his community and the public and crave the lifestyle of upper class white American culture, because he knows nothing else. For much of his life, he has been exploited for his talent, and he is now numb to the thought of being exploited. This is why the paradigm must shift and education must become the first and top priority. Once education is in the
forefront, the black male athlete can limit his exploitation. The opportunities for both education and the ability to compete in a sport he has participated in for much of his life will be great. If he is educated on proper priorities going into college, he will understand how to use what is placed in front of him to prepare himself to succeed both academically and athletically.

Until this shift comes to fruition, the black male athlete will continue to be oppressed for his athletic intelligence, and not rewarded for his mental intelligence. Bishop E. Bernard Jordan wrote in his book, The Laws of Thinking: 20 Secrets to Using the Divine Power of Your Mind to Manifest Prosperity, “Labor will never make a man wealthy, creativity will.” Therefore, no matter how good an athlete is, unless he is able to use his intellect to stretch the money he makes further, he will never be wealthy long enough to improve the projection of his family’s class status. For the sacrifices made and achieved by the many celebrated professional black athletes, many more have also traveled the same paths and failed. Those black athletes who have failed have endured the hardships of exploitation and have often been unprepared to live better lives afterward due to not taking their education seriously. Not only does a change need to occur in the minds of many black male athletes, a definite change needs to occur in the model that is the NCAA.

For all the promises made, just as many, if not more are broken. A system that creates many dreams, shatters even more on a daily basis. To maintain the current model would be a slap in the face to the athletes who

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participate in it and also to the American way. Sports in America are and can be a wonderful culture to be a part of. Sports instill many teaching tools for the youth that partake in them to carry on throughout their lives. Everything in this world has evolved since its creation. It is time that the National Collegiate Athletic Association follow suit in compensating its revenue-producing athletes.
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