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Black Athletes and White Authority Figures: An Exploration of Race in Sports

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Black Athletes and White Authority Figures: An Exploration of Race in Sports

Senior Project Submitted to

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by

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Thank you to my Mom for her constant support and love.

Thank you to my Dad for his love, and for teaching me to love sports in the first place.

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Introduction

Prior to the San Francisco 49ers 3rd preseason game in 2016, Colin Kaepernick made the choice to kneel in protest of the oppression against Black people. As he said after the game "I am not going to stand up to show pride in a flag for a country that oppresses Black people and people of color. To me, this is bigger than football and it would be selfish on my part to look the other way"[1]. Ten days later on the opening day of the NFL season, players from various teams around the league would follow suit on this protest. The protest was met with various responses, some supportive and others negative. The most common refrain on the negative side seemed to believe that it was disrespectful to the military and that athletes should simply "stick to sports". Donald Trump, then a nominee for president stated "I think it's a great lack of respect and appreciation for our country and I really said they should try another country, see if they like it better. See how well they'll be doing. See if they are going to be making $20 million being a second-string quarterback"[2]. Trump may hold an especially biased opinion, but he does speak to a certain fan's perspective that athletes should stick to sports and should keep any discussion of race out of sports all together. Through this project, I want to examine how intertwined race and modern sports culture truly are and explain why they can never be separated. Any person who believes in them as two

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[1] Wilner, Barry. "Colin Kaepernick: Timeline of the QB's Football and Post-NFL Days since He First Knelt in 2016." *Chicago Tribune*, 7 June 2020,
[2] Wilner

separate ideas has not truly paid attention to sports in America. Race has always been a part of sports, and always acted as a vehicle to talk about the race issues that are a part of our country. From Jackie Robinson to Muhammad Ali to Tommie Smith and John Carlos, athletes have always paved the way for discussions about race in America.

In this project I have specifically focused on three elements of race and modern sports culture. The first of them focused on the connection between slavery in Americas's south and the ownership that white owners have over Black players in leagues like the NFL and NBA. The language of ownership implies a certain connection between these two, even as the players are paid high salaries. But a further examination shows a level of dehumanziation that occurred in slavery can also be found within modern sports. The second element of race and sports that I chose to focus on was the ways in which Black men have negotiated their role as authority figures within the white coaching world of college basketball. For a world that promotes white men as the primary authority figure, it is necessary to trace the path of Black men in the coaching world. Respectability was the first wave of this negotiation, while later Black coaches like John Thompson embraced their Blackness as part of their coaching style. Unfortunately, there still remains a large bias in terms of the hiring of Black college coaches. That was the focus of the third element of race and sport that I examined, a statistical analysis of the kind of environments that the most successful college coaches originated from. I specifically aimed to determine whether we could learn anything about the elite college coaches through examining the demographics of their hometowns, and found that the majority of these coaches came from predominantly white backgrounds.

Through all three of these elements it became apparent that Black bodies are what generate the money within sports, but the people most benefiting from these bodies are not the players themselves. Whether it is the owners benefiting off of NFL players, or white college coaches benefitting from college kids in search of their NBA dreams there is a certain pattern. A pattern that exhibits the ways in which one race is able to benefit off of the talent of all other races. It's also important to mention that blackness has often acted as a stage for white people to act wild or outside of their normal behavior. Cultural appropriation is a common occurrence, where white people feel able to imitate and appropriate Black culture. Figures like Danielle Bregoli, who in 2016 became famous for ranting on Dr Phil act as symbols of the kind of actions that white people are allowed to portray. They are able to act wild or out of character without their race being stigmatized. Much like white people are able to benefit off of the talent of Black people, they are also able to appropriate the behavior of Black people without fear of any consequences.

In many ways, modern sports culture is similar to America as a whole. Our culture and media celebrates its Black athletes over all else, from Lebron to Tiger Woods to Patrick Mahomes. But the coaches and owners and general managers, those that truly run these teams remain white. There is a lack of equity when we talk about those creating the product, as opposed to those who benefit off of that product. The system has been created in an effort to to discourage those who are non-white to actively be apart of the sport once their bodies no longer serve a purpose. The image that has been created in our minds allows black and latino men to be a part of the product when players, but not beyond that 15-20 year timespan. High end sports stars

make upwards of 20 million dollars a year, but it is solely through their bodies that gain this revenue. These athletes are able to benefit off of their talent when they are integral to the product. But as soon as their bodies no longer are needed for the product to thrive, these athletes are expected to move on to something else. While the identity that is associated with owners is one of the CEO or of the leader of a company or organization, something that can often have no expiration date. It is well established that the CEO's and leaders of our most powerful organization are overwhelmingly white. Coaches are seen as authority figures within our culture, an extension of a father figure or military leader. Within the media, the representation of authority figures is often seen as a white man, the right kind of man to lead a family or lead a unit of soldiers. When coaches and owners are depicted as so often being white, it makes it difficult for those even with the resources or credentials to break that mold.

The system is also set up so that a primarily white audience can enjoy these athletes without having to examine the larger significance of the product. I think this is part of the reason there is such outrage when a player expresses some kind of displeasure with the system, and where the whole mantra of "stick to sports" comes from. The following and watching of modern sports is based on the idea that you do not want to think about the larger significance of it, and instead want to escape from your own life. Protests like Kaepernick taking a knee, or Lebron James and Dwayne Wade protesting the killing of Trayvon Martin act as a reminder that the Black men actually are people as well as athletes. For a certain number of fans that reminder can be unsettling to them, because it forces them to confront the humanity that each of these athletes possess. Many of the fan bases within these sports are made up of people that work

within expendable jobs themselves. That may be part of the reason that these white viewers would prefer to view these athletes as less than human, in an effort to feel better about their own expendatibility. Those who most benefit from this product are very aware of these facts and that is likely part of the reason that there is such a lack of diversity within both the owners of professional sports teams and the elite coaches of college basketball teams. For NFL owners it is often referred to as an old boys club, and that is reflected in both the age and race of the owners. Additionally the owners of all of the other teams must approve any prospective future owner. This gives an incredible amount of power to those already in charge, and prohibits the likelihood of the current system being disrupted in any way.

In my third chapter I specially examine the lack of diversity within the college coaching ranks but it is clear that once again those in charge would prefer for the most elite jobs to only belong to a certain kind of person. It is true that the identity most associated with authority is white men, but also true that those making the hiring decisions have done very little to change this stereotype. Much like ownership, I think there is something purposeful about the fact that the stereotype has remained as reality for so long. The reality is that race and sports are forever associated with each other and that is reflected in the power struggle between authority figures and players. Through these three chapters, I examine how this control over Black players has developed over time and what we can learn from this legacy of white authority figures and Black players.

Slavery and Sports Culture

The Slavery metaphor is both compelling and fraught when it comes to describing the relationship between professional athletes and owners. It is often a retort used by those that protest any bad treatment by players that a person making upwards of 20 million dollars a year could never be portrayed as an enslaved person. However elements of the control that NFL owners and management have over their players invite the slavery comparison. From slave trading to the way that the enslaved are categorized, definite parallels exist in the way that the owners of football teams and the owners of enslaved people treat black bodies.

The measurement and fascination of athletes' bodies have long been a key part of sports culture. Fans often marvel at the 7'6 basketball player who is significantly more agile than the average person, or the 340-pound offensive linemen who could outrun any standard 180-pound person. Each year before the college football season prominent college football reporter Bruce Feldman writes an article ranking the biggest "Athletic Freaks in College Football". The ranking consists of players whose extraordinary physical gifts appear to be superhuman, who display abilities that would impress anyone. As Feldman writes in his intro "Since the early 2000s, I've spotlighted the biggest freaks in college football around this time of year. The premise: Showcase guys who generate buzz inside their programs by displaying the rare physical abilities

that wow even those who observe gifted athletes every day"[3]. The most recent list focuses on a 350-pound lineman from Alabama who can box jump 48 inches, a defensive back from UTSA whose speed has reached 24 MPH, and many more[4]. These are athletes that are identified as having skills that are not normal, and thus are identified solely through these skills. The article does not spend one sentence describing the kinds of people these college athletes are, instead choosing to categorize these athletes solely through their physical attributes. ESPN ran a show in the late 2000s called Sports Science which again focused on elite athleticism, trying to challenge popular conceptions about pro athletes through the use of science. It was especially focused on testing the limits of what the human body could achieve, and the difference between an elite athlete's body and an "ordinary joe's" body. It was designed to show just how extraordinary the athlete's skills were as compared to a normal person. The show once again seemed to perpetuate the idea that an athlete's athleticism and physical ability was the primary characteristic that should be focused on.

The NFL combine is an event held every February for college football players hoping to impress NFL scouts. The athletes are tested on their speed, jumping, and strength. Additionally, their height and weight are measured, as well as their hand size. The two most well-known events during the combine are the 40-yard dash and vertical jump, which measure a player's speed and jumping ability. This is the time when those previously labeled "athletic freaks" can truly show off their skills, and hope to parlay those skills into money-making opportunities. It is not a time for interviews or personality, but rather a straight evaluation of these players' physical abilities.

[3] Feldman, Bruce. "Bruce Feldman's 2021 College Football Freaks List." *The Athletic*, The Athletic, 10 Aug. 2021,
[4] Feldman

A very similar process was conducted on enslaved people by slave traders in the Antebellum South, and specifically in New Orleans. Along the city's waterfront, ships from around the world were packed so tightly that someone could walk from deck to deck. Crates of clothes, shoes, guns, and tobacco were present as were the main slave crops of sugar and cotton. Not far from these ships was North America's largest slave market, located in New Orleans. Antebellum travelers converged on the slave market when in the south, a place where slavery was truly visible. There were two main yards in the city, run by competing firms. Each of these firms maintained their yards, with pens to keep people enslaved, and frontage for displaying these people. Between September and May, slaves would line the streets outside of the pens in blue suits and calico dresses. Walter Johnson describes one of the slave yards here "As many as a hundred slaves might occupy a single block, overseen by a few slave traders whose business was advertised by the painted signs hanging overhead 'T. Hart, Slaves,' 'Charles Lamarque and Co., Negroes.' Here the traveling observers and writers found what they were looking for: a part of slavery that could be used to understand the whole of the institution. Slavery reduced to a pure form: a person with a price"[5]. This is the moment when slavery was most visible, hundreds of people forced into a small area and prices placed on their heads[6]. These enslaved people were objects and items to both traders and buyers. To organize and advertise the enslaved, traders created categories for them. As Johnson explains "To limit the amount of information that they had to send back and forth, the traders packed people into price categories according to gender,

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[5] Johnson, Walter. *Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market*. Harvard University Press, 1999. 25
[6] Johnson 26

age, height, weight, and skin color"[7]. They would be measured through each of these categories and those with attractive heights or weights or skin colors would often be advertised as the most attractive for buyers[8]. This categorizing of a Black body into these very specific categories was a way of organizing their skills and body types. A buyer could determine what type of enslaved person was most needed by these categories.

The similarities are there in the way that the NFL combine is designed, a way for NFL teams to categorize the skills of these athletes. It makes sense for NFL teams to want to understand the skills of their future players, players they will be investing money into. The idea of the combine in itself does not speak of slavery, it is an opportunity for the players to impress scouts and show off their skills. But the way that these bodies are categorized into very specific categories does offer a similar feeling to slavery. It is striking when you compare the language of height and weight and age and strength and how those very same categories were used hundreds of years prior in slave yards all over the south. Slave traders were taught how to "read" the Black people for their suitability in slavery. Each aspect of a Black body was a clue into how this same figure would perform as an enslaved person[9]. These traders would then try to match aspects of these bodies with specific slave owners. Walter Johnson writes about this "reading" of the Black body in this passage "Gazing, touching, stripping, and analyzing aloud, the buyers read slaves' bodies as if they were coded versions of their own imagined needs-age was longevity, dark skin immunity, a stout trunk stamina, firm muscles production,

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[7] Johnson 56
[8] Johnson 57
[9] Johnson 58

long fingers rapid motion, firm breasts fecundity, clear skin good character"[10]. Each part of the Black body said something about their ability as an enslaved person. These physical abilities seemed to represent specifically what these bodies would accomplish as enslaved people. By simply looking and feeling up these Black bodies, traders determined their value. Much like NFL scouts try to to find clues into how successful college players will be in the pro game, slave owners hoped to find clues on how succesful enslaved people would be on a plantation. This is the best illustration of just how much the physical look and physical ability of the enslaved mattered to traders and was the sole determining factor in their value.

It speaks to this idea that even before they enter the NFL, athletes are seen simply as numbers on a page, numbers that describe their speed or strength or jumping ability but numbers all the same. How quick their feet can move around cones or how many bench presses they can do are what is most important for NFL teams from the beginning. Very little attention is paid to their value as people, or what beliefs, opinions or experiences they may have. To many of these teams, the athletes are a name that corresponds to a set of skills. That is an important connector between these two categorizations, neither one of these "owners" thought of the bodies they were categorizing as human beings. Instead existing solely as an object that would create financial value for them.

Another parallel between the current day NFL and the domestic slave trade of the 19th century comes in the form of slave trading, and the choice that the slaves were afforded in this trading. The exchange of two enslaved people was seen as a straightforward exchange of property, with a value assigned to each piece of property.

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[10] Johnson 58

Trades in sports culture are quite different from that, each player may have a specific salary but they are not seen as property in the same way. A slave trade also often happened because of an owner's death or a supposed lack of hard work from the enslaved or a surplus of a certain kind of worker. While current-day sports trades most often happen because a GM or owner believes a different player will help their team win games, which in turn will have financial benefits for them. It should be noted that in the current day NBA or NFL trades and domestic slave trading are very different in principle, even as there are certain connections including a lack of choice.

The lack of choice about where they would be, or whether they were to stay with family was a big issue for many enslaved people. Enslaved people often wished to not be broken up from children or sent to a foreign place, but that wish was often not fulfilled. An example of that came in the form of Thomas Clemson, a slave owner in the 1850's and the founder of Clemson University. When asked about his opinion on the negotiation of an enslaved person's sale, he stated "My object is to get the most I can for the property… I care but little to whom and how they are sold, whether together or separated… the affair should be kept secret as possible on account of the Negroes"[11]. Clemson does not seem to have any thought of the enslaved person as having a chance to negotiate, he seems quite intent on just getting the most for his "property". There was no thought of what this sale might do to this person, or what effect being separated from one's family could have. Any negotiation was not a possibility, that in a world that is so dominated by a belief in the enslaved as an object or cargo to be sold, their personal feelings would never be thought about or taken to account. The only way in which an enslaved person might be able to change in any way his sale was to run

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[11] Johnson 39

away just as the sale was about to be completed. This was the case for a man named Edward Hicks. Edward Hicks used flight to renegotiate the terms of his sale. Soon after he was sold to a Lunenburg County, Virginia slave trader; Hicks ran away and he told his story to an old man he met on the road, and the man fed him and pointed him back to Lunenburg. As Johnson writes "When he returned, Hicks saw "some of my friends and brothers there"... and they advised him "to go to an old house where cotton was kept and stay there to stay until the advertisement was over. Hicks was still hiding there when the Slave trader headed off for New Orleans without him. By the spring when the trader returned there was a white man in Lunenburg who wanted to buy Hicks"[12]. Through this escape, Hicks decided his destiny and made sure that he stayed in the place he had been born and around people he knew. It is quite telling that he would risk his life to negotiate his trade and showshow little choice enslaved people were afforded when apart of the slave trade. Hicks was aware that a request to be sold to someone in Lunenburg would never be granted. He was so certain it would never be granted that he escaped and hid for months in the knowledge that if he was ever found he would be severely beaten or killed. But for Hicks, the risk or death was worth the ability to make a choice about his future.

In current day sports culture, many athletes are left without a choice over their trade destination as well. Sports are an entertainment product, a business that generates revenue, and that is often the phrase used to describe trades between two teams. A player should not be able to complain, because, in the end, they should realize that sports are a business. Anytime that a team has the opportunity to make a trade that will help the team win or help improve their financial standing in some way, the

[12] Johnson 42

team will always make that trade. They will not think about loyalty to the player, or how the trade will impact the player's family.

An NBA player named Patrick Patterson in 2015 wrote an Op-ed explaining how difficult it can be to be a part of a trade. He spoke of going through his normal afternoon routine before a game, and then suddenly being summoned to the General Manager's office. He thought nothing of it, as this GM had often asked his advice on players or just had friendly conversations in general. But in this case, Robinson sensed a tension in the room that had never been there previously. The GM informed him that he had been traded from his current team the Houston Rockets to a new team the Sacramento Kings. Within three days, Patterson was getting ready for a plane to Sacramento. But Patterson describes a bitterness toward the team and a lack of understanding for why the trade had occurred. A comparison between himself and the player he had been traded for was natural, a curiosity for what that player possessed that he did not. Additionally, the adjustment to a new place was difficult, and Patterson explains that adjustment in the text. As he writes "Before that point, I never thought much about the human factor of trades. It was just a string of names scrolling on the bottom ticker on ESPN. Like any big career change, my trade meant being forced to leave behind really close friends, a city I was used to, and a work environment was comfortable in. My game suffered. My shot felt off. I simply wasn't playing my best basketball. As anyone who's ever been frustrated at work can tell you, your attitude and productivity take a hit and it's hard to dig yourself out"[13]. Patterson admits that he had never truly thought through the specifics of how a trade affects an individual player. But he details just how

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[13] Patterson, Patrick. "You've Been Traded: By Patrick Patterson." *The Players' Tribune*, The Players' Tribune, 20 Feb. 2015,

difficult it can be to move to another city and leave your former life and former friends behind. The lack of structure and lack of familiarity resulted in a dip in his game. But the owners and teams don't ever stop to think about how this trade affects the person, only whether the trade makes financial sense. At that moment the player, much like an enslaved person, is an item or a piece of cargo, an item that can help generate money in some way. It does not matter whether the player has been part of the organization for 15 years or whether their kid has just started a new school because those are characteristics of a human's life. Teams have made it clear that players are not viewed as human beings but rather as an asset, and that idea is reflected in their decisions. There is no negotiation when it comes to these trades, much like there is no negotiation when it came to the domestic slave trade of the 19th century.

In both cases owners additionally may protest if confronted with the idea that these Black bodies are treated as objects. Slave owners were often noted for creating excuses as reasoning for the selling of enslaved people. They may protest that an old owner may have died, or that the enslaved person didn't work hard enough, the slaveholders always had a reason but rarely were responsible for their own actions[14]. They did not always want to admit publicly that they were treating the enslaved as property, much like many NFL owners have trouble publicly admitting that they view their Black players as property. There is a common idea that somehow the property of these owners is "part of the family", and thus can not be explicitly stated to be their property. That even as these owners can find financial value from these people, there must be some kind of special relationship that excludes them from being viewed as property. That is the public perception that modern NFL owners hope to portray, never

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[14] Johnson 58

admitting the true relationship between owner and player. But that is not the truth, and

not really how many current-day sports owners feel about their players in private. After

Colin Kaepernick began to protest by kneeling during the national anthem. NFL

Commissioner Roger Goodell and all 32 owners met to discuss its impact on the

league. During this meeting, Texans Owner Bob McNair was unknowingly recorded

giving his true thoughts on player protests. He stated that "We can't have the inmates

running the prison"[15]. It gives us an inside look into the way owners truly feel about their

players. McNair truly believes that players are simply the inmates in his prison and that

he has control over their actions. That an expression of individuality by the players may

violate this control, and thus equate to inmates running the prison. A simple protest of

the national anthem, an expression of a player's own thoughts on police violence is

seen as a violation of control. McNair has made it clear that he believes NFL players

should solely exist as tools to gain revenue, and not as human beings with opinions.

Lastly, it also helps us to see how owners work very hard to publicly deny any owner

and property connection, even as they are well aware of it in private.

Fantasy football is played by 40 million people each year, by far the most popular

fantasy sport in the United States. There are thousands and thousands of leagues,

which usually consist of groups of 8-12 friends who compete with each other weekly.

Fantasy football owners actively assess NFL players based on their relative value to

other players, making them a kind of commodity. This leads to the draft preparation

stage, players are grouped into prospective tiers or hierarchies and turned into

statistical representations of their production. These friends then pick a team through

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[15] Wickersham, Seth, and Don Van Natta Jr. "Gaffes, TV Ratings Concerns Dominated as NFL, Players Forged Anthem Peace." *ESPN: Outside the Lines*, ESPN Internet Ventures, 27 Oct. 2017,

either a draft or auction and thus settle on the group of players that they will "own"

throughout the season. Thomas Oates, an American Studies Professor at the University

of Iowa has written about how the ownership of these Black players is a form of

"vicarious management", the use of new media by white fans to control Black NFL

players. Oates' thoughts are further summarized here "Oates argues that fantasy

football, along with the NFL draft and The Madden NFL video game franchise, is a form

of "vicarious management," or the ways that a mostly white NFL fan base is invited to

use various forms of new media to control predominately Black NFL players through a

context of "racialized androcentrism". Oates contends that vicarious management

'invites audiences to identify with the institutional regimes of the NFL (and the

authorities who conduct them) rather than with the athletes'. He goes on to add that

'athletes framed by this mode of fandom are positioned as property, often valuable, but

ultimately disposable" [16]. Oates seems to believe that an NFL fan base that is mostly

white uses things like video games and fantasy football as an opportunity to serve as

the owner of the players. In these games, these fans are invited to play the role of a

General Manager or Owner of the team. Which allows them to identify with those

positions and the people that occupy them. While occupying these roles, they must view

the players as property and as assets that can be traded, dropped, or added. Property

that offers a certain kind of value to the owner, a value that can bring winning or

financial gain to the owner. In these scenarios, there is no room to explore the opinions

or personal experiences of these players. Instead their only value is through their

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[16]Kellam, R. Kyle. "The Illusion of Control: Reinvigorating Colonial Desire through Fantasy Football's Procedural Rhetoric." Reconstruction, vol. 17, no. 1, 2017, 6

performance on the field, and how that performance can bring financial value to the stand in owner or GM.

Another key part of the fantasy football experience is the way that players are converted into statistics. It is the role of the fantasy owner to decide who holds the highest value and is worth starting based on their ability to generate points. The media has played a huge role in creating the value of players and boiling that value down to a numerical one. There are a multitude of magazines and websites that take the stats from players' previous seasons, and convert them into usable data for fantasy players. ESPN, CBS, and the NFL Network all have hour-long weekly shows that are dedicated to the "sleepers" or "busts" of the week. Analysts spend this hour determining based on the previous week or season performance whether these players are worth keeping or trading. It is a game that has now become so much a part of the fabric of the NFL in general, and it seems that one's fantasy result is often just as important as the result of your favorite team's game. But there is also something more problematic about Fantasy Football completely taking over the media landscape, the numerical value associated with fantasy can be players only value to the general public. Kyle Kellam writes about this possibility here "More critically speaking, it has made the enumerated identity of the player as ubiquitous as his human action in the NFL community … The mindset that players are mostly controllable objects"[17]. Kellam claims that for many players their identities are now so tied to these numbers that their human actions no longer register for many fans. The more that the fan and thus the fantasy owner views these players through these numerical lenses, the higher chance they are viewed as controllable

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[17] Kellam 13

objects. This view of humans as these objects only leads to their humanity being taken away, and any human characteristics have been disregarded.

There is also something crucial about the way that fantasy football is regarded by fans as simply a causal entertainment tool. The participants in these leagues form the lists of dehumanizing commodities that each of the mainly Black players possess and often determine which of these players is best to own through these lists. To many white players, they could never comprehend that creating a roster or grouping the players through their attributes could have any problematic elements. It is simply a vehicle for hanging out with friends and watching the games in a deeper way. They could never stop to realize the significance of Black bodies being reduced to statistics. African lives were recorded as units of cargo on slave ships, while plantation inventories cataloged enslaved people as merchandise. But this history is not seen as significant when drafting fantasy for most fans. This idea that something based solely on fun and entertainment as anything more than surface level can sometimes almost seem difficult to comprehend. Fantasy football is so wide-reaching at this point (40 million teams per season) that the broader consequences of dehumanizing these players into numerical objects just don't enter the average player's mind space. I've played fantasy football since I was ten years old, and have rarely thought about the ways that it has dehumanized players and limited their value into a number. Louis Maraj speaks to the idea of how this "entertainment product" can be viewed through the lenses of slavery, even if those playing it do not always recognize this. Maraj writes "Mobilized in White imagination as an entertainment tool, the drafting, auctioning, and trade in Black bodies from the vantage point of an "owner" renders fantasy football a means through which we

might recognize the wake of slavery and, importantly, how casually sports fans might re/animate its logics, mechanisms, and imaginations"[18]. Maraj seems to be speaking to this idea that so many fans casually view these Black bodies as objects. They are solely seen through their ability to provide entertainment, and whether they should be drafted or auctioned. Using and recycling terms and concepts that were so often used when talking about slavery seems easy for so many fantasy players. Little awareness of what auctioning or trading black bodies means, and the historical significance that it has. The nearly 40 million people that play fantasy football rarely stop to think how these terms and the vehicle of fantasy football as a whole can be damaging to these players. When one's only association with a player is through their exploits on the field, and how those exploits on the field translated in a numerical value; it makes sense for the humanity to be taken out of a player.

Players are of course aware of fantasy football, and of the financial benefit it may bring for the league. But most of all they are aware of fantasy football through in-person and social media interactions with fans. In the modern age, it seems that many players are more often recognized for their fantasy value than even for the fact that they are NFL players. Julius Thomas, an NFL player for the Denver Broncos wrote in 2014 about this change in recognition "To some people, I am 'Julius Thomas, tight end for the Denver Broncos.' But to many others I am just the tool to help them reach fantasy rewards"[19].There is something almost eerie about the fact that solely through face-to-face interactions Julius has come to understand his value in these people's

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[18] Maraj, Louis M. "What's in a Game? Wake Working (Fantasy) Football's Anti-Black Temporalities." *Women's Studies in Communication*, vol. 43, no. 4, 2020, pp. 400–413.,
[19] Thomas, Julius. "From That Guy on Your Fantasy Football Team, with Love: By Julius Thomas." *The Players' Tribune*, The Players' Tribune, 26 Dec. 2014,

eyes. He is not seen as an incredible athlete, something he has worked his entire life to achieve. To so many people, his entire person resides in his fantasy value and whether that fantasy value will bring wins. When you become an NFL player, there is an understanding that you will become a public figure and your on field production will in some way determine how you are viewed. But in these cases, you are still being viewed as a person, as Julius Thomas the tight end for the Denver Broncos. It becomes something different when you are seen only through the lenses of fantasy football, and the fantasy value that resides within that person. That people see Julius in person and only mention his fantasy exploits is quite astonishing, never stopping to realize that he may be more than just a set of fantasy points.

Julius spoke about this experience of being stopped by fans in the same 2014 article for *The Players Tribune*. The idea is that there seems to be a constant stream of fantasy owners, hoping to prove to Julius that they are so thankful for his good play and the fantasy benefits they have acquired from it. As Thomas writes "I first started getting approached in public by fantasy football owners around October of last year. People would come up to me and say, 'Hey man, I had you on my fantasy team since day one. I always believed in you'. All my day-one fantasy owners take pride in identifying me as their fantasy football weapon. Almost like a GM who drafts a steal in the fourth round that turns into a Pro Bowler. I'm always polite, but it can get a little exhausting when it happens everywhere you go. And I mean everywhere: Grocery stores, the mall, public restrooms, Italy, etc"[20]. These fans want to show the player they have identified the skills he possessed from the very beginning and thus take great pride from that. This speaks to Oates' idea that fantasy allows fans to become owners or general managers of the
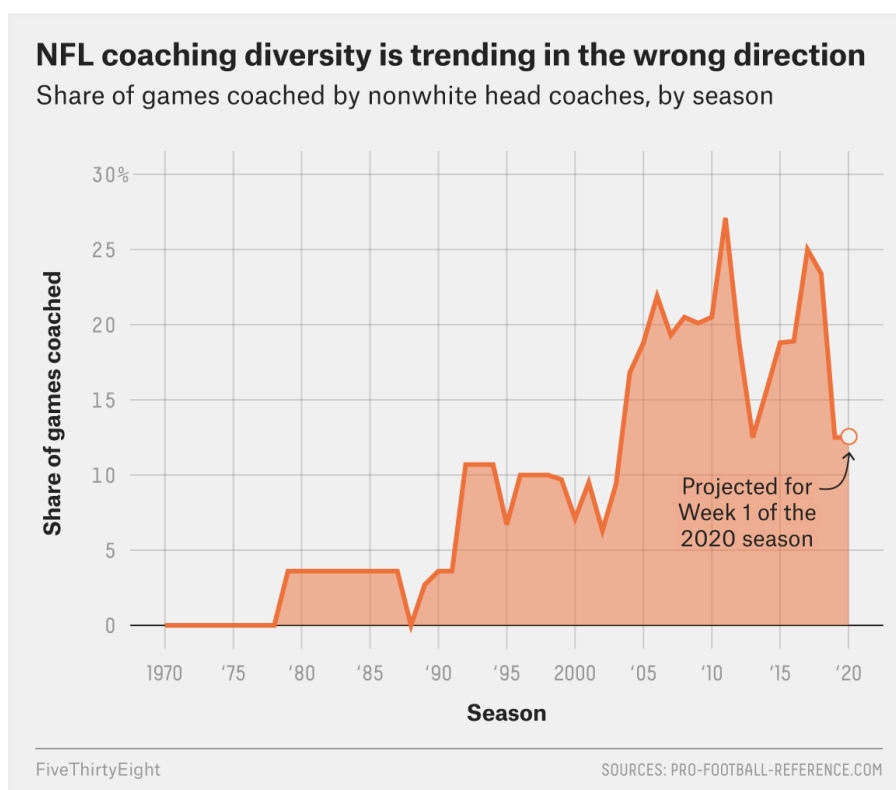
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[20] Thomas

players. They are able to imagine themselves in these roles, and in control of the players' lives. You can also sense in the way it is written that Julius has begun to get quite annoyed with these encounters. He may try to stay polite, but it seems everywhere that he goes he is reminded of his role as a fantasy asset. He lists almost every public place as a spot in which he has encountered a fan, and a fan's choice to remind him of their unique relationship. Even on vacation in Italy, a fan took the time to mention his impact on that person's fantasy team. It seems inescapable for Julius in a way, that he is constantly reminded of how he is viewed by many of his fans. Even in a moment where they can see his humanity in the flesh, they still view him as a numeral fantasy value. Questions about his day to day life are less important than making sure that he knows his value as a Fantasy Football player. By asking questions of his daily life, these people may have to confront the fact that he is no longer solely a fantasy assett. For many of these fans, they cannot imagine his identity outside of a member of their fantasy team and that is reflected in their face to face interactions.

This lack of humanity when it comes to Black people in the NFL does not apply solely to those playing the game, it also is shown in the coaching ranks. At the conclusion of the 2021-22 NFL season there was only one Black head coach in the entire NFL, Mike Tomlin of the Pittsburgh Steelers. For a league where over 70% of the players are Black, this stands out as a major issue. In 2002, the Rooney rule was instituted following the firings of head coaches Tony Dungy of the Tampa Bay Buccaneers and Dennis Green of the Minnesota Vikings. The NFL adopted the Rooney Rule in 2003 based on recommendations made by the league's Workplace Diversity Committee. It was named after then-chairman of the committee, Dan Rooney, the late

owner of the Pittsburgh Steelers. The committee's initial focus was on the historically

low number of minorities in head coaching positions. The policy originally required every

team with a head coaching vacancy to interview at least one or more diverse candidates

before making a new hire. In 2009, the policy was amended to include general

manager jobs and equivalent front-office positions, requiring each team to interview a

minimum of two external minority candidates. Initially the rule did seem to work and

from 2010-2017 at least 25% of the head coaches were people of color [21]. This was

seen as a sign of progress, with hope that the gap between the percentage of Black

players and Black coaches would continue to lessen. But by 2019,

NFL coaching diversity is trending in the wrong direction
Share of games coached by nonwhite head coaches, by season

only 12.5 percent of regular-season NFL games were coached by people of color, a

share that dwindled to just 3% by the end of the 2021-22 season. This led to the NFL

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[21] Paine, Neil. "The Rooney Rule Isn't Working Anymore." *FiveThirtyEight*, FiveThirtyEight, 14 Jan. 2020,

instituting a change in rule that required every team to interview at least two external minority candidates for open head coaching positions and at least one external minority candidate for a coordinator job. Despite these efforts, it seems that many owners and GM's (almost all white) do not seem interested in hiring non-white canidates. Doug Williams, the first Black Quarterback to win a super bowl believes that it is those who are making the decisions that are the problem, rather than the rule itself. As Williams states "But it's not the rule that's not working, it's the people," says Williams, who is now senior adviser to the Washington Commanders. "It's not just football, it's America as a whole"[22]. It really does not matter how many Black head coaches are required through the Rooney Rule. Those in power and those making the decisions on hiring are not interested in hiring people of color, and those people do not want change it seems.

All of this was known prior to the most recent NFL offseason, but even then eyebrows were raised at the firing of Miami Dolphins head coach Brian Flores. Flores had been one of the three Black head coaches during the 2021-22 season, and had been seen as a rising star in coaching circles. He had been an assistant coach under Bill Belichick and the New England Patriots for 10 years, and then led the Dolphins to a 24-25 record in his three seasons as coach. For a roster considered one of the worst in the NFL, this record had been seen as quite an achievement and certainly unworthy of a firing. There was an assumption that he would acquire another job of some kind, that some other team would reverse the Dolphins mistake. That did not happen, and about two and a half weeks after his firing, Flores filed a lawsuit against the New York Giants, Miami Dolphins and NFL as a whole. Through this lawsuit, Flores alleges that the

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[22] Neuman, Scott. "Why a 20-Year Effort by the NFL Hasn't Led to More Minorities in Top Coaching Jobs." *NPR*, NPR, 3 Feb. 2022,

league is filled with racism, and that there is a racial bias against the hiring of Black

coaches. He states that "Well intentioned or not, what is clear is that the Rooney Rule is

not working. It is not working because the numbers of Black Head Coaches,

Coordinators and Quarterback Coaches are not even close to being reflective of the

number of Black athletes on the field"[23]. There is nothing particularly complicated about

this statement, Flores is very clear that the Rooney rule does not improve employment

opportunities for Black coaches. That even if its initial ideas were well intentioned, the

process surrounding the rule simply does not work. Those who make the majority of the

hiring decisions in the NFL do not seem comfortable with the hiring of Black people, or

providing opportunities for Black people at any level outside of the playing field. Worse

than that, Flores alleges that Dolphins owner Stephen Ross offered Flores $100,000 for

every loss during the 2019 season[24]. Ross believed that if the Dolphins were

guaranteed to lose they would acquire a better draft pick and the opportunity to draft a

star quarterback. Flores refused without hesitation, but it gives a window into what he

dealt with during his time as a head coach. Ross likely would have greater cause to fire

Flores if he had a losing record, something that he had been instructed to do. Lastly,

towards the end of his tenure as head coach there had been rumors that Flores was a

difficult person to work with. It is likely that Ross might have felt Flores was "difficult"

because he failed to go along with the bribery scheme that Ross had created. This

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[23] United States District Court, Southern District of New York. *Brian Flores v. NFL*. 1 Feb. 2022, https://www.wigdorlaw.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Complaint-against-National-Football-League-et-al-Filed.pdf. Accessed 15 Mar. 2022.

[24] United States District Court, Southern District of New York. *Brian Flores v. NFL*. 1 Feb. 2022, https://www.wigdorlaw.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Complaint-against-National-Football-League-et-al-Filed.pdf. Accessed 15 Mar. 2022.

gives a summation of the kind of treatment that Black coaches receive once they beat

the very small odds that they can become a head coach in the NFL

Flores also spoke about the entire ownership culture of the NFL, and likened the

actions of the NFL owners to the owners of plantations. As the lawsuit states "In certain

critical ways, the NFL is racially segregated and is managed much like a plantation. The

owners watch the games from atop NFL stadiums in their luxury boxes, while their

majority-Black workforce put their bodies on the line each sunday, taking vicious hits

and suffering debilitating injuries to their bodies and brains while the NFL and its owners

reap billions of dollars"[25]. For so much of this chapter I have attempted to discuss the

ways in which comparisons can be made between modern sports culture and slavery.

But very rarely has someone currently entrenched within this sports culture been brave

enough to make a direct comparison between the two. Flores has spent much of his

adult life fighting to become a successful head coach within the NFL. He has sacrificed

years of his life working his way up the ladder, waiting for this one opportunity. He has

seized that opportunity despite being offered money to lose on purpose and yet he was

fired. He understands that the system is catered to benefit both the white owners and

white coaches. Those who sit in those luxury boxes do not want diversity anywhere but

on the field. On that field, they benefit off the incredible athleticism and speed that these

Black athletes offer them. They do not care much about the faces inside these helmets

as long as they continue to "reap billions of dollars". When you consider all of these

facts, it is not difficult to understand why Flores would make a comparison between a

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[25] United States District Court, Southern District of New York. *Brian Flores v. NFL*. 1 Feb. 2022, https://www.wigdorlaw.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Complaint-against-National-Football-League-et-al-Filed.pdf. Accessed 15 Mar. 2022.

plantation owner and an NFL owner. Modern sports culture has created a system that

benefits very rich white men, on the basis of labor by predominantly black athletes.

When you put it in those terms, it is quite easy to understand why both Flores and I see

genuine connections between slavery of the antebellum south and modern sports

culture.

Whiteness and Coaching Authority

The idea of a white coach was birthed from the very invention of basketball, and its Christian roots within the YMCA. From its origin, basketball seemed a vehicle for white men to teach people the "proper" way to live their Christian lives. Though the actors have changed, the idea of basketball as a tool for teaching about life has remained. Viewers of "behind the scenes" sports documentaries can attest that coaches at every level of men's sports will refer to players as "son" and that players often call coaches "sir". Both of these bring up associations with the military or with a father figure, two roles that are closely associated with authority. In our society, you are expected to have respect for your father and for high ranking military officials. They are seen as leaders and examples of the appropriate way to live one's life. Our society links whiteness with fathers and military officials as the ideal of what an authority figure is supposed to look like. In corporate America, white people hold the most powerful jobs. 89 of our 100 senators are currently white, while 92.6% of Fortune 500 Company's CEO's are white and of course we have had only one non-white president within our country's history. Senators are a position voted by the public, and it is significant that white voters feel most comfortable with them as representatives of their communities. While members of the boards of these companies feel most comfortable with a white

man as their forward facing leader. These choices are not made based on qualifications, but rather on the image of a white man as a sign of authority. That in itself connects power and authority to whiteness within this country, and puts forth the image that authority figures must be white. Relatedly, whiteness' association with authority incentivizes white men as college coaches. The exclusivity within the coaching ranks has forced those that are non-white to present themselves as overly respectful. This chapter is concerned with investigating the ways that Black men have negotiated this link between whiteness and coaching authority. Knowing that in order to secure the elite jobs within college basketball they must present themselves as respectful and well-educated.

This idea was first embodied by John McLendon, the first Black coach to ever coach at a division 1 college and later by Temple coach John Chaney. There was a focus on education and respect as the primary goals of coaching. Both of them understood the way to keep their jobs as Black men was to appear as a respectful man to their white superiors. This is a sharp contrast to another Black coach, former Georgetown coach John Thompson who was known for his loyalty to players over the institution. Thompson had pride in his Blackness, something that brought great amounts of criticism from those within the NCAA. Thompson's style of coaching has allowed for coaches like current Kentucky coach John Caliapri to thrive. White coaches like Calipari are able to co opt pieces of Thompson's style like support of players over an institution, without being seen as "too Black".

The connection between Christianity and athletics among young men is not a new phenomenon. In the late 1800's the notion of Muscular Christianity came to be.

Dissatisfied with an idea the church had become too feminine, men in the late 1800's saw athletics as a form of manliness[26]. A form of manliness that valued the moral and physical beauty of athleticism. Through most of the 19th century, athletics had been seen as evil and unworthy of participation by truly religious people. But at the very end of the century, athletics began to be regarded as "adjunct to social uplift" and the movement of one's body as a "glory to Christ"[27]. Through this, many churches began to form alliances with athletic leagues and playground associations. These associations and religion had once seemed so separate, and now almost were combined into one entity.

The most prominent organizations that brought religion together was the Young Men Christians Association or the YMCA. The YMCA was founded in 1844 by a London dry clerk named George Williams, but would not start showing signs of a physical health organization until the late 1880's[28]. In 1887 the YMCA created the Physical Work Department, which was focused on "character building" for young men. This included a battle against this idea of "male softness" and a belief that physical exercise could help in this battle. In its first 40 years of existence, the YMCA had been primarily focused on keeping young men away from sin. This new era of the YMCA instead primarily focused on physical exercise and its ability to help with character development. As Clifford Putney writes "Character building, as the name implies, required not the preservation of morals already taught, but rather the strengthening of boys so as to ward off degeneracy. Character builders thought it essential that the boy

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[26] Putney, Clifford Wallace. *Muscular Christianity: Manhood and Sports in Protestant America, 1880-1920*. Harvard University Press, 2003.
[27] Putney 60
[28] Puntney 64

have his masculinity cultivated at the outset; otherwise he might never develop into a leader capable of asserting "American values"[29]. There was a general fear among the Christians of this time period that young men would become soft and would not assert the correct values. Without athletics and physicality, young men would struggle to have their masculinity cultivated, and thus will not be the right kind of Christians. This focus on athletics led to 450 YMCA associations maintaining a gym by 1900. There soon was a belief that working out and playing sports was a key part of being a Christian. The phrase body, mind and spirit was created and with it the trademark triangle logo which represented these three pillars.

One of the most popular sports in these early years was basketball, in fact it was invented by Dr James Naismth who was an instructor at the YMCA Training School. The first basketball game ever played took place in a YMCA gym in Springfield, MA in 1891. It quickly spread throughout the many branches of the YMCA, and was lauded for its compatibility with many of the Christian ideals like teamwork and respect. Basketball had become a Christian game, a game that would help young men with their character development and ensure their masculinity. It is amazing to think that 130 years later even as basketball has evolved into an international game, Christianity still remains

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[29] Putney 67

such a key part. Just 9 out of the 240 coaches that I researched identified themselves as something other than a religion within Christianity. Many coaches like Tony Bennett of Virginia or Mike Krzyzewski of Duke have stated that they likely would have been pastors if not for becoming coaches. There is a certain connection that exists between the game of basketball and Christianity. A longstanding belief even in modern times that some of the principles of these originals will create young men with the "right" kind of values. Bennett, the current coach of the University of Virginia is especially passionate about the concept of principles. He leads his team through the five pillars of the program, them being humility, passion, unity, servanthood and thankfulness (Romano). These are ideas that anyone could try to live by, but seem especially centered around Christianity. When asked about these 5 pillars in 2015 Bennett said "It's not just lip service, we really believe in them. They've influenced me and I've used them for my program every year. I think these pillars are what truly matters. Whether you're a believer or not, those are significant for a team. They're in our locker room, and they're everything to our program. To be great in basketball, those things have to be there"[30]. These are the principles of the program, everything seems to revolve around these ideals. I think it speaks to the fact that at least for the coaches, these Christian ideals remain a large part of the sport. For these coaches, religion and basketball are intertwined and success on the court is dependent on Christian values being a part of the team's culture. There is a sense that for these coaches, religion and basketball cannot exist without one another. Additionally, these white men are connected to religion and seen as examples of the right kinds of Christian men. Much like a CEO or

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[30] Romano, Jason. "Virginia Coach Tony Bennett Says His Faith in Christ Is the 'Greatest Truth' He Knows." *Sports Spectrum*, Sports Spectrum, 9 Apr. 2019,

Senator these universities can hire white men with the knowledge that they will

represent a pure and Christian authority figure. For Black men, this leaves very little

room within the college coaching ranks. Their physical image is not one of authority or

Christianity, so they must put forth the image of respectability through their actions.

This is a concept that goes back to the early 1900's when Black women of the

baptist church created the idea of Black people appearing as respectful to their whites

superiors. In a time in which Black women were often viewed as "lazy, promiscuous,

and brutish figures", these women believed that they could reverse these stereotypes

through respectability[31]. By claiming respectability through their manners and morals,

Black women asserted the will to define themselves outside the parameters of

prevailing racist discourses. As one woman described it "Fight segregation through the

courts as an unlawful act? Yes. But fight it with soap and water, hoes, spades, shovels

and paint, to remove any reasonable excuse for it, that is the fight that will win"[32]. The

idea is that by appearing to be clean, respectful and people of good character these

women could remove any excuse for racist treatment. They understood that legally what

was happening was wrong, but that white people's minds would not be changed through

the law. Additionally, respectability functioned as a bridge discourse between Black

America and potential white allies. The moralistic language was similar to that used by

other progressives of the time, and they felt it would appeal to these progressives.

There seemed to be this notion that if you were not conforming to respectability, you

were in some way setting back your entire race. Not much room for individuality was

allowed in this movement, instead an understanding that in order to appeal to these

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[31] Higginbotham, Evelyn Brooks. *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920*. Harvard University Press, 1993. 187
[32] Higginbotham 193

white progressives everyone must present themselves as respectful, clean and people of good character. The idea of respectability was also intertwined with religion and the church, as would be expected based on its founders. Someone could not be seen as respectful without being a weekly churchgoer, something that many of these allies could also identify with. The combination of religious, clean and someone of good character created this idea of respectability. These things created the ideal of what a Black person was supposed to be, in order to appeal to white people.

The idea of respectability is often especially important when it comes to Black people of influence, someone who reflects the view of Black people to the entire white world. Ray Block Jr writes about this idea in his article *Gluttons for Punishment? African American Celebrities and the Issue of Leadership.* He specifically writes about the norms that a Black celebrity is expected to fulfill from both a white and Black audience. Often Black celebrities can be viewed as not being "Black enough" from their Black audience, while also being perceived as "too Black" if they speak out against any injustice that has occured against Black people. As Block Jr writes "We show here that there is a dilemma for African American celebrities from the policing behavior of both Blacks and whites. The Black community, motivated by their subculture's different set of norms, tend to punish Black celebrities for not living up to these Black norms. It seems that Black celebrities can get punished by Black audiences for not being "Black enough" politically. Conversely, it seems that White audiences, motivated by long-standing mainstream norms, tend to punish African American celebrities for transgressions against those norms, or basically being "too Black" politically"[33]. It is almost impossible to please both sides of the spectrum, with the idea that in any outcome you are always

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[33] Block Jr 6

seen as either too Black or too white. Often this results in this person choosing to try to please the white side of the spectrum, especially in work environments that are led by white executives. I think this is true for someone like McLendon or many other Black coaches who have found a way to be hired at elite schools. They are aware that in order to maintain their jobs they must act a certain way, and they are much more likely to act the way that will please their white superiors. This may lead to resistance from those in the Black community that feel they are not "Black enough" but the reality is their job security is the most important thing. A white coach will never face these kinds of considerations, never put under these kinds of pressures from the two sides of the spectrum.

No coach better embodies this idea than John McLendon, the first Black coach to ever coach at a predominantly white college. McLendon was born in Kansas and while attending the University of Kansas met and learned from the inventor of basketball, Dr James Naismith. From meeting with Naismith, McLendon not only learned the rules of basketball but also the religious values that could be taught through the sport. When asked about how religion and basketball intersected, McLendon remarked that "Basketball is supposed to be a teaching tool. One is supposed to improve on the lives of young people through athletics- through the trials of making the team and through discipline. If you don't improve lives, then you are not doing your job"[34]. He believed much like Naismsith that basketball was the correct teaching tool to improve young men's lives. These young men would be the "correct" kind of christian men through this vehicle of basketball. If you were coaching basketball without teaching these Christian

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[34] Katz, Milton S. *Breaking through: John B. McLendon, Basketball Legend and Civil Rights Pioneer* . University of Arkansas Press, 2007.

values, "you were not doing your job". He first began teaching these values in the early 1940's at North Carolina Central, an HBCU. From the very beginning of his tenure he was known for his insistence on teaching his players to be the right kind of people. This included being expected to study, attend all classes, go to the church of their choice on Sundays, and always conduct themselves as gentlemen[35]. Making sure that his players were respectful and good citizens seemed to be a key part of McLendon's teaching philosophy. McLendon not only taught these principles to his players, but also exhibited them himself. He was a man who held very few vices, and felt the best way to teach his players to be a "gentleman" was to be one himself. In his book on McLendon, Milton Katz describes this idea "It certainly helped to persuade parents to send their sons to play for McLendon when they were told that the coach was a person of high character who didn't drink, smoke, or curse and who attended church on a regular basis. McLendon believed that character and integrity were essential to the success of his students and athletes, and he taught by example"[36]. McLendon exhibited very few tendencies that could be described as controversial or problematic. He was a religious man who seemed to value and exhibit character and integrity. This was the kind of man that would appeal to a white audience, and be accepted as the right kind of coach. This is not to say that he didn't have genuine basketball coaching acumen, he is credited with the creation of both the fast break and press defense. But his level of respectability and character were a key factor in his ability to be the first coach hired at a white college. The white administrators would always be more comfortable with someone who showed these kinds of characteristics.

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[35] Katz 34
[36] Katz 36

In the years between the end of McLendon's career and the hiring of Georgetown coach John Thompson, a radical shift occurred among Black people in America: the founding of the Black power movement. It was a time in which Black people no longer wanted to appeal to the interests or sensibilities of white people. Instead it seemed they were interested in using any means in order to end the oppression of Black people. The violence and militant nature surrounding the Black Panther Party are often the things most highlighted. But truthfully, the party's primary goal was to bring change for Black people, and that was highlighted through their 10 point plan in 1967[37]. It was clear that this was the beginning of a Black power movement, and of the belief among Black people that change was needed. There was a recognition that change was only going to be accomplished through action. At this same period of time, parents in Brooklyn had seen white teachers not providing their students with a fair education. In response to this, they decided to campaign for Black teachers to be brought to the school. Through the Ford Foundation and the school board, the parents were given the opportunity for an experimental school that hired primarily Black teachers[38]. This was yet another example of Black people seemingly no longer deferring to anyone else, and only through their own action trying to achieve a better education for their children. It was a far different perspective than that of the Black baptist women of the early 1900's. No longer was appealing to white people a goal or even an idea. There was an understanding that only through the will of Black people would change occur. This was the generation that John Thompson came from, a belief in Black identity

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[37] Fayer, Steve, and Louis J Massiah. "Power (1966-68)." *Eyes on the Prize*, season 1, episode 13, PBS, 29 Jan. 1990.

[38] Fayer and Massiah

and Black power. He was thus someone who did not believe in appealing to his white

superiors, or having to be seen as respectful and someone of good character.

Thompson was known for his loyalty to his players over the institution, an

institution that was primarily white and situated in a largely white neighborhood. In fact

before its arrival, Georgetown had been one of the few Catholic schools not to recruit

Black athletes. John Thompson completely shifted this narrative, transforming

Georgetown into a place that embraced its Black athletes and Black culture. A nagging

criticism was actually the lack of white players on many of his teams, an idea that he

was in some way racist toward white people. The real criticism that may have been

veiled within this critique was Thompson's unapologetic Blackness. The Hoyas were

almost all Black — with their Georgetown starter jackets, and the Kente cloth that the

Iverson-led Hoyas of the '90s donned. Georgetown basketball embodied a brand that

Black Americans felt they owned, just as white Americans disapproved of it[39]. In a

majority-Black city with a Black mayor, the Thompson-led Hoyas, as The Undefeated's

Chris Palmer put it, "appealed greatly to local Black fans, particularly young Black men

who felt labeled, disrespected and disregarded"[40]. He had created a team culture that

felt like it authentically represented Black culture. Most importantly as former

Georgetown guard Gene Smith stated "He created that environment, and that worked

for us, "But also for Black America, it was like, 'Okay, we're not taking any shit. We're

not apologizing"[41]. Thompson had such a different perspective than someone like

McLendon or Chaney, he was not interested in appearing as respectful to his white

[39] Herring, Chris, and Santul Nerkar. "John Thompson's Unapologetic Blackness Changed College Basketball." *FiveThirtyEight*, ESPN, 1 Sept. 2020,

[40] Herring and Nerkar

[41] Siegel, Alan. "John Thompson Never Backed Down from Anyone." *The Ringer*, The Ringer, 31 Aug. 2020,

superiors. More than that, he was not going to apologize for being Black, or for

recruiting an entirely Black team. It seemed he had created a team that Black people

could identify with and be proud of. This was a team and coach that were proud to be

Black, and that showed on the court. As Chuck D of Public Enemy put it "Not only was

this a team full of Black players who would definitely take it to you, you had a big-ass

Black man as a coach who wasn't taking no shit. That was big"[42]. It was a team that

was not appealing to its white fanbase or white superiors in any way. Other Black

coaches had been so focused on pleasing the white people around them, where

Thompson seemed to completely reject this notion.

It's interesting to reflect on this perspective through the lenses of Roy Block Jr

and his words on the Black celebrity. When someone does not present themselves as

respectful they are thus presented as "too Black". This is a critique that was often

launched of Thompson and Thompson's teams. The fact that he never had a white

player start for him in his final 26 years of coaching is often cited as his inherent racism

toward white people. Additionally, his teams were often described as overly violent or

intimidating toward their opponents. In the 1984 NCAA Tournament, a Georgetown

player named Michael Graham dunked and right after pushed one of the opponents to

the ground. In response to this, the color commentator of the game Billy Packer stated

"Here's where Georgetown gets accused by many of being a bunch of thugs"[43]. This

comment has an element of racism within it, insinuating that this team solely composed

of young Black men are thugs. For the white media it seems, any group of Black men

who show any violence at all are seen as criminals. Celebrating a dunk by pushing your

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[42] Siegel
[43] Siegel

opponent should not bring up thoughts of thugs, and it likely would not if it was a team of white players or even coached by a white man. This comment illustrates the media and many white people's opinion of Thompson and his Georgetown teams. Through not apologizing for his Blackness, Thompson and his team were labeled as violent and unruly. This is something that a white coach will never have to contend with, a white coach who had recruited an entirely white team would simply never be labeled as racist. Any Black coach that accepted their Blackness in the way Thompson did would always be viewed as the wrong kind of coach, because he is not catering to his white audience.

Thompson was also known as being fiercely loyal to his players, intent on defending his Black players even when a white audience had villainized them. He sat out multiple games to protest the NCAA's decision to apply Prop 48, a controversial measure that denied eligibility to athletes who didn't meet certain academic requirements, to freshmen — and that he believed unfairly targeted Black athletes[44]. In February 1983, after Villanova fans at the Palestra in Philadelphia held up racist banners that read "Ewing Is an Ape" and "Ewing Kant Read Dis," the coach pulled his team off the court until the signs were removed[45]. These might seem like the logical thing to do, to simply protect his players against racism. But more than that, it was Thompson once again standing up to the institutions that ran the NCAA. When his players were disrespected, he would refuse to even put a product onto the court. Most coaches would want to respond to racism of their players, but there was something specific about refusing to even play the game. This symbolized that Thompson valued

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[44] Thompson, John, and Jesse Washington. *I Came as a Shadow: An Autobiography*. Henry Holt and Company, 2020. 60

[45] Thompson and Washington 110

his players over the product of the NCAA, and would protest until his players got fair treatment. He cared about their lives and their futures above all else it seemed.

The Georgetown teams of the 1980s and 90's were known for their pride in being Black, and specifically as a key part of Black culture. This was a time in which Black culture was becoming more and more a part of the national consciousness. Between the exploits of Black basketball players like Magic Johnson and Michael Jordan as well as the rise of hip hop, it felt like Black culture was something being consumed by white people more and more. The Georgetown teams and their signature blue jackets were intertwined with hip hop culture as a whole. As former NBA player Kenny Smith said "The whole rap community, when the rap music was going on, everybody who had made a rap record had a Georgetown jacket on"[46]. Everyone from Biggie to Outkast to Fat Joe have mentioned Georgetown in their songs. Thompson had created a team that was so embraced and respected by the culture of rap. At this time in the mid 1990's, rap and hip hop culture seemed to be something that so represented Black people and was something really only performed by Black people.

That soon would change most notably through a Detroit rapper named Eminem. Eminem is now the highest selling rap artist of all time, and for many that represents the power of being white within a Black-dominated industry. He is able to combine Black street culture along with his status as a white middle class man and craft a persona that appeals to his white audience. In many ways Eminem can draw comparisons to the use of blackface in the early 1900's, able to use the vernacular of Black people without any of the ramifications of being physically Black. Russell White writes about this idea here

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[46] Scott, Dana. "A History of Hip Hop's Influence on the NBA, as Told by Chuck D." *HipHopDX*, Warner Music Group, 9 Oct. 2020,

"Eminem's performance draws upon and merges together elements of Black vernacular street culture primarily associated with the urban North and white ethnic cultural allusions drawn from slasher films and Southern rural horror. Moreover, like the Blackface minstrels of the past, Eminem's performance articulates and taps into contemporary frustrations felt by poor working-class white males"[47]. Eminem is able to craft an identity around Black culture and speak to the frustrations of poor white people through this identity. Much like the blackface minstrels, he is able to unleash much of the frustrations around his own identity while wearing the mask of someone else. His white audience is able to accept his lyrics and his persona because he is white, something that would never be accepted if these same lyrics and persona were coming from a Black man. Emimem is able to benefit off of Black culture without actually having to deal with the realities of being Black.

This leads into the modern idea of the kind of coach that John Thompson was, current Kentucky coach John Calipari. A Black coach like Thompson who embraced his Blackness and valued his player over the institution would never be able to thrive long term in high level college basketball. The white media and universities will never fully be able to accept this kind of figure, because he does not cater to them. But if you take a white coach like Calipari, who once again recruits all Black teams and values his players over the institution it can be accepted. He is the college coach equivalent of Eminem, someone who uses Black culture to his benefit without having to deal with the realities of being Black. I think part of Calipari's privilege as a white man is his ability to take parts of Thompson's persona and cater them to his own personality, whether that

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[47] White, Russell. "Behind the Mask: Eminem and Postindustrial Minstrelsy." *European Journal of American Culture*, vol. 25, no. 1, 2005. 6

be loyalty to his players or elements of Black culture. He is able to craft this personality without fear of being labeled "too Black" or "racist", because as a white man he is seen as the image of what a basketball coach is supposed to look like. Any Black man who accepts his identity will not be accepted by the white audience, and John Thompson was the best example of that. John Calipari actually exhibits that it was not the choice of player over product or the embracing of Black culture that upset people, but rather the color of Thompson's skin.

Calipari's greatest skill has been his ability to consistently recruit the best high school players, year after year. Understanding that most elite players do not view college basketball as a way of gaining an education, but rather as the stepping stone to professional basketball and the money that will provide. Calipari does not pretend to view college basketball as this beacon of education, a place of morals and "love of the game". Instead he understands that the NCAA makes almost a billion dollars each tournament, that the coaches make millions of dollars every year and that thus players are most interested in how their talent can generate money for them. When recruiting players, he does not pretend that his school is anything but a stepping stone to the NBA. In fact, he makes it clear that he will do everything to improve the opportunity for a maximum payday in the NBA.

When asked about whether it is more important to win championships at Kentucky or to best prepare players for the NBA, Calipari has time and time again stated that preparation for the NBA among his players is his number one priority. When asked about this in 2019 he stated "The environment here, everything about it is about preparing them for the NBA, it's an NBA environment. How we practice. The

competitiveness in practice. The games. The shots. Every shot matters here. It's kind of

like their rookie year is here. You can teach really good players how to play and what it's

going to be like (in the NBA) or you can teach them to be in a system, we're teaching

kids how to play"[48]. This gives a real insight into the perspective that Calipari has when

it comes to improving the individual skills of his players. He could choose to run a

system that prioritizes the team over the individual and likely win more games. But

instead he has chosen to create a team that prioritizes improving the skills of the

individual and becoming accustomed to an NBA environment. The results speak for

themselves when it comes to Caliapri's time at the University of Kentucky. Since he took

the job in late 2009, 31 Kentucky players have been selected in the first round of the

NBA Draft. The next closest school Duke has only had 20 players drafted in that time

span. This suggests that Calipari is able to recruit and find talented players and then

translate that skill into production at the college game, all while providing an NBA like

environment. This production has led NBA teams to consistently choose these players

over players from any other school. Additionally these players have excelled when

actually in the NBA as well. Of the top 40 highest paid players in the NBA, seven of

them went to college at Kentucky. Once again this represents the highest by any school,

suggesting that the preparation does lead to genuine results. This makes it quite easy to

understand why young Black men would trust Calipari as the person to propel them into

NBA stars. When you have proof of a certain process working, it would always make

sense to go with that proven commodity.

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[48] Tipton, Jerry. "Only One Title for CAL's UK Teams? 'We Could Have Done More.'" *Lexington Herald Leader*, Lexington Herald Leader, 29 Sept. 2020,

Besides his honesty and bluntness, Calipari may also have achieved recruiting success through his attitude and personality. He comes from a working class background, so this also may allow for some level of relatability. He is known for showing off the wealth that he achieved to his recruits, from watches to cars to suits. Through this Calipari seems to be indicating that by attending his school he can guarantee that you will achieve the similar riches that he has procured. He has been described by many of his players as having a certain swag or a certain attitude that appeals to his prospective recruits. I think it's key to examine this idea that Calipari may have co opted certain elements of hip hop culture into his recruiting strategy. The flashy style of people like Sean "Diddy" Combs inspired the kind of persona that he exhibited to his recruits. This level of personality is often not allowed to be portrayed by Black coaches, instead expected to be respected and well-educated. If they do show a level of personality, it is criticized for being too Black like in the case of John Thompson.

This contrast between personalities was never more evident than in the mid 1990's when Calipari and Temple coach John Calipari clashed. Chaney, who was born in 1932 and coached for over 60 years is perhaps the most prominent Black coach of his era. He grew up in Jacksonville, FL in the 30's and would often see the KKK burning crosses outside of his house[49]. He would eventually move to Philadelphia where he found his love for basketball. He attended and played basketball at Bethune-Cookman, but always knew his true desire came in the form of coaching. He would spend his next twenty years coaching at various Philadelphia high schools and a Division 2 college before landing the job at Temple. He coached for 25 seasons at Temple, winning a total

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[49] Hunt, Donald. *Chaney: Playing for a Legend*. Triumph Books, 2006.

of 741`times and reaching the NCAA Tournament 17 times. He was known as a

disciplinarian, and as someone who did genuinely feel he could impact these young

people's lives through basketball. He had also taught at the high schools in which he

had coached at, and thought of himself as just as much a teacher as a coach. He was in

many ways an extension of the kind of coach that John McLendon, with maybe a few

modernized adjustments. This is quite a contrast to Calipari, someone who had

achieved a head coaching job at UMASS by the age of 29 and even from the very

beginning felt more like a businessman than a teacher. It was also the contrast between

the kind of Black coach that you were supposed to be and the kind of coach that white

institutions would never truly allow a Black man to be.

By the middle of the 1990's, Temple and UMASS were the two best teams within

the Atlantic-10 conference and it was known that the two coaches did not particularly

like each other. This dislike came to a head in 1994 when Calipari's squad beat Temple

in a tense and emotional game. After the game during Calipari's press conference,

Chaney stormed in and confronted the young coach. He was furious that Calipari had

worked the refs to his advantage by complaining throughout the game. When Calipari

attempted to defend himself, Chaney angrily stated "Shut up.. I'll KIll you" before being

escorted off by security[50]. This incident illustrates the difference between the two men,

Chaney could not stand that some injustice had occurred where Calipari would do

anything to gain even a small advantage. For so long he had remained respectful even

in the face of injustice, in the assumption that he must to keep his position. He had been

inspired by someone like John McLendon, a belief that as a Black man he must portray

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[50] Hock, Jonathan, director. *One and Not Done*. *ESPN+*, ESPN Films, 2017,
https://www.espn.com/espnplus/catalog/d3c9b0d7-4d9a-4f77-808c-9befadab300f/one-and-not-done.

himself as respectful and well behaved. But in a moment in which a white coach on the opposite side was so disrespectful, it became too much for Chaney and he could no longer remain respectful. I think it is important to also mention that this is a confrontation between an older Black coach and a young white coach. A Black coach who was forced to coach for 20 years before even getting a division 1 job, while the white coach got a job before he had even turned thirty. A white coach who felt he could get away with anything, while a Black coach who knew he needed to act a certain way to even maintain his position as a division 1 coach. This signifies the kind of person that Calipari was allowed to be, the privilege of being a white coach. That he is described as being "swaggy" is a direct privilege of not having to be seen as respectful or highly educated, something that every Black coach is expected to be.

Analysis of College Coaches

Each year the NCAA Basketball Tournament is held in the middle two weeks of March, a single elimination tournament which pits the best 64 teams in Division 1 college basketball. These 64 teams are divided into 4 regions and ranked from one to sixteen based on their accomplishments. The field is made up of 32 conference champions and 32 at large teams. These teams are often primarily made up by Black men, men who often are recruited from urban environments. A 2018 study by Shaun R. Harper profilled the teams comprising the top six conferences in College Basketball (SEC, Big Ten, Big 12, Pac 12, Big East and ACC) and found that Black men were 2.4% of the undergraduate students enrolled at the 65 universities, but comprised 60% of men's basketball teams on those campuses[51]. These "student athletes" help create a tournament that is highly profitable for the NCAA. The NCAA Tournament is actually the NCAA's most profitable two weeks of the year, with the tournament generating 917.8 Million dollars in 2019[52].

The majority of this product comes in the form of Black athletes, athletes who play college basketball in the hope it will lead them to a lucrative NBA contract. Of the 300 players picked during the last 5 NBA drafts, 85% played Division 1 basketball. So the idea of college basketball acting as a pipeline for the NBA and its potential riches is

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[51] Harper, R. Shaun. (2018). Black male student-athletes and racial inequities in NCAA Division I college sports: 2018 edition. Los Angeles: University of Southern California, Race and Equity Center.

[52] Allen 1

correct. Coaches at some elite colleges recruit players by promising them a path to the NBA, an ability to prepare them for the next level. While other coaches recruit with the idea that they will transform them as men, a belief that they can teach these kids the lessons of life through basketball. Regardless of the recruiting pitch, all of the elite coaches benefit off of the talent of these prospects. The majority of these promises come from white men, and through the talent of primarily young Black men is how they achieve financial success.

With the knowledge that the majority of these coaches were white, I wanted to research specifically the kinds of backgrounds that the elite coaches of college basketball had originated from. Examining where these men had been born and then went to high school, were these communities that would be categorized as urban or suburban or even rural? To further examine these coaches, I also aimed to categorize their age, race, ethnicity and religion. Was there a specific pattern in the kinds of people that were able to get high level college basketball jobs? To get a substantial view of these patterns, I knew it would be important to gather data from a large data set. Thus I charted the coaches whose teams had made the last ten NCAA Tournament's. About 79% of all the coaches were white in this study, which was probably an expected result. The even more revealing result came in the form of the truly elite coaches, those who made 3 Million dollars per year and more. There were 40 coaches who had this salary at some point during this ten year stretch, with 34 of those 40 being white. Amazingly just two of the six non-white coaches still have a job, seeming to indicate that Black coaches that are able to obtain an elite job are given a much shorter leash than their white counterparts.

This leads to the most important part of this study, an analysis of the kinds of environments that these coaches came from. To truly determine and understand the kinds of environments that each of these coaches grew up in, I examined the percentage of white people that lived in the county in which they graduated high school from. This allowed for a raw statistical percentage of the kind of environment these people are used to, and the kinds of people they had grown up around. There were a total of 240 coaches who fit this criteria and I charted the demographics of each of their high school locations. The average of all of these locations when it came to the percentage of white people living there was 80.4%. This is an astonishing number and really points to the fact that the majority of these coaches grew up in environments that were almost entirely white. It was not a diverse population that many of these coaches were accustomed to, but rather one dominated by one specific race. Rural areas like Nebraska, Iowa and Indiana dominated the locations of high schools, as well as suburbs of cities like New York, Philadelphia and Chicago. Very few of these top coaches seemed to originate from urban areas, areas that may have been more diverse. These were coaches who were used to living in mostly white environments. And yet they coached teams that's success and thus their success relied on Black athletes. Relating to Black athletes and their families was key to their success and yet it seems that for some of them they may have never really encountered Black people until graduating from high school. For people like Baylor coach Scott Drew (98.6% white) or Michigan State coach Tom Izzo (99.1% white) they had truly grown up in environments with no Black people whatsoever. But through the help of primarily Black athletes, Drew now makes 3.35 Million dollars a year and Izzo makes 3.4 Million dollars a year. This

seems to point to the fact that the extremely rural environments that both Drew and Izzo grew up in have not in any way stopped them from achieving success in high level college basketball. Specifically it has not stopped them from recruiting high level prospects to their respective schools.

Though it has not stopped Drew and Izzo from achieving success, it is important to examine the differences that arise from growing up in a more rural environment when it comes to your opinion on diversity. Often those who grow up in a more urban environment will be more likely to be tolerant of diversity than those who are used to a more rural setting. Professors of Sociology Mark A. Fossett and Jill Kielott explored this idea in their study *The Relative Size of Minority Populations and White Racial Attitudes*. As they write "Compared with rural areas, large urban areas have more complex divisions of labor, more rational and competitive market structures, more extensive bureaucratic structures, and more educated populations. As a result, achieved characteristics (e.g., education) are thought to play a more important role, and ascribed characteristics (e.g., race) a less important role, in urban stratification systems. Consequently, community size should be positively related to support for integration"[53]. There seems to be this idea that in an urban environment there is a much more complex and multifaceted society that exists. Thus the level of education is often how people are grouped or identified, as opposed to solely identified through one's race. The things you have achieved are given a higher level of importance than the things that you are born with. This allows for a greater level of support for things like diversity or intergration, because one's worth is not solely derived from their race. There may be

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[53] Fossett, Mark A, and Jill Kiecolt. "The Relative Size of Minority Populations and White Racial Attitudes." *Social Science Quarterly*, vol. 70, no. 4, 1 Dec. 1989, 4

certain levels of segregation that arise from such a dependence on one's education, but at the very least one's worth is not fully derived from their race. And the authors also seem to be stating that those who do grow up and live in rural areas will be less likely to be in support of something like large amounts of diversity or integration, because they solely see people through the lenses of race.

I am not stating that coaches like Tom Izzo or Scott Drew must be racist because they grew up in a rural environment, or that they are sure to be open minded if they had grown up in a more urban setting. But rather, it is important to be aware of the kinds of environments the majority of these coaches come from, and the lack of diversity they are accustomed to. More than that, it seems that those who both look like these athletes and came from backgrounds similar to them are often not hired by these schools. Many of the Athletic Directors and administrators making the decisions seem quite happy with giving these jobs to those who come from environments similar to Drew or Izzo. As evidenced by the lack of non-white coaches who have been able to break that 3 million dollar threshold, the truly elite jobs seem to primarily go to people who look like the Atheltic Directors and do not look like the players.

Another pattern of coaches that could be noticed through the study is the upward mobility of white coaches, especially in comparison to Black coaches. Many of the white coaches who have been hired at the elite jobs recently did it through hard work, through reaching the tournament with a smaller team and then upsetting an elite program. This is evidenced with someone like current Illinois coach Brad Underwood. He took over as head coach of a little known university called Stephen F. Austin in 2013. He subsequently led them to three straight NCAA Tournaments including two first round

upsets. This was a school that had previously never reached the NCAA Tournament, and seemed to represent a coach truly on the rise. After this third straight tournament in 2016, Illinois had a head coach vacancy and made the decision to hire him. For a man whose salary had been just 300,000 a year at SFA, the almost 3.1 Million a year he was offered at Illinois was a major upgrade in salary[54]. It seems to represent the way things should work, someone offered a promotion because they truly deserve it.

Unfortunately it seems that this does not always continue when talking about Black Coaches. Take someone like Marvin Menzies, former coach of New Mexico State. Menzies was hired by New Mexico State in 2008, a school that once again is not a traditional basketball power. He subsequently led them to 5 NCAA Tournaments in the next six years, becoming a perennial power in the Mountain West Conference. You would believe that this kind of consistent success might catch the eye of a high major program much like it had done with Underwood. Instead Menzies moved on to UNLV in 2016, which is a minor upgrade but nowhere near an elite program. He had been making about 350,000 dollars a year at New Mexico State, and UNLV offered to pay him about 650,000 dollars a year. So it was a definite improvement, but based on his previous five years not the massive improvement that he might have hoped for. This seems to be the norm around college basketball, a lack of reward for proven success among Black coaches and an automatic reward for success for white coaches. It seems that upward mobility is not available for Black coaches no matter how successful they are. This study as a whole seems to indicate that Black coaches are "allowed" to coach at places like New Mexico State or UNLV or an HBCU, schools where they can

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[54] Hamilton, Brian. "Illinois Makes a Savvy Decision by Hiring Brad Underwood." *Sports Illustrated*, Sports Illustrated, 18 Mar. 2017,

excel in this smaller pond. But athletic directors and the NCAA as a whole does not seem interested in hiring Black coaches for a larger pool, jobs that both in visibility and pay are elite.

Another benefit of being part of an elite program is the ability to secure the best kids, to recruit the truly elite players. The players that are ranked as the top 25-30 in the country often only seriously consider 9-10 schools, which almost always include schools like Duke, Kentucky, UCLA and North Carolina. It has long been known these schools not only secure these kids because of their prestige, but also because of their financial resources to "convince" these players to choose their school. In the last ten years specifically, recruiting the best kids has also meant reckoning with the fact that they will only stay for one year. No coach has better understood this than John Calipari. He has embraced this idea of "One and Done", that the primary goal is to prepare players for the NBA. Calipari is the son of Italian immigrants, and has a certain gangster quality to him. He often shows up to recruit houses in a fancy car or in a private jet, wearing a fancy suit and a Rolex. He is known to promise the players that through him they can achieve similar wealth, and that he will do everything in his power for them to achieve that wealth. Calipari represents the new age of College Basketball, this transactional relationship between top recruit and elite coach. He also represents the dirtier side of high level college basketball, because not once but twice he has been punished by the NCAA for Recruiting Violations.

In the mid 1990's Calipari was coaching at University of Massachusetts and convinced a young Black kid from Hartford, Connecticut to join his team. This kid's name was Marcus Camby and three years later he would be drafted 2nd overall in the

NBA Draft. About a year after this draft selection, it started to become clear that Camby had been recruited illegally. During his recruiting process, Camby later admitted that he had received $28,000 from two sports agents[55]. These agents had later been shown to have a connection to UMASS, and thus much of the team's success under Camby was vacated. Calipari always rejected any notion that he knew of this, and had been in the dark about any misconduct. By 2007, Calipari had moved on to coach the University of Memphis and once again secured a top prospect. This time it was an athletic young guard from Chicago named Derrick Rose. Rose would lead Memphis to the Championship game in his sole season, before being drafted 1st overall in the NBA Draft. Once again after his selection in the draft, Rose's recruiting circumstances began to come under question. The NCAA sent a letter to Memphis a month after the end of the season stating that his SAT score from high school was invalid. They questioned whether he had taken the test himself, and thus should have been ineligible to attend Memphis. They also suggested that Memphis had known of this cheating and looked the other way. After a thorough investigation, the one season that Rose had played was vacated[56]. Once again, Calipari stated that the sanctions were unfounded and that he had known nothing about any cheating. But by the time Calipari finally arrived at Kentucky in 2009, there did seem to be a pattern that followed him. Despite what he said, he seemed ready to do anything for his team to achieve success.

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[55]Hock, Jonathan, director. *One and Not Done*. *ESPN+*, ESPN Films, 2017, https://www.espn.com/espnplus/catalog/d3c9b0d7-4d9a-4f77-808c-9befadab300f/one-and-not-done.

[56] Hock, Jonathan, director. *One and Not Done*. *ESPN+*, ESPN Films, 2017, https://www.espn.com/espnplus/catalog/d3c9b0d7-4d9a-4f77-808c-9befadab300f/one-and-not-done.

A part of that success seemed to also include following through on his promise of sending these young Black men to the NBA, and of being part of life changing money for them. This might be one of the reasons that Calipari and many other high level coaches can reckon with cheating when it comes to recruiting. They may believe that the breaking of the rules can be morally acceptable if it leads to the fulfillment of lifelong dreams for these players. Behavioral Scientist Francesca Gina explored this phenomenon in her 2006 study *Self-Serving Altruism? The Lure of Unethical Actions that Benefit Others*. Gina theorized that people are more likely to cheat if it is understood that their cheating will benefit others. Often this cheating is self-serving in some way, but if they can convince themselves that others are also benefiting they often feel much less guilt. Gina ran experiments where participants were given a set of math problems and a certain amount of money given to them for each problem solved. In the second part of each experiment, they were able to split the money with someone by combining their answers. Gina was able to track how much more likely the participants were to lie about the amount of answers when splitting the money, and thus the hypothesis was proven correct. People have much less problem cheating if they are certain that someone else will benefit from that action. As Gina wrote in her conclusion "The results demonstrate that when the outcome of an individual's dishonesty could benefit another person, the level of individual cheating increased… individuals were more likely to behave unethically when dishonesty benefited others in addition to the self (i.e., the self-and-other-payoff condition).These results suggest that social utility and justification work in concert and that these two factors have an additive effect in

promoting individuals' dishonesty[57]. This idea of receiving a benefit from an unethical

action you've done and then being able to justify this action through it benefitting

someone else seems to be proven through this study. Solely benefiting from the action

or solely helping someone else achieve something does not have the same power on

their own. For coaches like John Calipari they genuinely believe they are giving a

life-changing opportunity to these kids, and that any unethical recruiting behavior is

worthy of the final results. They are also aware that they would not be as successful if

not for these same kids, and that both their financial and professional standing relies on

the talents of young Black men. These two factors work in unison and allow many of

these coaches to justify any of their cheating as not immoral at all. If they get a higher

salary through this cheating but in return one of their players is drafted top 5 in the draft,

is there really any issue at all?

Another key pattern of those in this study came in the form of the amount of

italian-Americans who have reached the elite level of college coaching. Coaches like

the previously mentioned John Calipari and former Louisville coach Rick Pitino have

been compared to the mob or mafia in the way that they recruit young athletes. Both are

known for their fancy cars and suits, and an ability to promise that if the athlete comes

to their school, he will be taken care of. This brings forth the idea of identity for

Italian-Americans, and how that identity has morphed and changed throughout the 100

plus years since they migrated. When Italian-Americans initially came to this country,

they were focused on simply surviving in this new place. This meant likely leaving much

of their previous lives behind, trading in a lifestyle of agriculture for one that centered

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[57] Gino, Francesca, et al. "Self-Serving Altruism? the Lure of Unethical Actions That Benefit Others."
Journal of Economic Behavior, vol. 93, 2013, pp. 285–292.,

around more urban places. Initially, there was a feeling that the promise of a better life in America was truly fulfilled as long as you worked hard enough. Unfortunately, the stereotype of Italian Americans was often not one of hard work but instead one of the mafia[58]. The image that the wider American public had of Italian-Americans was one of lawless public and private violence, rooted in an almost psychopathic view of family over everything else. Even if this did not describe the vast majority of Italian-Americans, stereotypes can be quite powerful in their ability to shape a narrative.

The circumstance of being within a new culture and place while also being only viewed in this stereotypical idea created identity issues for many Italian-Americans. It did not allow them to create a true identity around their culture, instead choosing to simply assimilate as a white person within standard American culture. A certain belief that they would not be treated by harassment or racism if they simply assimilated into being another version of a European white immigrant. There would be nothing specific about the culture or identity of an Italian-American person. Through this, if Italian-Americans were not questioning or trying to understand their own identity, they would in no way question or contest the racism against those that did embrace their identity. Groups like African Americans and Jews were heavily targeted because they truly did embrace their identities, and it seemed that Italian-Americans were hoping to avoid that racism through assimilation and a lack of questioning. Even with this assimilation, many Italians still did face racism and harassment, but unlike African American or Jews as a whole did not seem as interested in understanding it or confronting it. The effect that this assimilation had Italian-Americans is described by David AJ Richards in his book *Italian Americans: The Racialization of an Ethnic Identity*.

[58] Richards 220

He specifically compares the way that Black Americans were able to gain a level of clarity in both their ethnic identity and American identity in the way in which they protested the injustices against them. As he writes "This privatized sense of Italian American identity should be contrasted with the very different sense of both African American and Jewish identity… African Americans, consistent with the terms of double consciousness discussed earlier, portested both the terms of the structural injustice that oppressed them (namely, the debased sense of themselves as Blacks) and the defective conception of American nationality that rested on that debasement. Their rights-based protest transformed both their ethnic identity and their sense of American identity"[59]. By actually accepting some kind of specific identity, Richards argues that a group of people can transform one's ethnic identity and through that begin to understand that identity within the framework of America. For Black americans, that means understanding the very specific history of racism including Jim Crow and slavery. It is not a history that is easy to accept, but by accepting this history and protesting the racism that is included in this history, the identities of Black Americans were transformed. This is not to say that the history of African Americans and Italian-Americans are similar in any way, but instead the effect that assimilation can have on a group of people. For Italian-Americans, when faced with the stereotype of a mafia lifestyle or genuine discrimination against them they decided to assimilate. They decided that instead of reckoning with this stereotype, and how it affected their own identities as Americans; They instead aimed to become just one of many immigrant ethnic groups that could be identified as white. Not crafting a specific identity around

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[59] Richards 239

their culture, and instead hoping to reject any notions of lawlessness through assimilation.

This assimilation has allowed Italian Americans to become another group of white people, and that actually helps them in the elite college coaching ranks. With a more established ethnic or racial identity, there may not have been the same opportunities for Italian Americans in these coaching ranks. As evidenced through my study, those that make the decisions at the elite college basketball programs have made it quite clear that they prefer coaches without a strong ethnic identity. So it may be that the assimilation by Italian Americans into a subset of white culture may be the specific reason that there are so many coaches with some kind of Italian background. More than that, the amount of Italians that have gotten opportunities to be high level coaches speaks to this idea that they have fully transitioned into white culture. They are no longer viewed as a specific ethnic group but rather as a type of white person. If there had not been assimilation to such a severe degree, and Italian-Americans had genuinely accepted their ethnic identity, there likely would not be the same number of coaches. There comes a power with this assimilation into a white person, you are no longer a minority and that is reflected in the coaching ranks.

I have established the bias in head coach hiring within high level college basketball, but the next question to answer is the effect that this has on the players. Does the amount of white coaches actually have a profound effect on these players? A way to examine this is through the lenses of Black teachers' effect on Black students, especially in comparison to white teachers. Andre M Price wrote about this idea in his book *Know Your Price: Valuing Black Lives and Property in America's Black Cities*. He

specifically wrote about the amount of Black teachers that were placed into primarily Black schools after Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, LA. He writes that when a Black student is placed with a white teacher after previously being with Black teachers both their studies can suffer. It is less something that a white teacher would be doing, but rather the effect that Black teachers can have on Black students. As Price writes on the effect on Black students test scores "Stanford University researcher Thomas Dee who, the year before Katrina, found that Black students of both sexes who had a Black teacher scored 3 to 6 percentile points higher on standardized tests in reading than those who did not. Dee found a similar increase in the math scores of Black students taught by a Black teacher"[60]. It's very clear that through these studies Black students seem to perform drastically better when their primary teacher in that subject is Black. Price also wrote about how Black teachers also can positively affect the behavior of Black students. According to 2015 research by Adam C. Wright, a professor of economics at Western Washington University,when Black students receive instruction from a greater number of Black teachers, the probability of suspension decreases[61]. In a 2017 study, Wright and his team also showed that students of color placed with a teacher of color were less likely to argue or act out than minority students placed with White teachers[62]. Through the various research presented by Price, it makes it clear that when Black students are taught by Black teachers, both their studies and behavior seem to improve. There seems to be a direct correlation between the race of the instructor and the way that it affects the student. I think this can help to illustrate the

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[60] Perry, Andre M. *Know Your Price : Valuing Black Lives and Property in America's Black Cities.* Brookings Institution Press, 2020. 39

[61] Price 38
[62] Price 39

ways that white coaches could have a negative effect on Black athletes. Even if these white coaches fulfill the mission of sending these players to the NBA, it's fair to wonder if a Black coach may have further improved their skills or taught them things that a white coach would struggle to. Black coaches can speak to an experience in high level basketball that white coaches could never understand, and likely can help prepare them for the NBA through that experience. Much like a Black student's academic development may suffer under a white teacher, it is fair to wonder whether a Black player's development could suffer under a white coach. These players may have the natural ability to reach the NBA, but the development directly before reaching the NBA can be the difference between being a star or someone who is out of the league within a couple years. That is not to say that a white coach cannot develop a player for the NBA, John Calipari is well known for his developmental abilities. But when there is such a lack of diversity among the elite schools in college basketball, it is fair to wonder whether Black athletes would be better served if there were a larger percentage of Black coaches within college basketball.

The other direct result of the lack of diversity among coaches is the Coach as a symbol of authority, especially the power imbalance that can happen between a white coach and Black players. Coaches always have a level of power over their players, and through that are seen as the authority figure. There is a certain power imbalance that occurs between this authority figure and the player, especially when the coach is seen as the one with a level of knowledge on the subject. Peter Welman and Tatiana Bachkirova write about this idea in the book *Coaching Relationships: Putting People First*, writing "The professional status of coaches is closely linked to the image of an

expert in a particular field… The coach's expertise implies knowledge and skills that facilitate the coachee's learning. Being an 'expert' of the process could still give the coach an opportunity to overstretch the coachee, to illustrate their intellectual power unnecessarily and to lead them in a direction that they have not chosen"[63]. The authors are exploring the idea that the coach is able to claim power because of their implied intellectual knowledge on their specific sport. Through being an "expert", they are able to lead the player in whatever direction they deem necessary. This power is further shifted when you view it through the lenses of race. For a white man to have this level of power and authority over Black players is significant. For so many of these players, their reference point for power coincides with whiteness as a whole. When they think of an authority figure it is of a white man, and that is something worth noting. Throughout this chapter, I have proven the lack of diversity that exists within the coaching ranks of college basketball. More than that, it seems the most common hire is someone who has no experience in demographics outside of white environments. My overall conclusion from this is not that this kind of coach is ruining college basketball, but that more people should be aware of the demographics that exist within the coaching ranks. An awareness may bring actual change, giving better opportunities to those Black coaches and a possibility for better development among the athletes.

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[63] Welman and Bachkirova 46

Conclusion

Through the three chapters within this project, I aim to show the ways in which race and sports culture are connected. Specifically attempting to show the control that white owners and coaches have over Black athletes. I picked three separate ways of discussing this relationship between white authority figures and Black players. With my first chapter, I aimed to relate the modern concept of professional teams owners to slavery within the Antebellum south. It is a purposeful choice to make this claim that involves one of America's most shameful moments. If a comparison between current ownership of players and the ownership of slaves can be made at all, it signifies how flawed the current player-owner relationship is. In my second chapter I aimed to chart a path of how the role of black leadership in coaching has changed through the last eighty years. That this path ends with a white coach assuming the characteristics of a Black coach signifies that there are serious issues in the hiring of Black coaches. The identity of white authority figures is so entrenched within our society that it seems nearly impossible for Black coaches to break that mold. In my final chapter, I chose to do a raw statistical analysis of the kinds of coaches that are hired at the elite basketball schools. As opposed to my previous two chapters, my assumptions in this one were solely based on data. This allowed me to make different kinds of conclusions, and eventually learned that white coaches from rural or suburban areas are often the profile of coach most

selected by these universities. All three of these chapters allow for a different kind of analysis, whether it is comparison or evolution or statistical analysis. Through all of this, it's quite clear that there remains a level of white leadership over Black athletes.

As I think about this project as a whole, I reflect back on this idea of athletes simply "sticking to sports". As a diehard sports fan myself, there can be something that is almost appealing about this idea of sports being completely removed from the rest of the world. Being able to sit down and watch a game that completely removes oneself from the rest of their life is appealing in some ways. Escapes like that are very rare in our current society, and it makes sense for someone to look for that. But if I learned anything from this project, it is to resist that urge. Sports culture is so connected to the world, and as a sports fan it is your responsibility to examine the ways that sports are intertwined with every part of our world. The connection of race and sports is something that should be made very clear to those who are watching it and something that everyone should in some way be aware of. I will still play fantasy football, but from now on a part of me will definitely be aware of the remnants of slavery surrounding it. I'll still enjoy watching NFL games and March Madness in the years to come, but I'll be aware of the inequities that exist within the leadership level of both of these sports. Realistically, I don't think this structure or system will change overnight but I do think a greater awareness among sports fans can be an important first step. The more people that recognize the inequalities that exist within ownership and authority figures may lead to those inequalities not being quite as severe.

It should also be noted there have been positive signs in recent years when it comes to this inequality among authority figures and players. In the last year, both North

Carolina and Villanova have hired Black head coaches. While in the NFL, two Black

head coaches were hired after the lawsuit filed by Brian Flores. These are small

victories and they may not last, but it does aim to show that things may be at least

pointing in the right direction. The problem that remains is that the people making these

decisions are still primarily white and largely hesitant to hiring non-white people. The

fact that there has still never been a Black man to own an NFL team is shocking, and

quite representative of the kind of people that are allowed to own an NFL team. While

74.3% of Division 1 Athletic Directors are currently white. As the Rooney Rule proved,

no set of rules will force people to hire those that they are biased against. So until

changes occur within the upper management levels of these sports, I find it difficult to

imagine we will see genuine changes among the lack of equality between players and

authority figures. My hope is that as more and more people are aware of the lack of

equality that exists within coaching and upper management the more difficult it will be

for it to remain. Awareness does not automatically lead to results, and the current

system within sports likely will not change within the next 10-15 years. But I do have a

belief that both players and teams as a whole would benefit from a more diverse set of

coaches, GM's and owners. Teams and leagues will be better equipped to address

serious issues affecting their players if the racial disparity between players and upper

management is not so extreme. When we reflect on Colin Kaepernick's choice to kneel

and the response by many teams and the league overall, it was clear that not one

person understood the perspective of Kaepernick. In a moment in which a conversation

could have been had about race within the league and the country, instead it seemed

that the league was afraid of upsetting a portion of their fanbase. A larger number of

Black people within the high levels of the NFL could have offered perspective on his decision to kneel. This perspective in turn could have helped approach this unique situation with a more nuanced and balanced view. For a sport where upwards of 100 million people watch the Super Bowl every year, there is a power in the choice of response. That is part of the reason having diversity among the upper management can be important. It is also why I hope that through a greater awareness of these inequalities, things will begin to change in the near future.

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