

Black Labor vs. White Wealth
In
Collegiate Basketball

By

Titus Jerome Jackson

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Thesis Committee:

Dr. Debrah C. Sickler-Voigt, Ph.D

Dr. Don Belcher, Ph.D.

Dr. Aaron Treadwell, Ph.D.

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Abstract

The purpose of this ethnographic study is to explore the landscape of college basketball from a former player's perspective and to focus on labor and wealth in the sport. As history appears to repeat itself, my intent is to show readers this type of ideology has been around for over 400 years. Race has always been a present feature in American society, as we are structured in race hierarchy from white to dark—beginning when the first slave arrived in this country. This hierarchy story has been passed down from generation to generation in the African American community as it took passage during the beginning of slavery. As a young Black kid growing up in the south, I could identify how members of my community would both see and learn this hierarchy rather quickly. This was especially true during the 1970s when I was a kid.

Reflecting on these truisms, one of the things I find most frustrating about us as African American athletes is how as a collective whole, we often underestimate our abilities and talents. We must learn to understand that we are more than just figures that can run and jump for sports. As we are doing most of the labor in college-run programs that produce revenue in the billions; we constantly see a distinction between labor and wealth as it pertains to those who are making the decisions and money. Based on my findings and experience, revenue continues to soar year after year. With so much money that is earned through college basketball, there should be no excuses for former players like me not to graduate with a meaningful degree and seek employment from the very system that is profiting from Black talent. Yet many college players do not graduate with meaningful degrees or, if they do graduate, the education behind that degree is lacking because of the culture that still exists between sports, the people in charge, and the African American athletes who are the force behind the profits.

Puzzling over this conundrum led me to develop the guiding question for this study: Why do African American male basketball players continue to lag in getting a quality education and professional positions within college athletics? We keep hearing it is going to getting better; however, that rhetoric is often used as a cover-up because the issues are the same from when I played college basketball over 30 years ago.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

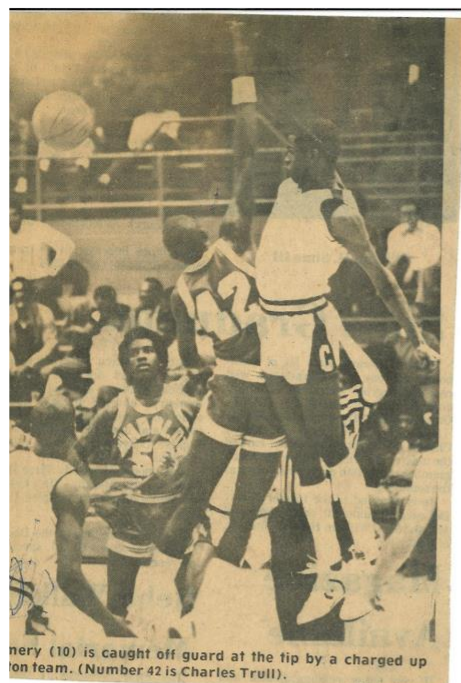


Figure 1.1. Titus Jackson’s high school playing days. *The Covington Leader* newspaper clipping.

The game of basketball, when I first played it as a young child, had an innocence to it. Personally, I enjoyed every step, every jump, every basket—especially during my high school years. As I completed high school, nothing gave me more joy than being recruited to play collegiate basketball (Figure 1.1). The process is like no other in life for a high school junior or senior. Unfortunately, for most teenagers there is a business side of playing basketball that is often shielded—even blatantly hidden—from high school players (Staurowsky et al., 2023) It is often not recognized until we are juniors or seniors in college and only because it is at that time in our career when we understand that playing organized basketball is about to end. We cannot

help but ponder about the people who took advantage of us because of our age, our naivete, and our love for the game.

When I was in high school, the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) was just beginning to take off in the Memphis area. We played in those tournaments when the high school season was over. It only lasted for a few months, which was usually April and May. However, players who are in middle and high school today participate in leagues and tournaments across the country sponsored by shoe and sports apparel companies all during the summer and up until school starts again in August. Coaches in these summer leagues, who once did it for free when I played (at least 35 years ago), are now earning six-figure salaries to coach for two or three months in the off-season. This is something I witnessed firsthand as a high school and collegiate basketball official. Their purpose is to lure players early while they are still in high school, with hopes that the relationship formed with one or multiple players from those camps will continue throughout college.

Players often sign scholarships to certain colleges and universities based on the relationship a shoe company has with that coach. Collegiate basketball can be a huge step up, with the promise of future wealth, for many players. Once a player is in college, he is part of a massive entertainment machine, and he may find himself playing in nationally televised games, interviewed for worldwide publications, and pursued by fans. Playing collegiate basketball is no small step for a player—collegiate basketball entertains millions of fans every year from November through March. The main attraction being “The March Madness Tournament,” which is the tournament that decides the National College Athletic Association (NCAA) champion in Division I men’s and women’s basketball. If the same player who developed a relationship with a coach connected to a shoe or athletic apparel company just so happens to be the next high-profile basketball star coming out of college and going into the National Basketball Association (NBA), that same company feels as if he is the front-runner for signing a long-term contract to market their brand, based on the history they have with that player. There is no doubt that this is

a cutthroat business when it comes to these types of recruiting tactics and companies will often do what it takes when it comes to helping certain coaches, as I have witnessed. The shoe and apparel companies have a major economic impact across the United States, and with the wealth they generate, certain sections of our society have gotten wealthy.

According to Dr. Billy Hawkins (2010), a professor in the Health and Human Performance Department at the University of Houston:

In the larger scheme of things, sports mirrors patterns of social interaction that prevail in the larger society, and at times it can be viewed as a barometer of racial progress. Intercollegiate athletics is a subculture of the sports industry that similarly reflects and reinforces race, class and gender ideologies that are dominant at the macro level of society. (p. 18)

It is often not just sports that mirrors societal behaviors, as there are other extensions of society across this country that reflect what Hawkins (2010) calls the "racial barometer" as well.

Companies like Apple, Amazon, Nike, and Coke are in business to turn a profit. Sports are in business to turn a profit. Companies like Apple, Amazon, Nike, and Coke sell products. Sports sell products. These products include the labor of the athletes who play the sports. This realization causes me to question: "Do we see their sponsorship mainly because we live in a capitalist society that loves money?" I am not sure.

Joe Reedy (2021), who writes for the Associated Press, maintains that Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS) and Turner Sports paid a combined \$850,000,000 to carry the 2022 NCAA Basketball Tournament. Unfortunately, the labor part of this equation—the players—continues to suffer, mainly at the hands of White men who control the sport. University of Connecticut professor Dr. Joseph Cooper (2019) details this in his book *From Exploitation Back to Empowerment*. Viewing the widespread success in the sporting realms—namely in football, basketball, and track and field across all levels—many scholars have argued that sporting

venues serve more as sites for exploitation consistent with the American tradition of commodifying Black males' bodies for the financial and entertainment benefits of Whites rather than for the collective racial, social, political and economic uplift and sustainability of Black people. It would be easy to disagree with Dr. Cooper (2019), but only if more African Americans were involved in basketball leadership roles as coaches and administrators, and also if more revenue was given back to those same communities the exploited athletes come from. Polite (2011) defines exploitation as "the unfair treatment or use of, or the practice of taking advantage of a person or situation, usually for personal gain" (p. 2). This is an apt definition for how sports venues use Black athletes for their advantage, for financial gain, with little to no return to the athletes or their home communities.

Basketball's Cultures

I personally feel that college basketball has a culture that is different from other sports on college campuses. My bias is probably due to playing basketball at the Junior College and Division I level. Culture is what holds an organization together and motivates the people within it to do the right thing (Meehan et al., 2008). As players, we developed our collective culture in locker rooms, on bus trips, and walking back to our dorm rooms after practice. From day one on campus, we did things in unity, and over time our bond with each other only grew stronger as we were becoming men. If we ate, we all ate together. When we had practice, we would check on each other, making sure no one was late. This is how we as players developed our own culture within the limitations of playing basketball and being students. I still have those same relationships with former teammates today—we all share the same values and experiences, as we journey through life as Black men. We share the same ups and downs, both at home and on our jobs, even though we work in different fields and live in different parts of the country.

According to Coakley et al. (2017), author of the book *Sports in Society Issues and Controversies*, "culture can be described as a shared way of life and shared understanding that

people develop as they live together and once culture exists, it influences relationships and social interaction” (p. 5). It is sometimes amazing how our shared past continues to play a significant part in our lives. I feel as if the culture of basketball showed us how to work through the trials of life. Wins and losses often mirror both the good and bad times of life. Basketball taught us how to grind and never give up in life. This is also something that I learned from my parents and people in my neighborhood when I was a young child. Unlike some youth of today who are more isolated, I was constantly surrounded by people who showed me their wisdom. They took pride in passing that wisdom to the next generation.

At times implementing a winning culture can be difficult and challenging; however, changing how people think can influence behavior as it can be the catalyst for change (Meehan et al., 2008). For a basketball coach, the concept can be simple if the right players are brought together. The players who buy into a particular system can produce wins, while making sure all working parts are aligned. Top programs across the country are able to separate themselves from lower-tier programs based on this idea of developing a winning culture, changing how people think, and influencing behaviors. I only say this because most basketball programs across the country run the same plays. In other words, they often mirror each other more often than not; however, the difference can often come down to a coach getting his players to buy into his system. Often there is a culture within a culture in college basketball, or rather a subculture. For example, a program in the State of Florida might recruit only Florida players, whereas a program in the State of Kentucky will recruit players across the country. For the most part, collegiate basketball players have their own style on college campuses. In other words, this subculture consists of players having their own movement, language, and style. In other words, there is the college basketball culture that operates the same across the country and there is another culture that functions differently at the program levels.

For example, the culture at the junior college I attended had a totally different culture than the culture at the four-year institution where I finished my basketball career. At the junior college

most of the players, like me, were either from Memphis or the surrounding area. Our style of basketball was fast, as we averaged over 100 points per game. We had a Black coach and he often spoke to us in a language that we understood—which was often slang, or a style that Black people spoke around Memphis. We practiced and played college basketball in the same way we often played neighborhood pick-up games—we loved it and he knew it. He was also well respected around Memphis, so his cultural reach went beyond the junior college and into local society. However, when I arrived at the four-year institution, things were different. For one, the coach was White, and his style of basketball was slower, more of a half-court type of style. He talked to us differently, mainly because he could not relate to us, nor could he understand our struggles as Black men both on and off campus. In other words, it is often hard or difficult for a White coach to understand Black kids if he has never experienced life as a Black person—especially because most of the time the only thing we have in common is basketball. However, both coaches understood the value of landing good players and what it meant to their program. Unfortunately, this further describes the culture of collegiate basketball.

What I remember most from my college days is how we stood out on campus—mainly due to our height and body type. We were usually 6 feet 4 inches to 6 feet 9 inches and in the locker room we often used slang, which differed from language we spoke in the classroom.

Recruiting Brings Wealth, But What about A Player's Education?

When it comes to those benefiting from wealth surrounding collegiate basketball, the process often starts with recruiting. It is hard to believe that recruiting was once illegal in collegiate sports. According to Ronald Smith (2011), the author of the book *Pay for Play: A History of Big-Time College Athletic Reform*, "The original constitution and bylaws demanded that each member agree to prevent inducement to athletes to enter college for athletic purpose and to prohibit all but bona-fide students in good academic standing" (p. 53). One can ask: "Why is recruiting so important in today's game?" and "When did the emphasis switch from education to sports?" It was a slow process that grew overtime, as it took decades to take on the structure we see today.

The change really took off when Magic Johnson and Larry Bird played the 1979 NCAA Championship game. Not only could both of them play the game of basketball, but they were also marketable for the sport. It was also a plus that one was Black and the other one was White. Their friendly rivalry lasted years, well into their NBA days, and it was a rivalry that fans and media enjoyed and followed (Ferrucci & Perry, 2015). But has this old rivalry, an example of what—at the time—was a natural extension of two players' talents and not their race, become more insidious? It is worth some thought.

Recruiting success is vital to programs. Strong programs succeed in securing superior athletes and making millions of dollars. Weaker programs suffer by losing games, not being able to fund themselves, and securing less talented players. One of the things that makes the recruiting process so alarming at times is the way Black and White players are recruited differently to play basketball at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs). This is not new in the world of college athletics; for ex-players like me, we see the difference almost every day in our roles as students and players. With an evident lack of concern for young Black males, this process will probably continue to exist in the future. Recruiters often apply more professional recruiting techniques when it pertains to non-minorities. Their main emphasis is education rather than basketball.

Non-minorities often graduate with meaningful degrees and often land higher paying jobs (Adler & Adler, 1991). The obvious counterpoint to this is the recruiting techniques and their emphasis when it pertains to minorities, where the emphasis is on athleticism rather than education and without any real enthusiasm for encouraging minority athletes to pursue meaningful degrees. It is hard not to notice this—and it is something I was able to see firsthand when I played in college.

In my experience, for African American student athletes, the conversation with coaches often pertained to basketball and how to improve as a player, even when the season was over. One would think the conversation would be about the many assignments we missed while playing and how to get those assignments to our professors in order to pass so we could graduate. I never remember a coach talking to me about that or what it would take for me to graduate or how many classes I needed to graduate. Graduation was something I had to pursue for myself. I had to develop self-discipline to do what was required in order to receive my diploma in Agribusiness. I had to have pride in knowing that my work would result in a degree. I often think about teammates who put forth all that work and effort playing basketball for four years to leave school without their degrees.

With regard to the few non-minority student-athletes I played with in college, I can say all of them came from a two-parent household, which is often not the case when it comes to minorities. Two-parent households often bring structure that a single parent home does not (Adler & Adler, 1991; Rowe, 2020). The culture is often different when it comes to minority and non-minority households. As a minority, we often leave home with a different message when it comes to education and how important it is for our future. In many cases we are the first ones in the family to attend college. I can remember the many conversations I had with my mom, as she discussed the history of our family and how she wanted me to be more than a basketball player. Even though she did attend college for one year in the late 1960s, she had to quit because her family could not afford it—even with tuition costing less than \$100 per quarter. The stories of

how there is a difference in the way we are raised and the pitfalls we experience that are different from those experienced by non-minorities are true. I was able to notice a few differences once I went to college. We often had little money, and even after graduating our experience with money was different. Knowing how to purchase what you needed as opposed to getting what you wanted was often difficult. They overlap each other so much, and it was often difficult for me to distinguish one from the other. I struggled with this issue for years. Given these experiences, I feel it is important that we continue to study why there is a difference in recruiting minorities and non-minorities at Predominantly White Institutions (PWI) and the effect that it has on the African American students and our community. According to Cooper (2019), "in many cases no teaching, learning, or completion of assignments are taking place, thus the academic exploitation and fraud at the interscholastic level involves the use of sport as a bait to lure vulnerable Black male athletes away from their native communities and educational spaces that could potentially meet their academic needs at a more satisfactorily level" (p. 66). College was often challenging and frustrating for Black males like me when I first arrived; however, college should have been the most critical component that changed the trajectory of our academic achievement. The reason this is so important is because with all the issues we have in society and within our Black community, a good education can mean the difference between landing a low-skill, low-paying job or a decent job with the possibility to learn and grow, socially and financially. There were former teammates at the university I attended who left school without their degrees and experienced trouble landing jobs as football or basketball coaches, not to mention jobs in the professional sectors.

Education is no doubt the key to success in the world we live in today. This is reinforced by former President of South Africa Nelson Mandela's statement that "[e]ducation is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world" (Strauss, 2013, para. 2). Obtaining a college degree is hard. It requires years upon years of hard work going to class and studying. It is especially hard for non-minority student-athletes who have gotten into college based on their

athleticism but often bring with them less-than-stellar educations from their high schools and confidence issues when working alongside students who arrived at college more academically prepared. There is a perception that is voiced by Adler and Adler (1991), who authored *BackBoards & BlackBoards*: “smart [read: non-minority] athletes feel sports is a means to an end rather than an end itself, while most African American athletes are simply lazy, not wanting to put in the extra work in obtaining a degree” (p. 85). It is not about laziness or effort. For a student-athlete, particularly a minority athlete, it is even harder trying to balance both sports and getting a quality education, and for those athletes with a spotty educational background, the process can be even harder.

Most of the time it may seem that athletes are lazy; however, the attitude of laziness is often a cover-up for not knowing how to be a college student or for one who is not prepared for college courses. College course work is intimidating when an athlete fails to have the basic skills other students take for granted, and it is easier to fall asleep in class or try to find someone who will do the work for you. The main reason why athletes sit in the back of the class is to hide from the professor, but that strategy does not work. As a former adjunct instructor, it was not difficult to notice them regardless of where they sit. It was easy for me to understand that the physical output of playing, or the grueling work of the daily practices are always easier than studying. It is amazing how we will give up the chance of becoming a better student for basketball—a trade we often suffer from as we get older, and we realize at that point it was not worth it. We athletes often get passed through the school system (middle school and high school) at an early age once athletic ability is recognized. When I was in high school, I watched a former teammate go to class and joke the entire time to keep classmates laughing and hide his lack of interest in studying, or perhaps his lack of confidence in succeeding academically, a practice he continues to use to this day. I feel he was only in school for basketball based on the way he carried

himself while in school. But I have empathy for him. If he was like most of us who played high school basketball, we often thought it was the only road to achievement. Anshel et. al. (2009) sums it up well, saying, “In fact, sports has been widely institutionalized as the only path to success for many in the African American community, especially for men” (p. 162).

Integration and Basketball Recruitment Practices

It is difficult to start each day without reading the news or turning on the television to see or hear someone reporting on some type of scandal that is taking place or has happened in collegiate basketball. Minorities have long been a part of scandals in college basketball prior to the 1960s; however, nothing changed college sports in the south like integration (Sokolove, 2018).

Colleges and universities outside the southern states prior to the 1960s had already begun recruiting minorities before integration. With the help of integration and the 1964 Civil Rights Bill, African Americans, as well as other minorities, were given an opportunity to attend PWIs across the United States without being overtly discriminated against (Rhoden, 2006). Top African American recruits after the 1960s were no longer willing to attend Historically Black Colleges or Universities (HBCUs); it was not difficult to understand why—money. PWIs often had better playing facilities, better traveling arrangements to and from games, and larger operating budgets. Top players are often attracted to the best places to perform while competing. They often spoil us at every turn when it comes to basketball and we often forget the most important opportunity in front of us, which is getting an education while we are on those campuses. This is that insidious underbelly of collegiate sports for the Black athlete. Under any other

circumstances, would someone from a PWI university come to our community and offer us such an opportunity? Probably not.

The main contributor in providing free labor to collegiate basketball has been African American males (Copper, 2019). With so much money involved in basketball, coaches and administrators are willing to incorporate illegal acts when it comes to recruiting some of the top basketball players in the country who are usually African American (Cooper, 2019). For example, a university approximately 170 miles north of Nashville was embroiled in a large scandal that involved the recruitment of basketball players using illegal tactics. One of the coaches on the basketball team hired prostitutes to lure respective athletes to sign athletic scholarships. This is a tactic often used on minorities. On one of my recruiting trips, which my parents did not attend with me, I remember going out to bars and being introduced to a very attractive female. I never saw the campus except for the arena where home basketball games were played. However, if either one of my parents had attended that visit with me, I can assure you that the visit would have been different. College recruiters take advantage of our young minds because we often think about things less important to us than education—not knowing how important education really is in our lives and how that importance will only continue to grow as we grow older. My story is not random or unique. We—my fellow athletes—often shared stories about the differences in how we were recruited once we got to college. The more talented athletes received more attention than the less talented ones. Most of the time, non-minorities never joined in that conversation because their recruiting process was more civilized. For example, their parents were often with them, and they had the chance to visit the Biology and/or English Departments, as well as the arenas.

Across the United States, high school and youth basketball have become a year-round sport as they are no longer only played in the fall soon after football season. Previously to its transition to a year-round sport, winter and spring were usually when college coaches got the opportunity to see recruits and it was also when the recruiting process started. Today, the recruiting process is

mostly done over the summer, at elite campuses and sponsored by large shoe companies.

According to Rhoden (2006), “The sports industry is not just a signature aspect of the American way of life but has also become a major component of the American economy” (p. 174). With so much at stake when it comes to recruiting, it is important to take a closer look at this process and see if minorities are being recruited the same as non-minorities. If there is a difference, we should ask ourselves why and the reason behind the differences and, more importantly, what drives college basketball: wealth, labor, or both.

It has been well-documented that most of the time, more talented players come with challenges before enrolling in classes, due to poor academic performance or some other type of issues. More talented players often do less schoolwork in both high school and college because they get a pass for helping the team win more games. A former high school teammate once told me that when his former high school team reached the state finals in basketball, his team completed the least work in the classroom. While in college I noticed the same trend, the most athletic players were the least prepared for the rigors of certain college courses.

The aspect that often gets overlooked the most in college athletics is the fact that the students who need education the most are usually the ones not receiving it. Even if a degree is received after our playing career is over, it is often not earned, due to players either receiving help from special professors of the program or because they are placed in less demanding classes. One can—and should—ask: “What makes one man stand on principle and others sit quietly and accept what is handed out?” (Rhoden, 2006, p. 234). This question is hard to answer because as players we all think differently. What makes one player want more out of his college experience—an education and a promising post-college career—than just playing a sport? In my situation, I wanted my degree, hard work and all, most of the time.

After leaving school, with or without degrees, it is mostly minorities who struggle with common everyday tasks, like finding a job, paying the electric bill, and even reading and writing. It is often hard to believe that this still goes on after a person attends college, but it does. We rarely talk

about these problems anymore because it usually centers around minorities, and after leaving college these players often find themselves moving back to the communities they came from. It's then hard to give back or become stable in a community if there is nothing to give back.

Moving The Ball Forward...

As we continue to look at recruiting practices in college basketball, as this study does, it is easy to recognize how better understanding is needed to address what is going on in collegiate basketball and how recruiting can impact student-athletes for years after their playing careers are over. It is also important to understand the relationship colleges and universities are having or not having with student-athletes as it pertains to education and signing their letters of intent. We need to ask if both participants are abiding by the contract. My review of literature, presented in Chapter 2, will continue to explore these issues.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE: SPORTS AND THE ANALOGY OF PIMPING PLAYERS



Figure. 2.1. The Mack Movie Poster. Fair Use. <https://www.amazon.com/Mack-Max-Julien/dp/B0000696I2>

Remember a pimp is only good as his product and his product is women. Now you got to go out there and you've got to get the best ones you can find and you got to work them broads like nobody ever worked them before and never forget anybody can control a woman's body but the key is to control her mind. You see pimping is big business and it's been going on since the beginning of time and it's gonna go on till somebody up there turn off the lights on this small planet. Can you dig it? (Campus, 1973, Figure 2.1)

The above lines come from a movie, *The Mack* (Campus, 1973), which I remember watching not long after graduating from college. I remember renting this movie, and I was intrigued with it given my curiosities about street life, which I still have to this day. Unfortunately, sports are a mirror of what exists in society. The movie is based in the inner city of Oakland, California, and it details how one man convinces women to sell their bodies for money, while he collects all of the profits. Pimps, as finely illustrated in the movie, wear lavish clothes. The language they speak is known as jive, which can be a combination of slang and jargon. I remember speaking a little jive

with my friends as a kid and I also remember my parents speaking a little as well. They used words like *jive turkey*, *right on*, and *give me five on the back hand side*. Jive was mostly heard in cities like Chicago, New York, and Philadelphia (Chin, 1994; Lettman, 2022). Over the decades since slavery, it is interesting how Black people have added a certain coolness to the English language. English is a language the slaves had to learn in order to fit into plantation life, but they modified it with their own patois in order to maintain their culture (Chin, 1994; Lettman, 2022). My correlation between street pimps and collegiate basketball coaches is how they both use mind control tricks over the lives of people to earn money off the labors of their products. I understand that I could have used a different word, like slavery, to describe both the past and present condition of basketball. However, pimping is a word we often used in the locker room after practice and when we felt someone was taking advantage of us—both on and off the court. A word like pimp, in my opinion, can grab a reader's attention differently than slavery, because we have become so accustomed to hearing the word slavery. The word "slavery" denotes no power and no self-determination, through no fault of our own (Johnston, 2022). "Pimping" works better because while we do have the ability to exercise our own power and self-determination now, situations beyond our control, such as financial needs, allow others to control our psyches. We're the best, yes, but others control our minds and bodies (Johnston, 2022).

Identifying Disparities Among Blacks and Whites

The economic impact of free labor in this country has been unprecedented for centuries, as one race (the White race) has dominated the unjust distribution of wealth and power while controlling important legal sectors in this country (Cooper, 2019). In the larger scheme of things, the purpose of this review of literature is to understand the producer of labor in college basketball, while also understanding wealth and power that comes from the exploitation of people—student-athletes—in collegiate basketball at the Division 1A level across America. According to

Anderson (1994), who authored *Black Labor, White Wealth*, this monopoly of control results directly from centuries of abusive exploitation and expropriation of the labor of a darker race—Black Americans of African descent. One would think being a collegiate basketball player would lead to success for all students considering how colleges and universities stress education. Are their main concerns profits? One must ask. We can only imagine if the system was set up so that Black people could profit at the same level as their non-minority counterparts. Players and their families should be granted some type of financial benefit from the revenue that is generated in today's college game (Staurowsky et. al., 2023).

It is also important to note that beyond basketball courts, our society passes laws and labels corruption and crime in one area, namely Black communities, but makes many of the same activities legal within the political system in a different area of our society, namely White communities (Cooper, 2019). As in college basketball, the discrepancies are based on who is affected and who benefits. For example, two people can commit the same crime or have similar corruption cases against them, but based on skin color and other variables, the punishment is never the same (Cooper, 2019). Namely, people of color go to jail for years, while the other person (typically White) walks free (Hawkins, 2010). We should ask ourselves: “How is this not a form of corruption and what are its connections to the unequal treatment of Black athletes?” Rhoden (2006) asserts that sports serve as an ideological symbol for America as an integral aspect of the U.S. economy; hence, the creation of the conveyor belt is designed to streamline the extraction of the talented Black male athlete from Black communities to White-controlled, identified, and dominated sporting spaces. Rhoden (2006) linked the current condition of college athletics to acts similar to slavery and other unethical conditions that surround collegiate basketball (Hawkins, 2010; Rhoden, 2006). I understand that playing collegiate basketball is totally different from picking cotton or working in the fields; however, the purpose here is to describe how some aspects of life have remained the same, such as control, wealth and power,

and who has it. It is interesting to observe how one plantation has been replaced with another—from the cotton field to the football field and the basketball court (Hawkins, 2010).

It would not be surprising to learn that the culture in college basketball originated some 400 years ago when the first slave arrived in Jamestown, Virginia (Anderson, 1994). The platform was set in motion long before the sport of basketball was ever invented.

Many of the early immigrants' groups established "cultural riches" or turf control over certain public sector jobs, business, and vocations. When these groups cornered niches, they then had avenues for providing employment, business and political opportunities to incoming members of their group. (Anderson, 1994, p.

11)

For example, in fall 2016, "75.8 percent of presidents at the 128 Football Bowl Subdivision colleges were White men, as were 78.9 percent of athletics directors. About 7 percent of athletic directors were women, and all of them were White. Nearly 90 percent of faculty athletics representatives were White, as were 87.5 percent of head football coaches and 100 percent of conference commissioners" (New, 2016). Nevertheless, the strength and driving force of most athletic departments are its athletes. With good players, programs have the ability to win games, which can lead to large financial gains. What holds an organization together and motivates the people within to do the right thing rather than the easy thing? The answer, for many top-performing companies, is culture-values, mindset, and behaviors that constitute an environment conducive to success (Meehan et al., 2008).

Wealth in Sports and The Plantation Mentality

In the larger scheme of things, it is important to understand wealth and how it works within American society. What is wealth?

This definition obviously includes everything whether material or intellectual, whether tangible or otherwise, which contributes to the advantage or pleasure of mankind and of course includes the benefits and gratification derived from religion from morals, from political and civil liberty from oratory, from instructive and agreeable conversation from music, dancing acting and sources. (Anderson, 1994, p. 32)

Anderson's (1994) research addressed the connections between wealth and politics:

Together wealth and politics represent a potent combination of powers, because they are versatile and by working together they can provide other forms of power too. They are the root cause of racial stratification, exploitation and the unequal distribution of resources. (p. 32)

In turn, the financial side of sports is no different than any other business, as the culture is often the same, a point driven home by Meehan et al. (2008): "Installing a winning culture can be a tough challenge, as it requires changing how people think about the company and altering habitual behaviors" (p. 2).

What often distinguishes revenue sports from non-revenue sports is the expectation of the money that will be generated and the players who represent non-revenue sports (mostly white). Sports like tennis and golf are non-revenue sports. Basketball is a revenue-generating sport. According to studies by Dr. Shaun Harper et al. (2018) of the Center for the Study of Race and Equity in Education, African males represented 64.3% of Division I basketball players in 2012, which should not surprise anyone who follows college basketball. Universities often spend millions to recruit players. From 2006-2007, one Southeastern Conference (SEC) school spent over \$2 million in recruiting while two others spent \$1.4 million and \$1.3 million respectively

(Hawkins, 2010). In 2014 the NCAA Men's Basketball Tournament paid the SEC over \$314 thousand (Hobson, 2014). This is a far cry from the times in which recruiting was illegal. Adler and Adler (1991) articulated, "This world is the intricate result of complex, interdependent factors and people, of all whom operate to fulfill their own needs and ends. The way these factors come together creates the composite that is big time college athletics" (p. 26).

The history of wealth from the hard work of slaves was established in 1786 when the framers of the Constitution laid the legal foundation for a Black-White wealth and power imbalance by: (1) counting Blacks as three-fifth of a person; (2) postponing for years the effective date for outlawing the slave trade; and, (3) obligating the government to defend fugitive slave laws and to use its forces to suppress Black insurrections and violence (Anderson, 1994). Similar to the governing body in those times, the governing body of the NCAA can at times operate likewise in the same capacity, setting the rules and determining what is legal or illegal based on its own interest. This is also called a plantation mentality (Flaherty, 2018; Green, 2007; Rhoden, 2006). Plantation mentality is a metaphor because that quest for power began with the attempt to assert control over individual lives and freedom in the hellish years of literal bondage (Rhoden, 2006). Hawkins (2010) stated:

In order to negotiate strategies to navigate successfully in this current culture of intercollegiate athletics, it is imperative that young Black athletes understand that the playing field and arenas at these institutions have replaced the cotton and tobacco fields once worked by our ancestors. (p. 40)

According to Rhoden (2006), the plantation is where the Black athlete's dramatic march through history began, and to understand the plantation is the beginning of understanding the present dilemma. The Black male slave was valued for the strength and agility of his body, his ability to perform at top levels for hours on end, and his financial value to his owner. The Black student-athlete is also valued for the strength and agility of his body, his ability to perform at top levels

for hours on end, and his financial value to his institution's athletic program (Edwards, 1985).

Thus, the plantation mentality still exists in both college and professional sports. Examples of this mentality can be seen all over sports, not just in basketball and football.

Just as a healthy, top-producing Black male slave was an asset to his owner and was not likely to be sold, so, too, is the top-scoring Black athlete not likely to be encouraged to pursue educational interests at another university, despite the fact that schools operate with transfer portals that allow student-athletes to change schools. For example, The University of Georgia football coach Kirby Smart recently signed a \$112.5 million contract extension that expires in the year 2031 (*CWEB*, July 21, 2022). The transfer portal for athletes has made his job difficult because now players can move to different colleges and universities similar to coaches, who relocate for higher salaries. Unfortunately, Smart feels the players he recruits should stay committed to his program at Georgia while he continues to make millions. Since 1999, Coach Smart has coached at eight different places until making it back to Georgia, where he played college football (University of Georgia, 2022). It is fair to assume he moved around for better opportunities and a larger salary. This way of thinking continues to show how the same circumstance can be looked at differently depending on where you are and how you are benefiting from sports. Yet the athletes are not encouraged to move for better opportunities, particularly the high-achieving athletes—in fact, they are often discouraged from seeking a better-fitting program. It is the same ol' attitude—do as I say and not as I do. The same attitude can be seen in professional sports as well. The former owner of the Los Angeles Clippers of the National Basketball Association (NBA), Donald Sterling, expressed the same mentality when he said, “I clothe them, I feed them, I give them money, I give them a car, I take care of them” (Rhoden, 2006).

To truly understand this plantation mentality, our first twelve presidents owned slaves at some point in their lives and eight out of the first twelve owned slaves while in office (The White House Historical Association, 2023). The only exceptions were John Adams and his son John Quincy

Adams, who opposed slavery. The third president, Thomas Jefferson, owned over 600 slaves, the most of any president. What is so astonishing about his presidency is the fact that he worked tirelessly to establish a new nation founded upon principles of freedom and egalitarianism (The White House Historical Association, 2023). Jefferson is also the principal author of the Declaration of Independence. From our history we can understand why pockets of our past look similar to the way we live today, as we cannot escape it, not even in sports. Unfortunately, African American athletes blinded by a lack of knowledge or understanding of the history of what preceded them have played a major role in helping maintain an unfair corrupt destructive system (Rhoden, 2006, p. 7).

The Need to Move Beyond Free Labor

The most important aspect of financial fortune in college basketball is its players along with the free labor that players provide. It is unfair to say players are receiving a free education with the amount of money that is being generated from playing basketball. Outside of scholarship money, nothing goes to players—they are an unpaid workforce (Sokolove, 2018). During my years of playing collegiate basketball, we were often brainwashed into thinking we were getting a free education. The question we should have been asking was, “If it is so free, why are we the only ones not getting paid?” Anderson (1994) noted:

“The sport industry is not just a signature aspect of the American way of life, but it has also become a major component of the American economy. In other words, families throughout this country depend on college basketball to survive, as it clothes, feeds and provides shelter.” (p. 10)

Within any other part of our society this would be illegal and unlawful. Based on the financial impact of free labor that exists in college basketball, would it be fair to compare these actions to a form of organized crime? I address this only because the NCAA is a non-profit organization that generated between 4 and 6 billion dollars in 2018 (Sokolove, 2018).

In the book *Backboards and Blackboards*, Patricia and Peter Adler (Adler & Adler, 1991) provided a detailed analysis about how the collegiate basketball system operates and described how athletic departments exploit players—as different coaches and administrators seek to fulfill their own needs. The exploitation in college athletics cannot continue at a pace that seems to hide behind tuition, books, and room and board, while people in the establishment are benefiting to a far greater extent than the athletes. Unfortunately, for the many basketball players across this country, the vast majority of those in administration set the rules, make the decisions, and earn millions of dollars from labor supported mainly by African American males. There is absolutely no denying the facts that continue to be researched on a daily basis regarding what is taking place in collegiate sports when it comes to labor and wealth. Unfortunately, the ideology for the vast majority with the power and control constantly reminds us how the plantation mentality still exists. While we concentrate on the exploitation of labor, we often forget about academic exploitation (Gatmen, 2011).

The Myth of the Free Education in College Basketball

Education is important to Black communities. Based on my own experiences and review of literature, I question why athletes' educational needs are not placed at the forefront by college sports administrators and coaches, as education is touted as the main purpose of higher education. According to Professor Hawkins (2010), "Education has always been valued in the Black community. The value we place on education pre-dates Blacks' existence in the United States. Scholars of ancient African civilization have well documented the value these dynasties have placed on education" (p. 32).

A concern that often comes to my mind given our free labor and reduced educational opportunities is how we are put on a form of factory conveyor belt and passed down the line. Or, perhaps these actions can be viewed as replicating the plantation mentality—use the product, the Black person, until there is no more use for it and replace it afterwards. With these concerns in mind, it is somewhat confusing how education and more importantly “Free Education” is preached to so many high school basketball players across the U.S. as they are recruited. In fact, the likelihood of an African American player developing significantly in his intellectual or scholarly pursuits over a four-year period with limited academic skills is low (Cooper, 2019). The existence of an academic achievement disparity between Black males and their White counterparts in American public education is undeniable, uncontested, and persistent (Epperson, 2015). The need for a strong education is important and it is fundamental for everyday life. Reading and writing are vital. According to Aronson (2004), “If people are serious about addressing the underlying factors which contribute to Black male underperformance, they must think complexly about these factors and analyze them to find a way to address the factors” (p. 45). Depending on who is paying attention, it can be perceived that Black males are in trouble, especially because we have to be more than the labor aspect of collegiate sports. In 2014, Mary Willingham found from her doctoral research program that half of the 183 football and basketball player participants in her study were reading between fourth and eighth grade levels (Cooper, 2019). This goes back to my earlier question: “Under what other circumstance would a major university admit a Black male student who only reads at a fourth or fifth grade level?”

Navigating the K-16 Education System

We should also ask what is going on in our K-12 school systems and what policies are being implemented to educate our kids, mainly our Black male kids? That answer depends on who you ask. It was not until I became an adult that I noticed that we do not have enough African American male teachers in the K-12 school system for one. According to the National Teacher and Principal Survey (Taie & Lewis, 2022), Black male teachers accounted for 1.3% in grades K-12 in the 2020-2021 school year. People who often look like each other relate better with each other based on similar life experiences. We as little boys often have an inner anger and frustration engendered from generations of both subliminal and overt discrimination, familial or financial difficulties, socio-cultural issues in our neighborhoods, and the knowledge that sports may be our only way out. Most non-minority teachers and administrators do not understand our anger and frustration, and this could be a reason why the system deals with us in a way it does not deal with little White boys, including harsher punishments, higher rates of suspension, and less attention to our academic needs (Epperson, 2015). Unfortunately, by the time we reach college it is often too late, knowing we have been passed through the system and/or not been given equal treatment. While never recognizing what has happened until it is too late, we often feel as if we have beat the system and that is so far from the truth. It is often us as Black males who leave our K-12 education and college cheated out of an education that has real-world value—value that improves our futures and the futures of our dependents.

One can only guess how an athlete feels as he is sitting in a college class with students who have a stronger K-12 academic background and who understand what is being taught. From personal experience, it is intimidating because the professor can have a dialogue with certain students in class that is difficult for students of different cultures and ethnicities to understand. It seems like they are speaking their own language and those outside of their group are out of the loop. In certain situations, I felt different from my classmates at junior college and the four-year institution I attended. These situations fostered my sense of resiliency and self-efficacy

(Bandura, 1997) when it came to schoolwork, because I wanted to graduate. I sought out the support I received from my family and teachers. My village consisted of Black and White teachers. I had teachers throughout middle school and high school who actually cared about my future.

Moving The Ball Forward...

This review of literature presented scholarly publications and news features that focus on labor, wealth, and education and their implications for Black collegiate athletes. I applied the analogy of pimping to identify the inequities and lack of control Black players have experienced with regard to their own education. My next chapter on research methodologies builds on the topics and self-reflections addressed in my introduction and review of literature.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to examine collegiate basketball from a former player's perspective, my own, and to better understand the culture of intercollegiate basketball. I have applied ethnographic (Harrison, 2020) and autoethnographic (Ellis & Adams, 2020) methods combined with a systematized review of literature (Trent & Cho, 2020) to guide this study. As my previous chapters have articulated, furthering one's education is the central focus and main reason why most students go to college; however, this is different for most Black males who play college basketball. Being a college athlete can be extremely challenging. Athletes carry the pressures of having to perform both academically and athletically. While the focus on working with college athletes should center on education, unfortunately, the emphasis is primarily on playing due to the wealth revenue sports generate from the free labor of college athletes. Given my concerns about the massive educational and financial gaps Black athletes experience as enormous revenues are generated at their costs in college basketball, the guiding research question I have designed for this study is: "Why do African American male basketball players continue to lag in getting a quality education and professional positions within college athletics?"

Qualitative Research Design

Qualitative research offers a relevant investigative method for generating practical understandings about this thesis' explorations on Black labor versus White wealth in collegiate basketball. Patricia Leavy (2020), professor of sociology and editor of the book *The Oxford Handbook of Qualitative Research*, described qualitative research as an "engaged way of building knowledge about the social world and human experience and qualitative researchers are enmeshed in their projects" (p. 1). Based on my personal background and my ongoing

interest in college basketball, I have chosen ethnography as the primary research method to guide my qualitative study and have also integrated aspects of auto-ethnography into my research methodologies.

Ethnography

Ethnography describes the culture and customs of people; it also provides the framework for recognizing and describing how people make order out of sheer chaos (Harrison, 2020). In the scheme of things, college basketball has its own culture—hence the importance of this ethnographic study—because it is different from other sports on college campuses. This is mainly due to its distinct type of athletes. My entire high school team was composed of African Americans and my Junior College team only had one White player out of 15. Basically, no other college sport roster is filled with more African American players than basketball, which is often why we are different. According to Hawkins (2010), Black players comprised 58.9 percent of the 2005-2006 NCAA Division I basketball season.

When conducting an ethnographic study, it is important to understand that the research is prepared by a person who is an observant as well as a participant. “The process of ethnography, from initial hypothesis through planning, fieldwork, synthesis of data and writing, represented several years of a person’s life” (Sands, 2002, p. xx). Fortunately for me, I get a chance to include the sport of basketball in this research and from an autoethnographic view.

According to Sands (2002):

“Doing good ethnography is more than recording behavior through a video lens or microphone, catching behavior in a snapshot, or describing it in a notebook. Doing good sports ethnography demands more than just reading one of the many textbooks on ethnography and applying its concepts.”

(p. xxi)

An insider perspective of this ethnographic culture brings validity, allowing me to tell a story of basketball based on my own experiences and the experiences of others like me. I want to educate the reader that we are not as dumb has all too often been portrayed in dominant culture.

Autoethnography

Autoethnography is an analytic, research genre, and form of writing that explicitly connects a researcher's lived experiences and perspectives to the social and cultural world in which they exist (Ellis & Adams, 2020). Extending beyond more common autobiographies and memories, autoethnographies fall within reflective ethnography with rich narratives that evoke emotion from the reader, while also requiring the researcher to critically examine the recursive relationship between themselves and historical events, social structures and cultural practices (Denzin, 1997; Ellis & Brocher, 2000). Simply put, autoethnography is an effective research tool that describes events as they happen. It leaves less room for interpretation.

Linking ethnography with autoethnography, my study is based on the premise that who is better qualified to tell a story about labor and wealth in college basketball than someone who played, like me? This has been an issue in my life for many years. I am looking at this study from my personal perspective but with the overlay of researched data and professional analysis, I can present a multi-layered report. My graduate studies have given me an outlet to formalize the feelings I have had, along with conversations with former teammates and educators.

Autoethnography is appropriate because I played high school and university basketball. I am an insider; I understand the culture; and, I have received its benefits and experienced its negativities and struggles. I have accessed my own artifacts, including scrapbooks, photographs, newspaper clippings, and other sentimental keepsakes as data sources to teach others.

Systematic Review of Literature

My ethnographic study with its autoethnographic connections is strengthened by my systematized review of literature that infuses quantitative and qualitative data into my study. Furthermore, the works I have referenced support the personal reflections and interpretation addressed within this study. My inclusion of a systematized review of literature includes the elements of a systematic review of process. To understand my research subject more fully, I have immersed myself in readings from journals and books written by respected sports writers, such as Drs. Hawkins (2010), Cooper (2019), Southall et al. (2013, 2015, 2023), and others. These readings have helped me see this study from perspectives outside my own, which adds greater validity to my research. I have also incorporated data from university and sports websites, as they are applicable to understanding contemporary trends, behaviors, and finances in collegiate basketball.

Background

After spending years playing basketball every fall from middle school to college, my observations, experiences, and personal involvement are highly suitable for describing the culture of college basketball. Not only did I compete in basketball as a player, I became a basketball official at the high school, college, and professional levels (NBA). I also worked as a basketball referee due to the love I have for the game. I did not want to become a coach because I wanted more out of life than being around basketball every day. As a former basketball player and official, I feel my experiences are essential for not only telling a more compelling story, but also to provide a more authentic story for other players who have not had a chance to voice some of the same concerns as mine. Because labor and wealth are the main concerns in collegiate sports, the public, unfortunately, often overlooks the quantity of

uneducated male athletes the sport leaves behind. For most colleges and universities, the educational system has a double standard when it comes to educating African American players (Cooper, 2019). The reality is that an uneducated African American male does not have the same opportunities as a non-minority. According to Superintendent of Humboldt City Schools Dr. Janice Epperson (2015), “The existence of an achievement disparity between Black males and their White counterparts in American public education is undeniable, uncontested and persistent. Black males face both socioeconomic and educational challenges that drastically affect their performance in school” (p. 34).

Settings

The settings that are relevant to this study include the places where I lived, studied, and played basketball. I grew up and graduated high school in Covington, Tennessee, and I went to Junior College in Memphis. I finished my playing career at a four-year institution located less than 50 miles from downtown Nashville. These experiences have deeply impacted my role as a researcher for this study. I have chosen to focus on my own experiences from grade school through high school (1980-1987) and up until the present time. When I began this journey, the game of basketball was nothing more than a game to me. As I was tall for my age, it was only natural that I played basketball. Ironically, baseball was my first love. I admired players like Reggie Jackson and Dave Winfield of the New York Yankees. During that time, I enjoyed reading the sports section at home, and I can remember my mom telling me how she appreciated me reading the paper –even though it was the sports section. By the time I reached high school in Memphis, I knew I could attend college on an athletic scholarship. Unfortunately reflecting back on my experiences, I feel as if I did not maximize my talent as a student and as a player. I only did enough to just get by. That way of thinking came back to haunt me in so many

ways in my early years of life. Not only was it because I did not attend the school I wanted, I also did not achieve the proper education that I needed. Even though I graduated college with a decent education, I regret not being a better student. Despite this, I was determined to graduate with my degree mainly because my mom constantly preached how she wanted me to attend college because she did not have the same opportunities that I did. My family was not financially strong. We were not rich and certainly understood poverty.

Even though it has been 36 years since I graduated high school, I still stay connected to basketball by attending both college and professional games and occasionally high school games. From an early age my interests were players' stats, like points per game, block shots, and rebounds. However, by the time I reached college, my interest shifted toward the issues, problems, and controversies surrounding the game of basketball. Unbeknownst to me at the time, my thinking was an example of sociological studies in sports.

When I became a firefighter after my college graduation, I was determined to go back to school to further my education. For various reasons, playing collegiate basketball as an undergraduate did not allow me time to concentrate on being a good student. Plus, I wanted more. My journey started by driving from Murfreesboro to Memphis to attend classes for my master's degree in Sports Management. A class taught by Dr. Southall changed my trajectory. After graduating with a master's degree in Sports Management, I knew I wanted more, especially after learning about scholars like Dr. Billy Hawkins and Dr. Fritz Polite. College professors who looked just like me—two African American men who shared the same interest that I had in sports. They wrote about issues from an African American standpoint that often get overlooked. Having earned my first master's degree, I took a break from college and then decided to pursue a master's degree in liberal arts with an emphasis in Sociology.

Scope

The scope of this study is derived from my experience as a basketball player from grade school in the 1980s through college in the 1990s and now 2020s and spans to the present day. My scope also addresses the challenges we—African American athletes—face. We often get so caught up in playing, we forget to look beyond playing because our time is limited to the four years of playing collegiate ball after high school. We are usually 22 or 23 years of age. I have watched the game of basketball metamorphose to what we see today. Even though some things have changed within the game, a lot of what I have witnessed in the game has remained the same over the years.

Data Analysis

I analyzed both qualitative and quantitative data to identify my thesis's major themes. As my study includes autoethnographic research (Ellis & Brocher, 2000), I documented my lived experiences spanning from my childhood through my university studies and on to my contemporary professional life. My documented personal qualitative data includes my self-reflections, a personal scrapbook with images and news clippings, and examples from visual culture that inspired me, including the movie *The Mack*. I combined my lived experiences and ways of knowing with my systematic review of literature to understand the ethnographic culture of collegiate basketball. Using coding (Saldaña, 2020), I was able to break my data into relevant themes and present clear understandings about the disproportionate differences between Black labor and White wealth in collegiate basketball. I analyzed quantitative data to bring awareness to the multimillion-dollar salaries earned by the top 20 coaches in the country. I also evaluated quantitative data to look at the revenue that the top five college conferences received in one

year. Combining these multiple data sources through triangulation (Bennett, Landahl, & Phillips 2020) enabled me to understand and explain my research question that focused on why African American male basketball players continue to lag in getting a quality education and positions within college athletics. My analysis has provided me with a pathway to present a clear image of what collegiate basketball is today and how it has remained very similar to college basketball when I played it in the late 80s and early 90s.

Moving The Ball Forward...

Moving forward from this review of literature, I will present how I have applied my research data, ethnography, and autoethnography to present the key themes that emerged in this study for interpretation. They include:

1. Moving Beyond the Plantation Mentality
2. Transformative Education Cultivating College and Career Readiness
3. Salaries and Profits
4. Misconceptions of Black College Basketball Players

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

This study focused on the labor and wealth in collegiate basketball at the Division I level. Specifically, this study has examined the salaries and experiences of mostly uneducated African American players and the revenue that is generated from their free labor. Unfortunately, this cycle has been in place for decades and based on the current condition in college basketball, as addressed in my review of literature, and seems as if the *status quo* is here to stay. Why we would expect those at the top of the apex would want the current situation to change if they are ones that benefiting from what is currently taking place? Based on current data and literature, the NCAA and some of the top conferences are generating so much revenue they do not know what to do with the money (Southall et al., 2023). For African American players, the ride has never been free: “You give us your athletic ability, we give you a free education, is a bare faced lie concocted by the white sports establishment to hoodwink athletes, white as well as black” (Edwards, 2018, p. 21). The chapter presents the results of my study and demonstrates how profitability in college basketball has continued to surge year after year at the expense of mainly African American players.

Moving Beyond the Plantation Mentality

It is often difficult to understand why collegiate basketball is not making a more conscious effort to move its Black athletes beyond the debilitating plantation mentality that prevents Blacks from asserting control over their individual lives—especially in regard to educational achievements and financial stability (Flaherty, 2018; Green, 2007; Rhoden, 2006). We consistently see the plantation mentality year after year in sports—and not just in college basketball—due to Black athletes not receiving fair compensation for their work and the lack of Black leaders in top

coaching and administrative positions. On the surface, it is hard to argue that young Black men are not in a more favorable position than ever before on PWI campuses by playing basketball. Scholarships, housing, meals, academic help—these resources all appear as sound practices and helpful to the athletes from an outside perspective. However, and more importantly, we should be asking “At what price?” and “How are non-minorities doing?” when considering if things have gotten significantly better for minority players. What I have found consistent within my review of literature that includes Cooper (2019) and Hawkins (2010), scholars that I consistently follow, is that college basketball still needs reform. They argue that reform requires serious attention to changing the current landscape, while also holding administrators, coaches, universities, conferences, and the governing bodies responsible for unfair treatment across the landscape of college basketball (Cooper, 2019; Hawkins, 2010).

Since most of the large colleges and universities rely on special admitted students—students recruited and admitted often solely for their athletic abilities—to stock their programs, some accountability should be in place (Rhoden, 2006). Unfortunately, when preference is given to an athletic recruit who would not normally meet admission standards, that recruit begins at a deficit in the academic realm of the classroom. We have too many young Black men who are having a difficult time trying to maneuver their way around college campuses, especially considering the challenges they may face in their classes. This happens far more often than outsiders realize. “For example, The University of California in 2004 reported that 95% of its freshman football players on scholarship were special admitted, compared with 2% of the student body” (Hawkins, 2010, p. 178). This brings me back to a statement I made earlier in this paper. If not for revenue sports, would it be logical for PWI to admit students—mainly African American males—who are unprepared for rigorous academic classes?

Dr. Cooper (2019) demands answers to a similar question in his book *From Exploitation Back to Empowerment: Black Male Holistic (Under Development Through Sports and (Mis) Education*, saying,

If the skill sets were reversed, would a Black male who possessed athletic skills at a fourth-grade level be offered a scholarship to participate on a Division I athletic team and asked to perform immediately or on par with their peers (which is the case when the scenario is academic in nature?) p. 78

Dr. Cooper (2019) also raises another important question on why college basketball needs reform.

How many Black males who are not athletes and read at a fourth-grade reading level would be admitted to prestigious Division I institutions where the admission standards for the general student body are highly competitive and selective? (p. 78)

If college sports are serious about establishing reform and making the landscape fair for all students-athletes, the powers-that-be would redirect their marketing as it pertains to supporting student athletes, how it is not a big business, and other propaganda techniques used to misinform the public (Southall & Staurowsky, 2013).

Reform also consists of athletes taking a stand and not waiting on administrators. Student athletes must advocate for themselves. In 1992, the University of North Carolina decided it wanted to bring awareness to its Black student body by constructing a Black Cultural building. It was not until Black athletes threatened to boycott playing football that they received the attention of the then-President of the University and other administrators on campus to satisfy this need

(Rhoden, 2006). This example reinforces how the strength of athletes beyond the football fields and the basketball arenas should never be underestimated when it pertains to reform.

As a former student-athlete, I have experienced how we often allow a coach or an administrator to guide us in the direction in which they want us to follow, particularly when it comes to academic and personal choices. Often many of them end up talking us out of advocating for better conditions, as they tell us: “You don’t want to do anything that will hurt the team.” There are other times in which administrators think the issues or problems will simply go away by not responding. An example of this concerned the University of Missouri (UM) Football team in 2015. Amidst racial tension and systemic racism, African American students on the UM campus tried asking President Wolfe for help with addressing these issues. They did not receive a response until an African American player from the football team came across and joined a peaceful demonstration put on by minority students (Gass, 2015). One football player turned into 30 African American players on the team getting involved (O’Malley, 2015). The protest ultimately expanded to include the entire team. Unbeknownst to President Wolfe at the time, his nonresponse probably cost him his job (Dresner, 2015; Gass, 2015).

The football team became involved due to President Wolfe’s decision not to respond. They took a defiant stand and asked for President Wolfe’s resignation. If he did not resign, they stated they would not play in the upcoming game against Brigham Young University (BYU) in Kansas City Missouri (Maese, 2015). By not playing the game, the UM would have to pay a \$1 million forfeit fee to BYU. Furthermore, when 30 African American football players announced their refusal to play another game until Wolfe resigned, the clock began ticking (Azara, 2015). Their collective stance and unity had impactful results. Not only did President Tim Wolfe resign, but the UM Chancellor also resigned under pressure from the governor (Suggs, 2015).

With limited community cultural wealth (CCW), it is important that Blacks and other groups overcome variables by leveraging information resources and other shortcomings by working together (Yosso, 2005).

Schools are making millions of dollars from TV contracts on basketball and football programs and most of that money is being generated by great black athletes. Maybe black athletes are finally waking up and realizing how much power they have. (Rhoden, 2006, p. 212-213).

So, how do we move past the Plantation Mentality in college basketball and collegiate sports? A transformative education part of the answer.

Transformative Education Cultivating College and Career Readiness

The greatest resource to a community is its people (Hawkins, 2010). We can often overlook the transformative power of education and how it allows us to move beyond poverty and change our mindsets, including ones programmed by dominant-cultural norms, such as the Plantation Mentality (Yosso, 2005). Analyzing the results of this study, I have identified how education, when done properly, can yield positive solutions for Black student athletes by preparing youth for college and graduating career ready collegiate athletes.

Preparing Students for College

There are many ways we can prepare K-12 Black students for college readiness. One method is to lead by example. Former NBA player Jalen Rose has risen above poverty and positively changed mindsets in the same neighborhood where he grew up in inner-city Detroit by creating

the Jalen Rose Leadership Academy, which prepares 9th through 12th grades students for college (Miller, 2015). What makes his story different from the *status quo* is his investment in his own childhood community. Rose's contributions to students' education and college readiness are so important because he is teaching adolescents from the inner city how valuable their education is to their future. It often takes someone who looks like the students to convince them and build their positive self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). Athletes who go back to their communities are helping impressionable children and adolescents—future college athletes, in many cases—to truly understand the struggle that is often overlooked by others (Miller, 2015). As a former standout athlete in college, who would better understand the plantation mentality in college basketball than Rose? His quest for reform shows how important it is to inform students' ideologies and understandings of cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005).

There is a need for more academically focused charter schools that prepare students for college like Rose's because we have a current trend that is taking place across the country with the emergence of prep schools designed especially for producing revenue-earning athletes. Prep schools have been around for some time; however, over the last three decades their numbers have recently grown because they have little oversight. They allow those who are extremely athletic to concentrate on sports rather than their studies (Cooper, 2019). In so many cases there is limited or no focus teaching or learning, only the exploitation of primarily African American male athletes. "A common pattern across prep and traditional private schools is the prioritization of athletes over academics as it pertains to Black males" (Cooper, 2019, p. 67). With exploitation there is often financial exploitation as well, often from an individual or individuals ready to reap the compensation of free labor (Cooper, 2019). This is why it is important to realize that most charter schools are located in the suburbs, rather than within the inner cities, where they are

needed and might change the way particular groups of children are perceived. The core problem with all of this is the fact that little concern is given to the well-being and futures of the African American male children, some of whom will grow up to become the next collegiate basketball players. Fortunately, Rose has gotten deeply involved and is not waiting for help. He is deeply connected to his culture and environment and understands firsthand the importance of education in African American students' lives. Using examples such as Rose's, the African American community must learn how to educate young men who are preparing to go off to college, especially those going to college to play sports.

Graduating Career Ready African American Collegiate Athletes

Mary Willingham's eight-year study, from 2004 through 2012 (Smith & Willingham, 2015), exposed how young Black males playing collegiate athletics have been consistently taken advantage of and deprived of a proper education. Her research revealed that 183 football players from The University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill read at an eight-grade level and of those players, 10% read below a third-grade level. We need to stop and ask ourselves: "Why is this taking place and, more importantly, why are we allowing this to take place at some of the best colleges and universities across this country?" According to Hodge et al (2008), young Black men participate in a system that is controlled by a hierarchy due mostly to legalized and moralized injustice based on the social construction of race (p. 944). What is even more alarming is how major colleges and universities often discard athletes when their playing careers are over, with few to no skills when it comes time to finding a job (Cooper, 2019; Hawkins, 2010; Rhoden, 2006; Smith & Willingham, 2015).

Unlike when I played college basketball, academic help is available to athletes through a university's academic support team that has a budget ranging from \$1- \$2.6 million to help athletics stay eligible (Southall et al., 2015). Despite the resources provided through academic support and the hard work that it takes to play Division I basketball, even greater advocacy methods are needed to ensure that African American players graduate with their degrees and have the skills they need to be career ready.

In 2013, Harper et al.'s research identified 10 universities with the lowest graduation rates of African American players, with graduation rates spanning from 31-36%. More recently, Heath & Myers (2022) presented 2022 NCAA graduation data that revealed much improved graduation rates: "Over the course of 20 years, significant gains have been demonstrated within the diverse student-athlete population—Black student-athlete graduation rates increasing by 25 points from 56% to 81%... (para. 3)." Cooper (2019) has scrutinized NCAA graduation success rates, calling them fraudulent and racist because they mask the truth. He noted how many Black collegiate athletes are earning degrees in university studies that simply cluster their credit hours as a means to facilitate their pathways towards graduation, rather than helping them graduate with degrees that center on specialized in fields of study that make them career ready.

Eliminating Clustering in Predetermined Academic Majors

One of the most egregious practices in collegiate sports is the clustering of college basketball players into the same classes and majors. Leticia Oseguera (2010), a professor in The Department of Education Policy Studies at Penn State University, described clustering as a form of academic exploitation. Programs often use clustering, the act of purposely grouping students together, to help players maneuver around demanding class loads, and to make it easier when so

much class time is missed for road games and tournaments like March Madness. Unfortunately, clustering is a tool I witnessed my college coach apply regularly. It was shocking to me when he tried to apply it to my studies. The day I had to register, I walked into his office, and like the rest of my teammates, I was handed my class schedule. His major of choice for us was Psychology because he was friends with the professors in that department. As I reflect upon that experience, it seems as if we are conditioned to not think independently as basketball players (or as athletes in general, since this happens with other sports as well) and as Black men. This type of clustering culture demonstrates my coach's and many other coaches' low expectations for Black athletes' academic performances. The coaches' focus remained on thinking, breathing and practicing basketball rather than securing the best majors and classes to suit individual athlete's educational and career needs. For example, a survey found that 83%, 118 out of 142 colleges and universities, had at least one team in which at least 25% of the juniors and seniors majored in one thing and in most cases, these students were on the boys' basketball team (Hawkins, 2010).

The team I played on represented more than 25% of the players clustered in one major. Based on my reflections, our clustering percentage was more than 75% my junior year and 80% my senior year. Less than 45% of my teammates from my junior and senior years combined left college with degrees. In opposition to my coach's recommendation, I graduated college with a degree in agribusiness—a major of my own choosing. What made me different? I knew my athletic talent would only get me so far, and I knew I was not going to play basketball beyond college. Plus, I had the support of my mother. Her high expectations made me want more as a student. There is nothing more frustrating than not having knowledge and being forced into a degree that is not of one's choosing.

Salaries and Profits

Despite its importance, no one likes to talk about money, especially when it comes to athletes, coaches, university athletic programs, the salaries and profits that come out of those programs, and—most glaringly—the evident inequities. Examining the structure of PWIs, we will notice a process that is familiar when it comes to labor and profit as it pertains to college basketball—the Plantation Model (Hawkins, 2010). To illustrate this, Table 4.1 presents the top 20 coaches in college basketball from the 2022 season, their university affiliations, their salaries, and race (Tabalia, 2023). The data on Table 4.1 reveal that the 2022 top-20 coaches’ salaries do not include any African American coaches—the sole beneficiaries from this model were disproportionately wealthy White men. It should be alarming that Black student-athlete labor propels this model of colligate basketball coaching and yet, African Americans are either minimally or not at all represented at the very top (Smith & Willingham, 2015). Ranked below the top twenty salaries, only three African American coaches were recognized, including Indiana University’s Mike Woodson, University of Missouri’s Cuonzo Martin, and Marquette University’s Shaka Smart. Each has a salary of \$3 million. I was surprised when I came across information stating that Virginia coach Tony Bennett only earns \$1 million a year for his longevity bonus. This caught my attention because, as a firefighter, I receive \$60 per year. It has literally taken me 20 years to make \$1200.

Table 4.1 2022 Top 20 Coaches in College Basketball

Sourced from Jedidah Tabalia (2023)

1. Mike Krzyzewski	Duke	\$ 9.7 million	White
2. John Calipari	Kentucky	\$ 8 million	White
3. Jay Wright	Villanova	\$ 6 million	White
4. Chris Beard	Texas	\$ 5 million	White
5. Rick Barnes	Tennessee	\$ 4.995 million	White
6. Bob Higgins	West Virginia	\$ 4.15 million	White
7. Brad Underwood	Illinois	\$ 4.1 million	White
8. Chris Mack	Louisville	\$ 4.0 million	White
9. Bruce Pearl	Auburn	\$ 5.4 million	White
10. Tony Bennett	Virginia	\$ 5.2 million	White
11. Bill Self	Kansas	\$ 5.1 million	White
12. Buzz Williams	Texas A& M	\$ 4.1 million	White
13. Dana Altman	Oregon	\$ 4 million	White
14. Mike Cronis	UCLA	\$ 4 million	White
15. Tom Izzo	Michigan State	\$ 3.9 million	White

16. Larry Krystkowiak	Utah	\$ 3.76 million	White
17. Jimmy Dixon	Texas Christian University	\$ 3.67 million	White
18. Ed Cooley	Providence	\$ 3.4 million	White
19. Scott Drew	Baylor	\$ 3.35 million	White
20. Archie Miller	Indiana	\$ 3.35 million	White

When it comes to jobs in administration within college athletics, just as in coaching, White men are the dominant gender and race. This fact is highly evident at the NCAA's office, located in Indianapolis, Indiana. Table 4.2 shows the top 16 NCAA positions in 2021 based on salary, gender, race, and position. From the 16 employees listed above, 10 out of the 16 executives are White men (63%) and 6 are female (37%). who earn their money from the hard work of mostly football and basketball players. The NCAA is a non-profit tax-exempt organization focused on college sports in the United States with 1,100 member colleges and universities in 102 athletic conferences. In other words, given their prominence, the NCAA is the law of the land when it comes to college athletics (Paddock, 2023). Unfortunately, for the many basketball players across this country, the vast majority set the rules, make the decisions, and earn millions of dollars from labor supported mainly by African American males. There is no denying the facts that continue to come to light what is taking place in collegiate sports when it comes to labor and wealth.

Table 4.2 Top 16 NCAA SALARIES IN 2021

Sourced from Paddock (2023)

SALARIES	NCCA EXECUTIVES	RACE	Gender
1. \$2,991,112	President Mark Emmert	White	Male
2. \$1,761,612	Executive Vice-President Donald Remy	White	Male
3. \$1,389,815	Executive Vice-President Stanley Wilcox	Black	Male
4. \$627,805	Executive Vice-President Katrice Albert	White	Male
5. \$547,054	Senior-Vice President Robert Williams	White	Male
6. \$867,300	Chief Medical Officer Brian Hainline	White	Male
7. \$425,382	Vice-President Theresa Gronau	White	Male
8. \$682,168	Senior Vice President Kathyleen McNeely	White	Female
9. \$602,924	Senior Vice-President Joni Comstock	White	Female
10. \$610,471	Senior-Vice President Daniel Gavitt	White	Male
11. \$549,172	Vice President Jonthan Duncan	White	Male
12. \$417,024	Vice-President David Schnase	White	Male
13. \$545,850	Vice President Kevin Lennon	White	Male
14. \$431,415	Managing Director Scott Bearby	White	Male
15. \$412,948	Vice President Lynn Holzman	Black	Male
16. 383,368	Vice President Nalma Stevenson	White	Male

The data clearly indicate how Black labor from playing collegiate basketball at the Division I level (DI level) fuels the sport's White wealth. For example, during the months of March and April, during March Madness, fans across the country participate in the NCAA Basketball Tournament by filling out their brackets, watching games on television, or showing up at the arenas as fans. "All teams are placed within a 'bracket,' in which they face off against an opponent (based on seeding) in a single-elimination game" (Chien, 2023). Furthermore, 90 percent of the income generated is during these two months out of the year. Only 1 percent of the total student athletes can say that they were the ones who generated this revenue, and out of that 1 percent more than half are Black (Hawkins, 2010). Table 4.3 presents the amount of revenue that the top 5 conferences received in 2019 along with the salary of each commissioner (Barnett, 2020).

Table 4.3. 2019 Revenue Data for the Top 5 Conferences

Sourced from Barnett (2020)

Revenue	Conference	Commissioner	Salary	Year	Race
\$768.9 Million	Big Ten	Jim Delaney	\$5.5 million	2019	White
\$721 Million	SEC	Greg Sankey	\$2.0 million	2019	White
\$533 Million	Pac-12	Larry Scott	\$4.6 Million	2019	White

\$497 Million	ACC	John Swafford	\$3.5 Million	2019	White
\$409 Million	Big 12	Bob Bowlsby	\$4.4 Million	2019	White
Total: \$ 2.9 billion in revenue					

The three elements that stand out consistently are revenue, salary and race. Unfortunately, this is the same trend I witnessed as a player, and it became evident when I tried to seek employment for an administrative job at the university where I had played college basketball. With so much money being generated within the NCAA, it is hard to believe that it is a non-profit tax-exempt organization with 102 athletic conferences (Paddock, 2023). Table 4.3 shows how the top five conferences generated \$2.9 billion in revenue. In 2021, the SEC generated \$833 million, which is an increase of \$112 million in just two years. It is a 15% increase in profit in just two years. As evident in the tables presented in this chapter, our college educational system is using sports as a means of exploitation and profit. “Unfortunately, these opportunities are often smoke screens for academic neglect and athletic exploitation. As a microcosm of the broader U.S. society reifies the devaluation of Black humanity and overall well-being” (Cooper, 2019, p. 86). Tables 4.1-4.3 demonstrate how college sports have become a vehicle through which White NCAA coaches, commissioners, and executives are rewarded with nice salaries from the work of Black college athletes. The data also show how vital Black athletes are as providers for other communities to live comfortably, while the African American communities continue to suffer. Unbeknownst to so many athletes like me, we have been so busy generating billions in jobs, facilities, stadiums, homes, and private educations for others, while African American communities rarely receive a dime from our own labor. According to Hawkins (2010), athletes share similar characteristics

with migrant workers and slaves. Our work can be compared to that of migrant workers because individuals must temporarily relocate from their homes to work at jobs that are controlled by a different race and located far out of reach from their communities (Hawkins, 2010; Southall et al., 2015). Student-athletes (migrant workers) also provide education at a discounted price to athletic department personnel and their family members, since athletes are needed for that department to operate (Southall et al., 2015). In reference to slavery, enslaved persons were purchased and sold to work the fields while providing a profit for the owners and their families, just as African American male college basketball players are separated from family members and recruited to play (work) away from home and to provide for the establishment, like NCAA executives, league commissioners, administrators, and coaches. What emerges from this is how one race and community continue to grow and prosper from the labor of minority basketball players, while the other race and community continues to lag further behind. This is a worsening crisis for Black athletes—evident to many—and yet little is done to address the issue.

Misconceptions of Black College Basketball Players

Dumb, stupid, lazy, can't read, always late, high jumping, alley hoop, always sitting in the back of the classroom, looking like Snoop Dog represent the common misconceptions of Black college basketball players. As a Black college basketball player, these are some of the insulting terms I heard far too many times. "Stereotypes have a long and convoluted history in the USA widely influencing African American males who are the most visibly stereotyped racial group in the USA" (Harpalnai, 2017). Yet, these stereotypes continue to be perpetuated by a system determined to keep Black males down, in their place, and that place is on the basketball court or the football field generating revenue. More importantly, how does society move beyond

stereotypes and misconceptions of African American men and African male athletes who dominate the landscape of Division I basketball? These disrespectful, insulting and repugnant misconceptions are embedded in the fabric of America and are consequences of slavery (Taylor et al., 2019). As stated earlier in this paper, a lot of what we see today in sports has been around for some time now. The only difference is how the dynamics of labor have shifted from large and small plantation fields to the basketball arenas and football fields. For young Black males, the struggle continues as the process to overcome negative misconceptions is often addressed everyday (Cooper, 2019; Epperson, 2015; Harpalnai, 2017; Rhoden, 2006). Oftentimes, so many young Black kids who grow-up with athletic talent get passed through school because they are not required to work in the classroom and the system reinforces to them that it is okay and normal to put forth little to no effort into their studies (Cooper, 2019; Epperson, 2015). Ultimately, the consequences of these negatively reinforced behaviors come to life when young, non-educated or not-properly educated Black men enter the job market with few chances of survival.

The first step in moving past negative misconceptions is to educate youth at the elementary level and to stop overemphasizing sports in the Black community. Because of fewer high-quality educational opportunities and the overemphasis of sports, Black males are often less prepared for college and less interested in their studies than non-minorities. According to Elite and Elite (2002), the African American community often feels that sports is considered the only way out of poverty and oppressed neighborhoods. “Changing how people think and changing

how people value their community starts with education and everything in life is not based where you come from but how you live and maximize your potential and resources regardless of your plight” (Cooper, 2019, p. 253). Instead of making fun of the students who get As, we should be finding ways to praise them as individuals who want more out of school than sports alone. Even though we will continue to see misconceptions, change often starts at home and that is the Black community. This is why Jalen Rose chose to start a charter school in the inner-city of Detroit. At Rose’s charter school, the teachers are accountable for the education of their students. They are highly cognizant of the issues involved in teaching young Black students to move through school in purposeful ways that do not hinge on their abilities as athletes. At the Jalen Rose Leadership Academy, the educators choose to be there to make a difference in kids' educations and most of them look like their student population (Black).

Moving The Ball Forward...

It is evident from the results of my research study that there are diverse problems faced by Black student-athletes. First, the plantation mentality keeps them subdued with short-lived fame and a so-called free ride through a university that they may or may not graduate from. Second, my study has addressed how those in positions, who have the abilities to change the landscape of college athletics, have not done what is needed to prepare student athletes for college and career readiness. Third, my study identified how predominately White NCAA coaches, commissioners, and executives are the ones earning the enormous salaries and profits generated from the talents and labors of Black athletes. Fourth, misconceptions of Black college basketball players remain prevalent due to stereotypes about our capabilities. My study has demonstrated that these

concerns have continued since my own college playing days and in some circumstances be worsening, even though more researchers and scholars are tackling these issues. In the next chapter, I will conclude this study with my significant findings and interpretations, as well as discuss its limitations and recommendations for further research.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The research question that guided this qualitative study is “Why do African American male basketball players continue to lag in getting a quality education and professional positions within college athletics?” This question along combined with my ethnographic and autoethnographic research methods served to address my validated concerns about the educational, financial, and career gaps Black college basketball athletes continue to experience. My interest in this study was grounded in my own life experience as a college basketball player.

Over the last thirty years, the landscape of college basketball has developed into what we currently see today, and what is unfortunate for so many who participate in college basketball is that these hard-working athletes often walk away empty handed. As I demonstrated through Figures 4.1-4.3’s revenue data for college basketball, it seems illogical to refer to players as amateurs, when college and universities are making billions (Southall et al., 2023). Recognizing and understanding the current growth in wealth, popularity, and labor in college basketball, I believe it is necessary to further discuss (1) how Black athletes are expendable in the realm of college basketball, (2) the issue of amateurism and those who benefit from withholding pay from young athletes, and (3) the need for positive role models and an getting an education that prepares Black athletes for college and career readiness.

The Expendable Black Athlete

The college system in basketball continues to build its wealth on the backs of the expendable Black athlete, because the majority of revenue players are minorities. Our treatment is different than non-minority athletes. Basketball and football are the most dominant sports as they bring in billions of dollars year after year, while non-revenue sports like golf, tennis, soccer, and swimming rarely produce income (Cooper, 2019). Notable is how the Black athlete has been used in the past and currently as a human machine. Basketball players, like me, understand the meanings of reaching the end of our careers and how no longer being able to play the sport can be comparable to a slave who was once expendable because we no longer are earning those in power enormous profits. The comparison may seem harsh because society often cringes when the word slave is brought up; however, the similarities are real. For example, when a slave became old and unable to perform, he or she was replaced with another younger slave, which is the same approach we see in college basketball (Edwards, 2018). With a shelf life of four years, it should not be surprising that players are expendable. Even though non-revenue athletes have the same shelf life, their path through college and sports is often very different, since most of their athletes are White. Leaders in most of the Public White Institutions (PWI) are White and their concepts and leadership style often reflect their ideology and whiteness (Cooper, 2019, Hawkins, 2010; Southall et al., 2023). While the Black athlete is expendable, these same non-minority athletic directors are prone to help those athletes who often look like them. They give the expendable athlete one excuse after another. I certainly experienced this after my college career was over. It is often difficult to determine if it is racism or favoritism because some leaders *will* hire a minority; however, it is usually only one minority. The history in this country

harkens back to slavery. It is unfortunate that economic exploitation is as real in college basketball, as it is profitable. This holds true today more than ever.

What is noticeable throughout college basketball is how it continues to be profitable based on the data identified in Chapter 4 and who is in line to benefit the most. What makes this unbecoming is the fact that leaders within the NCAA and college administrators continue to justify the exploitation of athletes and even sometimes pretend that it does not exist, based on different marketing strategies contributing to the well-being of athletes (Southall et al., 2023). With the amount of revenue generated in college basketball, the NCAA can control the narrative and the information that is disseminated, with society believing that the NCAA and its member schools are doing whatever it takes to educate student athletes (Cooper, 2019). The evidence is in the numbers over the years from: “2006-2019 the revenue directly generated by the top five conferences athletic department nearly doubled from 4.4 billion to 8.5 billion with the primary source of this surge being from the sale of lucrative broadcasting rights from football and basketball” (Southall et al., 2023, p. 266). Despite efforts to prove playing college basketball is about the well-being of the athlete, the end results tell a different story, as evident in the profits and the decisions made throughout college sports. Honestly, how could it not be about the money, as its “revenue provides multi-million-dollar salaries for coaches, disproportionately rewards athletic administrators, and fuels a facilities arms race across campuses” (Southall et al., 2023, p. 274).

The Issue of Amateurism in Collegiate Basketball

The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) continues to fully support amateurism. It justifies compensation restrictions by giving students free tuition, meals and board (McDavis, 2018). I understand how some detractors want to see the innocence in college sports; however,

the innocence is often shielded when there is a win-at-any-cost attitude involved, which brings the NCAA and universities, rather than players the profits of victory. The history of college sports clearly articulates this and has seen its share of revenue-generating scandals since 1852, when the first athletic event was recorded between Harvard and Yale, as they battled each other in a game of regatta. With hopes of gaining an edge in competition, Harvard obtained help from a non-student in order to win (McDavis, 2018). In 1892-93, then Harvard President Charles William Eliot wrote this in his annual report; “college athletics is filled with dishonesty; betting and gambling; recruiting and subsidizing; employment and payment of the wrong kind of men as coaches; extravagant expenditures of money; and the general corruption of youth” (McDavid, p. 288).

The decision to keep college athletes as amateurs was decided years ago by President Theodore Roosevelt because he needed to establish some type of order in college sports due to their steady growth and corruption (Smith, 1990). Since Roosevelt’s time, we have experienced the exponential growth of college sports. History shows that cheating in college sports has been around for over 130 years. The only difference is how things have evolved. When competition take place between individuals or teams, more often than not, nothing is off limits when it pertains to winning. Scandals and corruptions will continue to occur in college sports because there are individuals who are willing to pay whatever the cost to win, even legislators (McDavis, 2018).

When I played basketball in college, I never felt the sport was about amateurism. I often cringe when I hear scholars and critics use amateurism to describe college sports and how students are getting a free education. Unfortunately, based on the history of college sports and the first recorded sporting event, I feel the NCAA has always tried to use amateurism as a cover

for profit only because corruption and scandal is synonymous within college sports. In other words, the NCAA cannot have one without the other based on history. We should be asking some of the most powerful individuals in the game, including commissioners, athletic directors, school presidents and coaches: “Have we put financial gain and profit over everything when it comes to educating players, mainly young black men?” It seems as if they are ignoring some of the most important issues in sports, when they pertain to the education of Black athletes, as they are putting forth little effort at making any change.

The Need for Positive Role Models and Getting an Education



Figure 5.1. My mom, Bonnie Lou Jackson, photographed for her high school graduation.

This thesis has clearly demonstrated the need for positive role models for black youth and college athletes, as well as the need for effective educational systems. As a young kid, I remember the conversations that my mom (Figure 5.1) and I had about education. I often felt that I had an upper hand when it came to my mom being my role model, as our conversations extended further than basketball, as we often talked about life and my responsibilities as a man. She often told me how hard her family had it when she was younger due to limited educational and career opportunities. As student athletes, we often have the same struggles as other students; however, we still have to perform as basketball players for practice and on game day. From the outside it seems as if we live the perfect life, it was not until my mother told me there were consequences of having athletic talent. The duties of a mother can reach further than some people can understand.

My mom explained to me that she wanted me to be more than just a basketball player. Unlike a normal student, she expressed how I would have to balance life as a student and the demands of being an athlete. I also remember her using a quote that brings back memories even to this day when she said, “I didn’t raise any dummies in this house,” words that still get me motivated today. She never did say the road would be easy; however, she knew the importance of education and what it could do for me. These experiences have allowed me to have choices that my mom did not have. I also remember her saying, “I paid the price so you wouldn’t have to.” This is what allowed me to be different when I got to college as a basketball player, knowing I had control over my destiny. I also remember her telling me nothing was going to come easy for me after I finish playing college basketball. In my professional life, when I have seen and experienced things that have been unfair at the jobs where I worked, I have reflected upon my mom’s inspirational teachings about education. My education has often allowed me to take different routes to reach different and positive outcomes and work through the unfairness I have witnessed and experienced. As a positive influencer, her words and wisdom were so true, even as I reflect on them in my life today. She was also the first to say that my education was not free.



Figure 5.2. This newspaper clipping shows my team playing under Coach Waller's leadership.

Another mentor in my life was my high school basketball coach Dwight Waller, who shared similarities with Jalen Rose, as he also played professional basketball in the NBA (Figure 5.2). He encouraged all his players to attend college understanding the value of education. At times, I witnessed him lending his own money to help players. Not only was he a coach, he was also a science teacher, a friend, and a church member. He was able to touch my life because he encouraged me in similar ways to my mom to not go to college just for basketball, but to also go to seek a quality education. What made him different from my college coaches is the fact that he cared about the well-being of young black teenagers. All kids would benefit from coaches and teachers like Coach Waller; ones we can relate to and that often look like us.

Today, I also serve as a role model. I keep in contact with most of my former teammates and encourage those who did not graduate to go back and seek their degrees. I often say to them some of the same things that I have written in this thesis. I discuss (1) the enormous amount of money the universities and coaches are receiving and (2) the amount of free labor over four years that was provided by playing basketball and not graduating. I follow up these conversations by explaining how important it is to keep your eyes on the prize—and that prize is their diploma and securing professional careers in the area of their choosing. There is no better feeling than walking across that stage when the routines of playing basketball and going to class are over.

Implications and Recommendations for Future Research

The continuing disparity between Black labor and White wealth demonstrates a need for research beyond what I am currently doing within this thesis. Scholars must continue to dig deeper into

the structure of college basketball programs and bring these issues to light. Just because young Black college students receive athletic scholarships does not give the NCAA, universities, administrators, and coaches the right to treat them as expendable profit machines undeserving of the same future growth and prosperity as their non-minority teammates. Therefore, it is important that we continue to research the issues in college athletics, as it brings awareness to issues like Black Labor vs. White Wealth in college basketball. As my study incorporated autoethnography (Ellis & Adams, 2020; Ellis & Brocher, 2000) and was shaped by my personal experiences as a Black collegiate basketball player in the 1980s and 1990s, additional studies can be conducted to learn the perspectives of other collegiate basketball players spanning from those who played decades ago and ones who are currently playing. Furthermore, additional ethnographic studies can be conducted to learn the conditions and perspectives of Black female collegiate basketball players and those of athletes playing revenue-generating sports outside of basketball. I also make the argument that changes in collegiate basketball need to move beyond conducting research alone. Now is the time in which questions need to be directed toward those people in charge and for players to receive tangible changes that will positively impact their college and career readiness.

Conclusion: Let's Continue to Move the Ball Forward...

In conclusion, I often ask myself if coaches controlling my mind and body was worth the trade of getting my degree by playing college basketball when I had other routes in which I could have used to attend college. The game has left permanent scars on my body that constantly remind me of the many hours that I spent on a basketball court while in high school and college. We deserve more than tuition, meals and board based on the amount of revenue the game produces. The industry continues to see profits increase year after year and for us past and current players, we need more than just memories to live on. What we do see is how the compensation mainly benefits White males in leadership roles, mostly coaches and administrators. It is difficult to say if the status quo will ever change based on how the structure is currently organized. We need leaders who are in positions that understand a change is needed, as they recognize players are at a disadvantage while being student athletes. That disadvantage often comes with being broke, struggling to eat, having our majors chosen for us, and being too tired to attend class. Before any college basketball players arrive on a college campus to play college basketball, they should know all the nuances that come with playing because at times it is a mind game, and they have to deal with everything that comes with those mind games.

The labor part of playing college basketball is real and it is frustrating to see millions in salaries being handed out to coaches, as we players struggle financially, physically, emotionally and educationally. We are not spoiled students who walk around campus not caring about our education; we are probably tired due to our demanding schedule that often starts at 5:00 am. By the time we finish playing our last basketball game in college, the system has worked vigorously to get every piece of talent out of us. How can we be called amateurs if we are working that hard to win games while coaches and administrators are making millions? As presented on the charts

in chapter 4, the top 20 college basketball coaches are making over \$3 million per year. Based on those numbers how can we continue to call college basketball an amateur sport? This is something I struggle with. As Black men we are constantly in a fight regarding amateurism and, we should not be surprised at the hierarchy we see today. The burden of future investigation on issues like Black Labor/Wealth vs White Wealth in college sports is important and it is up to future researchers to keep the issues at the forefront. More athletes need to share similar stories so outsiders can better understand what is truly taking place on our college campuses as it pertains to past and current athletes. It is essential to see more Black men, like me, who once played college basketball, to further their education beyond a bachelor or master degree. PWI need more of us as professors. African American basketball and football players need to be able to identify with someone outside of coaching who looks like them.

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