Challenges of Being a Black Student Athlete on U.S. College Campuses

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        The purpose of this Literature review article is to examine the social, cultural, individual and institutional racist factors that pose challenges to many African American college athletes, both men and women, to develop skills outside sports that are necessary to succeed in college and life. The passion for athletics by Black youth has to be positioned within the wider racist environment that one is exposed to while growing up. The dominant presence of Blacks in the high profile sports of football, basketball and track and field while having lower graduation rates compared to White athletes deserves scholarly interrogation. This article uses the Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Student Involvement Theory frameworks to explain the phenomena of Black student athletes in College and the challenges that they encounter as they pursue both athletic and academic success. Based on Edwards' (2000) contextualization of the Black athlete which is premised on the Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Astin's (1984) Student Involvement Theory (SIT), this article examines the following issues: The legacy of racism and discrimination; Black athletes and labor on campus; sport and race ideology; graduation rates and the academic challenges faced by Black student athletes. The academic challenges that Black athletes face while pursuing a dual objective of excelling in athletics and getting a college education are situated within the racial laden learning environment characterizing the Predominantly White Colleges (PWC) in the U.S. This paper contends that society, institutions of higher learning and the individual student have to collaborate so as to put the athlete on a path to success in college and in life.

Introduction

The spectacle of collegiate sport and the prominent role of Black athletes in United States (U.S.) colleges and universities continue to arouse discussions (Bailey & Littleton, 1991; Donnor, 2005; Edwards, 2000; Fletcher, Benshoff & Richburg, 2003; Foster, 2005; Fountain & Finley, 2009; Harrison, 2000; Hawkins, 2010a, b; Martin & Christy, 2010; Murray, 2000; Pascarella & Smart, 1991; Richards & Aries, 1999; Ridpath, 2008; Ryan, 1989; Sailes, 1993; Singer, 2005a,b; Suggs, 2000; 2006; Thelin, 1994; Umbach, Plamer, Kuh & Hannah, 2006; Wolmiak, Pierson, & Pascarella, 2001). Central to the discussions is the dominant presence of Black athletes, both men and women, particularly in the high profile sports of football, basketball, and track and field as well as the integrity of higher education given the abuses that characterize athletics (Kihl, Richardson & Campisi, 2008; Lumpkin, 2008). Unfortunately football and basketball are also associated with some of the lowest graduation rates (Donnor,

2005). Indeed, Eitzen (2003) asserted that the gap between intercollegiate athletics and the mission and philosophy of higher education has widened significantly over the last decade while others such as Simon (2008) insist that Athletics is an important component of a student's education while in college. Simon (2008:41) argues that "academic values and athletic ones can be mutually reinforcing" and hence intercollegiate athletics should be utilized to teach fundamental human values rather than disparaged. In the middle of the debate is the fate of Black college athletes that join campus in pursuit of an education via an athletic scholarship (Donnor, 2005; Simons, Bosworth, Fujita, & Jensen, 2007; NCAA, 2009; Singer, 2005a). This Literature review based article uses the Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Student Involvement Theory frameworks to explain the phenomena of Black student athletes in College and the challenges that they encounter as they pursue both athletic and academic success. The overriding goal for this paper is to add to the growing literature on the conceptualization and critical analysis of the place of the African American student athletes on the discourse surrounding race, college athletics and education. Although the terms Black and African American have different meanings, in this paper, the terms shall be used interchangeably to refer to people of African descent going to school/college in the United States of America.

    The experiences of Black college athletes reflect the place of the Black people in the United States of America. Dubois (1964) intimated that slavery and race prejudice are potent, if not sufficient, causes of the African American position in American society. He went on to argue that whereas the Black individual must strive to help oneself, unless the striving be aroused and encouraged by the initiative of the richer and wise environing group, one cannot hope to succeed in life. The purpose of this article is to examine the social, cultural, individual and institutional racist factors that make it difficult for many African American college athletes to develop skills, aside from those acquired from sports, to succeed in college and life. Drawing on Edwards' (2000) contextualization of the Black athlete which is premised on the Critical Race Theory (CRT) (Bell, 1992; Singer, 2005b) particularly the institutional racism framework, and Astin's (1984) Student Involvement Theory (SIT), this article highlight the macro and micro-challenges facing Black student athletes. Indeed Black student athletes, both men and women, encounter race related challenges that make it difficult for them to excel in their pursuit of success in athletics and academics in an environment characterized by a legacy of racial ideology. The history of sport in the U.S. is characterized by racial ideology where people use their ideas and beliefs of skin color to evaluate athletic potential. The prevailing ideology is that dark skinned people excel in certain sports due to natural abilities (Walton & Butryn, 2006). The legacy of this racial ideology has "shaped many aspects of existing social organization and cultural practices" (Coakley, 2009, p. 20). According to Singer (2005b), sport management scholars should recognize the significance of race and ethnicity as viable epistemological considerations in research inquiry. In this context, CRT views race as a most important social construct to consider in the analysis of social, political and educational problems in society (Bell, 1980, 1992; Singer, 2005b). The premise for CRT is that an examination of race and racism must begin with an understanding that Whiteness has been positioned as the optimal status criterion not only in the American society, but also at the global level (Bell, 1992; Comeaux & Harrison, 2007; Ogbu, 2003; Singer, 2005b). CRT is therefore a framework or a set of basic insights, perspectives, and methods that could help "sport management scholars identify, analyze and change those structural and cultural aspects of sport that maintain subordinate and dominant racial positions" (Singer, 2005b: 471) in and out of organizations. This paper therefore positions the situation of

Black athletes and their pursuit of the dual objective of athletic and academic success within a challenging racist laden environment.

Whereas institutions of learning are tasked with creating an ideal learning environment, nevertheless individual Black college students also have a major role to play in breaking through the academic and socio-cultural challenges posed by the long history of marginalization. According to Student Involvement Theory (SIT) an individual plays a central role in determining the extent and nature of academic growth according to the quality of effort or involvement with the resources provided by the institution (Kuh, 2001; 2003; Kuh et al., 2007; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). SIT holds that for a student to learn, they must invest time and energy into the pursuit of learning. It is my contention in this paper that a Black student athlete is not just a passive participant in the pursuit of her/his college education. Rather s/he is an active agent in the whole educational process as postulated by Astin (1984). And whereas recent data show that graduation rates for student athletes are on the increase (Franklin, 2006; Hosick, 2008; Lapchick, 2009; Sander, 2008; USA Today, 2008; Wolverton, 2006), scrutiny shows that Black male and female athletes trail their White counterparts (Lapchick, 2009; NCAA, 2009; Singer, 2005a, b). Indeed the low graduation rate for Black athletes raises fundamental questions about individual student priorities and institutional commitment. However, to understand the gap in the graduation rates, we have to examine the prevailing racial ideology that has historically placed obstacles on the path of the individual Black student athlete.

Legacy of racism and discrimination

Edwards (2000; 2010) and Harrison (2000) concur that the one way integration through sports, the Black middle class moving up and out of the ghetto, and the devaluing of the Black mind and intellectualism in general have led to a construct and racial identity of despair and hopelessness among the African American community. For a number of Black youths, there is a decline in the hope of mainstream life choices and life chances. The decline in hope for success has also impacted the African American community with regard to functioning of the key institutions such as the family, education, the economy, political infrastructure and even the Black church (Edwards, 2000; Harper, 2006; Harrison, 2000). The limited career pathways for the Black youth and the predominance of racial ideology have combined to generate the epidemic of crime, drugs, violence, gangs and gang warfare, and pervasive despair, malaise and hopelessness within the Black society (Edwards, 2000, 2010; Harrison, 2000). This hopelessness in the Black community therefore characterizes the youths in schools and eventually in college where their passions are better expressed on the athletic field which could negatively affect academic performance given the efforts and time invested in honing their athletic ability (Bimper, Jr. & Harrison, Jr., 2011). According to the Student Involvement Theory (Astin, 1984, 1999) for a student to succeed in college, one has to actively participate in the learning process. It is this lack of personal involvement in the academic pursuits due to the long history of institutional racism and academic marginalization that compounds the challenges that the majority of Black college athletes experience (Harper, 2006). According to Harrison (2000, p.36):

> The social circumstances of black males affirm the volatile nexus of education, race and sports. Systematically, the talents of black males in athletics continue to contribute to the high success of revenue producing sports programs (football and

basketball). This sets up in American higher education institutions what Edwards calls the sport "participation system" that easily reflects societal structures with a legacy of racism and discrimination.

Although Harrison's (2000) quotation directly refers to the males, Black women student athletes also trail their White counterparts in terms of overall average graduation rates. The utilization of Black athletic talent in institutions of learning when the student athletes are not getting a deserving education reveals a hypocrisy that continues to draw criticisms (Foster, 2005; Hawkins, 2010a, b; Sack & Staurowsky, 1998; Singer, 2005a). Authors such as Hawkins (2010a, b), and Sack and Staurowsky (1998) have labeled the athletics talent as Black athletic labor that contributes to the revenue generated by these institutions' athletic departments. . Indeed the authors argue that the dominant role of Blacks in selected collegiate sport would seem, superficially, to provide evidence that sport is an elevator to success. However, only a fraction of Black players make it to the professional leagues and fewer still lead successful post athletic lives. Scrutiny of collegiate athletics shows that universities are more concerned with exploiting the athletic talent of the Black community than with nurturing its academic potential (Sack & Staurowsky, 1998). According to Hawkins (2010a), the needs to compete athletically at elite levels and maintain and sustain multimillion dollar athletic budgets have pressured White institutions to recruit Black athletes for their programs. The affirmative action programs in place for regular minority students compared to athletes also reveal the fact that colleges are more concerned with producing winning sports teams than seeking to produce graduates in education, law, medicine, economics, business and engineering particularly from amongst people of color (Sack & Staurowsky, 1998; Singer, 2005a).

The tragedy that many Black students as well as the African American community face is the fact that the dominant culture has socialized them into thinking that it is only in athletics that they can succeed in life (Edwards, 2000; Harrison, 2000). Research and athlete testimonies suggest that many young Blacks, especially men, grow up believing that the black body is superior when it comes to physical abilities in certain sports (Coakley, 2009; Edwards, 2000; Harrison, 2000; Harrison et al., 2002; Lomax, 2000). This misguided belief inspires some Black people to believe it is in their biological and cultural destiny to excel in playing certain sports (Coakley, 2009). And the fact that there are no visible role models in fields other than athletics inspires young Black people to feel that their chances of gaining respect and material success are dismal in any realm other than a few sports (Coakley, 2009; Edwards, 2000; Harris, 1994; Harrison, 2000; Harrison et al., 2002; Singer, 2005a).

The acceptance that Blacks are more athletic by the people of color is in line with a caution by Singer (2005b) that people who have embraced the status quo of White dominance would resist any other view. This is due to the internalization of the stereotypes directed at the Black people, to a point of believing in their own inferiority both individually and collectively (Harper, 2006). According to Duncan (2002), Blacks who have been socialized into various institutions and approved to hold positions of responsibility uncritically accept the values that inform these institutions to the disadvantage of the larger Black community. Blacks who have experienced athletic success in a predominantly White set up would not question the unfairness of the system.

The focus on athletic success in the Black community is a positive response to the negative socio-historic forces that shape the Black identity in form of institutional racism (Comeaux & Jayakumar, 2007, 2010). Institutional racism stems from the history of systematic

discrimination against and devaluation of African American community in the U.S. At community level, the African American people have been marginalized through policies which explicitly and implicitly deny them equal access to resources, less qualified teachers, poor schools, and racial micro aggression which combine to contribute to low academic performance of the children of color (Comeaux & Jayakumar, 2007).   Therefore, a high proportion of Black students go to school with a single-minded purpose to excel in athletics and only barely make it through the academic program to maintain eligibility. Thus it is necessary that athletes get proper guidance right from the time they start competitive sport on the choice of future careers based on their all-round potential. The real challenge is to discover how to socialize the young Blacks to invest in education with the same enthusiasm, work ethic, and creative expression that they display on the playing fields (Harrison et al., 2002). The guidance has to come from the family, community leaders, school-teachers, coaches, faculty and eventually the individual himself or herself when they come of age. This is important as one can only mobilize all the resources needed to move in a direction and target that is clear in one's mind. For many Black athletes, they attend school with a bloated anticipation of joining professional ranks given the racial ideology they are exposed to throughout their lives.

Hyatt (2003) cites a study by the Center for the Study of Athletics, which collected data from forty-two Division 1 colleges. The data revealed that a high proportion of African American athletes attended college as an avenue to professional ranks. For example, 44% of African American and 20% non-African American football players expected to become professional athletes whereas in basketball, the figures were 7% of the African American and 3% of the non-African American. Unfortunately, only a small percentage of athletes in college are drafted into professional leagues. For instance, NFL and NBA, two of the leading professional leagues in the U.S., recruit only 2.3% and 2.5% respectively (Bolig, 1994; Le Crom, Warren, Clark, Marolla, & Gerber, 2009). These figures also fluctuate from year to year as in 2003-2004, the numbers were below the averages with 0.8% of college basketball players, 1.3% of college football players and 6.9% of college baseball players drafted (Le Crom et al., 2009). The chances for a Black college athlete getting drafted by the Professional Leagues are therefore very low. It is therefore vital that college bound Black athletes be educated to focus on alternative careers beyond professional sport.

Institutional racism, Black athletes and labor on campus

Institutional racism and racial realism provide useful conceptual frames for understanding Black college athletes' circumstances at Predominantly White Colleges (PWC). According to Foster (2005), institutional racism involves identifying subtle, more deeply ingrained attitudes and actions that contribute to Black students' alienation from the college. He goes on to assert that at PWC, "it is not only occasional open acts of racism that create a hostile climate, but also unintended acts of ignorance, routine questioning and disparagement of Black peoples' intelligence, and a history of excluding African-Americans from the Institution" (p. 493). Institutional racism goes beyond racial realism which argues that race continues to be an important factor in American life and culture. According to racial realists, racism is inherent to American culture and operations historically and in the present (Foster, 2005; Hawkins, 2010). According to Bell (1992) the originator of Critical Race Theory, race is a critical social construct in the analysis of social, political and educational problems of people in society. Race realism theorists question the idea that 'institutional structures are logically self-evident, objective, a

priori valid and internally consistent' (Foster, 2005; p. 492-493). This deep understanding by thinkers permits them to interrogate the function and impact of institutions in peoples' everyday lives, as opposed to the abstract conceptualization of what different institutions are supposed to do and operate. This framework is suitable for critical race thinkers engaged in studying race relations on PWC (Foster, 2005) as well as the Black experience. Foster (2005) identifies two aspects of institutional racism that would shed light on the experience of the Black college athlete. These include imposition of rules and regulations that are discriminatory in effect and/or intention and the collective failure of an institution to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their color, culture or ethnic origin. Additionally, institutional racism can be seen and/or detected in processes, attitudes and behavior which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and stereotyping, putting minority people at a disadvantage. Thus the set up in PWC which is a reflection of the values, practices and beliefs of the White dominant culture requires serious interrogation given the long history of marginalization of the Black people in society.

Historically men and women from the Black community were marginalized or underrepresented at all levels of competition and management in professional, institutional and community sports (Coakley, 2009; Edwards, 2010; Harrison, 2000). Blacks were rarely allowed access to competitive sport involving the dominant Whites prior to 1950. Thus the Blacks competed amongst themselves in sports and events segregated by choice or by necessity. One of the reasons for exclusion of Blacks was that "blacks didn't have the character or fortitude to compete with them" (Coakley, 2009, p. 293). Since the 1950s, Blacks were allowed access to some sports and they virtually took over and dominated the role of players in selected sports. College sports also followed a similar pattern. The commercialization of intercollegiate sport forced institutions and coaches to put their prejudices aside and recruit the best players irrespective of color and academic preparedness. This change of policies is in line with Derrick Bell's (1992) Critical Race Theory and in particular the interest- convergence principle that explains how laws and policies established to promote equality maintains the status quo. This is because, racism serves to reinforce and advance White Supremacy, helping to maintain a status quo that while disproportionate or inequitable to racial minorities allows Whites to retain their positions of power (Bell, 1980). White people therefore have little incentive to work to eradicate racism unless it is to satisfy their perceived interests. This notion of 'interest convergence' explains the changes that have evolved over the years in collegiate sport. To fully achieve racial equality, there has to be a convergence of interests for the Whites and Black people (Bell, 1980). An analysis of past victories in the struggle for race equality confirms Bell's analysis. For example advances for Blacks such as participation in Professional and PWI Intercollegiate sports coincided with changing commercial interests of the elite Whites teams and Institutions that needed to use Black talent to generate revenue.

On the other hand, the African American community and their talented youth saw this as an opportunity for their sons and daughters to use athletic talent to access college education and improvement in their social and economic status. At the same time, the commercialized nature of collegiate sport thrived as Black athletes provided the entertainment value in the athletic arena that Whites enjoyed watching. However, the dominance of Black athletes in the revenue and media publicized programs of basketball and football sends out the wrong image that Blacks dominate in sports. According to Coakley (2009):

Even today, 41 million black Americans are underrepresented in or absent from most sports at most levels of competition (in 2009). This fact is often overlooked because a few of the most popular spectator sports involve high proportions of black athletes. People see this and don't realize that African Americans are absent or nearly absent in thirty-nine of forty-four men's and women's sports played in college, most of the dozens of sports played at the international amateur level, and all but five of the dozens of professional sports in the United States. There is a similar pattern in Canada and in European countries with strong sporting traditions (p. 293).

The under-representation of Blacks in the majority of sports is attributable to the racial ideology that channels them into supposedly athletic events while Whites gravitate to sports and roles requiring intelligence (Jameson, Diehl, & Danso, 2007). These stereotypes characterize American society including colleges. According to Harrison et al., (2002) young Black males find involvement in sport and athletic ability as key determinants of social acceptability and group membership. Participation in sporting activities also demands raising one's level of skill and athletic ability to gain respect and approval of the peers. Thus the Black youths go through an experience of immersing in sports as well as identifying with other peers. They find inspiration from existing role models who are most likely athletes with high status. This therefore shapes the interests and focus of Black sports aspirants towards basketball, football and track and field (Harrison et al., 2002; May, 2009). This unfortunate self-limiting choice of sporting endeavors as well as other life interests effectively channels talent towards football, basketball and track and field thereby limiting the Black community from nurturing potential professionals such as lawyers, doctors, engineers, architects, corporate executives, educators, among others (Edwards, 2000; Harrison, 2000; Harrison et al., 2002). According to Jeanquart-Barone cited in Foster (2005), institutional racism thrives when informal barriers exist that prevent minority members from reaching high positions or sectors in a system.

NCAA records show that Blacks made up 10 percent of the student body in division one universities. However, they constituted 21 percent of the college athletes, 46 percent of football players, 60 percent of basketball men and 47 percent of basketball women with scholarships. The astounding revelation is that 70 percent of all Black male athletes played football or basketball. Hawkins (2010b), states that during the 2005-06 season, Black male athletes represented 47% of NCAA Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) and 59% of NCAA Division 1 basketball teams. The interesting aspect is that the top earning programs, especially basketball and football, tend to have more Black athletes. It is no wonder that the two have the lowest graduation rates (NCAA, 2009; Coakley, 2009, p.508). Bearing in mind that the biggest revenue for NCAA and the college affiliates comes from football and basketball, one gets the distinct impression that White dominated sports and colleges as a whole are thriving on the backs of Black athletes (Hawkins, 2010a, b; NCAA, 2009; Coakley, 2009). It is what Smith, cited by Harrison (2000, p. 36), captured so vividly:

One of the most conspicuous bizarreries of modern academe is the fact that the majority of the big sport athletes and virtually all of the stars are black. The crowning irony is that, in states where blacks were only a few years ago barred from voting, the majority of football and basketball players are black. On every campus I visit I see a little band of black students (they are especially conspicuous on campuses in states where there are few black residents, such as Utah, Nevada, Nebraska, Colorado). ….They mix

very little with white students. They are classic black entertainers. It is for their exploits that arenas of white students shout themselves hoarse. The cultural discontinuity is staggering, the irony beyond articulation.

College sport is therefore a replica of what Harrison (2000) and Hawkins (2010a, b) have called a plantation system. Kihl et al. (2008) cite media that depict African American College athletes in a cartoon as a "plantation" (p.288) and shows the all African American teams playing in front of an all White audience with the caption "Of course we don't let them read or write" (p. 288). Such depictions in some localized media negatively impact the Black athletes. Despite the ridicule, the Black athletes provide the labor in the college entertainment industry and hopefully through the scholarship they get an education (Kihl et al., 2008). But as much as Black athletes get plenty of publicity, Coakley (2009) indicates that they represent one of every six Black men on division one campuses compared to one to 29 for White men, one for every 25 of every Black women and one of every 33 of white women. The high proportion of athletes among Black students gives the public the impression that Black males are super athletes who attend college because of their athletic ability yet 99.5 percent of Black men between 18 and 23 who are in college do not have athletic scholarships (Coakley, 2009). It is unfortunate that even as colleges recruit players, they hardly pay attention to outstanding students of color who lack athletic ability but are brilliant in academic discourse. The lack of diligent yet non-scholarship students on campuses predisposes the Black college athletes to feel lonely, unwelcome, and isolated. Testimony from players, who played for PWC show that they were discriminated against, isolated and felt lonely (Hillman, 1995).

Coakley (2009:p510), identified six factors that contribute to isolation of the Black athlete on campus thereby eroding her/his academic commitment and capability. These factors include the following:

1. Racial and athletic stereotypes thus compromising formation of supportive social relations to have any academic success.
2. Spending too much time on athletics related tasks that they have no time for anything else on campus.
3. Campus activities fail to capture the imagination of Black students hence intensifying the unwelcome feeling.
4. Campus life that is not appealing to Black students forces them to withdraw and disconnect with the student body.
5. White students feel uncomfortable relating with Blacks given the lack of prior exposure to diversity in their upbringing.
6. White students perceive that Black students are privileged hence creating tension and thereby undermine any genuine social and academic interaction (Coakley, 2009, p. 510).

All these aspects indicative of institutional racism predispose African American college athletes to drop out or barely succeed academically. The toxic environment in college makes it difficult for Black college athletes to engage fully in academic discourse. Yet according to Astin's (1984, 1993, 1999) Student Involvement Theory, success in college academics is dependent on active participation in the learning processes.

Sport and racial ideology

Sports are at the center of racial ideology not only in the U.S., but also at the global level (Coakley, 2009; Walton & Butryn, 2006). Racial ideology is a "web of ideas and beliefs that people use to give meaning to skin color and evaluate people and forms of social organization in terms of racial classification" (Coakley, 2009, p.20). Although the application of racial ideology may differ from one place on the globe to another, it remains a powerful force in many societies. Racial ideologies are particularly used to place people into categories based on assumptions about character traits and abilities, both intellectual and physical (Singer, 2005a). Unfortunately, these assumptions serve as the foundation for important social practices and policies that affect people's lives. According to Singer (2005b), the present social order has been created by the Whites (Caucasian and/or European background). It is a system of human domination or a constellation of institutions, ideas, and practices that had enabled the Whites to achieve and maintain power and privilege over other racial and ethnic groups, including Blacks. Due to the domination by the Whites, "the folkways, mores, values, attitudes, and beliefs of the dominant White Race" have become the norm upon which other racial groups in society are evaluated (Singer, 2005b, p.467).

Popular forms of sports in society reinforce and reproduce the ideologies favored by people with the most power and influence. According to King (2005), college sport is first and foremost a White institution devoted in large part to imparting the values, myths and norms of the dominant social order to a largely White student body. In the U.S., sports provide a medium for promoting and entrenching racial ideology. This occurs as interaction takes place at the national political level, media, family level, with friends, neighbors, peers, coaches, teachers and other people of influence in one's life. It is on this basis that Edwards (2000) argues that the African American community should be enlightened about the consequences of focusing solely on athletic careers as dictated by the White dominant culture. According to Coakley (2009), knowledge when used critically undermines racial stereotyping and gradually subverts the ideologies that support them and the racism that often accompanies them.

Blacks and passion for athletics

Edwards (2000) argues that the single-minded pursuit of athletic success by Black athletes is counterproductive. He argues that at the root of the problems of the Black community is the fact that Black families elect to push their children toward sports career aspirations, often to the neglect and detriment of other important areas of personal and cultural development. The focus on athletics is a consequence of the prevailing racial ideology, which is deeply ingrained in the mind of the people in the African American community and propagated by the dominant White culture. Other researchers attribute channeling of Blacks into sport to the encouragement by teachers, coaches and friends/peers (Harris, 1994). However, Edwards (2000) situates the overwhelming inclination by the African American community towards athletics in a wider socio-cultural and political context including:

a.   A long-standing, widely held, racist, and ill-informed presumption of innate, race-linked Black athletic superiority and intellectual deficiency. This stereotype projects a Black person as athletic, skillful, fast yet intellectually deficient. Racial stereotype refers to the generalization used to define and judge all individuals who are classified in a particular racial category.

Stereotypes provide ready-made yet superficial evaluative frameworks for making quick judgments and conclusions about others (Coakley, 2009; Harrison et al., 2009; Stone, Chalabaev & Harrison, 2012). As much as the dominant White population perpetuates this stereotype, it gets tacit and unknowing support from the Black people themselves (Harper, 2006). Many Black athletes experience social acceptance in predominantly White settings unlike other professional careers. The pursuit of sport is made a priority when individuals of color have an encounter with racial discrimination and therefore find alternative immersion in sports dominated by fellow Blacks (Bimper, Jr. & Harrison, Jr., 2011; Harris, 1994; Harrison, Harrison, & Moore, 2002; Sailes, 1993). According to Harrison et al., (2002) sport performance is the most salient of the few positive stereotypes for Black people.

b.   Media propaganda portraying sports as a broadly accessible route to Black social and economic mobility. The mass media as an institution is pivotal in transmitting messages and influencing the public. Thus the publicity given to Black athletes who have achieved through football, basketball, track and field, boxing, among others convinces the young Blacks that athletics is a rewarding career. The media bombardment characterized by high earning Black athletes over 24 hours a day tends to promote sports dreams and downplays educational and other scholar related opportunities (Edwards, 2000). In the U.S., most media are privately owned and therefore their dominant goals are to make profits and to distribute content that promotes the ideas and beliefs of the people in positions of power and influence (Coakley, 2009; May, 2009). Sports coverage in the media is a major social construction. Media sports are created, organized and controlled by persons whose motives and ideas are grounded in their social worlds, experiences and ideologies (Coakley, 2009; May, 2009). The projection of sports in the media is selectively done to reaffirm dominant ideologies and promote the interests of wealthy and powerful people who own media companies. According to Gabriel (1998), one role played by the media is reinforcing narratives of race and national identity in ways that can marginalize racial and ethnic minorities within a nation. Other authors such as Wilson, Gutierrez, & Chao (2003) add that historically, the media has favored the dominant White culture in their writings. The mainstream media therefore support Whiteness by producing and disseminating selective versions of culture. Thus content directed at promoting education endeavors among the people of color is not an attractive and profitable option.

 c.   A lack of comparably visible, high prestige black role models beyond the sports arena involving football, basketball and track and field (Edwards, 2000). This relates to the question of stereotypes and identity formation. Indeed Black youth that are immersed in black cultural attitudes may consider football, basketball and track and field as appropriate for their participation. They however, avoid other sporting activities or even career preparing endeavors that are deemed inappropriate by fellow Blacks. Black athletes therefore develop attitudes, skills, interests and competencies in only a narrow range of activities to the total exclusion of other endeavors (Edwards, 2000; Harris, 1994).

        This cocktail of influences on the psychology of the Black community has led to "a single-minded pursuit of sports fame and fortune that spawned an institutionalized triple tragedy in black society" (Edwards, 2000, p.9). The ingredients of the triple tragedy include the tragedy of thousands of Black youths in obsessive pursuit of sports goals that the overwhelming majority of them will not attain; personal and cultural underdevelopment that afflicts so many successful

and unsuccessful Black sports aspirants; and the tragedy of cultural and institutional underdevelopment throughout Black society at least in some parts as a consequence of the drain in talent potential toward sports and away from other vital areas of occupational and career emphasis such as medicine, law, economics, politics, education and technical fields (Edwards, 2000; Sailes, 1986). As the Black child grows, s/he is systematically channeled towards the world of athleticism as evidenced by the overwhelming presence in sport. The visibility of Black athletes to youths dwarfs any success of Black Lawyers, Doctors, Engineers and other professional careers. This is due to institutional racism, which has limited Black access to the full spectrum of high prestige occupational opportunities (Singer, 2005a). Yet "Black America needs black productive, educated individuals to serve as role models and to become leaders in economics, politics, business, and education" (Sailes, 1986, p.442).

Black athletes, graduation rates and academic challenges

The NCAA data for 2009 (see Table 1) show that Graduation Success Rate (GSR) for Division 1 players has reached 79 percent for the 1999 to 2002 cohort. The GSR however varies widely by sport, race and gender (Fountain & Finley, 2009; NCAA, 2009).

Table 1 - *Graduation Success Rate trends for Division one Men's and Women's Sports*

SPORT	WOMEN (1999 – 02 Cohort) in percentage	Men (1999 – 02 Cohort) in percentage
Basketball	83	64
Cross Country/Track	85	75
Fencing	91	84
Softball/Baseball	86	69
Bowling	76	-
Football (FBS)	-	67
Football (FCS)	-	64
Golf	88	80
Gymnastics	94	85
Ice Hockey	91	82
Lacrosse	94	88
Rifle	82	82

Skiing	98	87
Soccer	89	78
Swimming	91	83
Tennis	89	84
Volleyball	88	79
Water Polo	88	87

Source: NCAA (2009)

A March 2009 report for the men's and women's basketball teams in the national tournament revealed that a substantial gap persists between the graduation rate of White and Black athletes (Lapchick, 2009). For example, White male basketball athletes graduate at 80 percent versus only 58 percent of African-American male basketball college athletes. White female basketball athletes graduate at 89 percent, while 75 percent of African-American female basketball athletes graduate (Lapchick, 2009). A NCAA (2009) data shows a huge graduation gap between African American and White college athletes from 1995 to 2002. About 84% of the White athletes graduate compared to 63% for Black athletes. This disparity in graduation rates has to be positioned within the larger context of the marginalization of the Blacks in American society.

It is obvious that sports where Black athletes are heavily represented such as basketball and football are at the bottom of the graduation rates. Yet the revenue from these two is what subsidizes the other sports that are graduating high rates of students and are predominantly White (Bimper, Jr. & Harrison, Jr., 2011; Hawkins, 2010a, b). According to Asim (2006, p.48), while the "kids are slam dunking and flying into the end zone, they are not learning much as most colleges have confused commerce with education". Additionally, the sheer involvement and single minded pursuit for athletic excellence on the part of Black student athletes compromise their physical and mental application towards academic achievement that is critical to successful matriculation and graduation from college. According to Student Involvement Theory (Astin, 1984, 1993, 1999; Kuh, Kinzie, Buckely & Hayek, 2007; Morgan, 2001; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005), student involvement on college campuses is one of the most important factors influencing their academic success.

The Student Involvement Theory (SIT) posits that the individual plays a central role in determining the extent and nature of growth according to the quality of effort or involvement with the resources provided by the institution (Kuh, 2001; 2003; Kuh et al., 2007; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005). According to SIT, a successful student invests time and energy into the pursuit of learning. This demands effort, time and commitment as well as an enabling learning environment. This educational learning involvement entails attending classes, interacting with faculty, doing research, engaging in group discussions, library usage, and participation in student activities such as co-curricular, government and societies within an institution (Astin, 1984, 1999; Kuh, et al., 2007). SIT further shows that academic success is tied to the quantity and quality of the physical and psychological energy that a student invests in the overall college experience. Such involvement includes absorption in academic work, participation in co-

curricular activities, interaction with faculty and staff among others. Morgan (2001) emphasizes involvement, which entails interacting with faculty and student peer groups. Out of these activities, a major predictor of academic success is student athlete-faculty interaction. A study by Comeaux & Harrison (2007) established that academic success of Black student athletes, in the revenue-producing sports of men's basketball and football, is to some extent dependent on the nature of interaction with faculty.

Challenge 1: Faculty stereotypes

        Unfortunately, studies (Cameaux, 2010, nd; Simons, Bosworth, Fujita, & Jensen, 2007) show that college athletes were perceived and treated differently along racial lines by faculty. These studies reveal that race is a major factor in athlete stigmatization. Studies show that stereotypes of Blacks are more negative than stereotypes of other ethnic minority groups (Cameaux, 2010; Jones, 1997; Thomas et al., 2007; Yopyk & Prentice, 2010). Indeed Professors, fellow students and other members of the University community often have false stereotypical beliefs about not only Blacks (Dee, 2010; Stone, et al., 2012; Thomas et al., 2007) but Athletes too (Harrison et al., 2009). It is therefore a double dose of tragedy to be Black and an athlete leave alone being a woman (Cameaux, 2010; Stone et al., 2012; Yopyk & Prentice, 2010). The African American athletes reported receiving a lower grade, being suspected or accused of cheating and being given hard time when asking for accommodations to represent the college. Being an African American college athlete therefore plays a role in the athletes' reports of negative treatment by faculty over and above that of being an athlete alone (Dee, 2010; Simons et al., 2007; Yopyk & Prentice, 2005). To compound the problem of Black college athletes versus faculty interaction, the athletes when asked how they responded to negative attitude from faculty, stated that they implicitly accepted the stereotype by not participating in class, dropping the class or not attending. According to Simons et al. (2007), these behaviors usually reflect, from the faculty point of view, lack of academic interest and motivation. To faculty, therefore, these behaviors serve to reinforce the stereotype they hold that African American athletes are not interested in an education. At the same time, they reflect athletes' low academic self-esteem and self-confidence due in part to the stigma. Jameson, Diehl, & Danso (2007) as well as Yopyk & Prentice (2005) established that there is a link between negative stereotypes and poor performance. According to Jameson et al. (2007) and Yopyk & Prentice (2005), African American participants, both men and women, underperformed on a difficult intellectual ability test when negative stereotypes about their group's intellectual ineptitude were made salient.
        Facing a learning environment that is racist and discriminatory predisposes Black athletes to potential academic failure. Black college athletes therefore need the colleges to mount programs to help them gain confidence to focus on academic work. Athlete involvement in academic pursuits positively affects a student's overall satisfaction with the college experience, fosters the continuing pursuit of academics, and facilitates personal growth and development (Astin, 1984; Morgan, 2001). The better interaction with faculty and the more academically involved they are, the more likely they are to benefit intellectually and personally. This calls for institutional policy formulation to strengthen faculty and Black college athlete interaction as well as friendly curricular and co-curricular offerings on college campuses, which are sensitive to the minority, Black athletes (Singer, 2005a).

Challenge 2: Academic underachievement

The other challenge that Black athletes contend with is the negative perception that serious scholarly work provokes among peers (Harper, 2006). Indeed from Astin's (1999, p. 525) study, he observed that, "athletic involvement, like academic involvement, tends to isolate students from the peer group effects that normally accompany college attendance". Martin and Harris III (2006) cite one Black athlete testifying that the majority of teammates are lost in a system of under-achievement and despair. To them, they are in college to play football and they contend that being "nerds" won't earn them additional respect. There is a widespread feeling that failure to attend class is cool thus depicting a lack of academic commitment. According to Shulman & Bowen (2001) and Bowen & Levin (2003), a significant proportion of athletes, and especially Black ones, have not internalized academic values and do subordinate academic achievement to achievement of athletic goals. This lack of college preparedness among some Black college athletes is situated in the wider socio-political inequalities that characterize access to quality education (Comeaux & Jayakumar, 2007).

One of the questions posed by Astin's (1999) study was "Does one form of involvement (e.g., in extra-curricular activities) enhance or diminish the effects of another form (e.g., in academic work)? It appears that athletes who devote a disproportionately high percentage of their time on athletic pursuits at the expense of academic priorities fair poorly in terms of their class attendance and other academically oriented assignments and thereby compromise their progression towards graduation. This failure to graduate by a number of college athletes enhances the dumb jocks stereotype and the perception that Black athletes are intellectually deficient (Simons et al., 2007). The failure to graduate by some Black college students is a form of exploitation that transcends an individual. Sailes (1986) asserted that the Black athlete is exploited when s/he is denied an education. The tragedy of not graduating due to expiry of eligibility is accomplished because the athlete was siphoned through easy, non-degree related courses during the eligibility period; the student was not given proper tutorial services; other individuals were made to take exams for him/her or the grades were altered to maintain athletic eligibility. Thus failing to graduate and lacking any marketable skills beyond athletic talent is a reality that many Black athletes face (Sailes, 1986; Singer, 2005a).

Challenge 3: Faculty and Black student athlete interaction

Black students who join college with a clear goal to graduate with a degree tend to look at their athletic ability as a means to earn a scholarship so as to get an education. Honora (2002) found that higher achieving high school Black students focused on academic goals and expectations. However, they worried about financing their education hence their focus on sports. The lower achieving ones viewed sport as possible career option but without necessarily going to college. Likewise, there are athletes whose focus is on pushing their athletic talent to the highest possible levels including going professional. For such a student academics are a mere distracter that, if possible, should be dispensed with. A study by Comeaux & Harrison (2007) using the Student Involvement Theory came up with three important findings that shed light to the Black athletes' experience in colleges. The findings were that:

a.   Black college athletes who were encouraged to attend graduate school by faculty tend to get higher grade point averages (GPA). This calls for faculty athlete interaction.

Athletes left to the devices of only coaches may not be academically challenged beyond the playing field. Thus there has to be deliberate institutional effort to help athletes evaluate their athletic ability and set realistic goals including those that transcend the playing field.

b.   Those that are provided assistance in achieving professional goals by their instructors tend to perform better academically in college. Most students reach college when they are not quite sure what they want to pursue in terms of majors and careers. Thus an early exposure of Black athletes to faculty members of different academic orientations can help in exposing the student.

c.   Those who are assisted with study skills by faculty had lower GPAs. This intriguing finding could be due to the fact that students who need such basics as study skills had a significantly weaker foundation upon which to build academic success. According to the authors, such a finding was not surprising since students generally tend to seek assistance with their study skills when they are not doing well academically (Comeaux & Harrison, 2007). But unlike White students, Black ones seem not to seek out the assistance. This could be attributed to the way Black athletes perceive and respond to the college environment and the fact that they have limited informal information exchange with White faculty and students who form the majority in NCAA affiliated colleges (Allen, 1992; Comeaux & Harrison, 2007). According to Schwitzer et al., (1999) the lack of knowledge and the experience of interacting with students and faculty different from themselves create a considerable social distance and therefore alienation of Black athletes.

Challenge 4: Social-cultural Isolation

The cultural transition from an African American home to a PWI causes acute stress for Black students who have to move to institutions and possibly States that are populated by the dominant White culture (Edwards, 2010; Thomas, et al., 2007). That is particularly so for student that went to segregated high schools. Hargrove (2004) and Willoughby (2004) revealed that a survey of public education in the U.S. 50 years after Brown v. Board of Education found that schooling for some Blacks was actually more segregated than it was prior to 1954. According to Thomas et al. (2007), segregated education prior to college places Black students at a disadvantage in several respects as such schools have fewer resources, less experienced teachers, higher poverty, and fewer advanced placement courses that predict academic success at college level. One can therefore envision the cultural shock that stems from encountering a totally new White culture that they were never used to before thereby feeling lonely and homesick. According to Edwards (2010), the Black student athletes in PWC experience a "social-cultural isolation and alienation within the integrated collegiate environment" (64). The Black athletes therefore lack "locally accessible powerful personalities epitomizing and projecting the achievement traditions" (p. 64) of the Black community. Whereas the availability of scholarships, education and playing opportunities are afforded to the Black student athletes, the social and cultural cost is unhealthy (Edwards, 2010).
According to Sanders & Hildenbrand (2010), African American athletes feel isolated on college campuses as a result of others stereotyping them as academically inferior. Because of the

shared feeling of isolation, the African American athletes "tend to create peer networks comprised mostly of other African American athletes" (217) a factor that extends to clustering into specific majors that are 'Black student athlete friendly'. It appears that participation in college sports compels students to adjust academic goals and priorities to manage the athletic demands (Sanders & Hildenbrand, 2010),

Challenge 5: Athletics Schedule

Coaches tend to have a firm grip on student athletes as they determine the student scholarship as well as team roles (Coakley, 2009). The coach is also under pressure to have a winning season and thereby retain the job. Black student athletes are therefore given mixed signals when team priorities are set and academic studies are put second to practices and competitions (Fletcher et al., 2003). This lack of clarity arises from the publicly proclaimed institutional priorities of academics coming first and athletics second even though Black athletes rank the athletics role first and academics second (Singer, 2008). The vicarious need for coaches to retain their jobs leaves the player at the mercy of faculty members, on one hand, and coaches on the other. Torn between meeting the academic obligations to faculty and the coach, the latter comes out on top (Coakley, 2009). This is because the coach arranges aspects of the life of the student athlete such as meals, housing, schedules, time usage, and team bonding activities and to some extent study times. Schedules by coaches on student athlete time creates an environment of athlete to athlete intensive interaction and thereby could negate any faculty efforts to academically impact the student athletes effectively (Fletcher et al., 2003). It is no wonder that some athletes are more predisposed towards taking up professional sport rather than graduate. Despite pressure being exerted on Black student athletes, they have the potential to apply themselves successfully to both athletic and academic excellence. Indeed one educational value of athletics is the self-sacrifice and dedication to succeed when under pressure (Simon, 2008). According to Kuh et al. (2007) the best predictor of college grades is the combination of an individual student's academic preparation, high school grades, aspirations and motivation. A student has to take charge of his or her academic responsibilities if they are to succeed. Thus situations where Black athletes are solely focused on athletic excellence may fail to get proper college preparation, score poorly and not have the motivation needed to excel academically. This is in line with their socialization into athletic endeavors and away from intellectually challenging tasks (Harrison et al., 2002).

However, the cumulative physical toll due to athletic involvement throughout the academic year can potentially wreak havoc on underprepared Black student athlete's ability to concentrate on studies (Thomas, 2008). The physical conditioning program is characterized by intense daily afternoon pick-up games, weight training sessions, cardiovascular conditioning, timed trials and fitness tests, and individual skill development. Apart from the physical demands, the emotional highs and lows associated with competition outcomes can leave an individual athlete in a state of burn out. According to Fletcher et al. (2003), "athletes experience significant disappointments and fears when their team has key losses or when they perform poorly." (35). Athlete's fears include losing the opportunity to compete because of injury or being cut from the team or being forced to retire from the sport one loves (Fletcher et al., 2003). The physical and emotional strains leave the student athlete tired all the time. This fatigue translates to failure to do assignments, dose off in class, miss class to recuperate in bed, poor concentration and mental lapses (Thomas, 2008). Added to the sport related demands are personal social habits and peer

pressures associated with young men and women which may compromise academic pursuits during the competition season. Research findings show that student athletes' classroom performance is lower compared to the out of season performance (Scott et al., 2008).

Challenge 6: Academic rigor

The demand for the premium commodity in form of Black athletic talent continues to escalate as institutions compete to recruit the five star athletes into their program (Hawkins, 2010a, b). This competitiveness on the part of institutions also gives them the leeway to recruit talented but underprepared Black athletes into college. Researchers (Donnor, 2005; Dowling, 2000; Sanders & Hildenbrand, 2010) have highlighted the negligent admission strategies where college underprepared students are enrolled in easy courses so as to play out their eligibility without any intent of graduating. Ultimately such student athletes obligingly vanish to make room for another incoming eager class of recruits who go through the same pipeline. Thus Division 1A coaches recruit some talented players who are functionally illiterate or otherwise unable to meet the demands of rigorous curriculum. The lack of academic preparation is however secondary to athletic talent at the recruitment stage as well as through their collegiate years. The under-preparedness of the Black athletes is a systematic process that originates long before recruitment into college. Ultimately therefore, graduation rates for Black Athletes continue to linger below that of their White counterparts and according to Hawkins (2010a) "not because of lack of intelligence, but due to priorities" (99).

The academic assistance and preferential treatment as rewards for their athletic ability provide a feedback to the athletes as to what is important in college. Hawkins (2010a) argues that the low priority placed on academic endeavors is exacerbated when the athletes witness the premium placed on winning than on academics. The mixed messages send to athletes are made worse by the sacking of coaches for poor athletic results in spite of graduating student athletes; coaches changing institutional loyalties for astronomical amount of money leaving the athletes that they recruited (Edwards, 2010).

Some of the Black athletes therefore end up performing poorly academically or have to be helped to fulfill the eligibility requirements through dubious practices that characterize some of the athletic and college programs (Hawkins, 2010a, b; Donnor, 2005; Dowling, 2000). Dowling (2000) identifies three key ones including registering student athletes in useless courses, a protective layer of administrative complicity, and the actual takeover of the normal academic machinery of the university such that papers are written and handed in, take-home exams completed, and credits awarded on a "ghost" basis without even the athletes knowing. Scandals at the university of Minnesota, suits against Creighton University and Drake University, among others (Donnor, 2005; Dowling, 2000) reveal the desperate situation of Black students, who are barely ready to pursue college education, being thrust into the limelight, shine in the athletic arena and eventually walking away into Professional sport or oblivion with a minimal level of education. However, the persistence of glaring gaps between academic preparation and academic demands and the rigor of these institutions of higher education as well as the recurring episodes of special admits are shameful blemishes for institutions of higher learning as well as the nation (Hawkins, 2010a).

On the other extreme, one has also to acknowledge that Athletics presents young Black people with hope to elevate their status. Indeed some compete in the field as well as in the classroom. Given the raising graduation rates, one hopes that more and more of the Black

athletes would open their eyes to strive on both ends of academic excellence as well as the athletic pursuit.

Conclusions

This article used the CRT and SIT to analyze the macro and micro challenges that Black student athletes face on U.S. College Campuses. The macro challenges analyzed include legacy of racism and discrimination; Black athletes and labor on campus; and sport and race ideology in American society. The micro challenges analyzed include faculty stereotypes; academic underachievement; faculty and Black student athlete interaction; social-cultural isolation; athletics schedule and academic rigor. The above challenges are routinely faced by African American student athletes on Predominantly White College campuses in the U.S. Although the long years of exposure to racist ideology has compromised their own view of academic success, the African American student athletes must rise to the occasion as individuals and exploit the opportunities offered at college level to elevate them academically and eventually economically and socially. According to Thomas et al. (2007), although struggling Black students needed someone from among faculty and peers, who cared about to them to help them out, they ultimately, as individuals, must realize that they have the freedom and a responsibility to succeed if they do their academic assignments diligently. Thus families and the whole African American community and their leaders should channel their energies in reforming the mentality of their youths so as to harness their potential fully while in college.

Given the negative laden environment that Black college athletes experience, a reasonable number do not actually acquire their educational goals. However, it is the responsibility of the university through faculty and administrators to deliberately create and implement policies and guidelines to address the institutional racism that compromises the learning environment for the minority college athletes to succeed in college (Singer, 2005a). One critical area that the administration must deal with is that of combating the stigma that follows Black athletes. According to Simons et al. (2007), the university administration needs to correct the misinformation based on the dumb jock stereotype and provide the campus with more accurate information about athletes. The university should facilitate more faculty participation in the athletic enterprise to help reduce the misperceptions on the part of both parties. It would help the college athletes if faculty sensitive to Black students were identified to offer guidance and mentorship, create forums for coaches and faculty to discuss their concerns and ways to cooperate in the education of minority athletes. The university should also strive to create opportunities for African American athletes to interact with other students away from the sporting arena and classroom. This way, the university would be helping Black athletes to see themselves as part of the university community as a whole and the rest of the university community to experience a different side of the athletes. Such interactions would help individuals to question racist standpoints and hopefully work towards overcoming them.

Indeed lack of identification with the academic processes in college reduces the likelihood of persistence among athletes. Athletes who fail to bond with the rest of the student population find it easier to step out of college (Hyatt, 2003; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005). Thus the failure of education institutions to promote academic integration of Black student athletes is an issue that compromises their academic success. The colleges have to demonstrate a readiness to transcend the legacy of racism that has blinded them from viewing Blacks as prospective career professionals away from the playing field. For example, even as Black players

have been recruited enthusiastically, the senior coaching positions and athletics administrative roles have not been opened widely to Blacks in Colleges (Hill, 2006; Lapchick, 2006; Yetman & Berghorn, 1993). Lapchick (2006) laments that with all the job opportunities that exist for professionals in college sport and with all the educational opportunities being afforded to Black college athletes, one would hope that sport would lead the way to progressive change on racial issues.

The onus is on the leadership in institutions of learning, faculty, athletic departments and administrative staff to work towards promoting a level playing field for all without discrimination along skin color or gender. According to Crosset (2007), admission of people of color to PWC still grants them hope and graduation, which signify a badge of ability. There is need to recruit more regular Black students and senior personnel in faculty and administrative positions including athletics to help focus the academic interests of Black athletes. Efforts should also be made to initiate and promote student and faculty interaction as well as mounting Black student specific programs to help shape their skills, attitudes as well as survival skills to navigate a White dominated environment (Crosset, 2007; Martin and Harris III, 2006; Singer, 2005a).

The ultimate challenge for American society and its institutions is to facilitate and impact the youth in such a way that voids the stereotypical beliefs of self and others that now permeate society. There is need to invest in the institutional development of Black communities and creation of greater opportunity for Black youths in the broader society. Sport should just be a means to connect and to instill the motivation and skills to navigate through life and competing at the highest level academically and socially. There is need to focus on promoting social, political, cultural and economic equity by affording Blacks opportunities in head coaching positions, athletic administration, management, faculty, corporate positions, politics and the entire professional landscape. That way, Black kids will see opportunities beyond and outside the narrow choice of football, basketball and track and field.

This paper contends that the society, institutions of higher learning, and the individual student have to collaborate so as to put the athlete on a path to success in college and in life. The CRT framework offers an understanding of forces that have constructed a system in which Black student athletes are used by institutions as cheap labor to entertain wealthy alumni, fans and other students while they are constrained from maximizing the opportunity to earn a degree that could set them on a path to professional jobs, wealth and power. However, the individual athletes have to own up to the responsibility of playing their part to maximize the opportunity in line with the SIT framework.

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