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This chapter uses critical race theory as an interpretive framework to explain and operationalize the role of race and racism in the lived experiences and challenges of Division I Black male athletes, and specifically in relation to engagement and achievement at Predominantly White Institutions.

Stereotypes, Control, Hyper-Surveillance, and Disposability of NCAA Division I Black Male Athletes

Eddie Comeaux

Black bodies are targets of unfair hyper-surveillance, and are too often rendered disposable in a variety of settings, including American higher education—particularly in the context of intercollegiate athletics. For instance, Division I Black male athletes—who disproportionately made up roughly 61% of basketball teams and 56% of football teams in 2014–2015—face discriminatory campus climates at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs), including negative stereotypes and various forms of hyper-surveillance, or intense purposeful monitoring for the sake of control (Harper, 2016; Johnston, 1999; New, 2015; Sanderson, 2011; Singer, 2005). New (2015) reported that athletic departments hired class checkers to carry out surveillance of athletes in the revenue sports of football and men's basketball to ensure that they regularly arrived to their classes on time and remained in attendance for an entire class period. Black male athletes in particular tend to be more susceptible to these surveillance practices, largely because they are viewed more negatively by the campus community than their nonBlack counterparts regarding their intellectual abilities (Simons, Bosworth, Fujita, & Jensen, 2007).

The surveillance of Black male athletes at PWIs is an understudied topic. One way to address this is to center race in analyses of climate issues, including stereotypes and surveillance practices that can affect the educational experiences and school-to-career transitions of Black male athletes. In this chapter, I introduce critical race theory (CRT) as a framework and argue that increases in hyper-surveillance practices in college athletics are motivated by neoliberal or big-business-oriented governing structures. Further, I argue that this surveillance is a driver of structural racism

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and that the racialized nature of the college athletics enterprise exploits the athletic labor of Black male athletes while rendering them disposable. I conclude with suggestions for how campus stakeholders can move forward from these practices.

Critical Race Theory

To shed light on Black athletes' realities on college campuses, I employ a CRT interpretive framework. CRT emerged in the mid-1970s from criticisms of the critical legal studies movement, namely, the inability to sufficiently address race and racism in the judicial system. Several progressive legal scholars, including Derrick Bell, Lani Guinier, Alan Freeman, Richard Delgado, and Kimberlé Crenshaw, argued for the need to foreground and account for the role of race and racism in social life and to address the ways in which the judicial system has legitimized and legislated racial inequalities in the United States (Crenshaw, 1991). Critical race scholars note that race continues to be deeply problematic, and that race relations are used to continually sustain the hegemonic systems of White supremacy (Crenshaw, 1991).

CRT has since developed as an analytical lens and influenced a great number of scholars, advancing empirical research in various disciplines, including education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). For elaboration on central tenets of CRT in education, refer to Chapter 1 and Solorzano (1998). In this chapter, CRT is a useful tool to analyze and explain the intersection of race and educational policy and practices on the educational experiences for Black male college athletes, and to offer strategies to confront racism.

Race, Racial Stereotypes, and Racism in College Athletics

CRT provides strategies to challenge dominant structures and policies encountered by Black college athletes. Indeed, a critical race framework is especially relevant when one considers the personal and learning development of Black athletes at PWIs. For example, an article in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* reported that Black athletes feel they are marginalized and not taken seriously by White professors in the classroom and on campus (Perlmutter, 2003). While engagement in educationally purposeful activities, such as student–faculty interactions, contributes directly to desirable educational outcomes, Black male athletes' purposeful campus engagement activities are limited (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011; Gayles & Hu, 2009). This reality is largely the result of a hostile campus racial climate, including reinforcement of low academic expectations and detrimental and deeply-rooted racial stereotypes held by significant members of the college community (Hawkins, 2010; Singer, 2005). For example, Singer (2005), using CRT as an analytical lens, engaged with four Division I, African American male football players at PWIs to understand their views of racism and the

potential impact that racism might have on their college experience. Through a single focus group and in-depth interviews, the author discovered that African American participants believed they were treated in an unequal manner compared to their White counterparts regarding the scheduling of classes, random drug tests, and consequences for poor behavior off the field that could be detrimental to the team.

These long-standing negative perceptions are not limited to faculty, coaches, and advisors. For instance, Sailes (1993) found that White college student participants believed that Black athletes were not academically prepared to attend college, were not as intelligent, and did not receive high grades as compared to White athletes. These findings are consistent with the literature on the unappealing "dumb jock" image, which suggests Black athletes have limited intellectual abilities, lack motivation, and do not perform well academically (Simons et al., 2007). In short, a CRT analytical lens advances the understanding of how dominant racial ideologies and structurally embedded racist practices work to maintain inequalities for Black male athletes attending PWIs. As well, such a lens highlights how Black male athletes are negatively viewed by campus stakeholders, and, at times, left vulnerable in a hostile campus racial climate.

The threat of negative stereotypes and racist practices can have pernicious effects on decision-making and behavior patterns for those targeted (Steele, 2010). Stereotype threat emerges from "the immediate situational threat that derives from the broad dissemination of negative stereotypes about one's group—the threat of possibly being judged and treated stereotypically, or of possibly self-fulfilling such a stereotype" (Steele & Aronson, 1995, p. 798). Researchers have proposed that in some academic situations, stereotypes about athletes distort perceptions of individual performance, and in other situations, just the mere salience of the stereotypes has the potential to undermine their best performance efforts in the classroom (Martin, Harrison, Stone, & Lawrence, 2010). The simple possibility of being judged is enough to deter a student from raising a hand or distract the student from contributing to a group discussion if they are triggered to become hyper-aware of performance.

Control and Hyper-Surveillance in Athletics

The high stakes investment in college athletics is evident. Under neoliberalism—defined as a belief in free markets, deregulation, individualism, and capital accumulation that tends to operate at the expense of, among other things, democracy, public goods, fairness, and social justice (Giroux & Giroux, 2004; see Chapter 1)—big-time athletic departments have created economic imperatives that lead them to produce and sell a product that will be attractive to consumers. As such, these values increasingly encourage athletic departments to manage—through the logic of surveillance and control—college athletes in revenue sports, who are disproportionately

Black men and largely responsible for enhancing and sustaining the product. For instance, the managerial decision making of a head coach may reflect utilitarian power over the athletes they have recruited. The athletics scholarship policy—which makes scholarships renewable at the discretion of coaches, per National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) bylaw 15.3.3.1—is a prime example of this utilitarian power and control.

Black college athletes understand that renewal of their scholarships (and their academic and athletic futures) is contingent upon their ability not only to perform well on the field or court, but also to comply with the expectations and policies of the head coach. In short, failure to comply with the head coach can result in nonrenewal of an athletics scholarship. In this sense, a head coach is likely to use utilitarian power to promise rewards, such as scholarship renewal, for control purposes, and to prioritize athletics over academics (Comeaux, 2015a). This serves the coach's own self-interests, which include delivering winning seasons and not necessarily developing the academic talents of recruited athletes.

Along with the maintenance of control through, for example, the athletics scholarship policy, there is a culture of hyper-surveillance in big-time athletic departments. Overt and covert forms of intense surveillance, which will be elaborated further, are motivated by the market-driven power of commodification and financial exploitation of athletic and racialized bodies, particularly the Black males in revenue-generating sports (see Hawkins, 2010). More than 30 years ago, Edwards (1985) pointed out this coordinated system of exploitation in intercollegiate athletics. Edwards forcefully contended that, because of a highly commercialized athletics enterprise that too often trumps academic obligations, there is an unfair contractual relationship between athletes and their institutions that deny Black college athletes access to opportunities for quality educational experiences. Clearly, race and racism impact the experiences of Black college athletes.

Further, hyper-surveillance practices serve to monitor athlete behaviors and socialization patterns within academic and social settings in higher education. In doing so, Black male college athletes are not only viewed as marketable commodities, but they have also been reduced, at times, to captives and "depoliticizers," or at least apolitical— essentially their socialization patterns on campus are monitored and controlled by coaches and other athletics stakeholders (Hawkins, 2010). Rarely are there opportunities to integrate and engage meaningfully into the broader academic community (Comeaux, 2015a). For example, athletics stakeholders, namely coaches and academic advisors/counselors, operate under the philosophy of simply keeping athletes academically eligible in order to compete in their sports and contribute to winning seasons (Comeaux, 2015a). This approach has created a subculture of low academic expectations and frequent targeted surveillance practices, thus limiting the possibilities for developing high-achieving, critically engaged athletes who can think critically and independently (Comeaux, 2015a). This neoliberal mode of governing is antithetical

to democratic values, and has become normalized and legitimized in athletic departments in very subtle and complicated ways.

Evidence of such hyper-surveillance practices can be found in how Black male athletes in revenue-generating sports are disproportionately under the watchful eye of athletics personnel as they traverse the educational terrain. Athletic departments employ "class checkers" who are paid to attend classes, compile signatures of targeted athletes, and make sure that these same athletes arrive on time and remain for the duration of each class session (New, 2015). According to New (2015), some athletic departments "are now opting for digital class checkers, using athlete-oriented versions of attendance software" (para. 10).

Outside of the classroom, social media has become increasingly popular among college athletes, fans, recruits, and other athletics stakeholders (Sanderson, 2011; see Chapter 7). With growing demand, the activity of college athletes on social media has created public relations issues and concerns about potential NCAA rules violations. Beyond bylaw 13.10.2, which states that an institution is not allowed to publicly comment on any prospective athlete until they commit, the NCAA has not developed or enacted a social media policy. Instead, institutions have been pressured to create and maintain their own. In a content analysis of social media policies in student-athlete handbooks from 159 NCAA Division I institutions, Sanderson (2011) found the majority were generally negative and content-restrictive, underscoring risk and punishment; some required athletes to provide athletics personnel with access to their social networking profiles or accounts. These policies raise a fundamental question about whether formal college and university social media usage and monitoring practices infringe on constitutional free speech and social media privacy rights. The findings also reveal another form of hyper-surveillance and control orchestrated by athletic departments—one that has become routine, normalized, and even celebrated with very little pushback from the broader public (see Chapter 7 for more detailed discussion).

Finally, many athletic departments have expanded to state-of-the-art academic facilities over the years, in part to attract top recruits (Wolverton, 2008). These new facilities generally include a plethora of desktop computers in academic center laboratories for exclusive use by athletes, and many even include glass-enclosed rooms. Such construction means more openness, more noise, and less privacy when compared with sound-proofed drywall. Considering the current monitoring practices in athletics, these new glass-enclosed rooms do indeed suggest a space and place of surveillance and control of targeted athletes.

From a CRT standpoint, unlike their white counterparts, a significant number of Black male athletes who enter college campuses are targeted and labeled by athletic department stakeholders, whether consciously or unconsciously, as suspicious and anti-intellectual (Simons et al., 2007). Such assumptions or labeling justifies and legitimizes the use of intense

surveillance practices rather than promoting educational outlets as the practices of intellectual freedom in a democratic society (Giroux, 2003). Moreover, through neoliberalist discourse of postracial or racial color blindness, athletics stakeholders' policies and practices—for example, class checkers, social media monitoring—appear race-neutral on the surface. However, they fail to identify and understand the material impact of their racist practices and patterns on the psyche and experience of Black male athletes, which results in White privilege and the maintenance of the interests of neoliberal White America (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). In effect, these shared neoliberal racial ideologies about Black males are accepted and internalized as racial common sense. This toxic understanding of race produces a form of anti-Black racism that Giroux (2003) termed "neoliberal racism."

Disposability of Black Male Athletes

Under neoliberalism, there is an unwavering drive for lucrative profit making, irrespective of the negative influence it can have on oppressed and marginalized populations—particularly Black people. White supremacists—those who believe in the inherent superiority of White people over nonwhites (Marable, 2000)—view these populations as inferior, insignificant, and disposable, and these populations tend to have limited access to opportunities and full participation in public life, resulting in what Bonilla-Silva (2006) has called color-blind racism and others have called the contemporary racial hierarchy (Giroux & Giroux, 2004). In higher education, Division I Black male athletes encounter similar experiences.

As commercial interests in revenue-generating college athletics continue to grow, and neoliberal values are embraced as central to the governing structure of the endeavor, it is increasingly difficult to ignore the effects on Black male athletes. Brown (2011) reported that athletes at Division I football subdivision schools spent 43.3 hours per week on sport-related activities, and men's and women's basketball players, who are disproportionately Black, missed the most classes—2.4 and 2.5 per week, respectively. Missed classes are largely the result of coaches' demands and television networks' (i.e., commercial sponsors') dictation of schedules and times for games. In fact, some Black male athletes are restricted to certain academic majors because of scheduling conflicts (Fountain & Finley, 2009).

Importantly, the commercial interests and entrepreneurial spirits in athletics undermine the purpose of higher education, prioritizing athletics over academics when it comes to funding structures, institutional values, and the treatment of Black male college athletes. A report by Harper (2016) revealed dismal graduation rates among Division I athletes in revenue-generating sports, where only 53.6% of Black athletes graduated within 6 years, compared to 68.5% of athletes overall. Looking deeper through a CRT analytical lens, the poor graduation rates among Black male athletes are indicative of the systemic failure—and role of race and racism—in which they

are largely celebrated and economically exploited for their athletic prowess; yet, they are seen as anti-intellectual and even marked as disposable once their athletic eligibility ends (Singer, 2005). Critical questions have been raised about graduation rates and whether the most highly publicized and disproportionately Black athletes in revenue-sports are adequately prepared for life after completion of eligibility (Comeaux, 2013).

Under the high-stakes commercial model of college athletics, athletics stakeholders tend to place blame on Black male athletes for their academic underperformance, failure, or choices, believing it is a problem with the athlete rather than a problem with the college or university system (Comeaux, 2013). Yet, athletics stakeholders, who are disproportionately White males, continue to benefit quite handsomely from the enterprise, and largely on the underpaid athletic labor, primarily of Black male athletes. In 2012, Huma and Staurowsky noted that if college sports revenue was distributed as it is in professional sports, the average Football Bowl Subdivision player would be worth $137,357 per year, while the average basketball player at that level would be worth $289,031. Indeed, these and other authors have made compelling cases that athletes in the revenue-generating sports of football and men's basketball are denied their fair market value, and moreover are not receiving guaranteed 4-year athletics scholarships, guaranteed medical benefits, guaranteed workers' compensation, and protection from brain trauma (Huma & Staurowsky, 2012; see Chapter 2). This lack of care, protection, and investment in Black male athletes indeed suggests they are a disposable commodity. For reasons of racial equity—broadly defined as producing fair and just academic experiences, opportunities, and outcomes for students of color at PWIs (Harvey, 2003)—athletics stakeholders must do more to improve the educational experience and school-to-career transitions for Black male athletes.

Implications for Policy and Practice

The visible consequences of the neoliberal political movement are abundantly clear in the racial experiences of Black male athletes at PWIs. This reality is not a coincidence—the NCAA system is purposefully designed to perform exactly this way. The message is clear. Neoliberal advocates in athletics continue to promote and sustain racist policies and practices—including 1-year renewal athletics scholarships, propagated stereotypical assumptions, and intense surveillance—that inevitably prevent Black male athletes from fully participating as active democratic citizens, and too often mark their lives as disposable and completely expendable.

To be clear, I am not suggesting that market forces cannot serve the interests of Black males or even public interests to some degree. However, a recognition and acceptance of education as a public good with democratic values—not as an afterthought—and market forces and White supremacy must be challenged and checked. As well, colleges and universities that

actively promote and recognize principles of democracy, fairness, inclusion, social justice, and academic excellence will be largely driven by the vision, knowledge, and competencies of those providing leadership. It is imperative that colleges and universities embark on self-examination and assessment of their own landscape (including campus leadership), accounting for the issues, and concerns raised in this chapter.

Athletics stakeholders, including University presidents, coaches, and senior-level administrators, may not be consciously aware that they support neoliberal values or that they are creating conditions that are not in the best interests of Black male athletes. Nevertheless, it is clear that interventions designed to combat racial inequalities and address the social significance of race and the existence of racism in the lives of Black male athletes are warranted. For one, it would be instructive for student affairs professionals to work closely with CRT scholars and other campus stakeholders who are racially literate to initiate and design professional development trainings and workshops that include sessions on specific cultural groups, including Black males, who are susceptible to discriminatory and racist acts on college campuses. An interactive and experiential session on the racialization process and racial stereotypes, for example, would facilitate intergroup dialogue and foster cross-cultural understanding of the types of conscious and unconscious policies and practices directed toward certain students. As an initial step to overcoming racial biases and prejudices, it would also be prudent for session participants to examine their own racial identities and their feelings toward other racial groups. Critical scholars must also continue to raise thoughtful questions around race and racism, and to challenge the new racism and racial common sense views that adversely impact the educational experience for Black college athletes. We must develop and employ antiracist pedagogy to name and to offer a critique of new, subtle and sophisticated forms of racism (see Giroux, 2003). Finally, we must continue to challenge market-driven values and the unregulated drive for profit-making in athletics that have visible and hidden costs to the educational experiences of Black athletes. These efforts may lead to racial self-awareness as well as racial literacy, and could ultimately contribute to the creation of more supportive and less alienating environments for Black male athletes.

Franz Fanon (1969) once wrote, "each generation must, out of relative obscurity, discover its mission, fulfill it, or betray it" (p. 206). Students, including nonblack students, will be responsible for challenging neoliberalism and "neoliberal racism," and for serving as change agents. Today, the power of solidarity among college athletes is evident. They (and their advocates) are finding their way and intentionally choosing their battles in the name of fairness and in the name of basic rights and well-being. The recent Mizzou players' protest against racism, the Grambling State players' boycott for better playing conditions, the Northwestern University football players' union bid, and college athletes' protests against police brutality and state sanctioned violence are all examples of their activism (see Comeaux,

2015b). Mobilization and organization among students is apparent, and there is participation and considerable promise in the path forward.

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