

TRASH TALK: Coded Racial Narratives in Sports

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INTRODUCTION

As an avid sports fan, I can eternally remember the glorious moments that my favorite sports teams have produced over my lifetime. The less fortunate instances when they have come up short are also memorable for the frustration and pain they cause. After any victory by my preferred franchises, I was eager to watch their highlights on Sportscenter and then read the box scores and recaps in the newspaper or an online sports site. When they lost, I

tried to avoid hearing about it and having the information about their shortcomings be repeated over and over became a burden to be managed until the next game or next season. Regardless of the outcomes, sports media, in my eyes, was entertaining and fun because it only involved sport. It provided short relief from the often disheartening news stories that reminded me that the world is plagued by many problems. For a long time, the ostensible purity of sports media, the focus on what happens in between the lines, and its entertainment value provided me with much comfort and delight. Sports seemed for me to exist in a vacuum of sorts; during the four quarters of basketball game or the nine innings of a baseball game I could take a momentary break from reality.

Sometime in the spring of 2010, I found myself watching an episode of ESPN's Sportscenter and came across a segment that illuminated how powerful sports media is. The segment was a report on an "incident" that took place between Dez Bryant, a former Oklahoma State African American football player, and Jeff Ireland, the general manager of the Miami Dolphins. Bryant made himself eligible for the National Football League Draft and Ireland was interviewing him to learn more about him in case the Dolphins found themselves in a position of being able to add Bryant to their team. All of this sounds normal enough, an employer interviewing a potential employee to learn if he is right for the organization and qualified to do the job. The situation got very interesting when for some reason, not known or reported by Sportscenter at the time, Ireland asked Bryant if Bryant's mother was indeed a prostitute. At that instant I felt a rather surprising rush of emotions. Countless ideas flooded my mind as I tried to gain a grasp on the situation. I wanted to know why such a question was necessary. I wondered if there was some context in which it could be called appropriate. I felt offended that a man of color looking to provide specialized

services to a team had been asked such a question. The power dynamic between the two individuals, Ireland and Bryant, their distinct racial identities, what behavior and language I would consider normal in an interview were some of the few social factors that I employed to make my own judgment on the situation.

Despite wanting to know all the facts surrounding the incident in an objective manner, I found myself becoming emotionally attached to it. For a variety of reasons, which I touch upon in my Dez Bryant case study, I found that Jeff Ireland, regardless of his intent, had committed a racist act. My opinion of him was not shaped totally by the incident and I was not looking for someone to demonize him in front of the American audience. I did find myself wishing that there be an in-depth panel discussion regarding the implications of the incident, not as platform to allocate blame or designate right and wrong but to serve as an educational conversation to spark debate amongst the show's audience. Unfortunately, this did not happen. For the most part sports writers and commentators debated whether or not the situation called for such a question. There were debates about how the question had nothing to do with race and all to do with learning how a young player deals with the sort of verbal abuse he will receive from opposing team and debates about how Bryant's "checkered" past requires this sort of double-check question. The failure to explore the matter in a more in-depth manner , left me with plenty of ideas and emotions and many messages to digest.

I refer back to my previous statement about how this event illuminated how powerful sports media is by saying that for most anyone who heard about the incident , whether they assessed Ireland was right or not, picked up their own plentiful basket of racial messages. The incident, for me, sparked a lot ideas regarding America's racial history, our education

systems, and institutions of power in the United States. After learning about this controversy, I could never see sports media as just responsible for reporting scores, times, and records. It opened my eyes as to how influential the context and medium within which athletes of color are shown can be in shaping how people perceive not only those athletes but the minority groups they belong to. The imagery and language utilized by sportswriters and in sports shows was not as neutral as I expected. The subtle, and sometimes explicit, manner in which some players were portrayed and written about began to reveal much more about perceptions of certain groups of people than I had ever noticed before. My illusion that sports media's focus was solely in athletic performance was shattered.

My own focus was then turned toward dissecting the messages sent by sports media. The realization that some precisely timed images, specific word choices, and associations used in sports media had grander social implications inspired me to more critically analyze the type of information I consumed on a daily basis. My affinity for sports intertwined with the fact that I, like most Americans, am heavily immersed in media brought me down this path.

My goal is to highlight a few critical issues within the realm of sports media. Through the use of case studies analyzing Tiger Woods, Barry Bonds, and Dez Bryant I aim to draw attention how racialized messages are delivered through the context of sports. In each case a specific, recurring, racialized idea used to portray an athlete will be investigated by looking through primary sources. The goal is to expose how professional sports as an institution of power is reflective of, and instrumental in, racial inequality by using coded racial narratives to damage the images of athletes of color and consequently, the communities they represent.

Social Historical Context of Athletes of Color in Sports Media

The time period I am going to focus on for my project will be contemporary. Although the plan is to examine recent racial issues in sports and how they are handled by today's media there is a long history concerning athletes of color and media. The importance of this topic is centered on the fact that some of the most visible people of color are athletes. The sports industry and its athletes have a tremendous following not only within the cities in which those athletes perform but across the nation and many times across the world.

This all sounds very positive for the most part; people of color finding tremendous fame, fortune, wealth, and professional success via athletics. These lucky individuals are presented

as being the most fortunate winners of the genetic lottery, given abilities and physical talents that go above and beyond the capacities of the mortal average human being. The audience is lured into thinking that such success breeds invulnerability to the social issues plaguing the rest of the people in their racial category. The newfound wealth and success is supposed to make those fortunate athletes of color feel grateful for making it despite the challenges that come with being person of color. What is rarely addressed is the reality that no amount of wealth and fame changes the institution that is professional sports and in a grander scheme, institutional racism.

Institutional racism on the professional sports level is extremely powerful. Team owners in leagues in the NBA, NFL, and MLB are almost exclusively white. Coaches, team personnel, and executives are also disproportionately white. It is hard to believe that leagues not only comprised of majority athletes of color, with the exception of MLB, which according to its website is comprised of forty percent athletes, cannot find a balance within its ownership and offices. The powerlessness of players is also on display in the hierarchical organization of white owners and athletes of color.

Although owners financially thrive from the athletic accomplishments of their athletes, there is a concerted effort to control their image and how they are sold to the American audience. Although athletes are amongst the most visible people in the nation, with thousands of games broadcast yearly, sports websites, blogs, magazines, sports columns, etc. tracing their every move, they actually say very little. Professional sports leagues produce some of the most colorful (no pun intended) characters in media today. The popularity of the leagues are directly tied to their revenue. The popularity of the league is dependent not only on brilliant athletic performance by athletes but also by the marketability of the players. Players

are marketable when they can be idolized, when they appeal to the broadest audience. The more marketable the players, the more marketable the league becomes thus resulting more money for everybody. In order for players to appeal to a broad audience the league tries to maintain a certain image for them. This image is supposed is very formulaic, exciting athlete, selfless team player, dedicated to winning, committed and loyal to his organization, having a positive impact in the community, etc. Those are the characteristics I imagine off the top of my head as a fan of pro sports. There are variations on this formula but the common denominator is the characteristic of not being a disruption. Historically speaking, players who have tried to activists of any sort have drawn more negative attention than anything. In professional sports, athletes and politics do not mix. This is especially true about athletes of color in white dominated institutions.

Athletes of color, when speaking about anything other their own sport, are rendered voiceless. This is why the way in which the media represents them is of critical importance. Not only do they play for institutions that reflect the white dominated structural inequality of society, there voice in sports media is also a field dominated by white journalists. Those white journalists are employed by publications, news stations, sports channels, that are either privately owned by white executives or part of larger media conglomerates that mirror the same dynamic. This means that the public perception of some the most visible people from certain races is shaped by their representation in media largely in control of the dominant group.

I find this topic extremely important because sports is marketed as a “ level playing field” impervious to the issues that trouble the rest of society when in fact it echoes and in some instances exaggerates and amplifies them. The media aspect is also extremely important

because of its prevalence and influential power. I suspect that certain images and misconceptions are fed to the American public to maintain for lack of a better term, racial ignorance in this country. The media also does a poor job, sometimes intentionally sometimes not, of feeding the public certain images and stories without placing them within the right context. Instead of educating the public, giving objective stories left up for interpretation, the public perception is sometimes swayed by biased, inaccurate reports. Also, any industry that is financially successful is loyal only to the dollar. This is why I suspect that despite the amount of charitable events, community outreach programs, etc. organized or attended to by athletes of color, those events are overshadowed by negative ones depicting criminality, violence, ignorance, subordination, in terms of media representation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In reading about minority representation in media in Page's "'Black Male' Imagery and Media Containment of African American Men" and "Race, Ethnicity, and Content Analysis of the Sports Media: A Critical Reflection" by Sterkenburg et al., of there was no disagreement about whether or not media has some effect on the way an audience formulates ideas about race, ethnicity, and sexuality. This allows us to operate under the assumption that negative images and discourse about certain groups of people or people seen as representative of their racial group do hold weight and are interpreted if not accepted to some extent by viewing audiences. Both researchers agree that sports media operates under the reality that the more powerful dominant group "have more power to label, categorize, and

define the less powerful ones” (Sterkenburg et al. 822). In both cases, the dominant group are white American or white European peoples.

Sterkenburg argues that sports media and even its content analysis by researchers overwhelmingly functions through a lens of white or non-white despite the many racial classifications that are used in common discourse (827). This structure is in place to ensure that, above all else, whiteness is preserved as the ultimate marker of social status in a racialized society. Depictions of racial or ethnic minority groups as possessing character traits that are undesirable and downright repugnant are used to maintain the status quo of white is right (Sterkenburg et al. 822).

The use of mass media to support social inequality has been in place in the United States since the eighteenth century (Sterkenburg et al. 821). In those days legal segregation and slavery were in place. Mass media supported those institutional structures by distributing messages about the inherent racial difference between whites and nonwhites, especially people of African origins. Today, segregation, slavery, and discrimination of any kind are completely outlawed. This is not to say that the system of race does not still exist to ensure that a dominant group maintains advantages economically, politically, and socially. Due to reform in legislation, racism now exists in more subtle yet arguably equally effective ways. Sterkenburg tells us that in sports commentary, for example, crude and overtly racist rhetoric has been abandoned but it has been replaced by clandestine and subtle racial biases (823).

An example of a common yet covert way to imply that African American males are inferior is to use mind-body dualism (Sterkenburg et al. 823). When analyzing the athletic achievements of Black athletes in comparison with white athletes, Black athletes are praised for their natural athletic ability while the success of white athletes is commonly attributed to

their quick thinking and adroit decision making (Sterkenburg 823). By framing their athletic skills in this manner and not saying anything overtly negative about either athlete, there is nothing to specifically target (Sterkenburg 823). This message still teaches us that whites have a skill set that applies in settings outside of an athletic arena and Blacks do not.

Helan Page offers a much more direct and accusatory view of mass media. She argues that our collective, national, assumption of African Americans derive from media and that media tell us that only a “few exceptionally embraceable African American men are capable of succeeding, while the rest should be contained (literally and figuratively) because they are innately incapable and tend to fail even when offered a chance” (Page 99). Media representations of dangerous and uneducated African American men are framed as threats to the white public space, as not having a place in the fabric of America (Page100). These images work to engrave into the national consciousness that those who are outside of the dominant group are only acceptable to a certain extent. Those who compromise the hegemony of white people will be cast aside and used as scapegoats for social ills (Page 101).

Mass media presents audiences with “black male imagery as information that is professionally designed and manipulated in a cultural struggle in which the dominant racial group seeks to contain the subjectivity of a competitive nonwhite other through the practice of racialized cultural politics” (Page 100). This places the blame for stereotypical racialized cultural products squarely on the shoulders of the media industry. The industry is not absolved of guilt just because media agents who live in a racialized society must by nature create products that serve the structures of racial inequality. There is a clear, vindictive, inexcusable attempt to safeguard the longstanding establishment of institutional racism.

The normalization of the image of the abominable African American comes from the systematic elimination of resources that finance and produce the creation of “positive black maleness” (Page 100). Positive images of black maleness are only embraced and endorsed when they fit within the ideological framework of white America. If those positive black images go as far as to reveal the negative ways in which the dominant group affects minority groups, they are shot down quickly (Page 107). When it comes down to it, a true hero of a minority community must directly challenge the institutions of the dominant group that oppress minority groups. Such challenges are not allowed and those who spearhead those attempts always meet some kind of misfortune manufactured by the same people they dared to challenge (Page 104). Social inequality as reproduced in mass media and in society in general is so deeply rooted it extends even to our federal government (Page 107). Programs that offer any criticism of public policy, police practices, the military industrial complex, the prison industrial complex, etc. rarely if ever reach the eyes and ears of national audiences (Page 107).

TIGER WOODS

There was a time when Eldrick “Tiger” Woods stood at the zenith of the American sports arena. His tremendous success on the golf course made him a millionaire. His squeaky clean image off of it made him a billionaire (Davie et al 109). For years, Tiger Woods was held as the golden standard for athletes. He exemplified professionalism in his workplace, the golf course, and graciousness in his personal life. Everything we heard about Tiger Woods pertained to his outstanding athletic achievements in golf. Other than that, only people close to him knew much about the type of man he was. We knew he had a beautiful wife named Elin Nordegren and that he was a father. His public relations team made sure that this is what audiences saw, a terrific sportsman, family man and refined gentleman. This was the case until the sex scandal erupted and we learned that Tiger Woods was an adulterer who eventually was diagnosed with sexual addiction. At this point, Woods’ status as a multiracial being or more bluntly, an honorary white man, was vanquished and he became Black again. We see this transformation in the way he is described and depicted in the media post-scandal.

Woods' public image was sculpted carefully throughout his entire life (Davie et al). His father, a former army information officer, used his experience to decide how Tiger would be presented to the world (Davie et al). He was very conscious of the idea that positive publicity would do his son very good, that Tiger's skills as a golfer had to be complemented with a clean, marketable image (Davie et al). One of the lessons passed down from father to son was that Tiger should always answer the media in the least amount of words possible (Davie et al). To say anything more than just the bare minimum was to risk revealing any information that could be spun, dissected, and scrutinized by the media. This tells us that Tiger Woods has always had a sense of how damaging a misplaced or misconstrued word, glance, or action as captured by a television camera or saved on a voice recorder can be. The power of the media was to be respected. His image was partly in his control and the rest was in the hands of journalists and sports commentators.

TIGER WOODS' IMPACT ON GOLF

Even before Tiger Woods reached the pinnacle of sport, he had learned to never draw attention to his personal life. The best way to become successful and remain successful was to present himself to the world as an embodiment of sport. Golf and Tiger Woods became synonymous. Before Woods' rise to the top, I certainly had no interest in following golf at all. The sport seemed to be purely a white man's game, played in beautiful golf courses by members of exclusive clubs. He really made golf relevant when he arrived on the scene in 1996. Tiger Woods made it "cool to like golf, cool to play golf, cool to talk about the Masters and the Open and other big tournament weeks" (Elliott). Tiger Woods was also responsible for the increase of interest in the sport not only as a whole but by people of color. Venita Roberson's "African

American Culture and Physical Skill Development Programs: The Effect on Golf after Tiger Woods”, written in 2003, asserts that in the ten years between 1993 and 2003 the number of African American golfers in the United States doubled (802). Although African Americans had been participating in the sport of golf for a very long time both professionally and for leisure, it was not until Tiger Woods became the face of golf that the sport was embraced more and more by men and women and of color (Roberson 802-810). Through his sheer athletic dominance, Woods seemed to transcend the racial barriers that existed within the sport. But soon we realized that this was never the case.

THE PRIVATE COUNTRY CLUB: AN EMBODIMENT OF WHITE PRIVILEGE

Golf clubs have, throughout their history, been places that are unaccepting of people of color and women. They have always preserved antiquated notions that no woman or person of color deserved access to the luxurious, elitist hubs of white males. For example, the founder of Shoal Creek Country Club in Alabama stated in 1990 that “we don’t discriminate in every other area except the Blacks” (Diaz). Shoal Creek was the golf course where the Professional Golf Association held its Championship that year. Jaime Diaz’s “Racism Issue Shakes World of Golf” shared an estimate by an official in the United States Golf Association that approximately “three out of four of America’s private clubs have membership practices similar to Shoal Creek (Diaz). The golf world was representative of institutionalized racism and racial discrimination to an extreme. It glorified the right of whites to form private clubs with racially exclusive restrictions that granted them the ability to preserve mainly all-white membership. Although the Professional Golfer’s Association of America (PGA) was forced to remove a white-only clause in 1961, there

was very little change in the membership practices being used at private golf clubs (Diaz). Despite the ruling, racist practices still exist. It is made increasingly difficult for anyone outside of the white race to join exclusive country clubs. These exclusionary tactics reveal one reason why golf, especially before Tiger Woods, did not have great commercial appeal. There was no way for a sport riddled with discriminatory practices, whose most prominent athletes were middle aged white men, to be able to capture the imagination people across the many demographics in the United States.

The arrival of Tiger Woods breathed life into the world of golf. The star power of Tiger Woods brought much attention to the sport but changed little of its hegemonic foundation.

TIGER WOODS AND RACE

There was a moment when Tiger Woods was not the king of the golf world. Before he became the biggest name in the sport, Tiger Woods was still identified as Black man. In 1997, Fuzzy Zoeller, a PGA golfer, was quoted as saying,

“That little boy is driving well and he’s putting well. He does everything it takes to win. So you know what you guys do when he gets in here, you pat him on the back and say congratulations and enjoy it and tell him not [to] serve fried chicken next year...or collard greens or whatever the hell they serve” (CNN).

Despite Woods’ youth at the time, he was twenty two years old, he was not a little boy. The term boy as directed towards Black men is meant to emasculate and insult. Regardless of how skilled a golfer he was, Woods was still seen as inferior by many of his competitors. Golf clubs create an environment for this sort of racial narrative through their racial homogeneity and racist practices. The statement about Tiger Woods serving fried chicken and collard greens shows how

Woods is seen as a stereotypical Black man .It goes without saying that Woods is not little boy and was certainly not there to “serve” anyone. After some public outcry, Zoeller defended himself by claiming the statement was a poorly timed joke that was not meant to offend anyone (CNNThe public, according to Zoeller, is supposed to believe that what he said is not representative of his actual thoughts and should not be taken seriously. This exemplifies how the golf club is in many ways the epitome of white privilege. Zoeller can pretend that the statement was a misunderstanding but it is obvious that the person of color is not generally respected at the golf course.). Unfortunately, only this sort of blatant racially insensitive remark or act is able to draw media attention. More subtle, yet equally hurtful, practices are not nearly as publicized.

It was clear that Tiger Woods’ ascension was making people uncomfortable; they could not keep him out of the sport. Samad Asadullah’s “Between The Lines: Tiger Woods’ Burden is Just Beginning” written in 1997 for the Los Angeles Sentinel, an African American owned weekly newspaper, expresses that “the social elite has never concerned itself with social responsibility that involved race...but now they have to deal with Tiger Woods...his success on the course and his mass appeal dictate such.” This appeared to be the case in the beginning. Woods had the status to make people address race on the golf course.

After Woods became only person to have ever won three consecutive U.S. amateur gold championships he was signed by Nike to a five year contract worth forty million dollars (Millard). Shortly thereafter, a Nike advertisement was airing on network television known as the “Hello World” commercial featuring Tiger Woods. The commercial shows clips of Tiger Woods playing golf at different stages of his life, with subtitles detailing his best golf scores at certain ages, his historic accomplishments as an amateur golfer, and then finally the statement “There are still courses in the U.S. I am not allowed to play because of the color of my skin...Hello

world... I've heard I'm not ready for you... Are you ready for me?" The advertisement clearly focused on the racial issues facing golf. It marketed Tiger Woods as a member of a minority group who was at a disadvantage due to the Black color of his skin despite his prodigious talents. The public relations manager for Nike at the time, Jim Small, said the advertisement was not created to target white-only golf clubs (Millard). Small said the commercial was made to encourage discussion about the exclusion of minorities and women in the sport of golf (Millard). Not only did he state the intent of the advertisement, Small bestowed upon Tiger Woods the mantle of "leading the charge" to make the sport more inclusive of women and people of color (Millard). We see that in the beginning, the marketing strategy used by Nike was very open and direct in their approach to race. They intended to use Woods to, at least symbolically, champion the fight for equality within the sport. The advertisement clearly illustrated how the color of his skin creates disadvantages for Woods and members of society outside of the dominant group. Woods even prioritized that he and Nike be instrumental in pushing for minority youth golf programs to encourage participation in the sport from minority youth and girls and to make golf more inclusive (Millard).

WOODS SHIFTS FROM ACTIVIST TO NEUTRAL

At the beginning of his career, Tiger Woods was expected to be the larger than life African American athlete who, in the mold of Muhammad Ali, would advocate to tear down the injustice within his sport and consequently society at large. This expectation was soon shot down. Ron Walters' "Tiger Woods seriously retards Civil Rights" describes Woods as wasted resource to Black America (3A). Walters' article in the Miami Times was written in 2002, about six years after Woods took the golf world by storm. We see that initially, there was hope that Tiger Woods

and his “Hello World” advertisement signaled a time for momentous change in a sport and surrounding atmosphere that was not hospitable to minority groups. By 2002, however, he had accomplished a plethora of athletic achievements in the sport but had already let people down. He served as a kind of role model by becoming successful but did not aggressively tackle social and racial issues at all. This would come back to bite him because regardless of the multiracial identity he assumed for himself, the sporting world and society at large still see him as Black.

Woods, instead of pushing the envelope and using his influence, began to take the stance of neutrality on all issues. When asked about what he thought about a private golf club in Scotland, site of the British Open in 2002, that excluded women, Woods stated that the club was entitled to set their own rules (Walters). This is completely contrary to what we expected from a young Tiger Woods who, in 1996, asked the world “Are you ready for me?” To completely back down from the challenge for whatever reason is unacceptable. In the specific case of the British Open in 2002, he was simply being asked for his opinion. He was outside of the United States and playing on British grounds and still would not denounce the inherent wrongdoing that is exclusion due to gender or race. This is the same person who, just a few years earlier, expressed to Nike his desire to endorse youth golf programs for the inclusion of minority youth and females (Millard). The question to ask then is why? Why did Tiger Woods change his stance on tackling social issues? The answer is complex. On some levels it reveals information about Woods’ personal attributes but may have more to do with large structures of power in place.

THE (QUIET AND PASSIVE) POSITIVE ROLE MODEL

The common defense of athletes that do not take the public activist route is to claim they are only responsible for presenting themselves as positive role models for youth, that their commitment and success within the sport will push others to reach their goals. This approach to creating social change does not engage problems directly and its results are unpredictable (Walters). William C. Rhoden, in his book, *40 Million Dollar Slaves* states that “the problem of the African American athlete is not an absence of resources- which are more abundant than ever- but an absence of vision and leadership to help define the next stage in the struggle” (Rhoden 200). Tiger Woods certainly falls under this category. Despite his immense wealth, Woods lacks a sense of duty regarding tackling the racial problems within his own sport and society.

There are several reasons why Tiger Woods may have decided to abandon his goal to tackle racial problems directly. One of the more interesting factors in this “decision” is due to what occurred to Woods’ racial identity in the process of becoming a golf superstar and worldwide celebrity. Through his athletic achievements, Tiger became tremendously popular. He became so well-known that fans of other sports and even audiences who were not following golf became

familiar with him. This sort of mass appeal is what deems an athlete a crossover athlete. A crossover athlete, due to his star power, demands attention and adulation from everyone. Their scope and influence is not limited to their own sport, they become cultural icons. This status as a crossover athlete allowed Woods to escape the “burden” of being a male of color thriving in an institution not welcoming of his kind. There is an important power granted to this type of individual, “the crossover athlete often transcends his own race” (Rhoden 204). As Woods climbed the ladder of social status, the box within which he was confined, the box of stereotypical black maleness, no longer contained him.

This new granted freedom meant that Tiger Woods’ was no longer looked at as a man of color. His new status granted him immunity from the consequences of being perceived as a Black man. Racism was no longer something he had to deal with. Woods’ special situation granted him a type of honorary whiteness. It is not surprising that the attributes that bestowed him such a distinction were his wealth and power. Those two qualities, along with mass appeal, must somehow, according to the rules of our society, make you a white man. Tiger Woods was allowed into the exclusive club because he played by the rules dictated by white America. Athletes of color “who made whites feel comfortable, who more or less accepted the vagaries of racism” and were capable of “taking abuse, turning the other cheek, tying oneself in knots, holding one’s tongue, never showing anger, waiting for the racist sensibilities to smolder and die out..” were allowed to integrate into the mainstream (Rhoden 101). Woods did exactly what the prescription required of him. His “if you can’t beat them, join them” strategy worked for him in terms of reaching professional success but left people of color disappointed and once again placed the mantle of responsibility for uplifting communities of color on someone else.

Tiger Woods' Asian-American and African American, American Indian, Dutch, - multiracial identity, although well documented, is something that became obscured during his rise in popularity within the United States (Davie et al. 113). His abundant wealth and meteoric claim to fame allowed him to rise to the top of social class (Davie et al 113). His public image, as constructed by his sponsors, was disassociated from any hint of Black identity. His social class allowed him to temporarily evade the consequences of his racial location. He was so rich that he could pretend he wasn't black although others still saw him as Black. When Woods appeared on Oprah's television show and told the world he saw himself as more than just Black, as Cablinasian, he didn't endear himself to more people by taking on multiple identities. Instead he alienated himself from all people who consider themselves Black. This reveals how detrimental even the faintest association with Black identity can be negatively affect the marketability and professional success of an athlete.

To make Tiger Woods something more than "just" a Black male, or a biracial Asian and African American male was the primary goal to increase his marketability. We see that in his particular camp it was not enough to make Woods seem like the one exceptional person from a pool of usually undesirable men of color, the route to go was one of complete suppression.

Tiger Woods himself has "denied his Blackness and invented an idiosyncratic ethnic category, Cablinasian, to describe his heritage and identity" (Davie et al 113). The idiosyncratic term Cablinasian was his attempt to account for his Asian, Black, Caucasian, Native American, Dutch family background.

The need for a multiracial people to try to define their own identity is well within their rights. The right of all people to be able to establish their own identity without having to deal with the societal burden, expectations, and stereotypes placed upon them by the system of race is

something we should strive for. Unfortunately, we have not progressed this far in American society and there still exists a distinction between our racial and ethnic background and our racial location. Racial location refers to the racial assignment every person is given by society. People are powerless to change their racial location. This idea of racial location comes from critical race theory. An individual came claim to be a person of many mixed races but is victim to whatever label they are given by the outside world. Regardless of our ethnic background, we live in a society where one is either within the dominant group or outside of it. Through the accumulation of status and wealth, Woods climbed the social ladder, tried to manipulate his image and toy with his racial location. By maintaining a pristine public image and remaining atop the golf player rankings, he was temporarily allowed to do this. Tiger Wood's deification as a sports icon, golf god, American marvel, granted him status as an honorary white man. It is almost as if the sports world granted him that access because if he was so perfect, then he couldn't just be a Black man.

The term honorary whiteness is commonly used to describe the status given to Asian Americans by whites. The honorary whiteness is meant to be a compliment to Asian Americans for being the minority group that outperforms other minority groups. Unfortunately, this status is damaging because by highlighting certain "positive" generalizations made about very varied Asian cultures it also criticizes and put down supposedly inherent negative characteristics of other minorities. What this means is that whenever an Asian American excels at something it is attributed to their cultural attributes so that other groups of minorities are categorized as lazy underperforming, irresponsible, criminal and overall inferior .

Woods was given such a status because although he was a Black man, he played by the white man's rules and dominated a white man's game. He lived the life that embodied the

American dream and he even married a white woman. Woods could not be criticized for anything because he did everything in a relatively quiet manner. His private life was indeed his private life, and as a Black man he did not challenge the white institution of golf. As a sportsman, Woods beat at a game that requires as much mental acuity as physical skill. He could not be stereotyped as a physical specimen that was genetically superior due to his race. Most importantly, he was bringing attention to golf without drawing attention to himself.

FALL FROM GRACE

The stainless record that granted Tiger Woods momentary immunity from being labeled as another Black athlete took a lifetime to accrue. Unfortunately, he no longer possesses such magical powers. During that time, Tiger Woods was able to operate outside of the dominant white racial frame, a frame consisting of racialized stereotypical images and interpretations used by whites (Davie et al. 111 or is this Feagin because Davie quotes Feagin). Once the unblemished image of Woods was destroyed by media reports of his adulterous activity, he regained his status as a Black man and the criminalization that comes with it.

One of the more visual examples of how Woods' entire public persona went from honorary white man to thuggish African American is the front cover of the February 2010 Vanity Fair magazine issue. Tiger Woods graces the cover but in a very different costume than the one the public had grown accustomed to. Instead of being a walking Nike billboard and wearing a Nike polo shirt, Nike shoes, a Nike hat, a Tag Heuer watch, and swinging a Nike golf club, Woods is

featured shirtless. In his hands are two dumbbells and the only clothing we can actually see on him are a black winter hat and a generic black wristband.

The Vanity Fair cover was the first time I could recall ever seeing Woods shirtless and the first time I had ever seen him lifting weights. He absolutely resembles an inmate weight training in a prison yard. The look on his face is stone cold and his eyes are empty and menacing. He has the look of someone who does not care about anything because he has lost everything.

The significance of the image is tremendous because it symbolizes the shift in the public perception of who/what is Tiger Woods. Before, he was a squeaky clean sportsman that was accessible to everyone because either he had no race or was an honorary white man. Now, he was a powerfully built, threatening and intimidating Black male. He was also diagnosed as a sex addict and he was an adulterer. It is as if a ratings board changed his rating from "Rated G" for family audiences to Rated R for adult consumption only.

The image confirms that once an embraceable Black male breaks the rules and does not operate within the guidelines of a white dominated institution, he loses all credibility. There is no room for a criminalized African American male within a white sphere.

The image is a conscious effort to illuminate how Woods' Black identity (along with his voracious and insatiable sexual appetite for white women) is what caused his downfall. The public is now encouraged to see him as traitor and a fraud. Tiger Woods was unfaithful in his marriage. He betrayed his wife but he did not commit any crimes. He paid the price for committing adultery when his wife divorced him. Tiger Woods is not the only professional athlete who has had several sexual partners and has cheated on his wife. The way he has been described in the media would lead us to believe so. This is the price of fame but also the price of operating as an honorary white man. There is no room for error because Woods' marketability is

what gave him the exclusive pass as an honorary white man. As soon as he lost that, everyone lost all respect for him. Woods went from being a role model to a laughingstock diagnosed with sexual addiction.

Tiger Woods became known as the wealthy Black man who could not control his desire for sex and more specifically sex with white women. In his fall from grace, Woods' image became more racialized than ever. As soon as the public was able to see him a sexual being, his Blackness, out of nowhere, was the most important part of his identity. The picture now focuses on a side of Tiger Woods that we had never seen before, a man with a dark side (no pun intended). The photo on the cover is one of many that were said to be "never before seen." This meant that the pictures were available before the scandal but they were not used. It must not have made sense to use a bad boy image of Woods when he was heralded as a wholesome role model.

DEZ BRYANT CONTROVERSY

In March of 2010, news reports indicated that during a pre-draft interview, Jeff Ireland, the General Manager of the Miami Dolphins asked then college player (now NFL player) Dez Bryant if Bryant's mother was a prostitute. The question, according to news sources, was supposed to be in context because of the specific questions Bryant was asked beforehand. Apparently, Jeff Ireland asked Dez Bryant what Bryant's father did for a living and Bryant responded by saying that his father was a pimp. According to a Sports Illustrated report, when Ireland asked Bryant what his mother's profession was, Bryant said that his mother worked for his father. Ireland asked if Bryant's mother was a prostitute because prostitutes "work" for pimps. The only people who truly know what occurred behind those closed doors are Jeff Ireland and Dez Bryant. Bryant later denied ever admitting his father was a pimp. So according to Bryant, Ireland asked the inflammatory question completely out of nowhere. ESPN analysts debated the issue, some believed the prostitute question was out of line while others believed it was normal for this type of question to be asked. Matt Millen, a former general manager, insisted that the question was actually created to test how Bryant would

react to an offensive statement. He believed that the things said on the field by opposing players are way worse than that question and that Ireland needed to know how Bryant would react. He also was visibly irritated that some people saw the interview as an act of racism. The Dez Bryant controversy brings to light not only the way in which NFL teams pry into the lives of draft prospects in order to determine if they are stable and embraceable Black men but also the abuse of power used by media outlets to exploit the players and their families.

The reason this controversy became so significant is because it brought to the surface how intrusive the pre-draft interview process can be. National Football League franchises want to know everything possible about their future employees. The more I saw and read about the incident the more I realized how the work structure of the NFL is completely different from your average workplace. This is not merely stating the obvious reality that athletes are not average employees because of their extraordinary skill sets, rare abilities, and big paychecks. What I mean is that a player essentially becomes property of the franchise. The franchise wants to know and sometimes even control the outside influences of their athletes. The athletes they most need to control are African American athletes who they believe need guidance to help them stay on the right path. This issue is about race because NFL teams buy into the mainstream criminalization of young Black men. Although Black athletes are not the only ones who get into trouble, they are labeled as the group that is racially more inclined to fail. The right path, in the mind of the franchise is the path that allows the player to stay out of trouble, produce on the field, and most importantly generate wins and revenue for the team. Teams are so invested in the players staying out of legal trouble not because they care for the individual but because they can gain profits from the player being on the field. Anyone who argues otherwise is wrong because when an athlete is

injured and cannot perform, they are of no use to a professional team. The value of the Black athlete is equivalent to his production on the field. This is why players are forced to play through debilitating injuries. If they aren't producing labor, they are seen as a financial and legal liability. For the most part, this sounds like a good deal; the player becomes successful and is surrounded by people who want him to succeed. Unfortunately, this rhetoric is riddled with coded racial narratives that often point to deficiencies in the home life of African Americans and even their perceived shortcomings as a race.

There is a fine line between ideology and practicality. What I mean by this is that the reality is that many African American athletes come from tough backgrounds and grow up in networks of people that are not always beneficial to them. To help those individuals grow as people, in ways they could not during their adolescence, short term measures might have to be implemented. In the case of Dez Bryant and other professional African American athletes, the short term measures can include educational tools seminars and instructional meetings but also restrictions like curfews, limitations on areas and venues they can visit and even monitoring of the people they choose to surround themselves with. The advantages are that these young men have access to the type of resources that were not allotted to them as youngsters. As products of impoverished minority neighborhoods, these men often grow up without having had the resources, access, education, cultural capital, and mindset necessary to fully understand the world around them. The disadvantage of having an NFL team tell you how to live your life by dictating where and when you are supposed to be places and who you can associate with is that it feeds into the notion that these men are irresponsible children who despite their athletic talent, lack the skills necessary to fit into society. We are fed this imagery of rich, white men shepherding troubled Black youth into successful lives. There is

also the assumption that without intervention, many of these young men will fall into a life of crime. This is where the balance needs to be struck; some of these athletes, like anyone else, would benefit from having access to resources that were previously unavailable to them but too much intervention allows white executives to exhibit a paternalistic influence over their African American players.

This is the case with Dez Bryant, he is a young man who may need some outside help to provide him with the support and guidance he needs to reach his full potential. Conversely, he was being described before the NFL draft as a player who no doubt possessed the physical gifts required to thrive as a professional athlete but one that had “character” issues and might be too risky of a project for an NFL team. This is before Bryant had any history of legal trouble. Bryant was confused as to why he was looked at as troublesome and unpredictable despite having a track record that indicated otherwise. The reason why is because he comes from a broken home. The image of the broken homes of racial minorities, especially African Americans, is ever present in the national consciousness as one of the main reasons why there is such a wide gap in terms of economic, social, and political power between African Americans and the white majority. The focus is shifted away from institutional inequality and the “broken homes” of Black families.

When Ireland asked Dez Bryant about his parents’ professions he was trying to put a gauge on what Dez Bryant may or may not become due to his family situation. This young man is categorized as damaged goods because in the public eye his parents are criminals. People don’t expect him to be a respectful, responsible, law-abiding citizen because not only because he is the offspring of two people who do not fit that description but also because he is Black. The way Black youth are criminalized in this society feeds into this notion. Once

again, the blame is put not on the structural inequalities that lead to poverty, hopelessness, and consequently crime. African Americans, along with some other racial minorities, are cast as racially inferior and deserving of their lower status.

SCAPEGOATING

One example of this can be seen in the ESPN article “Bryant’s mom wants apology from Miami.” The article states that Angela Bryant felt her legal problems were being used against her son. She was right; Dez Bryant was red flagged as a potential troublemaker not for things he had done in his life but for crimes committed by his mother. The article made sure to emphasize that she felt Jeff Ireland’s predraft interview question was inappropriate because Mrs. Bryant’s drug convictions had occurred over 12 years ago. The reason this is emphasized in the article is because in order to justify Ireland’s actions, or at least disqualify any reason for which the Miami Dolphins organization would have to apologize to the Bryant family, ESPN dug up criminal records that showed Angela Bryant was much more recently convicted on drug related crimes. The common knowledge had previously been that Angela Bryant was convicted in 1997 and sentenced to eighteen months in prison for selling crack cocaine. This article reveals that ESPN took the initiative to track down more information about Angela Bryant and further embarrass the Bryant family and fuel the argument that Dez Bryant comes from a broken home. The third paragraph in the article reads:

Lufkin, Texas police records acquired by ESPN on Monday show that she also was arrested in April 2009 after she was caught selling crack cocaine to police informants. In August, she was found guilty of two felony counts for possession of a

controlled substance and the manufacture and delivery of a controlled substance, and she was sentenced to ten years' probation. (ESPN.com)

The effort ESPN puts in to further expose Angela Bryant, a woman who never has and never will play professional sports, is tremendous. I wonder how they even came across those police records. Also, I find it disturbing that a media network whose focus is sports entertainment can come across and distribute these kinds of findings. Angela Bryant's criminal record also does not change the reality that Dez Bryant, the athlete in question, has nothing to do with any of this. Also, Angela Bryant served her time in prison. To continue to divulge information about her past for the entertainment of readers and viewers is unjust. Furthermore, ESPN has also chosen sides in the argument between those who believed Jeff Ireland crossed the boundaries of professionalism and those who believe he did not. This article does not have a writer's name attached to it. As a reader, I see the article listed as a product of ESPN.com news services and I assume that it represents the view and ideas of the ESPN as a whole. If there was a name attached to it the reader could, to some extent, believe those are the opinions and ideas of a specific person. In this case though, we see a powerful and highly visible media network use its vast resources to "acquire" police records about someone's mother. Angela Bryant is scapegoated as the protagonist of the entire controversy and Jeff Ireland is basically let off the hook. The article makes the argument that it is preposterous that this Black woman, a criminal with an extensive police record for dealing crack cocaine, is asking for an apology. They strip her of any dignity and destroy her reputation before reporting that Dez Bryant just wants to move past the situation and that Ireland called and apologized to Dez Bryant. The closing statement in the article is a quote from Angela Bryant in response to whether or not she think she deserves an apology, she

says, “I think he should have [apologized], Why wouldn’t you do that.” The placement of Angela Bryant’s question in the article creates a sarcastic effect. In the previous sections we are told three things: 1. Angela Bryant is a criminal 2. Dez Bryant just wants to move past the incident and 3. Jeff Ireland has already apologized to Dez Bryant. The story has been structured in a way that makes her seem like she is out of her mind for asking for an apology after someone equated her status as a Black woman with legal problems as a prostitute. The title of the article (“Bryant’s Mom Wants Apology from Miami”) is also highly misleading. The article barely mentions Angela Bryant’s desire for an apology but quite thoroughly lists her criminal background.

ESPN’s use of extensive resources to expose Angela Bryant is an example of social inequity. Before finding the article above, I thought ESPN did a decent job of reporting about the controversy. I recall seeing a panel style debate on Sportscenter with former NFL player Marcellus Wiley and other members of the media. Some of the members of the media, like Marcellus Wiley, thought the prostitute question was perfectly fine while others condemned it as a racist act. I was appreciative of the fact that at least there was a diverse spectrum of views on the issue being presented. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said about the articles that were produced in the following times after the incident. It is not a coincidence that it is a rarity to have a racial issue be discussed by the general sports media in a manner that reflects and respects the opinions of all people. The overwhelming majority of sportswriters, over ninety percent, are white (Alexander). This means that the news generated for sports fans of all races comes from a homogeneous white group.

CULTURE OF POVERTY

The question that we are left to wonder is why the upbringing and family background of Dez Bryant, and so many other African American athletes, is of importance for NFL teams. The reason why his background is so important is because white institutions like the NFL buy in to the myth of the culture of poverty.

The culture of poverty concept was theorized by Oscar Lewis in the 1960s and essentially argues that poor minority communities and their inhabitants can be expected to possess certain attributes, almost all negative (Gorski). Among the characteristics common to these neighborhoods are a lack of a sense of history, neglect of planning for the future, and frequent violence (Gorski).

The culture of poverty myth is most talked about with regards to the education system; often times teachers will expect less academic achievement from children that come from a poor minority community. This theory applies to why Dez Bryant has had to deal with so much frustration due to his family background. NFL organizations expect him to fail and to have trouble with the law because of who he is and where he comes from.

There are some especially demeaning expectations of poor people that come from the culture of poverty concept. The first one is that poor people are lazy and unmotivated. (Gorski) This misperception is highly inaccurate and a study by the Economic Policy Institute reports that “poor working adults spend more hours working each week than their rich counterparts” (Gorski). Poor work ethic is problematic for any employer but especially for NFL organizations. When Jeff Ireland was conducting his predraft interview Dez Bryant was expected to be drafted in the first round of the NFL draft. Players drafted that early usually receive large contracts of guaranteed money. This means that regardless of whether or not Bryant gets injured or underperforms, he has to be paid the amount on the contract. An

NFL team is a business, the reason it exists is to generate profits. If a general manager believes that Dez Bryant will likely exhibit poor work ethic and “steal” money from the franchise, he will hesitate to draft him. At the same time, Dez Bryant was a prized prospect because of how well he performed as a college athlete. College athletes do not get paid and there are no guaranteed contracts. To expect Bryant to become a liability after having been such a tremendous asset as an unpaid college player is to buy into the culture of poverty concept. The likeliness of an athlete to give up and stop working after having reached the pros is much less likely than the probability of a university exploiting an African American student athlete to generate revenue. I come to that conclusion because players in the NFL have to prepare hard because lack of preparation can lead to serious injury. Therefore, most guys work hard. Universities do not pay their athletes despite the fact that the athletic contributions of a single player can generate millions of dollars for the school. This topic can be a separate thesis on its own.

Another assumption of the culture of poverty is that “poor people tend to abuse drugs and alcohol” (Gorski). Our collective imagination encourages us to believe that poor minority neighborhoods are cesspools, hotbeds for drug sales and distribution and places that are untouched by the law. This is because “drug sales are more visible in poor neighborhoods” even though “drug use is equally distributed across poor, middle class, and wealthy communities” (Gorski) . The increased visibility of drug sales in poor neighborhoods is based on several factors, some of which include racial profiling and the conscious decision of police forces to pursue drug dealers and users in poor neighborhoods instead of rich neighborhoods. Why? Because poor drug dealers cannot afford to defend themselves with good attorneys in court and therefore are imprisoned at a higher rate. In the case of Dez

Bryant, the criminal record his mom possesses might as well be his. Her criminal convictions are a red flag to Dez Bryant suitors because in their eyes not only does he come from a neighborhood with a culture of poverty, he also is the direct offspring of a drug dealer and a pimp. This is more alarming to them because they assume the attributes he might have developed from simply being from a poor neighborhood will certainly develop from the compounding of being from a poor neighborhood and having delinquent parents. As more bad news about Angela Bryant appears, Dez Bryant looks more and more like a risky pick.

Needless to say, Dez Bryant will falter only because of his own decisions. The expectation for him to fail will only make it harder for him to stay out of trouble. NFL organization will operate using the deficit theory. Deficit theory operates under the assumption that “poor people are poor because of their own moral and intellectual deficiencies” (Gorski). The Bryant family is seen as a family of untrustworthy individuals because of criminal records and because they are perceived as lacking moral principles. This idea of how and why the less fortunate are less fortunate continues to thrive because people can reference well established stereotypes and pretend that systemic inequality does not exist (Gorski).

WHO ACTUALLY BENEFITS?

We see the same lack of social critique sports show segments telling the stories of athletes who, despite tremendous adversity, have become successful professional athletes are very common. The viewer is easily overcome by a feeling of satisfaction; he is often taken aback by the tremendous obstacles that many athletes of color must overcome to reach the pinnacle of sport. The more often I watch these segments the wearier I grow towards the intent of the

story. More importantly, I am taken aback by the irresponsible extent to which these segments bring up and then ignore social issues.

Most stories of athletes of color featured in these segments include imagery showing the dilapidated state of impoverished neighborhoods. We are given a glimpse of the dangerous, seemingly uninhabitable birthplaces of some of our biggest sports heroes. The viewer is shown that many athletes of color come not from supportive communities but from urban battlegrounds that have conditioned them to succeed athletically but fail as mothers, fathers, and citizens.

The issues highlighted in these segments often include domestic violence, gun violence, drug addiction, drug sales, and poverty. We are encouraged to appreciate African American athletes for surviving these urban jungles and becoming modern rags to riches stories. The problem I find with these segments is that the only people who benefit from these sneak peeks into impoverished minority neighborhoods are the people who are not confined within those spaces. The only reason those areas garner the attention of a national audience for a few minutes during a segment on a sports show is because one man or woman from the neighborhood made it big as a professional athlete. Otherwise those areas are overlooked not only by cameras but by institutions of power at large that have the power to combat the social ills mentioned.

One example is a segment done on ESPN show E:60 titled “The Good Son: Dwyane Wade’s Relationship with his Mother.” The segment is just over 7 minutes long and had little to do with the relationship between Wade and his mother and more to do with her previous crack addiction. The story is touching because we learn that Wade’s mother transforms herself, with the help and money of her son, from a crack addict to a pastor. Unfortunately

there is so much time spent talking about the criminal activities and drug addiction of Jolinda Wade, along with the prominent crime in Southside Chicago that the story becomes almost an example of what the viewer should expect from families from that area. Dwyane Wade is a millionaire because he is a world-class talent. Not everyone has the ability to escape an impoverished crime ridden neighborhood and overcome a severely deficient upbringing by possessing physical gifts. In the first few moments we are told that Wade grew up on the rough streets of Southside Chicago, that his parents separated when he was an infant, and that Jolinda Wade turned to heroine and cocaine. The segment shows, while Jolinda Wade talks about her former addiction, the drug paraphernalia associated with the drug use. We see a spoon with a powderlike substance being heated with a lighter and needles to indicate the drugs are injected intravenously. There is no reason for there to be so much depth regarding Jolinda Wade's drug addiction. She shares her most intimate moments and the uncontrollable desire she had for drugs. Wade shares that as a child he remembers seeing his mother "shoot up" using a needle and that he was even held at gunpoint when police entered his home looking for his mother. We then learn that over a period of seven years, Jolinda Wade serves twenty eight months in prison. The segment has less to do with the relationship between Dwayne and Jolinda than it has to do with Jolinda's shortcomings as a mother due to her drug addiction. We are shown images of drug paraphernalia, county jails and holding cells, abandoned lots, a police car on patrol, an abandoned home on a dark corner. The lowest point in the interview with Jolinda Wade is when she admits to having been a "tester," the individual who is used as a guinea pig when a new batch of drugs arrives at the hands of drug dealers. Within the heartfelt story, we are given images dark and threatening images to

represent the neighborhood. We also learn about the darkest and most intimate moments of a family that has struggled with issues that no family deserves to deal with.

The stories of the Wade and Dez Bryant families are disseminated to national audiences for selfish purposes. White audiences are given a guilt free sneak peek at the desperation of communities of color. Sports media gives the general public access to the criminal and family history of African American athletes; this is a form of exploitation. The audience sees how the mothers of two athletes have in some ways failed them but the audience is not reminded at all of how institutions at large have oppressed and continually failed communities of color. Essentially the blame for the crime, lack of education, drug addiction and availability, poor upbringing falls squarely on the members of impoverished communities. Using Dwyane Wade's mother as an example, she is pictured as a person who fell into drugs entirely because of her own moral and emotional weakness. We are given no sense of how difficult it might be, due to institutional inequality, to be a single mother raising a child in the South side of Chicago. The manner in which institutional faults are overlooked and the failures of people of color are highlighted is in itself a form of social inequality. The way in which sports show segments and articles bring up issues that have to do with race is irresponsible.¹ Those media items simply become chances to stereotype African Americans as not having the willpower or intelligence to overcome simple temptations. They also serve as chances for white audiences who hold the socioeconomic status necessary to create institutional change to

¹ On this note: after Barbara Bush watched *Precious*, the movie about an African American girl who was illiterate, sexually and physically abused, she was interviewed on public radio and decided that the solution was to promote literacy (via her own Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy) in order to prevent kids like her from living "without the skills needed to live a productive life." Barbara Bush said that without those skills "the chances are good they will continue the cycle of poverty and illiteracy." This is a perfect example of how larger institutional forces are not critiqued and the people trapped with those cycles of poverty take blame for those failures.

scapegoat African Americans as being self-responsible for their lower status on the social ladder.

BARRY BONDS

Few players have had as polarizing an effect on baseball as Barry Bonds. Some fans and baseball writers applaud his tremendous on-field accomplishment while others attack him with a venom normally reserved for murderers. Regardless, Bonds has become a larger than life figure in baseball and in the United States and his prominence in the national consciousness has revealed some disturbing things about the state of sports media.

Although baseball does not attract the largest television audiences amongst American sports, a title that has been taken by the National Football League, it still creates the most revenue and holds its title as America's pastime. When Barry Bonds made his march up the record books and captured the title of all time home run king by first passing George Herman "Babe" Ruth, a baseball legend who is often embraced as the embodiment of America, and then Henry "Hammerin' Hank" Aaron, he drew attention to himself and to the sport. Unfortunately, much of the attention was purely negative. Although one would expect a player of the caliber of Barry Bonds, on his way to making history, to be embraced by national media, Bonds was rejected.

In order to put this Bonds' treatment in perspective I will compare the he is received to way two former Home Run record holders, Babe Ruth and Hank Aaron, were received throughout their careers. Babe Ruth was considered almost a living God who brought the

excitement of the home run into baseball. On the baseball field, few could compare to the awe-inspiring talent of Babe Ruth. He had tremendous power as a hitter and fans were drawn to the man who could hit the most balls over the fence. Off the field though, Ruth lived a wild lifestyle. He had absolutely no discipline and was concerned only with fulfilling his every instinctive desire. Ruth was known by baseball writers for drinking heavily, eating like a glutton, and sleeping with large numbers of women. The fans though, knew very little about his exploits and considered him a wholesome, childlike, gentle giant. Baseball writers hid some of the shadier aspects of Ruth's life from the public. They endorsed him as a national treasure and never critiqued his personal flaws. Although, Ruth was not exactly a role model, his loving personality made him a very likeable person. Baseball writers, like fans, were enamored with Ruth and he grew into a legend. His appeal gave him many luxuries. One of these luxuries was the approval of baseball writers. He built a camaraderie with them that other players could not. To ensure that their friendships with Ruth were never questioned, writers made sure they covered up all the dirt on Ruth. They frequently partook in his drunken shenanigans and general debauchery (Chafets 53).

Obviously, Ruth received much more favorable treatment from sports writers than Bonds could ever hope for. Instead of writers covering up Bonds' antics (like they did for Babe Ruth) they tried to expose him. Although the two players played in vastly different times, Ruth at the start of the 20th century, and Bonds towards the end of the 20th century and the start of the 21st century it is worth noting how dissimilar Bonds' relationship with sports media is to Ruth's. It is also important to mention that Ruth was embraced as perhaps the best ballplayer of his era and the home run king even though he played in a time when Major League Baseball was all white. Bonds' merits as a ballplayer were brought into question

when people became suspicious of his steroid use, no one questions that Ruth attained his athletic achievements in a segregated league (Alexander).

Hank Aaron, an African American superstar outfielder hailing from Alabama, received numerous death threats when he was on the verge of breaking Ruth's longstanding home run record. Aaron was eventually embraced as baseball's home run record holder despite the racist threats he endured. Aaron, throughout his journey, was a gentleman and a classy individual. Fans who did not want to see him succeed simply could not come to terms with the reality that an African American could hold the most important milestone in America's pastime. Hank Aaron began his career in 1954, just seven years after Jackie Robinson broke Major League Baseball's color barrier by joining the Los Angeles Dodgers in 1947. Although Aaron was not the first African American baseball player in the league, his career began before the Civil Rights Era. He had to endure racist taunts throughout his entire career and things only got worse later in his career when he approached Babe Ruth's all-time home run record.

People perceived Aaron's approach to the top of the record books as an assault to white supremacy. When Babe Ruth ended his career, few people imagined a player would ever challenge the total amassed by Babe Ruth. Even fewer would have imagined it would be done by a person of color.

Although Aaron received death threats throughout his career, those people who threatened were classified as overt racists. Hank Aaron was considered a gentleman who withstood a lot of hostility and animosity and remained passive. Aaron admits that the hateful mail changed his perspective on life; he learned to not be so shocked by the animosity directed towards him. For the most part though, his antagonists were easy to distinguish.

Overt racists, people who admit to believing that one race is inherently superior to another, or that commit hateful acts based on race are easy to identify. They consciously and openly express hate towards people who they consider to belong to an inferior race. This group of people, for the most part, operates differently from the type of people who have targeted Barry Bonds.

The type of racism that Bonds is facing is a more covert type of racism. In today's society, blatant and overtly racist acts are illegal and often frowned down upon. Racism still thrives though in other forms, mainly institutional and covert racism. Bonds is targeted because unlike Hank Aaron, who is considered an embraceable African American male for the mostly passive way in which he endured racism, Bonds is hostile towards a largely white group of sports journalists. Bonds' threatening demeanor made him fall out of favor with baseball writers not just because he was unapproachable. When Bonds, as a large, physically imposing male does not go out of his way to ensure that reporters are comfortable around him or to ensure that he politely answers all of their questions, he is classified as an unembraceable African American male. Although baseball writers would lose credibility today if they blatantly attacked Bonds for being rebellious Black player, they manage more subtle ways to destroy his image and question his accomplishments.

There are plenty of athletes who are not easy to approach and who make reporters' jobs very difficult. Bonds is a special case though because of the status he held in baseball in terms of his significance to the sport and his presence on the national consciousness and also because of his race. Helan Page's "Black Male" Imagery and the Media Containment of African American Men" argues that media teaches audiences to categorize African American males as either unembraceable and dangerous brutes or as belonging to a group of a few

exceptional embraceable Black men. Bonds, because of his unwillingness to submit to baseball writers in addition to his poor social skills, has been cast as an unembraceable Black male. In contrast, Hank Aaron was seen as threatening only in the sense that he was challenging the greatest record in what was considered (white) America's pastime. The way in which Hank Aaron politely dealt with hostility and the professionalism he showed as a player even under extreme duress, makes him an embraceable Black male. He never seemed aggressive in response to the hate mail he received and even though the hate mail forced him to realize how ignorant and spiteful some individuals can be, he never let it change the way he approached the game and the business surrounding it. Instead he learned to value his family and his place in history even more.

The comparison between Hank Aaron and Bonds is important because it reflects how conscious a person of color in a white institution (like Major League Baseball) has to be of their image in order to succeed and draw praise. There is a very limited scope in terms of what is deemed appropriate behavior for a Black athlete. Often times the fame and popularity brings an increased scrutiny and these athletes are constantly under a microscopic lens with journalists following their every move and trying to produce stories by using quotes out of context. For an athlete of color, the pressure is even greater. On top trying to maintain a good public image by saying all the right things, an athlete of color has to make sure that his behaviors are seen as socially acceptable. For some time, baseball players who were Black or Hispanic could not date white women. This behavior was seen as unacceptable and often times had negative results for the accused player.

The special code of conduct that is required of athletes of color is representative of larger social inequities. There is a message sent to successful Black athletes telling them that

success does not grant them all the liberties and privileges given to their white counterparts. They are reminded that climbing the ladder of social class does not free them from racial hierarchy. An athlete of color with a positive public image is cast as the exceptional representative of a community of largely unembraceable and disposable people of color. The moment that said player becomes comfortable enough to “question the hand that feeds him” by acting up with management or refusing to cooperate with media outlets, he is quickly devoured in a storm of undue criticism.

Jackie Robinson, the first African American ballplayer to break the Major League Baseball color barrier is a prime example of what is expected from Black athletes. Before being signed to the Los Angeles Dodgers, Robinson was thoroughly questioned and interviewed by Branch Rickey, the general manager of the Dodgers. Branch Rickey wanted to make sure he was choosing the best candidate to be the player who represented racial integration in the league. One of the most important qualities that Rickey was searching for in Jackie Robinson was that Robinson would be able to take racist verbal lashings from fans, opposing players, and his own teammates and coaches. Rickey expressed to Robinson that the only way he would sign him would be if he agreed to turn the other cheek when he was verbally assaulted. Rickey also valued Robinson because he was well-educated and eloquent. In terms of public relations, it is easy to understand why some of these rules and “qualifications” had to be set down. Most baseball people and a large portion of America were not ready to allow a Black man to take part in America’s pastime. In order for the signing of Jackie Robinson to be even a moderate success, Rickey believed he had to pick the most outstanding, exceptional, embraceable Black baseball player he could find. It had nothing to do with talent, Robinson was a terrific ballplayer but the Negro Leagues had a

myriad of untapped talent, it came down to finding a Black man that a white audience would find easier to embrace. This meant he had to be well spoken, educated, and resigned to the fact that he was powerless in a white man's game. In contrast, Bonds knows his athletic talent, much to the chagrin of white baseball writers, certainly gives him special privileges. He also comprehends that in this era, overt racism is not as prominent as it was just a few decades ago. This means he has more freedom to do what he wants, when he wants to do it. This includes being a jerk to reporters and people in general. This behavior does not win Barry Bonds many friends but it is well within his rights. Bonds realizes he does not have to put on a performance and actively pretend to be grateful for being a wealthy baseball player. He doesn't open up to people because he has a right to keep to himself. Bonds' self righteousness is appalling to some people because he is African American. In this society, we expect athletes of color to be accessible and approachable because they are expected to be grateful for being able to rise above society expectations for them.

Bonds, although not deserving of his treatment by the media, cannot be placed in the same category of individuals as Henry Aaron. Since his youth, Bonds has been a puzzlingly difficult to please and often times a downright nasty person. Despite his character flaws he has been scrutinized by sports media to the point where he seems like he is to blame for the steroids era in baseball and for the destruction of integrity in America's pastime. Those allegations have opened a window of opportunity for some sportswriters to say things about a baseball player that would otherwise be completely unprofessional and out of line. Bonds' position as a baseball pariah has given some writers enough confidence to say things without the fear of being scrutinized. Their messages to the American public have revealed a darker

side to American sports media, one that contains racial animosity that we are led to believe does not exist in an industry dominated by the white racial group.

Barry Bonds is so hated because he has become a symbol of unembraceable blackness. The term comes from Helan Page's "'Black Male' Imagery and the Media Containment of African American Men." Page essentially argues that the media portrayals of men of color, and specifically African Americans, encourages us to believe that only a select few Black men are to be accepted as capable members of our society. Those acceptable men of color are labeled embraceable, pointing to their willingness to conform and submit to predetermined roles in society that do not threaten or instill fear in the white majority. These males are embraceable because they are cast as the cream of the crop from a pool of rejects and misfits. So long as the exceptional men adhere to the confining rules of the dominant group, they are valued and respected. Once they challenge any white institution, the criticism ensues and they can quickly lose the status that took a lifetime to attain.

Barry Bonds has drawn the animosity of baseball sportswriters for many reasons. Allegations that Bonds took steroids to ascend the home run ranks have tainted his illustrious career. Instead of being appreciated as a champion of athletic achievement, Bonds has been cast as a worthless cheater. Although there seems to be an overwhelming amount of evidence tying Bonds to BALCO, a company that was known for distributing illegal performance enhancing drugs, and Bonds has been indicted for four counts of perjury for lying under oath about using steroids or any performance enhancing drugs, nothing has yet been proven. Anyone unfamiliar with the intricate details about the legal proceedings would assume, due to the negative publicity, that Bonds is a fugitive of the law.

GAME OF SHADOWS CODED RACIAL NARRATIVE

Bonds' reputation, despite not being very good in the first place, took the biggest hit with the release of the tell-all book *Game of Shadows* released in 2006. The back cover of *Game of Shadows* describes the book as “a landmark piece of reportage and a page turning expose, Game of Shadows casts light into the recesses of American sport to reveal the dark truths at the heart of the game of the game today.” The “complete inside story of the most notorious steroids scandal in sports history” was authored by Mark Fainaru-Wada and Lance Williams, two reporters for the San Francisco Chronicle. The San Francisco Chronicle is the newspaper most responsible for coverage of the San Francisco Giants, the team Barry Bonds was with during his alleged PED (Performance Enhancing Drug) use. Although Bonds was being hounded for alleged steroid use, especially after the publication of this book, the authors of *Game of Shadows* were going to be imprisoned for failing to identify how they secured confidential court documents to expose Bonds. It was not until a defense attorney for Victor Conte, the man who was running the company responsible for distributing steroids to professional athletes, admitted he leaked the information to Fainaru-Wada and Williams that the two reporters were let off the hook. Understandably, a reporter's financial and professional interests are better served when they get the inside scoop on a story by any

means necessary. Their goal is to be the best journalists possible and to deliver the story before anyone else. No one has questioned them since Conte's lawyer identified himself as the source of leaked court documents. At the same time, the reporters write an entire book focusing on Bonds and how he has cheated baseball. I, as a baseball fan, have no problem with learning the truth about who has and who has not cheated in baseball. At the same time, it is disturbing to see so many people focus their efforts on bringing down one man.

The tone of *Game of Shadows* also strikes me as problematic. The book is generally very convincing in terms of objectively arguing that there is no way that Bonds, after surpassing his physical peak, could have gotten better and stronger without the use of steroids. I don't completely agree with everything that is said but they generally exhibit a logical cause and effect relationship between certain things. There are moments though where I can sense that the writers try too much to understand how and why Barry Bonds acts the way he does. When they stray away from facts and try to decipher Bonds' motivations, they reveal an almost paternalistic perspective. One paragraph in the prologue reads:

As he sometimes did when he was in a particularly bleak mood, Bonds was channeling racial attitudes picked up from his father, the former Giants star Bobby Bonds, and his godfather, the great Willy Mays, both African American ballplayers who had experienced virulent racism while starting their professional careers in the Jim Crow South. Barry Bonds himself had never seen anything remotely like that. He had grown up in an affluent white suburb on the San Francisco Peninsula, and his best boyhood friend, his first wife, and his girlfriend were all white. (Fainarau-Wada prologue)

This paragraph says more about the author than it does about Barry Bonds. Bobby Bonds and Willy Mays both encountered and faced overt Jim Crow racism during their younger years. Both those guys played professional (Mays) or minor league baseball (Bonds) before the end of the Civil Rights movement. By saying that Bonds had never seen anything remotely like the racism faced by his relatives, the author is assuming that he knows exactly how Barry Bonds was brought up. The author is also assuming that he has a full grasp of the obstacles faced by people of color at any point in time. Also, the reader is being sent the message that after the Jim Crow South, Black people were released from and cured of all the damages done by Jim Crow racism. In one seemingly irrelevant paragraph Fainaru-Wada and Williams have expressed certain ideas about race without carefully examining the repercussions. In a book about baseball and steroids, there is no need to place upon the reader certain judgments made about the effect of racism on an individual. I find that this specific paragraph is representative of the type of paternalistic narrative used by a percentage of white sportswriters. It is easy to sweep a paragraph like the one quoted above under the rug and take it at face value. I find it irresponsible for their literature to play with the idea of racism in a manner that suggests that two sportswriters can comprehend racism's effect on a person of color. To say that Barry Bonds has never experienced racism remotely similar to the kind found in the Jim Crow South is to foolishly assume that such overt racism no longer exists and at the same time undervalue the effect of other types of racism. It is almost as if Bonds has no reason to ever be angry because he never endured the troubles of his father and grandfather. There is no way for them to know that for sure. Also, pain for racial discrimination is passed down from generation to generation. The negative effects of the traumatic experiences undergone by Bobby Bonds and Willie Mays could easily ruin the way

Barry was brought up. The manner in which the author completely undermines Barry Bonds' life experience as an African American by essentially saying "you haven't been through anything, you spoiled brat" is extremely paternalistic. There is no way for one man to understand what makes another man tick, there is even less of a possibility for a white sportswriter to understand what a person of color faces on a daily basis. I selected the passage feature in the quote above because of how carelessly and insensitively it was put together. The book is not about race relations, the civil rights movements, Black ballplayers integrating into baseball, or anything having to do with race. At the same time, the selected passage shows how the reader is expected to have their certain understanding of why Barry Bonds, as a Black man, has an issue with certain white people. It is completely out of context and shows how white media coverage of athletes of color often voices certain racialized opinions and narrative that are often avoided in other situations.

The field of sports, in the way it is championed as a level playing field for all, often provides a shield for writers to say some things they normally wouldn't say. The second part of the paragraph justifies how Barry could have never experienced overt racism because he grew up in a white suburb and his first wife, best childhood friend and girlfriend were white. This argument is completely flawed. The argument also frames the white suburbs as the absolute best place to have a family, especially for Black people. The author's equating of Black families living in the white suburbs with a post racial society is problematic. Granted, I as the reader, gave the author the benefit of the doubt after the statement about Barry's exposure to racism. I assumed that by saying Barry had not seen anything remotely like Jim Crow racism, he acknowledged there might be "lesser" forms he has endured. Unfortunately, the author did not clearly express that idea and leaves the reader with the thought that Jim

Crow type racism was the last obstacle for African Americans. This idea is supported by the statements about Barry's upbringing in the white suburbs. To glorify the white suburbs as a place where a person of color can grow up without experiencing much racism is inaccurate. The author's idea is then supported by saying that Barry's closest friends and love interests were white. There could be many reasons why Barry chose those people. First of all, white suburbs are called white suburbs because they are overwhelmingly exclusive to white people. Historically, white suburbs have been an indication of institutional racism. The white suburbs have remained white because the New Deal Program's Federal Housing Administration deemed integrated communities as financial risks and their inhabitants as unworthy of federal bank loans (PBS:Race Power of Illusion). Essentially, the inhabitation of people of color in your neighborhood directly decreased property value. The author's glorification of the white suburbs as a safe haven for a young Barry Bonds is downright wrong. Living in a white community that generally excludes Blacks is conducive to internalized racism and oppression (Yamoto). Bonds could have learned to value whiteness and despise Blackness.

PUSHING THE AGENDA AT ALL COSTS

The negativity directed towards Bonds is often times completely unwarranted. There are examples of journalism that seem to have no purpose other than to demean Bonds. In 2010 Barry Bonds' former team, the San Francisco Giants, won the World Series. They became champions of the baseball world and, as with other championship teams, were really embraced by their city. By this point Barry Bonds had been out of the game for about 3 years. Although his name will forever be tied with the Giants franchise, his presence has nothing to do with the on-field performance of the San Francisco Giants. One writer decided to express that a large reason why the Giants won the World Series in 2010 was that Barry Bonds was not around. Gene Wojciechowski's "Giants Thriving in Post-Barry Bonds Era" is an all out personal assault against Bonds.

Wojciechowski's statements are so hyperbolic in nature that the reader can even lose sight of what the purpose of the article is. I found myself wondering if the article's intent was to praise the Giants while taking a jab at Bonds or to cloud a personal vendetta within the context of the Giants' championship. The article lost all credibility when the first argument the author made was that "Barry Bonds helped the San Francisco Giants win the World Series last season. And he could help them win it again this season. How? Because he's not a

Giant anymore.” His argument is simple but nonsensical, somehow Bonds’ departure three years ago is still helping the team improve. Wojciechowski uses loose associations between Bonds’ departure and increases in team chemistry, the amount of camaraderie found in a team, to continue to generate content with little journalistic value. All of his faulty cause and effect relationships seem forced and the reader can clearly tell that at the least the author is trying to make a story of out nothing and at the most he is using Bonds’ status as a punching bag to propel his writing.

Wojciechowski likens Bonds forced departure to “an emergency tracheotomy on the franchise’s windpipe.” (Wojciechowski) He also compared Bonds to a toxic presence “that was finally removed by the hazmat people after the 2007 season.” The rant continues as he calls Bonds “not a dark cloud in the clubhouse; he is an entire storm system of scowls and controversy” and he mentions that “his depressing aura was stretched tightly across the Giants like Saran Wrap.” (Wojciechowski) The writer has taken his critique of Barry Bonds to an entirely new level. He even takes the liberty of saying that none of the actual coaches or players on the team see Bonds’ exit as the reason for their success but that he personally is the one making that assessment. The question is then how does a sportswriter tell the actual athletes why they are winning instead of the other way around? There is no validation for his argument because the actual case study, the team itself, has moved on. Unfortunately, the writer has not. Also, creativity is generally a positive trait in writing but Wojciechowski’s litany of metaphors to describe Bonds’ presence on the team are redundant and unnecessary.

His choice of words paints a very specific picture of Bonds. We imagine him as toxic, a dark cloud, a storm system, a depressing aura, and an object choking the life out of a franchise. We imagine Bonds as a dangerous, unpredictable, life absorbing object. We never

see him described as man. Wojciechowski does as much as possible to alienate Bonds from the audience. The entire intent of the article is not to show how the Giants have moved on but to continue to destroy the image of Barry Bonds. The less we see him as a person, albeit a very flawed person, and more as a destructive and violent force the easier it is to continue to slander him.

The article strays further into obscurity by giving us details about how casual and friendly the atmosphere in the team's locker room has become. The writer mentions that players can walk the streets without being recognized, freely joke around with one another, play cards and dominoes, and have friendly exchanges with reporters. All of these things are great but have absolutely nothing to do with Barry Bonds. He transitions from all this happy go lucky activity to a short paragraph that reads:

Bonds recently appeared in a San Francisco federal court and pleaded not guilty to four counts of lying to a grand jury and one count of obstruction of justice.

More than three years have passed since his last time as a Giant, and the dark cloud still exists. Just not in the Giants' clubhouse anymore. (Wojciechowski)

The jagged transition is indicative of how completely unrelated Barry Bonds and the San Francisco Giants of today are. It clearly demonstrates how this sportswriter will use any excuse to promote his Anti-Bonds agenda. He ends the article with a very ominous tone that encourages us to believe that Bonds is somewhere, somehow doing damage to someone or something. The metaphor of the dark cloud that continues to exist makes it seem as though Bonds is a threat that needs to be extinguished. Regardless of where anyone stands in the debate on steroids in baseball, using steroids is not a violent act against a human being. Steroid abuse for the hopes of increasing athletic production may be cheating but it does not

make you a threat to society. The metaphor of this omnipresent dark cloud paints Bonds as a menace that has been and continues to be a problem for everyone. It also feeds into the description of Bonds as a hulking, powerful, unpredictable brute that on and off the field does not play by the rules. By giving us examples of how Bonds had a negative impact as a baseball player and also is facing criminal charges, the writer paints him as a man incapable of following any set of rules. This image of Bonds as untrustworthy and criminal pushes the author's agenda of portraying Bonds as a threat. His agenda is legitimized by the fact that Bonds is going to court in a case against the government of the United States of America.

WHY DOES IT EVEN MATTER ANYMORE?

Almost everyone is sure, due to overwhelming amounts of evidence, that Barry Bonds has used performance enhancing drugs. Regardless of whether or not the public actually sees the test results to put an end to the controversy, the public has already made its mind. What I don't understand is why there is such a collective investment in the prosecution of a man who cheated at a game (along with dozens others) that has a long history of players doing everything, illegal or not, to gain an advantage on the competition. In no way am I saying that what Barry Bonds did is right. What is difficult to understand is why this one man has to almost single-handedly carry the burden of the steroids scandal in baseball. Most importantly he has become the focus of the wrath of a few federal prosecutors despite the fact that the only person hurt by the actions of Barry Bonds is Barry Bonds himself.

Barry Bonds has been away from the game for over three years yet the spotlight continues to shine brightly on him. Major League Baseball has continued to thrive, every summer we learn of players signing contracts worth over one hundred million dollars. If the league were somehow financially suffering, money would be managed much more tightly. Not to mention that much of the blame that has fallen on players who have admitted to using steroids should be shared by Major League Baseball itself. The reason steroids became so prevalent is because the league turned a blind eye to it. There were no rules in place to police

players who were using performance enhancing drugs. Also, the league benefitted from the excitement (and money) being brought in to the game because of the increase in home run hitting. Although a rock solid connection between steroids and homeruns has yet to be made, the height of the home run era certainly coincided with the height of the steroids era. This is why I don't understand why now has come the time to address the issue and why Bonds has to be the first player to be legally prosecuted.

The actions of the media towards Barry Bonds is reflective of social inequity in the way that a group of sportswriters, almost all white, have painted Bonds as a criminal figure and a threat that warrants federal investigation and intervention. The persistent criminalization of Bonds by sportswriters has thrust him into the national consciousness to the point that he can no longer be left in peace. Because Bonds' actions, on and off the field, have been chronicled, dissected, and judged by a group of people whose job it is to determine the agenda for national audiences, his wrongdoings have drawn the attention of much more powerful agents of justice. What I mean by this is that Bonds could have faced consequences for cheating that were dealt out by Major League Baseball itself or even by voters for the Baseball Hall of Fame (who coincidentally are baseball writers). He could have been suspended by the league or temporarily denied entry into the Hall of Fame. Instead he has and will have to pay for one crime three times over. He was forced out of the league, may serve time in federal prison, and will likely have to wait several years before being inducted into the Hall of Fame (if ever).

Bonds is not a menace to society but he has become, thanks to sportswriters, a national obsession. This national obsession is so over the top though that the federal government has reportedly spent anywhere from ten to forty five million dollars trying to convict him. (Weir)

Legal experts also estimate that if convicted, it is unlikely that Barry Bonds will face jail time. The reason federal prosecutors have spent so much time and money on this trial is because Bonds is a big name with a bad reputation that is recognized nationally. He is essentially being used to propel the legal careers of a few prosecutors who will benefit from having a Barry Bonds federal case on their resume. (Weir) All of this comes from the build up of several years of sportswriters using the drama of the chase for the all time home run record and Barry Bonds' poor relationship with the media to paint him as a national enemy.

There has been a conscious effort to label Bonds a threat to America's game and America's society. There was no way that a Black man was going to hold the home run record in America's pastime and not be cordial to middle aged white sportswriters whose job not only includes reporting those events but safeguarding the sport.

The Barry Bonds trial has become a circus. The prosecutors will be bringing in several people to testify that Bonds knowingly used steroids and lied to Congress. One of the prosecution's key testimonies will come from Kimberly Bell, Bonds' former mistress. Her testimony is critical to prosecutors because she can give first hand accounts of changes in Barry Bonds' temper, sexual performance, and testicle size during the years he took performance enhancing drugs. We have a federal court case, Barry Bonds vs. United States of America, resting on testimony centered upon the size of a man's testicles. The reason Kimberly Bell is being asked to estimate bodily and behavioral changes in Barry Bonds is because steroids are believed to cause those effects. Regardless, I find it disturbing that the focus of a trial between an African American male and the federal government rests on Bond's sexual history. We already know that Bonds was hostile and difficult to understand towards the media even before the time he allegedly began taking steroids but somehow

more recent angry outburst are supposed to be attributed to steroid use. The prosecution's case now rests on proving that even in his most intimate moments, Bonds embodies unembraceable Blackness. It is preposterous that so many resources are being funneled into a case that hopes to embarrass and expose a Black man while blurring the lines of what is appropriate in a federal courtroom. What Bonds did was wrong, he did lie to Congress. At the same time, what will society or more specifically the American government gain from imprisoning him or putting him on probation? There is nothing to be gained by anyone from this trial. It represents an abuse of power being used against an African American athlete whose downfall was using performance enhancing drugs (something done by countless other baseball players) and not playing nice with white sportswriters.

MODERN DAY LYNCHING

Much of the negativity targeted at Barry Bonds comes in the form of coded racial narrative. Overt racist discourse is much rarer in sports media than is coded narrative. Despite this reality, there are moments when we catch a glimpse of the darker side of sports journalism. There are slip ups that remind even the biggest believers of Post-racial America that racism is omnipresent. One of these moments occurred on ESPN Radio. John Seibel, a radio host, was quoted as saying, “If [Bonds used steroids], hang him. Now I’m not saying hang him. I’m saying hang him from a tree. I’m not saying strap him to a gurney and inject poison in his veins.” (Alexander) This statement is self explanatory in terms of expressing how Seibel feels towards Barry Bonds. There is also a much deeper meaning that needs to be extrapolated. Obviously, this is an outlandish statement and we are not exactly sure in which context it was delivered. This statement regardless of its context was delivered over public radio. Anyone who had been listening for a few minutes prior or anyone who tuned in right at the beginning of that statement receives the same message.

We can gather several details from this event. First of all, the radio host must have developed some sort of comfort zone at his workplace. Regardless of how outlandish a radio personality can be, it takes time to determine what kind of speech your company will allow you to air to national audiences. This points to the reality that some situations and surroundings are more conducive to bad behavior than others. In this case, the bad behavior

comes in the form of racist statements. I doubt that Seibel delivered this statement after having written carefully planned his radio segment. These sorts of statements are the fruits of much less inhibited, spontaneous conversation. The type we get when people talk before they think. This does not mean that Seibel did not mean what he said. I, after reading his statement, believe that for at least one instant, this radio host wanted a Black ballplayer to be lynched for his alleged crimes. I also find it difficult to believe that had Seibel had a respectful relationship with a fellow sportswriter or radio host who was African American he would have uttered those words.

One of the most pressing statistics is that “an overwhelming majority of sportswriters and sports reporters are white, 90% and 87.5% respectively.” (Alexander) This homogeneous entity is responsible for producing constant newsworthy material for readers, listeners, and viewers. Their outreach is tremendous and their followers, sports fans, are loyal. We have one racial group monitoring and passing judgment on the character, behavior, and actions of another. Seibel’s statement is indicative of social inequity in the way that it shows that a white man can publicly call for the hanging of a Black man for crimes for which he has not been proven guilty.

The slave history behind this relationship between white sportswriter and Black performer is brought to attention. As much as any other sportswriters, bloggers, radio hosts, Black or White, denounces the statement, it does not change the fact that an environment exists that encourages and reproduces these racist thoughts.

As much as we would like to believe that statements like the one made by John Seibel are truly atypical, the reality is that a large percentage of sportswriters may agree with him. Most may not agree to the extent of asking for a lynching but agree nonetheless. The amount of

racist dialogue that goes on within the closed doors of an institution that through some racially exclusive measure has achieved such dense racial homogeneity is much more prevalent than any of us can imagine. It is frightening to know that the people who are responsible for shaping the national, even international, identity of so many African American Athletes fall under this category. We see on a daily basis how institutional racism reaches even the “level playing field” that we are taught to believe sports is.

CONCLUSION

By examining the lives and professional careers of Barry Bonds, Dez Bryant and Tiger Woods it became evident that the sports world, to this day, is riddled with coded racial narratives meant to preserve a racial hierarchy. Because the world of professional sports serves as a microcosm of our entire society this means that the terms post-racial and colorblindness are merely attempts to turn a blind eye to social injustices. These athletes are defined by their Blackness. The way they are represented in the media not only affects their public image but also affects their lives and the people they are chosen to represent. An athlete with tremendous fame, no matter their choice, is forced into the role of becoming the exemplar of an entire race of people. They are caught in a vicious cycle that dictates that whenever they fail they fail because they are Black and conversely whenever they fail it means that Blacks in general are inferior.

We also see, especially in the cases of Woods and Bonds, that once an athlete breaks the rules set by the white dominant group they become targets for humiliation and even legal prosecution. There are constant reminders for these Black athletes that despite their fame, wealth, and athletic gifts they are merely players in a white man's game and citizens in a white man's nation. As soon as they question the status quo or fail to express gratitude and submission towards the dominant group a Black athlete becomes worthless and is categorized as insubordinate or troubled.

Despite the information age and the new level at which Black athletes can connect with large audiences, their image is still in the hands of a group of white sports journalists and

sportswriters. Also, even the wealthiest athletes, with very few exceptions, are merely employees of even wealthier white owners. The racial power structure within sports, despite the wealth of Black athletes, is similar to the one of the entire country. Whites tend to control the most powerful positions.

All of this matters because it shows that institutional change for racial equality has yet to reach its full potential, even in supposedly level playing field of sports. The coded racial narratives found in sports support social inequity by trying to offer the failures of famous Black athletes as proof that Blacks are inferior. The more “evidence” found to push this argument, the more difficult it is to destroy racial barriers within our society. Black athletes are amongst the most visible Black people in our country. If they are depicted as morally decrepit, hostile, criminals then the entire population of Black Americans can be assumed to be the same thing. This mentality and the environment that upholds it works to preserve social inequality. Institutional racism is validated when we blame the discrepancy between the social, financial, and economic power between Black and whites solely on the unjustifiable notion that one group is better than the other. This makes it easier to preserve white privilege by pointing at the disparities between the races and blaming it on the alleged inferiority of Blacks. This diverts the blame away from the actual issues that have caused, currently cause, and will continue to cause these racial gaps to exist.

Black athletes must realize that their silence and adherence to the status quo only preserves a system that is inadequate. If an athlete with the visibility and influence of Tiger Woods does not use his power to advocate against these issues, he is selling himself short. What’s worse is that a Black athlete who does not use his voice to speak for himself only gives more power and leeway for outside forces to pick and choose what parts will be used to

construct that athlete's public image. If you turn on the TV right now you are more likely to read a story about/see a segment about a Black athlete in legal trouble than one who is working hard for a charitable foundation or doing a great job raising his kids or giving back to the community. Whenever those efforts are given air time, the athletes are shown as being put there by the organizations that govern them.

As the public images of these athletes suffer, as do the populations of people they are tied to. The more media outlet can focus on the broken down homes, irresponsible drug addicted mothers, absent fathers, legal troubles, and personal shortcomings of Black athletes the less attention is being paid to the various and overwhelming institutional injustices that corner so many Blacks into hopelessness. National audiences who are exposed to these coded racial narratives are affected by them. Americans living outside of impoverished urban ghettos make their judgments based on these narratives. This means that instead of viewing the corrupt systemic inequality as the source of the struggles within urban ghetto, the blame is placed on the disenfranchised members of those communities. We are encouraged by the racial narratives to accept their racial inferiority as fact and to blame them for not pulling themselves up by their bootstraps. We fall in love with the myth of meritocracy and in ignorance, justify institutional racism.

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