

DOWNTRODDEN YET DETERMINED:  
EXPLORING THE HISTORY OF BLACK MALES IN PROFESSIONAL  
BASKETBALL AND HOW THE PLAYERS ASSOCIATION ADDRESSES THEIR  
WELFARE

A Dissertation

by

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## ABSTRACT

Professional athletes are paid for their labor and it is often believed they have a weaker argument of exploitation. However, labor disputes in professional sports suggest athletes do not always receive fair compensation for their contributions to league and team success. Any professional athlete, regardless of their race, may claim to endure unjust wages relative to their fellow athlete peers, yet Black professional athletes' history of exploitation inspires greater concerns.

The purpose of this study was twofold: 1) to explore and trace the historical development of basketball in the United States (US) and the critical role Black males played in its growth and commercial development, and 2) to illuminate the perspectives and experiences of Black male professional basketball players concerning the role the National Basketball Players Association (NBPA) and National Basketball Retired Players Association (NBRPA), collectively considered as the Players Association for this study, played in their welfare and addressing issues of exploitation. While drawing from the conceptual framework of anti-colonial thought, an exploratory case study was employed in which in-depth interviews were conducted with a list of Black male professional basketball players who are members of the Players Association.

The general findings of this study revealed six major themes. From the perspectives of the participants, it was implied that there was a 1) history of lived experiences of racism, 2) Black players are insulated from racism but not disbarred from it, 3) superstars have the most social impact potential, 4) progress is accomplished

through strategic responsiveness to interest convergence (SRIC), 5) the NBPA is serviceable but limited, and 6) Black male professional basketball players are leaders of self-determination for Black communities. Implications for theory, policy, practice, and future research are discussed.

## DEDICATION

To my family, friends, fraternity, and most importantly my heavenly father, I am because you are.

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First, I must give glory to Yahweh because without him I would not be able to accomplish anything. The intelligence and strength required to complete my doctoral program and write my dissertation are gifts that were afforded to me by Your will. For that and many other blessings I am grateful.

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## CONTRIBUTORS AND FUNDING SOURCES

### **Contributors**

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## NOMENCLATURE

ABA	American Basketball Association
CBA	Collective Bargaining Agreement
CMS	Critical Management Studies
HBCU	Historically Black College(s) and /or University(ies)
HGT	Harlem Globetrotters
MLB	Major League Baseball
NBA	National Basketball Association
NBPA	National Basketball Players Association
NBRPA	National Basketball Retires Players Association
NCAA	National Collegiate Association of Athletics
NFL	National Football League
POTUS	President of the United States
PWI	Predominately White Institution
SRIC	Strategic Responsiveness to Interest Convergence
US	United States
WNBA	Women's National Basketball Association
YMCA	Young Men's Christian Association



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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

In a nation that is supposed to be based upon liberty and justice for all (Bellamy, 2000), the United States (US) is a society with a notable history of oppression and exploitation. The capitalist economy of the US breeds tension in the power relationship between employer and employee and cultivates the yearning to generate enormous wealth. According to economic theory, the very existence of profits is synonymous with the existence of exploitation (Yoshihara, 1998; Yoshihara & Veneziani, 2013). In order to generate profits there is an equivalent demand for labor, and in the US there has been a particular special demand for cheap Black labor. This demand specifically for Black labor denotes a political economy of racism and “the economic base of racism would have to be subjected to intensive analysis in order to get at the heart of the oppression of Black people in modern America” (Baron, 2000, p. 435). Even after slavery was legally abolished, the people who were formerly in bondage were subject to the steady struggle to protect their civil rights. Black people had to continue fighting for liberty and justice, battling through cultural, political, and socioeconomic barriers in efforts to improve their status as human beings residing in the US. Black people in America have historically been exploited and have encountered a downtrodden livelihood compared to their White peers who have experienced the luxuries of the ruling class.

America in the twenty-first century is much more diverse, inclusive, and socially progressive than during the eras of chattel slavery and Jim Crow segregation. Albeit,

exploitation and racism are issues that persist. A Black man served two consecutive terms as the President of the United States (POTUS), yet Barack Obama's ability to be elected and perform the duties of POTUS is simply a symbol of the "deliberate speed" (Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, 1954) in which the country has progressed in race relations since desegregation. To believe that racism no longer exists is to be blind, ignorant or delusional when you consider that there are numerous news reports, sitcoms, and movies that continue to depict the recurrent issue of race relations in America, especially between Black people and White people. Turn on the television or open a social media application and rarely does a day go by that there is not at least one headline story discussing an incident that refers to an issue of racial implications. Racism should not be conveniently ignored (Bonilla-Silva, 2007) and the difficult dialogue (Sue, 2016) must continue.

The issue of racism is compounded when contemplating the relationship between race and labor. In America, much of the labor class resembles the appearance of their ancestors from ethnic tribes while the majority of the elite class appear as step-children of mythical Greek gods. The sport industry is not absent from this analogy. Sport is a microcosm of society. In other words, "if we know the values of a society, the type of economy, the way minority groups are treated, and the political structure, then we would also have important clues about how sport in that society is likely organized" (Eitzen, 2001, p. 1), so all the social phenomena we witness and experience in society will be reflected (Lapchick, 1986) in the world of sport. Therefore, it is not surprising to recognize the comparisons between Black slave labor of America's past and the

exploitation of Black athletes in modern sports in the US (Beamon, 2008; Hawkins, 1995, 2010; Rhoden, 2006; Sailes, 1986). Building on previous research, this study investigates history and contributions of Black male labor in professional basketball concerning the notion of exploitation, and the manner in which Black male athletes address issues regarding their well-being.

### **Background Summary**

Dating back to the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade and U.S. Chattel Slavery, the exploitation of Black labor is a stain in the fabric of the United States that has been tough to clean out. It is deeply embedded in the country's institutions and is evident in American sport organizations (Beamon, 2008; Carrington, 2010; Edwards, 1979, 1984, 2000; Hawkins, 2010; Rhoden, 2006; Sailes, 1986). When considering the exploitation of Black athletes in American sports, much of the conversation is centered on the experiences of Black male college athletes being exploited for their athletic talent while simultaneously being bilked out of appropriate academic accommodations and scholastic achievement opportunities, and being discouraged from actively engaging in social issues beyond team sanctioned community service (Agyemang, Singer, & DeLorme, 2010; Bimper, 2015; Edwards, 1969, 1984; Garner & Singer, 2017; Harper, Williams, & Blackman, 2013; Hartmann, 2003; Hawkins, 2010; Nwadike, Baker, Brackebusch, & Hawkins, 2015; Sailes, 1993; Singer, 2015; Wiggins, 1991), in addition to the great debate about their amateur athlete status and receiving financial compensation concerning their exploitation at predominantly White National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) institutions (Flowers, 2009; Hawkins, 1995, 1999, 2010; Kahn,

2007; Meggyesy, 2000; Rhoden, 2006; Sack & Staurowsky, 1998; Sanderson & Siegfried, 2015; Smith, 2007; Southall & Staurowsky, 2013; Staurowsky, 2011, 2014). Unlike college athletes, professional athletes are financially compensated for their labor and it is often believed they have a weaker argument for their exploitation. However, labor disputes in the professional sports industry suggest professional athletes do not always receive fair compensation for their labor. Even though any professional athlete, regardless of their race, may claim to endure unjust wages relative to their fellow athlete peers, Black professional athletes' history of exploitation causes greater concern (Jenkins, 1996; Kahn, 1991; Kahn, 2000; Kahn & Shah, 2005; Kahn & Sherer, 1988; Naito & Takagi, 2017).

There is an apparent racialized divide between owners and athletes, especially when considering two of the most popular sports in the US: football and basketball. Nevertheless, professional basketball provides a special case to study the exploitation of Black athlete labor. The majority of the players in professional basketball are, and have been, Black whether considering the popular National Basketball Association (NBA), the former American Basketball Association (ABA), or the famous Harlem Globetrotters (HGT). Meanwhile the majority of league owners and managers are, and have been, White. The Racial and Gender Report Card (Lapchick, 2017) stated how the NBA was the first league in major US sports to have three owners of color, Michael Jordan of the Charlotte Hornets, Vivek Ranadive from India of the Sacramento Kings, and Marc Lasry from Morocco of the Milwaukee Bucks, leading its teams, leaving 90 percent of the NBA having White majority owners. During the 2016-2017 season, only 30 percent of

all 30 NBA teams had coaches of color, which was the same as the 2015-2016 season but a 3.3 percent decrease from the previous year (Lapchick, 2016). NBA general managers of color experienced a decrease from 6 to 4 during the 2015-2016 season and decreased from 4 to 3 (10 percent) in the 2016-2017 season. This occurred while a very disproportionate number of NBA players are people of color, equaling 80.9 percent, and 74.4 percent of all NBA players identifying as African-American or Black in a professional basketball league that has the capacity to roster over 500 players throughout all its 30 teams. Like the NBA, the National Football League (NFL) has similar racial peculiarities with about 70 percent of its athletes being Black and just two of its principal owners being a person of color: Jacksonville Jaguars Shahid Khan and Buffalo Bills Kim Pegula (Lapchick, 2017). It could also be argued exploitation in professional football is a serious case to research with billions of dollars being pumped into the richest league in the country while the athletes receive a fraction of those earnings (Ejiuchi, 2014; Goodman, 2017), often on non-guaranteed contracts, playing one of the most violent sports in the world. Albeit, for the purpose of this study the focus will be on professional basketball as a noteworthy example to investigate.

According to Forbes' (Badenhausen, 2017) nineteenth annual rankings of NBA team valuations, the majority of the NBA franchises, being owned and managed predominantly by elite White males, are valued as billion-dollar enterprises, generating hundreds of millions in revenues, with the average NBA franchise being worth 1.36 billion and teams in large metropolises, such as (listed in order of value) the New York Knicks, Los Angeles Lakers, Golden State Warriors, Chicago Bulls, Boston Celtics, and

Los Angeles Clippers holding a value of multiple billions. In the world of globalization, each team's financial situation is significantly dependent upon the revenue it receives through television contracts, in which evidence suggests that the presence of a superstar has a substantial positive effect on television ratings of NBA games (Hausman & Leonard, 1997). Moreover, a code of silence governs the NBA regarding the enormous value of NBA superstars, while league executives will admit in confidentiality that contemporary stars, such as Black male athletes LeBron James and Stephen Curry, are not paid enough according to the revenues they generate (Arnovitz, 2016).

The previous discussion about the financial condition of the NBA and its member teams and how the league is demographically organized with regard to ownership, management, and labor force indicates an overrepresentation issue that suggests racial discrimination and exploitation. Moreover, the situation of predominately Black labor and predominately White ownership and management in the NBA is indicative of a colonial situation, similar to that described in *The New Plantation* (Hawkins, 2010) and in *Forty Million Dollar Slaves* (Rhoden, 2006). Comparing all of this information with the US history of plantation economies makes the correlation between professional basketball and colonialism clearly logical, and something in need of further investigation.

Sport management scholars and others who study sport have insisted on criticizing popular wisdom about sport and engaging with more critical paradigms (Amis & Silk, 2005; Chalip, 2006; Coakley, 2017; Frisby, 2005). For example, critical race-based epistemologies are beneficial paradigms for the purpose of examining issues of



racial profiling, racial discrimination in the workplace and education, and legal implications of race. Race based epistemologies thus acknowledge realities that often go uncovered and provide an alternative to paradigms based on dominant worldviews (Singer, 2005). Relevant conceptual paradigms can contribute to the development of theory toward the advancement of a research field and applicable knowledge. Thus, for the objective of this study I propose that anti-colonial thought is an appropriate paradigm to apply to organizational theory in the context of sport in order to further theoretical knowledge about sport organizations, such as the NBA, and its practical implications. However, before discussing anti-colonial thought, organizational theory is discussed.

### **Organizational Theory**

Organizational theory is concerned with how organizations are established and investigates the structures and systems of organizations. To engage in organizational theory research is to be tasked with examining the patterns of organizations and their operations, as well as the consequences of them (Slack & Parent, 2006). Organizational theory is not only concerned with the theoretical issues and knowledge development about organizations, but also includes the practical implications of how practitioners and managers can improve upon their daily work in organizations.

An important question to consider is “What are the consequences of the existence of organizations?” (Hinings & Greenwood, 2002, p. 411). This question rests at the nucleus of organizational theory and may be addressed at two levels: first, how organizations affect the pattern of privilege and disadvantage in society; second, how privilege and disadvantage are distributed within organizations. Sport is commonly

known as a utopian phenomenon that represses conflict and facilitates good will. However, as Frisby (2005) would argue, there is a need to acknowledge The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly when considering sport, sport management practice, and sport management research. This includes understanding sport as a mechanism that serves to bring people together from different backgrounds and a tool to teach teamwork and leadership skills, as well as understanding that sport is a social-political institution that organizes people into superior and subordinate groups where there are issues of discrimination and exploitation.

Organizational theory can be applied to examine sport organizations, whereby a sport organization can be defined as “a social entity involved in the sport industry; it is goal-directed, with a consciously structured activity system and a relatively identifiable boundary” (Slack & Parent, 2006, p. 6). Acknowledging that organizations behave in various ways within the sport industry (i.e. as machines, as organisms, as political systems, as instruments of domination, etc.), including the fact of the perpetual growth in number of such organizations, it is important for sport researchers to understand organization theory and consider different ways to analyze organizations. Engaging in forms critical management studies (CMS) can serve this cause.

CMS is a discipline of critical theory and critique of business management and organizations (Adler, Forbes, & Willmott, 2007). The focus of CMS is on injustice and environmental destructiveness of the broader social and economic systems that these managers and firms serve and reproduce. CMS is an approach to research that scrutinizes the status quo and views the mainstream as problematic. CMS is an

appropriate approach to utilize for researchers seeking to investigate management and business practices from an organizational or meso-level. CMS scholars are mostly concerned with issues related to capitalism and its relation to structures of domination. Anti-colonial thought provides a similar paradigm for which to analyze capitalism and power constructs from the perspective of colonized subjects. An anti-colonialism paradigm can serve as a form of critical management studies to study the implications of sport organizations.

### **Race in Management Studies**

The concept and consequences of race have not been extensively studied in regard to management. The role of race has been constantly ignored in the study of organizations. Not only are racial ideologies often embedded in a Eurocentric view, but hypocritically a Eurocentric view excludes race in the development of organizational theory and also in the methodology of research (Nkomo, 1992). Race is often conceptualized too narrowly to where there is a need to study organizations with a greater understanding of the multifaceted nature of race (Wooten, 2006). Race infiltrates organizations through ideology and policy, and there is a need to broaden the scope of racism from an individual level or micro-perspective to a more organizational strategy or macro perspective. Since race has such a pervasive impact on organizations, race should be at the forefront of analysis when studying strategic organization and its implications.

In addition, slavery and colonialism were foundational aspects of management practices in the US, through which plantations were the basis of US economic development. Utilizing a historiographical approach to analyzing the institutions,

practices, and epistemology of management Cooke (2003) proposed there has been an exclusion and denial of slavery in management studies. This approach to research is significant because it centers the situation of slavery within the study of business management and operation through examining history of management strategies. Slavery has been located outside of the development of modern management due to excuses that delegitimize slavery as business management, yet the institutionalization of slavery and plantation management resembles the standards of historical management theory and praxis. Though the evolution of management research has evaded engagement with slavery, a historical approach to management research implies that management practices are emblematic of slavery. There is an obvious link between management and slavery, thus there is a need to conduct management research through the analysis of slavery. Acknowledging the denial of slavery in management studies presents the need for an anti-colonialism paradigm for understanding of management in order to comprehend the impact of slavery situations in management.

Essentially, there is a need for alternative frameworks to study and understand organizations and organizational theory as a social science concept. Conducting organizational research should not be constricted to one [Eurocentric] view. Due to race being embedded within society, race should be included, not excluded, when analyzing social organizations. Afrocentric paradigms have been proposed as conceptual frameworks to analyze organizations in contrast to Eurocentric paradigms (Schiele, 1990; Warfield-Coppock, 1995). Correspondingly, anti-colonial thought provides a framework centered on the experiences and conditions of the colonized, particularly

African descended people, in order to study the effects of colonialism as a management structure and system which can be applied to the context of sport management

### **Anti-Colonial Thought in Sport Management**

There is a need for alternative lenses and methods to research the effects of racial stratification in society because historically knowledge production has been dominated by White logic and White methods (Zuberi & Bonilla-Silva, 2008). Social science research has been White led and White dominated, and therefore the logic of analysis and methodology reflect as such and serve toward White supremacy. In order to combat the oppressive implications of White supremacy and its White ideologies and practices, alternative research approaches should be developed and engaged that provide different knowledge of race matters toward liberation from White domination. The field of sport management, a social science space, should be held accountable to this call.

Anti-colonialism serves as an appropriate paradigm and alternative approach to expand the understanding of race and organizations in its application to colonial situations in sport contexts. In addition, there is a need for critical analysis of the colonial situation in sports and to utilize decolonizing ways to understand sport (Carrington, 2015). Central to an anti-colonial framework is a component central to slavery and the colonial situation, the Black body as labor and the desire to be liberated from unjust labor conditions (Allen, 1970; Césaire, 2000; DuBois, 1996, 2017; Fanon, 1969, 2007; Marable 2015). Racism has been studied in regard to the Black athlete, emerging out of slavery into a space where they remain a commodity through sport, as machine or slave-with-pay, managed with a cost-benefit analysis to be discarded when

no longer profitable (Edwards, 1969). To extend this notion, Black athletes are understood to be affected by racism on micro-, meso-, and macro- levels by which the societal (macro) and organizational (meso) levels are the root of racial issues (Armstrong, 2011; Cunningham, 2010; Singer, 2015; Singer, Harrison, & Bukstein, 2010). It is most significant to comprehend the concept of the internal colonial model to analyze sport organizations. Hawkins (2010) provides critical analysis of Black athletes (minority group) at predominantly White institutions (PWI) (i.e. majority group) through the internal colonial (or plantation) model and juxtaposition of oscillating migrant laborers. The internal colonial model focuses on three core components of oppression consisting of economic exploitation, political oppression, and racial discrimination toward the minority group. Comparing Black athletes at PWI with oscillating migrant laborers illustrates the function of Black athletes and their experiences in regard to the material consequences of colonialism manifested through racism, exploitation, and oppression. This analysis resembles that of anti-colonial thought and an anti-colonialism paradigm.

Anti-colonial thought is an appropriate paradigm for sport management research and practice because it is a critical approach that illuminates the bad and ugly aspects of sport organizations (Frisby, 2005). Anti-colonial thought is not a formal theory yet it is a legitimate tradition of ideology. Anti-colonial thought is an ideology born of the struggle for liberation. In a broad sense, it can be defined in simple terms as a movement against any form or variation of colonialism. Therefore, adopting the ideology of anti-colonial thought is thus to be opposed to the practices and consequences of colonialism, or to

believe in the sentiments of anti-colonialism. Colonialism was not a benevolent endeavor to ameliorate the colonized, yet the colonizers' goal to civilize who they believed were uncouth was self-centered upon economic exploitation (Césaire, 2000). The tradition of colonialism is traced back to the era when European nations sought to expand their empires by going on voyages to Africa, India, the Caribbean, and the Americas in order to 'discover' new territories and utilize the area for its resources, including natural and human resources, with the objective of developing satellite states, or colonies. This process is also known as imperialism, through which dominant nations seek to become more powerful through overtaking poor nations, oppressing their people and exploiting its resources, by way of extreme force. Thus, there is a relationship of power between two groups, the powerful and the powerless. In relation to colonialism, this is understood as the relationship between the colonizers and the colonized.

Though there are various perspectives of anti-colonial thought, a few will be emphasized as core components. There is a foundational focus on the history of slavery, colonialism, and imperialism stemming from European nations seeking to "civilize" the world and expand their dominance (Césaire, 2000); an emphasis on the power relationship between the colonizers and the colonized (Memmi, 2013); the centralization of economic exploitation, political oppression, and racial discrimination of the colonized in a capitalistic society (Allen, 1970); the concern for indigenous culture and empowerment against the aims of colonial violence to dehumanize and maintain the institution of slavery (Fanon, 2007); and the engagement with revolutionary discourse, analysis, and action toward liberation of the colonized (Fanon, 1969). Anti-colonial

thought is not just an ideology; it serves as an epistemology of the colonized that promotes agency and resistance against colonialism, through identifying the material conditions of colonialism and reclaiming the oppressed voice (Simmons & Dei, 2012).

Anti-colonial thought is also a methodology whereby research methods include calculating the evidence of the colonial situation and perpetuation of neo-colonialism and gathering the narratives that explain the experiences of the colonized from their perspective (DuBois, 1996). Employing anti-colonial thought is a sociological approach seeking to examine the realities of the colonial imprint on formerly and presently colonized people in relation to the colonizers and interrogate historical and contemporary colonial institutions.

Anti-colonial thought is a legitimate paradigm with the purpose of recognizing that the development of society is born through the organization and management of plantation economies. The social issues that we experience today are thus rooted in slavery tactics. As mentioned above, there has been a tendency to dissociate slavery from management theory and practice, but if we are to adopt a genuine approach to organization and management theory we must critically analyze the history of slavery and neo-slavery in modern organizations (Cooke, 2003). This is not an easy endeavor. Anti-colonial thought conjures difficult dialogue and can be discomfoting because it is an approach that disrupts the status quo and strives for social justice.

Anti-colonial thought in sport management will serve to raise important questions, such as what role does sport play in examining neo-colonialism? What are the material conditions that characterize the development of youth athletes from



underprivileged communities? Why do professional sports predominately consist of Black male labor? Who are the primary beneficiaries of sport economies in America? How does sport work to marginalize or even dehumanize people of color? How are college athletics complexes structured? What are the experiences of athletes in organized sport? How do athletes who feel exploited resist their situation? What endeavors must be employed to combat oppression in sport as it relates to oppression in society? These are just a few of the various inquires that an anti-colonial thought paradigm can address in order to continue to build upon the need of more critical approaches to sport management research.

Whether we more closely associate ourselves with the colonizers or the colonized, it is important to recognize that colonialism is a process that has been detrimental to society as a whole and must be reconstructed for the greater good, instead of maintained for the privilege of a few. There is concern about the implications of racism and colonialism within the NBA, and there is intrigue about the manner in which players in the league address the problem of racial discrimination and exploitation. This study will serve to build upon the precedent of anti-colonialism in sport by not only identifying the sport arena as a colonial space and invoking athletes' participation in social justice in resistance to colonial control (Bale & Cronin, 2003; Carrington, 2015; Edwards, 1969; Hawkins, 2010; James 1993), but also by focusing in detail on professional sport in the US, in the specific context of professional basketball, as a very exploitative institution and by illuminating the voices of the colonized, professional Black male basketball players.

## **Purpose and Significance of the Study**

The purpose of this study is twofold: 1) to trace and explore the historical development of basketball in the US and the critical role Black male athletes played in its growth and commercial development, and 2) to illuminate the experiences and perspectives of Black male professional basketball players concerning the role the National Basketball Players Association (NBPA) and the National Basketball Retired Players Association (NBRPA), collectively considered the Players Association for this study, played in their welfare and addressing issues of exploitation. Welfare denotes the well-being of a person, including their health, happiness, protection and prosperity. In contrast, the exploitation of a person means to oppress or abuse them for their labor in order to benefit in a greater capacity from their work than they are permitted to do. For example, the NBA generates billions of dollars from the performance of its players, yet many of the superstar athletes in professional basketball are compensated by their teams nowhere near the amount of the value they generate (Arnovitz, 2016; Hausman & Leonard, 1997). In an anonymous statement a NBA team executive who works for a medium-revenue franchise said, “Whatever they pay LeBron or Curry, it isn’t enough” (Arnovitz, 2016), because superstars drive disproportionate value for the NBA and its member teams.

The focus on Black male athletes is a deliberate endeavor. It has been asserted that sport is one of the few contexts where Black males, as athletes, are embraced and

supported and can showcase their manhood (Harrison, Harrison, & Moore, 2002).

Previous research involving professional Black male athletes explains:

While athletes from other races and ethnicities most certainly have expectations from society, the pressure put on professional Black male athletes arguably exceeds their counterparts, especially given the history of racism and the central role Black males play in the commercial success of the American sport industry. (Agyemang & Singer, 2013, p. 50)

The realization that allowing Black males to participate in formerly predominately White athletic arenas is beneficial economically (Sage, 2007) developed into the influx of Black male athlete participation that helped propel American sport into the massive lucrative enterprise that we see today (Agyemang & Singer, 2011). The significance of this study is through gaining access to a very unique and exclusive population of athletes in order to procure insight into their perceptions of Black male athlete exploitation in professional basketball, an area of research that is rarely explored through qualitative methods. There is a long history of research conducted on the exploitation of Black male athletes, especially in the context of intercollegiate athletics, yet there are minimal accounts of the narratives from professional Black athletes' experiences of exploitation and welfare management.

Anti-colonial thought is a conceptual framework that will assist in facilitating the purpose of this study. Anti-colonial thought acknowledges the history of slavery and colonialism, locating the power relationship between colonizer and colonized (Césaire, 2000; Memmi 2013). Utilizing anti-colonial thought serves to centralize issues of

economic, political, and racial exploitation within institutional systems and practices being concerned with the people who have been negatively impacted and how they may be empowered to reverse their fate (Allen, 1970; Fanon, 1969). The intent of this study is to gain insight from Black professional basketball players about their experiences with a sport having a substantial history of NBA, ABA, and HGT owners encountering labor issues with its athletes, especially Black athletes, which can be compared to a colonizer and colonized relationship. Moreover, the Players Association is an organization structured for players to challenge the authorities of professional basketball and protect their liberties and well-being. For instance, Chris Paul, a Black male athlete, serving as the NBPA President elect held the responsibility of leading the organization in its effort to re-negotiate the 2011 Collective Bargaining Agreement to end a lockout and keep the league in action (Berri, 2012). The important contribution of using anti-colonial thought will be serving as an epistemology of the colonized that promotes agency and resistance, and (re)claims the oppressed voice towards social justice (Simmons & Dei, 2012).

Legal and economic perspectives have been provided about the issue of the exploiting labor and racial salary discrimination in professional basketball through empirical analyses of labor disputes, lockouts, and union litigation (Berri, 2012; Coates & Humphreys, 2001; Foraker, 1985; Groothuis & Hill, 2013; Hayden, 1998; Kahn & Sherer, 1988; Latimer, 1994; Naito & Takagi, 2017; Parlow, 2014; Zimbalist, 2000). Although these perspectives have offered evidence to help explain the existence of racism and racial discrimination within professional basketball in regard to player management, there is not enough evidence to help determine why such issues are

present. Therefore, there is a need to use alternative approaches to gain a deeper meaning of the racial discrimination that is present in the NBA. Employing a more qualitative approach that investigates the perspectives of those who are being impacted by issues of racism and exploitation, such as anti-colonial thought, will assist with providing experiential narratives that may add to elucidating upon the existence of the issues.

In summary, racial implications are embedded throughout the history of labor issues between players and owners in the NBA. There is empirical evidence to suggest a premium was paid on White players in the 1980s; it recedes in the 1990s; and it re-emerges in the 2000s. Throughout this time debates over the economic structure of the NBA lead to four lockouts (1995, 1996, 1998, and 2011 - the latter two caused the loss of games and thus shortened seasons), whereby owners concede marginal benefits to the players yet ultimately maintain the majority of power and fortune of the league. Throughout previous research there is no consensus about why there are racial implications concerning the economic structure and operations of professional basketball in the US, and less is known about the perspectives of the athletes themselves who have lived experiences of playing professional basketball and questioning their well-being as valuable laborers. Just as the voices of Black college athletes have been illuminated to highlight the experiences of exploiting labor in the NCAA, there is a need to learn from the voices of Black athletes in professional basketball concerning the experiences of exploitation and welfare management.

Acknowledging that the Players Association serves to address the well-being of professional basketball players, this study particularly explores how Black male athletes involved in the Players Association perceive and defend the welfare of players with an emphasis on the concerns of race and exploitation. The guiding research questions for this study are: 1) How do Black male athletes consider their contributions to professional basketball in the US and contemplate the notion of exploitation? and, 2) how has the Players Association impacted the welfare of Black male professional basketball players?

### **Definition of Key Terms**

In this dissertation, I use the following key terms:

**Anti-colonial:** resistance to colonialism; transcends identity politics often associated with postcolonial theory and emphasizes the intellectual, economic, political, and physical struggle of the African diaspora against European or Western world colonialism (Nkomo, 2011).

**Black:** refers to the ethnic group of people who form the African diaspora, people of African descent, that share similar experiences of people of color dispersed from slave trade outside of Africa into Western societies (Dubois, 1996; Patterson & Kelley, 2000).

**Colonialism:** the process of colonizing by an apparent dominant group over a seemingly inferior group by use of physical violence, ideology, political and economic practices towards the objective of the colonizers obtaining control over the colonized (Césaire, 2000)

**Exploitation:** the action or fact of treating someone unfairly in order to benefit from their work; the use or abuse of resources, including human resources (i.e. labor), to profit

greatly; in sport, the practice of utilizing athletes of color, primarily Black males, to fulfill the capitalistic objective of wealth generation while depriving the athletes of fair compensation, sincere education, leadership, and social advancement opportunities (Smith, 2007)

**Labor:** work, particularly physical work, that is provided to produce a service or product; historically in the US, Black people have been a prominent source of labor for economic gain of a predominately White owned and managed organization (DuBois, 2008).

**Race:** understood as a socially constructed identity, where the significance of racial categories is determined by social, economic, and political forces, not simply biological characteristics and conventional stereotypes (Omi & Winant, 1993; 2014)

**Racism:** the subordination of a racial group and maintaining control over that group through social norms and institutional control; institutional racism (Hamilton & Ture, 2011)

**Self-determination:** by theory, self-determination is concerned with the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being, including the social and psychological factors that enhance or diminish it (Ryan & Deci, 2000)

**Welfare:** in this text, welfare refers to the dictionary.com's (2018) first definition of the word. The good fortune, health, happiness, prosperity, etc., of a person, group, or organization; well-being. It does not refer to financial assistance or government aid.

CHAPTER II  
LITERATURE REVIEW

**Black Labor in the US**

History leaves an unfortunate legacy for Black people in America. The tradition of colonialism puts the Black person in a particular position in the Western world. A critical question Black people must ask of themselves concerning this particular position is, what impact has colonialism made on the social conditions of Black people, and whose responsibility is it to address the well-being of Black people?

Similar questions have been pondered before. At the Congresses of Black Writers held in Paris and Rome in the late 1950s, African and West Indian intellectuals were “deeply concerned with the question of human culture and personality and the impact of Western civilization on the traditional culture of Negro peoples” (Frazier, 1962, p. 64). These Black intellectuals were worried about how colonialism had negatively impacted the livelihood and heritage of Black people. It was believed during this crucial time period that the Black intellectual in America, being intensely influenced by integration ideology, seemed to be unconscious to the implications of these important questions, and thus a call was made for Black American intellectuals to be concerned with this manner of questions and be adamant about addressing them.

Albeit, there is definitely an established tradition of being concerned about the well-being of Black people in America which is evident in the numerous Movements throughout history. The Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 60s is the most



notoriously known social change group action that fought against the perils of the poor social conditions Black people experienced in the country. As Hillstrom (2018) indicated through in an explanation of the historical roots of such movements, there were resistance programs that preceded, such as slave revolts during the abolitionist movement and the migrations of the Underground Railroad. Other resistance programs along the timeframe of the non-violent protests of the Civil Rights Movement, such as the militancy of the Black Power movement and Black Panther program. And continuing the unfinished business of these movements in modern times are the political expressions of resistance through hip-hop culture and the Black Lives Matter movement. Yet there is a perpetual need to continue fulfilling this endeavor at full force as the US continues to deal with an age-old problem.

As has been previously stated by W.E.B. DuBois, “The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line” and “the question of Negro slavery was the real cause of the conflict” (DuBois, 1996, p.107). Now in the twenty-first century, the problem of the color-line is like an agitating chronic cough and the cause of the problem has mutated from chattel slavery to various manifestations of neo-slavery, most notably being compared with the manipulation of slavery laws in the 13th Amendment and the epidemic of the mass-incarceration of Black people (Alexander, 2012). Though chattel slavery has been legally abolished and cases such as *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka (1954)* have been adjudicated according to the problem of race relations in the US, issues of neo-slavery and racism in American society remain relevant and prevalent.

In order to gain a decent understanding of the current social conditions, it is imperative to have a knowledge of the history of those social conditions. When tasked with illuminating the issues that racism and colonialism produce for America there are two main factors that must also be divulged: the culprits of colonialism and the tactics towards liberation. In other words, there is a need to discover who are the perpetrators of colonialism and determine the actions that should be taken towards decolonization. This calls for a critical examination of the history of colonialism in the US. In order to determine the destiny of a downtrodden people, researchers should foretell the future by studying the past. In addition, researchers should analyze the history of racialized social interaction and issues of integration, maintaining hope and deed toward universal brotherhood (Crummell, 1889; Mosley 2016). If there is evidence of a poor history of race relations and a desire to produce a better future, then there is a need to educate society about the problem of race and figure out potential solutions to the problem.

### **The Problem of Colonialism**

The structure of colonialism in the US portrays a history of empowering and privileging White people while marginalizing and oppressing Black people. The social power that is maintained by White people is through a political and economic system that exploits African descendant people, as well as other people of color. DuBois (1996) spoke about this oppressive system of colonialism in America asserting, “In a day when political power is, for weal or woe, so intimately bound up with economic success and efficiency, the Negro is being systematically and quickly disfranchised” (p. 363). The disfranchisement of Black people did not commence in the US. Rather, it began with

Europe's fascination with Africa and its resources, human resources included.

Unfortunately, Africa's interaction with Europe led to Africa rendering its resources and people to the endeavors of colonialism, withstanding that colonialism was not a benevolent gesture (Césaire, 2000; Dubois, 1996).

It has been acknowledged that a serious problem in America is the color-line, and furthermore the residual effect of this problem is to view the Black person as a problem. A Black man may come to the realization, through reflecting upon his life experiences, that he is treated differently than others, often as a problem or "menace to society" (Johnson, 1994; Massood, 1996). This moment of reflection impregnates his mind and births inquiry about how it must feel to be considered a problem, to which DuBois (1996) explains to be Black is to be:

born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world, – a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. (p. 102)

The notion of double-consciousness that is employed by Black men, including Black people in general, is a gift of awareness in which not only do they understand themselves through their own gaze, as being a problem, but must view themselves from the perspective and values of others, the culprits of the problem. The sense of someone being a problem and pondering on how they relate to those that possess problem control

pushes someone's mind to see their self as being oppressed and wondering how they are perceived by the oppressors. Through utility of this double-consciousness Black people strive to develop an improved living experience for themselves in such a social system that can be oppressive against them.

The issue of being Black with regard to color is not the only issue. American society is also organized by an economic hierarchy, a socioeconomic structure that also results in Black people experiencing a terrible problem. Referencing the great scholar DuBois (1996) again, "To be a poor man is hard, but to be a poor race in a land of dollars is the very bottom of hardships" (p. 105). It is difficult to deal with personal problems, yet burdensome to overcome a community issue. Critical Race Theory (CRT) scholar, Derrick Bell, continuing the tradition of studying race described Black people as the *Faces at the Bottom of the Well* (1992) when asserting the permanence of racism. It has been proposed by scholar, Tommy Curry, that we should take Bell's Racial Realism seriously and understand that ideologies and philosophies are perpetuated to maintain racism and colonialism (Curry, 2008, 2009). It is necessary to recognize that to be of the Black race in an American society is to be of a race that tilts toward deprivation. Therefore, in order for Black people to survive in such a society they must strive for their liberation from this particular positioning and the often unfortunate social conditions they endure. They must lean towards progression in a manner that reverses the tilt such that there are equitable opportunities for all social beings.

DuBois (1996) conducted an abundance of research engaging in socio-historical analyses to delineate the process towards liberation for Black people since the era of

slavery. The findings from this voluminous research revealed that the problem of the color-line and colonial control is consistent. The situation of slavery survives through the continuance of colonialism; it is “a national crisis; for here loomed a labor problem of vast dimensions” (p. 109). Moreover, the liberating of Black people was not simply an issue of racism yet was vastly opposed due to the anxiety of losing the sustained source of labor. Ultimately, slaves could not be granted their freedom because in the US they must be utilized to build the infrastructure of the society. The wealth of a nation comes from the labor of its people (Smith, 2005). America’s great wealth has been built through Black labor. As American history reveals, it began with people of European descent enslaving people of African descent to exploit them for manual labor, to Jim Crow Segregation and neo-slave labor through manipulating the 13th Amendment within the prison industrial complex (Alexander, 2012) and indebting Black laborers by means of extremely low wages, onto contemporary racial discrimination and segregation that affords wealth to White people and leads to poverty and other negative social outcomes for Black people (Wilson, 2009; 2012; 2016). In *How Blacks Built America*, the White-male race scholar Joe Feagin (2016) emphasized:

Moreover, the size of the current economic value of the Black labor productivity stolen by Whites through all the institutional mechanism of slavery, Jim Crow segregation, and contemporary discrimination totals many trillions of dollars. In addition, there are the huge monetary losses that African Americans suffered because of the loss of lands and other property that was stolen or destroyed by Whites during the slavery and Jim Crow centuries. (p. 43)

The systemic exploitation of Black labor is thus an established trend in US economic and business management practices that has unjustly resulted in wealth generation particularly for White people.

Organizations, such as the Freedman's Bureau established in the late 1800s, were developed to facilitate the liberties of freed slaves, but restrictions were enacted in order to limit those liberties. The establishment of schools, especially in the Southern US, to educate the freed slaves were met with "ashes, insult, and blood; for the South believed an educated Negro was a dangerous Negro" (DuBois, 1996, p. 117). This logic produces an attitude that fortifies the problem of the color-line. This logic is why no matter the social development or liberation that we may perceive has taken place, there remains a social system that is oppressive; "for this much all men know: despite compromise, war, and struggle, the Negro is not free" (DuBois, 1996, p. 121). The strivings of Black people to liberate themselves in an American society is to improve their conditions while continuing to live in a society embedded with colonialism.

Slavery in the US can be characterized by extreme exploitation and by the consumption of Black human resources, both figuratively and literally, due to a fascination, or an eroticized hunger, for Black people, especially Black males. When developing America, Black Africans were captured and enslaved by White Europeans and through the enslavement process they "applied to African persons and cultural practices generic theories of social ineptitude and cannibalistic hunger" (Woodard, 2014, p. 30). Hypocritically, the White Europeans were the ones to engage in cannibalistic practices and due to their apparent ineptitude created a structure of dependency upon the

exploitation and consumption of Black people, particularly Black males (Woodard, 2014). At the core of slavery is the consumption of Black human resources by White slave masters in order to establish a relationship of dominance and a notion of racial superiority toward the ultimate objective of White supremacy.

Through slavery, dominance was instilled in White males at a tender age such that “[w]ithin the context of such plantation ‘friendships,’ young White boys developed and honed the skills of conquer” (Woodward, 2014, p. 38). The relationship between slave master and slave can be explained as a parasitic relationship; “parasitic master, in this instance, feeds his sense of authority and social stature through the diminishment of and animal-like treatment of his slave” (p. 86). This parasitic relationship indicates that for the White male, the relationship with the Black male is for personal, narcissistic, benefit at the racialized other’s expense. This relationship attributes the embeddedness of the slave situation in America, by which the Black male is ever vulnerable to consumption by White males in pursuit of White supremacy. Consumption of Black people has served toward their oppression and subordination, which slave masters took pleasure in cruel punishments and consistent exploitation to groom Black people into slaves.

A model slave owner or honorable White citizen could be defined by their treatment of slaves in which they “drove constantly, fed sparingly, and lashed severely” (Woodward, 2014, p. 59) which was a social norm, especially in the Southern US region, during the nineteenth century. The American way is to promote liberty and justice for all, yet traditionally White Americans have employed rituals of democracy with

disguise, both for the slaves and themselves, to the actual nature of the social system which is slave-driven colonialism. Western world social order is indicative of socializing Black people to be positioned in an inferior status to White people based on racial distinctions and for consumption purposes. Slavery in the US is a cannibalistic institution in which slavery is described as being founded upon the mental, emotional, social, physical, sexual, and literal consumption of Black people, especially Black males.

Consumption is also predicated upon the slave as a laborer. “Thought of as an object of labor, as labor itself, in the mind of many slave owners, the slave could be completely consumed with no moral repercussions” (Woodward, 2014, p. 109). Slaves can be consumed without integrity and the case of the slave being a laborer again posits a parasitic relationship where the slave is a producer of profit or some sort of benefit for the slave owner. Slaves are habitually relied upon to be exploited for the master’s gain. The consumption of Black people, and Black males particularly, is the basis for the parasitic relationship within American slave culture, the establishment for a source of labor, and the foundation of a racist social order.

In the Western world, the legacy of slavery along with a capitalistic philosophy of ceaseless consumption has instituted a colonial situation that continues to oppress Black people as a primary source of manual labor and embed racism as a core construct of society. Racism is defined as the subordination of a racial group and maintaining control over that group (Hamilton & Ture, 2011). This definition of racism is emblematic of a White supremacist attitude that White people may employ, overtly or covertly, toward people of color, especially Black people. Racism can manifest in the



form of individual acts or in a manner of community or institutional action; “the first consists of overt acts by individuals, which cause death, injury or the violent destruction of property...The second type is less overt, far more subtle, less identifiable in terms of specific individuals committing the acts” (Hamilton & Ture, 2011, p. 4). In slavery, the individual act of the White slave master unjustly and violently punishing the Black slave is known as overt racism. The teaching of considering Black people as inferior and conquerable and the delusion of democracy is less obvious, also known as covert racism. The latter is no less destructive and is arguably more dangerous. The covert conditions of racism that cause mass oppression and subordination are thus indicative of institutional racism.

The colonized subject is one who is forcefully situated at the bottom of the hierarchal social configuration of America where race and economics intersect. The colonized subject aims for liberation from their oppressive conditions imposed by colonial social order. The colonial situation is one which divides groups by racial and economic standards with political implications, and the group at the bottom of the spectrum represents the group designated to the struggle for emancipation and social justice (Fanon, 2007). The problem is not just racism. The problem is colonialism, whereas racism institutionalized is colonialism. Hamilton and Ture (2011) delineated the situation of colonialism in regard to American society:

There is no “American dilemma” because Black people in this country form a colony, and it is not in the interest of the colonial power to liberate them. Black people are legal citizens of the US with, for the most part, the same legal rights

as other citizens. Yet they stand as colonial subjects in relation to the White society. Thus, institutional racism has another name: colonialism. (Hamilton & Ture, 2011, p.5)

In order for Black people to be liberated from institutional racism there must first be recognition of their colonial situation. Due to White America's traditional practice of control and consumption, Black people must not anticipate emancipation by the leadership of White people but must learn to liberate themselves. To resist White supremacy in America means for Black people to fight for their right to protect and promote their own liberties.

### **Thoughts on Resisting Racism**

The Civil Rights Movement legend Malcolm X and his socially constructed counterpart Martin Luther King Jr. were conscious of the colonial situation and its racist implications. As previously mentioned, during the late 1950s there was concern about the integration of Black people into a Western White world, including the amalgamation of Black culture (Frazier, 1973). Black thinkers around the world worried that the Black intellectual in America was too infatuated with integration and was not concerned with questions about the salvation of their culture from the threat of colonial control. In the late 1960s, though Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr. did not necessarily agree on the utility of violence, they were both concerned about how the Black community could accomplish liberation from the negative consequences of racism through colonial control (King Jr., 2010; Malcolm, 2015). Collectively, it is understood that the problem of race relations in America is founded upon racism that was birthed from colonialism. This

racism is deeply embedded into the structure and systems of American society that exceeds the individual acts of racism. In order to combat this racism there is a need for Black people to organize and direct their own path toward redemption and liberation. The oppressor will not give freedom willingly therefore it is unto the oppressed to defend their culture and their liberty.

In 1964, Malcolm X explained in an interview his stance on racism as being anti-exploitation and that his motives didn't initiate any violence (Malcolm, 2015). He continued to explain how after leaving the Nation of Islam he formed a group called the Muslim Mosque Inc. which promoted open enrollment with an emphasis on youth members. This was due to youth having "less at stake in this corrupt system and [an ability to] look at it more objectively" (p. 634), as opposed to adults who were more subjective due to their presumably invested stake in the system. The attention to youth was to focus on the people who were capable of leading a revolt, and it is perceivable that youth should remain a focus for contemporary revolutionary efforts. According to Malcolm X, the colonial condition implies a political and economic system that cannot provide liberty for the oppressed, "it is impossible for as it stands, to produce freedom right now for the Black man in this country. It's impossible." (Malcolm, 2015, p. 710).

In 1967 during isolation from America and its civil rights movement, Martin Luther King Jr., within the confines of a rented house in Jamaica, wrote his book *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?* and discussed the condition of race relations in America (King Jr., 2010). He wondered, "*Where Are We?*" and highlighted the monumental event of the signing of the 1965 Voting Rights Act, in which

“legislation was designed to put the ballot effectively into Negro hands in the South after a century of denial by terror and evasion” (King Jr., 2010, p. 1). He acknowledged that the passing of the 1965 Voting Rights Act did not magically demolish the racist systems of America. Terrorism and evasion remained constant consequences of segregation attitudes, as the White public restrained from conjoining with their Black peers. Progressing forward often intensified the tendency of backlash. King Jr. (2010) also recognized that liberty will not be gracefully given and argued that liberty cannot be achieved “by passively waiting for the White race voluntarily to grant it...White America will never admit [the Negro] to equal rights unless it is coerced into doing it” (p. 96). Therefore, it can be argued that in order for Black people to achieve liberty and enjoy the freedom to express their full potential as US citizens they must self-educate and force freedom.

This study seeks to build upon the history of race relations and colonialism in the US by discussing this topic within the context of sport. Black people in America have been valuable human resources as a primary labor force for elite White people to build a prosperous economy. The social order of the country, influenced by White supremacy, results in racial discrimination and segregation. Organizations such as the Freedmen's Bureau resisted the oppressive nature of this social situation in order for the oppressed people to survive to the best of their ability in opposition to a system that maintains their marginalization. Building on this history in the context of sport, and more specifically within professional basketball in the US, this study will explore the experiences of Black male athletes as the primary laborers of predominantly White owned and managed

professional basketball organizations. The Players Association is the organization established to manage any labor issues and social problems that these athletes experience as players for these organizations, and thus will be the organization of focus for investigating the manner in which Black professional basketball players address their welfare.

### **Critical Perspectives and Colonial Thought in Sport**

There is a normalized tendency to think of sport organizations as positive institutions that serve as vehicles to promote euphoric conditions and positive relationships, but they may also be legitimately thought of as instruments of domination (Morgan, 1986). It is very common to believe in the portrayal of sport organizations as utopian entities, yet it is also wise to challenge conventional beliefs that may seem too good to be absolutely true in all cases and consider the potential negative consequences of such organizations. A challenge to common beliefs of sport organizations as benevolent entities is to adopt a critical perspective to pierce through the aura of goodness and bear witness to sport organizations as “instruments designed to benefit the interests of a privileged few at the expense of the masses” (Slack & Parent, 2006, p. 12). Such a critical perspective can comprehend sport organizations as dominant institutions who exploit laborers and the surrounding environment strictly focusing on the benefits of the organization.

The perspective of seeing sport organizations as instruments of domination or vehicles to preserve power, privilege, and political agendas is not necessarily common practice, yet there is a genealogy of such thought. As it relates to this study, previous

research has been done to illuminate how professional sport organizations and intercollegiate athletics programs exploit athletes, especially Black athletes. It is socially promoted and accepted to believe sport organizations provide an all-mighty good to society. In addition, it is common practice to focus studies upon one of the five key elements of a sport organization:

A sport organization is a (1.) social entity (2.) involved in the sport industry; it is (3.) goal-directed, with a (4.) consciously structured activity system and a (5.) relatively identifiable boundary. (Slack & Parent, 2006, p. 5)

There is a need to study the good, the bad the ugly of sport organizations and understand that there are a diversity of approaches for analyzing these organizations besides the pragmatic managerial approaches, whereas more critical approaches may offer alternative knowledge about the structure and function of sport organizations beyond the statistical analyses of status quo approaches (Frisby, 2005; Slack & Parent, 2006). Considering sport organizations as instruments of domination with the propensity to exploit correlates with analyzing colonial institutions as powerful organizations that exploit its laborers which may help frame research about sport organizations. Many studies in the field of sport management are very descriptive, yet do not utilize a theoretical framework to contextualize the study and help explain the social phenomenon of interest in order to gain an improved understanding of sport organizations and their management practices (Slack & Parent, 2006). A recent call has been made to utilize theoretical approaches that emphasize colonialism's impact on modern society and "how Western societies and their economic, political, technological and cultural development

cannot be understood outside of or separate from colonialism” (Carrington, 2015, p. 112). Thus, anti-colonial thought is an appropriate theoretical approach to answer this call and analyze colonial situations in sport.

### *Analyzing Colonialism in Sport*

An analysis of colonialism in American sport is most often centralized upon Black student athletes as the colonized and the NCAA as the institutional colonizer. The colonial relationship between Black student athletes and the NCAA is clearly illustrated through the internal colonial model; parallels are seen between the experiences of Black student athletes at predominantly White NCAA Division I Institutions to internally colonized people on a traditional plantation with an emphasis on the similar objective between the two instances being exploitation of physical labor (Hawkins, 1995, 2010). It is argued that the explicit focus on the collegiate level of sports to analyze the exploitation of Black athletes is done because the exploitation by the NCAA and its member institutions is greater than that witnessed in professional sports. On the professional level, athlete exploitation is hidden “by designer clothes and multi-million-dollar contracts” (Hawkins, 1995, p. 23) and at the collegiate level the features of neo-colonialism on “The New Plantation” (Hawkins, 2010) is more evident. The narrative identifying Black people as physically superior (Rhoden, 2006; Sailes, 1991, 1993) has been socially constructed and perpetuated throughout American history in order to justify the notion that profits should be made from the physical gifts of Black people through the display of their athleticism.

Additionally, the exploitation of Black athletes may be discredited because they benefit from receiving scholarships and the opportunity of higher education, among the many other privileges offered to Division I college athletes (Osborne, 2014). However, when this aspect of the narrative is critically interrogated, it is discovered that these Black athletes often express experiences with racism and oppression, challenges with social development, and poor or misguided education opportunities at NCAA PWIs (Beamon & Bell, 2006; Benson, 2000; Bimper & Harrison, 2011; Donnor, 2005; Edwards, 1984; Harper, Williams, & Blackman, 2013; Harrison, Comeaux, & Plecha, 2006; Hawkins, 2010; Hodge, Burden, Robinson, & Bennett, 2008; Kelly & Dixon, 2014; Purdy, Eitzen, & Hufnagel, 1982; Sailes, 1993; Singer, 2009). The narrative alters when Black male athletes reach the professional level with the ability to receive hefty compensation, lucrative endorsement deals, and massive media attention to morph them into mega celebrities. As Hawkins (1995) stated,

The November issue of *GQ Magazine* featured the article: “The Selling of Shaq” - i.e., Shaquille O’Neal. This title brought to mind the slave auction advertisements used to buy and sell slaves in the US...during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The slave auction advertisements generally gave written descriptions that expounded upon the physical abilities of the property (slave) being sold; however, O’Neal was pictured on the cover of this magazine in a designer suit. (p. 23)

Shaq, after signing a big contract with the Los Angeles Lakers, was also notoriously known for his quote in *The New York Times*, “I’m tired of hearing about money, money,



money. I just want to play the game, drink Pepsi, wear Reebok” (Araton, 1996). This attitude is indicative of being socialized into being a human commodity. Indeed, Shaq was able to earn a luxurious lifestyle by being a big-time professional athlete and having major endorsements. However, as explained from a CRT tenet (particularly interest-convergence), the oppressor is willing to grant privileges to the oppressed, when it is of advantage to the oppressor (Bell, 1980; Ramirez, 2004). Shaq received a large contract from the Lakers to play basketball, a shoe endorsement deal with Reebok, and was an athlete endorser of PepsiCo, Inc., yet as one of the largest celebrities of the NBA, he generated profits for these organizations larger than the checks he received from them. Again, there is a state of affairs in America, similar to a colonial situation, where the prosperity of predominantly White owned and managed organizations is developed and maintained on Black labor.

To study sport organizations means to study social phenomena of great concern within the context of sport organizations. Racism and exploitation of particular ethnic groups have been social concerns associated with sport organizations in America, as Armstrong (2011) avowed:

Based on the racial (and ethnic) dynamics that pervade sport - where a matrix of dominance defined by Whiteness permeates - there is a need for continual exploration and interrogation of the systemic elements in the organizational and commercial ‘terrains’ of Sport Management that: (a) ‘paint’ (and often stain) the experiences of People of Color with a racialized and ethicized reality, (b) largely define the collective actions and personal practices that bound the ‘fields of play’

for the mosaic of individuals therein, and (c) may be contested to promote racial and ethnic harmony, equality, and positive reflections and self-presentations in every facet of sport management (including athletic participation, sport spectating, sport media consumption, and sport administration). (p. 104)

The purpose of this study is to “lift the veils” (Armstrong, 2011) of contemporary ideology that mask the issues of racism and exploitation in the NBA and “illuminate the shadows” of the Black professional basketball players who have served in the Players Association under the intent of addressing the welfare of the players.

### **History of Black Males in US Professional Basketball**

The sport of basketball was invented by Canadian-American James Naismith in 1891 with the purpose of creating an indoor winter game to entertain and maintain the physical fitness of young men and women at the School for Christian Workers in Springfield, Massachusetts (Kimmel & Aronson, 2004). Within a few months the game became popular and circulated throughout the Young Men’s Christian Associations (YMCA) in the Northeast US. However, the game was invented as a non-contact sport and through its development it became such a contact intensive sport that it violated the mission of the YMCA, and the game was eliminated from YMCA gymnasiums. Amateur basketball then found its place at the intercollegiate level invading colleges in the Northeast and Midwest areas of the US.

By the 1890s the Intercollegiate League was playing a regular basketball schedule, and conference play began in 1905 with the Western Conference, which later became the Big Ten Conference. Basketball historians recognize the 1966 NCAA

championship matchup between Texas Western and Kentucky as the key moment for the sport with concern to race (Haskins & Wetzel, 2006). It was recorded as the first time a team started a lineup of five Black players who played against an all-White team. The Texas Western Miners, led by Don Haskins, and its starting five of Black players remarkably beat the renowned Kentucky Wildcats, led by Adolph Rupp, with a score of 72-65. This moment in basketball history was also seen as a critical moment in Civil Rights history.

The YMCA was a catalyst for the emergence of basketball in general yet may also deserve credit as the nucleus for Black players being involved in organized basketball. Researching African-American history in sport while tracing the development of basketball, Gerald R. Gems (1995) acknowledged how a multitude of Black people migrated from the South to the Midwest during the early 1900s in order to flee the terrors of “Southern hospitality” towards people of color in search for jobs and better social mobility opportunities. As he reported, “By 1914 the Y had its own league of four men’s teams and engaged in competition with White teams throughout the city. Within a year the Defender reported that basketball had become ‘the leading attraction’ at the Black YMCA in suburban Evanston” (Gems, 1995, p.138). The game continued to grow in popularity and by 1923 the New York Renaissance, also remembered as the Big Five or the Rens, made their debut as the first all-Black professional basketball team in the sport’s history, including the significance of being owned and managed by a Black man, Bob Douglas (Rayl, 1990). The New York Rens were known to be the greatest all-Black team, as well as being one of the greatest teams ever to compete through earning

numerous records, such as winning 88 consecutive games (a record that continues to stand), until they disbanded in 1948. Another great barnstorming team that featured Black talent in the beginning years of professional basketball was the Harlem Globetrotters, who were founded, owned, and managed by a White Jewish man named Abe Saperstein. Having a keen awareness of the racial tension and violence of the time period, along with having the business savvy to cater to underdeveloped markets (as did many Jewish entrepreneurs of the era), Saperstein encouraged “buffoonery and clowning on the court” (Kimmel & Aronson, 2004, p.60), which became the signature playing style of the HGT; the tradition of beating their all-White opponents was accepted since the HGT were seen as entertainers and not athletes (Kimmel & Aronson, 2004).

The Rens and HGT emerged before integration became widely adopted in professional basketball. There were a few Black players sparingly featured in some of the original professional basketball leagues, the NBA did not debut a Black player until October 31 (Halloween), 1950 when Earl Loyd graced a NBA court and broke the color barrier (Griffin & Calafell, 2011). Since that moment, the NBA would unmistakably be a racialized space where an emerging enterprise would be able to develop its prosperity on the backs of Black players. Surviving some of the initial speed bumps of driving the league to success, every decade of the NBA’s existence can be characterized by polarizing Black figures that shot the league towards the top of the sport industry, both figuratively and literally.

### *Here Come the Black Giants*

One of the most notable superstars in NBA history is Wilt Chamberlain. Many remember Chamberlain for his amazing 100 points scored in a single game in 1962, among other records that he shattered during his career (Goudsouzian, 2005). Before becoming a star professional basketball player, Chamberlain was a supreme talent in high school, being gifted at both track and field, and basketball. He was regarded by *Life* as the nation's top high school player and though prohibited to play professional basketball as a high school senior at Philadelphia's Overbrook High School, he was effectively, though not technically, drafted by the Philadelphia Warriors using the territorial pick (Greenberger, 2002). Not yet being able to play professionally, Chamberlain went on to be a superstar at the University of Kansas. He left school early to sign a professional contract with the HGT. He played with the HGT until he was the minimum of four years removed from high school graduation, which fulfilled his eligibility to play in the developing NBA league. Abe Saperstein, the HGT owner and manager, offered Chamberlain a large contract to play with his team an additional year, but, "the fledgling NBA so needed Chamberlain, however, that the league's seven other owners offered to help the Warriors' Eddie Gottlieb with his salary (Gottlieb declined their help)" (Goudsouzian, 2005). Albeit, Chamberlain decided to join the Warriors after the 1959 draft through the territorial pick and went on to earn the Rookie of the Year, as well as the Most Valuable Player awards during his first season in the NBA.

Wilt Chamberlain dominated the NBA skillfully utilizing his enormous size to his advantage, playing above the rim to garner rebounds, defend opponent's shots, and

of course, putting the ball in the basket. According to individual statistics, no player could achieve what Chamberlain could do. During the 1961-62 season, he averaged more than fifty points, and twenty-five rebounds per game while averaging forty-eight minutes on the court (Goudsouzian, 2005). Chamberlain continued to amass great individual achievements in the game of basketball, though not always being able to accompany individual success with team success. Regardless of his ability or inability to win many championships, he established himself as professional basketball's first major celebrity.

Though not as large of a media personality and individual commodity, Chamberlain's longtime rival Bill Russell also had a major impact on the NBA. Chamberlain was the league's first big media celebrity and Russell was the king of the league's first dynasty. Russell was a champion on the court and off. During the 1960s, Russell became one of the most influential star Black athletes, helping the Boston Celtics garner a multitude of championships winning the NBA title eleven times in his thirteen-year career (holds the record for most championships won by a single athlete in professional American sports), as well as being an athlete-activist on the forefront of social-political movements on issues of race and injustice (Goudsouzian, 2011). Even though Chamberlain was the NBA's first athlete to transcend the entertainment industry as a super celebrity, Russell was arguably the league's first superstar. Russell hit the ground running from the moment he entered the world scene of basketball. In 1956 the US Olympic basketball team was led to achieving gold by team captain Bill Russell, who also helped propel the sport of basketball on an international level and put the world

on notice about the effectiveness of a highly skillful and intuitive Black male athlete (Cunningham, 2006). He followed his amazing Olympic performance to join the Boston Celtics mid-season for his rookie year, which ended in him facilitating the franchise's first NBA Finals victory.

Bill Russell was valued so much by legendary coach Red Auerbach that the Celtics traded their premier player Ed Macauley and Cliff Hagan to get the rights to the second pick of the 1956 NBA Draft (Whalen, 2005). Auerbach would add to his resume as being a visionary coach and the trade would eventually be remembered as one of the best NBA transactions engineered. Known for his winning mentality and prowess on the defensive end of the court, Russell established himself as the centerpiece of one of the greatest teams in professional sports in US history. Bill Russell was such an amazing defender that the Celtics named their aggressive defensive strategy the "Hey, Bill" defense because perimeter defenders could play their man tight to hinder outside shooting, and if the opponent were to elude the perimeter defender's tight defense then he would yell, "Hey Bill" and Russell would move to help defend and shut the opponent's offensive attack (Taylor, 2006, p. 79). It is difficult to recount his impact from a statistical perspective because he played in an era when defensive statistics such as blocks and steals were not recorded. Blocks were not an official statistic but as a master shot-blocker his signature defensive move was nicknamed "Wilsonburgers" because sometimes he would smash the Wilson branded basketball into the mouth of shooter (Taylor, 2006).

In addition to what is commonly considered defensive statistics, he did record many rebounds, which also helped his team's defense recover the possession of the ball to set up their innovative "fast-break" offensive attack (Auerbach & Feinstein, 2007). Russell often led the Celtics in minutes played which is also indicative of his value to the team's success and his role as the centerpiece of one of the greatest dynasties in the entire world of professional sports. Russell's success on the court led to him being recognized by many as one of the most valuable players in the history of the NBA. Since 2009, he has been celebrated by the Most Valuable Player of the NBA Finals receiving an award named in his honor (Goudsouzian, 2011). Wilt Chamberlain and Bill Russell were preceded in the NBA by trailblazers such as Earl Lloyd and Chuck Cooper, yet they spearheaded the movement of NBA franchises seeking big, athletic, skillful, and most importantly intelligent Black male athletes. The Boston Celtics won the majority of NBA titles during the early years of the league with Chamberlain winning a title with the Philadelphia 76ers in 1967, followed by other organizations winning the NBA's ultimate prize due to major contributions from star players such as Willis Reed, Lew Alcindor (Kareem Abdul-Jabbar), Oscar Robertson, Paul Silas, and Wes Unseld during the 1970s. Albeit, the end of the decade saw declining TV ratings, low attendance and drug-related player issues – both perceived and real – that threatened to derail the NBA (Andrews, 1999).

#### *NBA Golden Era*

The savior of the league came during the 1979 NBA Draft in the way of the marvelous Earvin "Magic" Johnson Jr. After winning championships in high school and



college, Johnson was selected first overall in the 1979 NBA Draft by the Los Angeles Lakers (Johnson & Novak, 1992). On a team featuring the awesome talents of big-man Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, he won a championship and the NBA Finals Most Valuable Player Award in his rookie season, as well as four more championships with the Lakers during the 1980s. The Celtics manufactured the first dynasty in the NBA behind the efforts of Bill Russell in the 1960s, and another league dynasty was established by the Lakers from the talents of a masterful Black male athlete. The sports world went into a state of hysteria by witnessing the wizardry of the “Showtime” Los Angeles Lakers led by Magic Johnson in the 1980s (Pearlman, 2014). Johnson was a fascinating player because he had the versatility to play any position on the court. Johnson was a tremendous ball-handler and playmaker, so even though he had the size to play on the block as a post-man he was listed as the point guard. His skill set enabled him to amass statistics that filled the box score frequently recording triple-doubles with points, assists, and rebounds, and in the process, he facilitated numerous highlights that signified the Lakers’ Hollywood “Showtime” appeal.

Seemingly a battle between the races, Magic Johnson and the Lakers most infamous matchup was against Larry Bird and the Boston Celtics. At the time, Johnson was known as the best basketball player that was Black and Larry “Legend” was known as the greatest player of the Golden Era of the NBA that was White (Bird, Johnson, & MacMullan, 2009). The two players’ rivalry evolved from their college days, including the 1979 NCAA championship game, the highest-rated basketball game of all time, and the hyper-publicized stereotypical narrative of Black versus White (Ferrucci & Perry,

2015). Then when they became professional basketball players they helped the NBA emerge as one of the popular professional sports leagues yet developed a friendship off the court and did not let their racial differences hinder their comradeship.

The two players are credited with ushering in the modern era of the NBA, but Johnson accomplished more than his counterpart and had the most impact on the league and its success. As history stands, when reminiscing upon the Golden Era of NBA during the 1980s, Johnson's achievements in the league were clearly better (Ziller & Flannery, 2015). Magic Johnson won five championships to Bird's three. Johnson went to the NBA Finals eight times during the 1980s and beat Bird's Celtics 2-1 in the Finals within the decade. Larry Bird helped rejuvenate the Celtics franchise and restore the passion of Boston's fan base, yet Magic Johnson developed the Lakers franchise into a cultural icon. In tandem with Owner Jerry Buss' vision, Coach Pat Riley's style, and most significantly Johnson's brilliance, the Lakers became the golden treasure of the NBA and a global phenomenon. Though Johnson's excellence was the driving force of the Lakers' success, Buss and Riley, as well as General Manager Jerry West, were the White men in positions of power and control above Johnson. Thus, there is a reminder that sport organizations are vehicles for White people in power to profit from exploiting Black labor.

The trend of extraordinary Black athlete talent carrying the NBA, along with the merits of their respective franchise, continued following the greatness of Magic with the next great Black player of the league. The NBA excelled and was built upon the

significant contributions of star Black athletes, but no player has contributed to the prestige and prosperity of the sport of basketball like Michael Jordan.

The 1984 NBA Draft featured two prominent Bigs, Hakeem Olajuwon from the University of Houston who would be drafted first overall by the nearby Houston Rockets and Sam Bowie from the University of Kentucky who the Portland Trailblazers selected with the second overall pick. Hakeem would go on to become one of the most dominant Bigs in league history, eventually winning two NBA titles in the mid-1990s, and though seemingly promising at times during his rookie season, Sam Bowie's career was plagued by leg injuries and he would be labelled by many as one of the biggest draft busts in NBA history. Both of these Black male athletes would be overshadowed by the man selected third overall by the Chicago Bulls, as the former College Player of the Year from the University of North Carolina would transcend all the great players before him. Michael Jordan's professional basketball career began with him posting an amazing rookie campaign, including winning the Rookie of the Year Award, playing as a starter in the NBA All-Star Game, finishing the season third on the league scoring list with an average of 28.2 points per game, leading his team in rebounding, assists, and steals, and dazzling the gaze of all onlookers with countless highlights that garnered comparisons to the high-flying basketball legend Julius "Dr. J" Erving (nba.com, 2010).

Michael Jordan, also known as "Air Jordan", would set a new standard for comparison. His excellence on the basketball court, tallying tremendous individual statistics records, garnering numerous player awards, leading his team to multiple championships, and showcasing his flashy style of play, would not only earn him the

reputation of being the greatest player of all-time in the NBA (Staffo, 1998), but he also facilitated the globalization of the sport. Jordan was the centerpiece of the best basketball team ever assembled, as a member of the Dream Team that included other players like younger superstars Charles Barkley, Karl Malone, and Chicago Bulls teammate Scottie Pippen, as well as NBA living legends Clyde Drexler, Larry Bird, and Magic Johnson, that dominated world competition during the 1992 Olympics. The showcase Jordan and the Dream Team displayed during the 1992 Olympics is credited as the pioneering exhibit that led to the emergence of basketball as an international sport and business venture (Bernstein, 2000; Daly & Sachare, 1992). Furthermore, Jordan would build upon his illustrious college basketball accomplishments, impactful USA Olympics participation, and incomparable professional basketball achievements to become the most commodified professional basketball athlete in world history.

As a rookie for the Chicago Bulls, Jordan signed a lucrative endorsement contract with Nike, which developed the Nike Swoosh and Air Jordan product line into cultural icons in America and abroad. By 1998, just about a decade after entering the league and transcending the sport of basketball, Jordan was earning over \$30 million a year playing for the Bulls and getting paid over \$40 million a year in endorsements and promotions, making him the highest paid athlete in the world. However, Fortune magazine estimated that Jordan was generating over \$10 billion with regards to ticket sales, television revenue, product endorsements and merchandising; Michael Jordan was the clear catalyst of the booming business of basketball (Kellner, 2001). Jordan's impact on the industry of sport business and globalization is well documented (Andrews, 1996,

2001; Denzin, 1996; Kellner, 2001; LaFeber, 2002) and established him as the predecessor and ultimate example of how the exploitation of Black male labor in professional basketball would develop.

Michael Jordan set the tone for the next wave of elite Black male athletes in professional basketball in the new millennium. Players such as Kobe Bryant, Shaquille O'Neal, Allen Iverson, Kevin Garnett, Dwyane Wade, and Tim Duncan carried the NBA in the early 2000s and young Black men such as Kevin Durant, Stephen Curry, Russell Westbrook, Kawhi Leonard, James Harden, and of course, LeBron James are contemporary professional basketball players that continue the legacy of super talented Black athletes generating enormous revenue for NBA franchises.

The notion of exploitation consistently looms over the NBA and labor disputes are a pattern the league continues to repeat. The most recent work stoppage in the NBA came during the 2011 NBA lockout, the fourth major lockout in the history of the league, occurring upon expiration of the 2005 Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA.) The first two of the four, just before the 1995 season and just before the 1996 season did not result in the cancellation of games, but the third in 1998 and the most recent 2011 lockout both resulted in shortened seasons. The Players Association has served to negotiate CBA deals in contest of the lockouts, as well as address other welfare issues, and continues to organize in order to address issues regarding the well-being of the predominately Black sport.

## **History of the Players Association**

According to its official website (nbpa.com, 2016), the NBPA serves as a union for current professional basketball players in the NBA. It promotes itself as being the official negotiating body for determining “the collective bargaining agreement, prosecuting a grievance on a player’s behalf or counseling a player on benefits and educational opportunities, the NBPA advocates on behalf of the best interest of all NBA players” (nbpa.com, 2016).

It is fair to question the need for a professional basketball league as successful as the NBA, which has grown since its inception in 1949 after the Basketball Association of America merged with its rival National Basketball League, to utilize a labor union. Considering that NBA players have become multi-millionaires, people may find it difficult to argue professional athletes are exploited. But in 1954 the Players Association was formed in conflict with the treatment of players responsible for the development and commercial growth of the NBA.

It must be noted that the purpose of acknowledging the Players Association as a labor union is not to analyze the utility of labor unions or interrogate the history of labor unions and their effectiveness in labor disputes or racial salary discrimination. Labor unions have played a key role in US history regarding labor disagreements and social justice in general (Devinatz, 2007, 2008). Trade unions, such as the United Automobile Workers, the United Electrical Workers Union, and the Farm Equipment Workers Union, though not necessarily vanguards, have been progressive in their achievements of obtaining improved collective bargaining contracts for its members and other policy

reforms in resistance to the exploitation of laborers (Devinatz, 2009). In the sport industry, despite the fame of professional athletes and the access they have to media for attention of their concerns, the public is usually unsympathetic to highly paid workers, such as professional basketball players, during labor disputes (Parlow, 2014). Common-folk laborers from other industries receive empathy from the public that professional athletes aren't privileged to receive, but the Players Association has an advantage to thrive compared to other unions due to the unique status of professional athletes that gives the Player Association more power (Hayden, 1999). Still, the focus on the Players Association in this study is emphasized by means of recognizing that people who determine that they are oppressed in some fashion have to realize their agency and fight for the rights they believe they deserve. Since it is not to the advantage of the oppressor to change the conditions that benefit them, the oppressed must induce change for their own benefit. This situation, as related to a colonial situation in reference of US history, informs the focus on the relationship between the NBA and the Players Association.

The 1949 merger which formed the NBA left professional basketball players with the option of being submissive to the salaries offered by the new major league or choose to play for an amateur league (Bradley, 2005). The economic conditions of the NBA were unsatisfactory for its players. In 1954, Bob Cousy decided to organize the NBA Players Association, the first team sports labor union in the country, through seeking support from an established player from each of the teams at the time. In 1955, Cousy, serving as the union's first President, approached the NBA President with a list of concerns and demands, yet the NBA refused to recognize them. In 1957, after Cousy

met with the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations over possible union affiliation, the NBA agreed to bargain in good faith and the NBA Board of Governors finally formally recognized the NBPA and acknowledged their concerns. In 1962, new Players Association President, and teammate of Bob Cousy, Tom Heinsohn hired Harvard Law School trained attorney Lawrence Fleisher to help fight for union goals, such as a player pension program (nbpa.com, 2016).

The year 1964 is remembered most in US history by the Civil Rights Act passed under POTUS John F. Kennedy, which enacted the end of segregation in public places and banned employment discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex or national origin. The new civil rights and labor law would be considered one of the paramount legislative achievements of the US Civil Rights Movement. This time period was inundated with boycotts with the purpose of influencing social change, and the NBA was not absent from this phenomenon. Players threatened to boycott the 1964 NBA All-Star Game, the first ever to be televised, unless the Players Association demands were addressed. The core demands were the establishment of a pension plan, recognition of the NBPA as the exclusive bargaining party of the players, and to improve the per diem to at least \$8 per (nbpa.com, 2016). The game was delayed ten minutes as NBA President Walter Kennedy decided to guarantee that a pension program, among other demands, would soon be adopted.

In 1967 the Players Association was now being led by Oscar Robertson, the first Black President of the NBPA, after being inducted into the position in 1965. Oscar announced at the year's NBA All-Star Game that the players would seek further



improved economic conditions, including compensations revisions, healthcare provisions, and schedule limitations which resulted in the following agreement: 1) a \$600 a month pension plan for all players with ten years of service and over age of 65, 2) new medical and insurance benefits, 3) negotiations for exhibition game pay, 4) an 82-game limit on the regular season, 5) the elimination of games played immediately prior to the All-Star Game, 6) a new committee to review the standard player contract prior to the 1967-68 season (nbpa.com, 2016). The increased competition from the newly formed ABA, also influenced salary increases, as well as discussions between the NBA and ABA to form a merger to eradicate the competition for player services.

This led to the “Oscar Robertson Suit” of 1970 (named after the current president of the Players Association) under antitrust laws, carrying hopes of blocking the merger and the daunting restraint of the option clause that bound players to a franchise in perpetuity (nbpa.com, 2016). The year prior, Major League Baseball (MLB) player Curt Flood refused to be traded to another team and challenged the reserve clause by writing a letter to the MLB Commissioner Bowie Kuhn. Flood stated that, “after twelve years in the major leagues, I do not feel that I am a piece of property to be bought and sold irrespective of my wishes,” which was one of the most significant communications in sports labor history (Rhoden, 2006, p. 232). The reserve clause in sports was permissible in sports under the logic that athletes should be grateful for the opportunity to play sports as a profession regardless of the fact that ownership may deal with them according to their terms and restriction of player agency to ever maneuver the market as they personally see fit. Flood argued that the reserve clause resembled colonial sharecropping

tactics because, “The reserve system was the same system used in the South where the plantation owner owned all the houses that you live in...you worked for him and you shopped in his store and you never got over the hump...they’re the ranchers and we’re the cattle” (Rhoden, 2006, p. 232) and the conditions of the reserve clause should be resisted just as slavery systems were resisted. Initially, Flood was not successful with his challenge of the reserve clause, yet his efforts influenced athletes that experienced similar situations in professional sport. In 1970, *Robertson v. National Basketball Association* (1977) was filed as a class action suit challenging the labor practices of the NBA as violations of antitrust laws. The result of the suit, which was not ultimately settled until 1976, did not immediately restrict the reserve clause, yet it did put a halt to the NBA and ABA merger and included a few compensation improvements. The succeeding NBPA President Paul Silas used the momentum from the lawsuit to bargain for a new agreement with the NBA, which produced terms that provided players limited free agency and the termination of the NBA’s version of the reserve clause (nbpa.com, 2016).

The CBA of 1983 between the NBA and the Players Association was monumental yet nominal in effect by means of introducing the concept of the salary cap and revenue sharing with intentions of fostering competitive balance for the franchises and improved minimum economic conditions for the players though restrictions on maximum market value potential (Foraker, 1985). Labor disputes continued and additional lawsuits ensued over concerns with the salary cap, draft system, free agency policies, and revenue-sharing strategy throughout the next decade until the NBA’s first

work stoppage commenced in 1995 serving as a catalyst for a future series of NBA lockouts (Hayden, 1998). Withstanding the lockouts, revisions were made to the CBA during the 1990s to improve the labor conditions of NBA players under the unwavering leadership of Black male athletes, Isiah Thomas of the Detroit Pistons, followed by Buck Williams of the Portland Trailblazers, and then Patrick Ewing of the New York Knicks. Under the 1999 agreement,

the players enjoyed an 80% increase in salaries and benefits. In 2004-05, the last year of the 1999 CBA, the players earned approximately \$1.8 billion in salaries and revenues. The average player salary rose to well over \$4.5 million, and the median salary experienced unprecedented growth, doubling so that more than half of all NBA players earned at least \$2.8 million. (nbpa.com, 2016)

However, the 1999 CBA has also been highly criticized, even being characterized as a “Deal with the Devil” since the deal seemed to be agreed upon due to the influence of the impending deadline self-imposed by Commissioner David Stern just a day prior to it supposedly going into effect by terminating the entire season (Messeloff, 2016). It is believed that a decision was made immediately that resulted in short-term salary benefits for the players, especially young rookies and fringe journeymen, yet positive implications for the owners according to individual player and team salary cap policies that restrain the market potential, thus making the league an illegal anti-competitive economic space according to antitrust laws (Messeloff, 2016).

Furthermore, the new millennium encouraged new disputes between owners and players. Most notably, in 2011, after another lockout forfeiting regular NBA season

games another CBA was surrendered. The NBA and its players reached an agreement that encouraged the players to take a pay cut under the assumption that it would improve competitive balance and demand for the NBA. The agreement was presumably a better situation for the players, but it seemed as a clear victory for the owners. According to the substantial restrictions placed on player salaries, there were no strategies to address the real causes of competitive imbalance, and an apparent lie was communicated to portray small-markets as suffering from the loss of premiere players (Berri, 2012). Recently, the Players Association has made unprecedented progress in terms of labor relations by becoming the first American professional sports union to vote for funding health insurance for retired players (Fisher, 2016), but history informs us that with progress there comes struggle. The recent advancement is indicative of the ongoing struggle to continue to fight for improved treatment and liberty for the laborers of the NBA.

Founded in 1992 by NBA Legends Dave Bing, Archie Clark, Dave Cowens, Dave DeBusschere, and Oscar Robertson, the NBRPA is comprised of former professional basketball players of not only the NBA, but also the HGT, the ABA, and the Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA). The NBRPA is the only alumni association of its kind supported directly by their affiliate organizations, the NBA and the NBPA (legendsofbasketball.com, 2017). Their mission is stated as, "Working in conjunction with the NBA and NBPA, the NBRPA's membership promotes basketball and enhances the sport's image by building community relationships and fostering support for charitable activities and philanthropic events with a connection to the game" (legendsofbasketball.com, 2017). Many of the players facilitating the NBPA agenda get

involved in the NBRPA and are joined by more of their peers to address the welfare of all professional basketball players, as well as the broader communities they represent.

History shows how the Players Association has served as a mechanism for professional basketball athletes to realize their agency and fight for their economic liberties against the powers that work to exploit them for profit. Since the Players Association was founded by Bob Cousy, many advancements have been made to address the welfare of professional basketball players in the NBA. The advancements have not been made without a fair share of criticism. It is often recognized that improvements afforded to players are partnered with benefits for the owners. This situation echoes the sentiment that the oppressed must liberate themselves because the oppressors continue to perform in a manner that will serve their own advantage. In an economic situation the oppressed are the laborers and the oppressors are the owners, which also carry racialized characteristics when considering the classes of laborers and owners in the US. Sadly, just as the case has been throughout the history of America, those that are disadvantaged the most are the laborers, more specifically Black laborers. Recent labor disputes in the NBA indicate that the issue of justice between the relationship of owners and players in the league remain a consistent concern. Thus, we may be able to gain a better understanding of the issue of exploitation in the NBA, more specifically the exploitation of Black labor, and how it is perceived and managed by learning from the players about the topic.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

#### **Paradigmatic Assumptions**

A paradigm is considered as a pattern or model used to analyze social phenomena (Kuhn, 1972). However, paradigms should also be considered more than just a model or pattern. The manner by which we view the world and gain meaning, hypothesize and develop our beliefs is accomplished through our paradigmatic assumptions. Paradigms also carry epistemological, methodological, and ontological assumptions. The manner in which a person perceives the world is shaped by who they are, as well as where, how and what they learn throughout their entire life. Therefore, a paradigm is essentially a worldview or a shaped set of beliefs, and you operate utilizing multiple paradigms, with prominent paradigms being shaped by your cultural norms (Lincoln, 1985). Thus, a person's reality is constructed through their worldview or the major paradigm they tend to adopt.

Traditionally, positivists believe in seeking the objective reality and testing truth through quantitative experimental design, while interpretivists believe in subjective reality and gathering meaning from multiple truths through qualitative inquiry (Frisby, 2005). These are two common paradigms, yet there are numerous paradigms that people possess and utilize to view and understand the world. There is not necessarily one paradigm that is better than the other, as all paradigms serve a different and distinct purpose to help build knowledge of social phenomena. It is important to value

alternative paradigms and not focus on prominent paradigms, which can lead to a narrow scope about a phenomenon.

As such, it is important to mention that there has been a paradigm shift in progress, with regard to organization theory and how we manage to discover the truth(s) about world, from a positivist paradigmatic approach to variants of post-positivist paradigmatic approaches (Lincoln, 1985). The significance of this paradigm shift within organization theory and inquiry away from positivism is within the recognition of multiple realities and the various manners in which knowledge can be constructed. Engaging in the paradigm shift allows for anti-hegemonic analyses and more critical discourse.

#### *Researcher Positionality*

One of the main challenges of conducting qualitative based research is addressing research bias in knowledge production. A strategy to begin to alleviate this concern is for the research to state their positionality. Many critical epistemologies assert that “all knowledge is produced in specific circumstances and that those circumstances shape it in some way” (Rose, 1997, p. 305). This means that knowledge production is contextual and in order to understand the context of knowledge there is a need to learn the perspectives of those who experience the context. I believe it is important to understand that at its core qualitative inquiry is about acquiring an understanding of the meanings gathered from the perspective of how members in society experience the world and perceive their reality. In other words, qualitative research serves to understand how people interact with and interpret their world.

Denzin and Lincoln (2005) recognized that social constructs such as race, class, and gender “shape inquiry, making research a multicultural process” (p. 20) that is impossibly objective because observations and explanations are filtered through these diverse constructs. Therefore, it is suggested that qualitative research should be valued for investigating issues of diversity and inclusion from the perspective of marginalized voices. If the subject(s) of research are a part of a marginalized or minority group, then qualitative research may be the ideal method of inquiry to adopt. St. Pierre and Roulston (2006) acknowledged that identity politics play a “significant role in qualitative inquiry as those marginalized by dominant discourse and practices use qualitative methods” (p. 678) to illuminate the social power dynamics of the lived experiences of ‘the other’. In order to counter dominant discourse and hegemonic practices qualitative research can be employed to garner perspectives from diverse and oppressed populations that can offer profound understanding about social issues.

It is dangerous to take a colorblind approach and not to consider the endemic nature of racism, centrality of counter-narrative, and notion of interest-convergence when researching experiences of racially marginalized people (Milner, 2007). Researchers should consider the influence of race and culture when conducting research because it may be critical to understanding social issues through providing valuable context that informs research analysis and contributes to impactful research publications. Impactful research helps to close the gap between academia and industry. A goal of this study is to conduct impactful research that may benefit the sport industry.



Additionally, Nite and Singer (2012) suggested that qualitative inquiry is an appropriate framework to bridge the gap between researchers and participants that can serve as the language of social change and have a “meaningful impact on the lives and groups of individuals” (p. 95) that engage with and consume sport. I seek to employ qualitative research in this study in order to engage with a marginalized population in sport with an emphasis on race towards social justice initiatives. More specifically, the objective is to exercise qualitative inquiry to investigate the role of Black male athletes concerning the management of their well-being in response to the notion of the exploitation of professional basketball players, in order to gain a deeper understanding of their experiences as agents of social change for their own community and society at large; the community being the fraternity of Black professional basketball players within the society of the United States with regard to the social issues of racism and exploitation.

Partaking in knowledge development through qualitative research is a process of co-creating reality. The research participant’s perspective is interpreted by the perspective of the primary investigator in order to produce knowledge. As the primary investigator, I acknowledge I am a Black male who believes that racism is a socio-historical construct that is embedded in American culture. Researching with Black male participants on the topics of race and exploitation may produce a bias that can inevitably reproduce ideology about America as a racist society. The race and gender familiarity between investigator and research participant can also generate a sense of comfort that can allow for honest dialogue. A strength of a quality investigator is the ability to invite

participants into a welcoming research environment and actively listen without judgement in order to receive authentic feedback about the inquiry. I acknowledge my personal biases with confidence and strive for the utmost integrity in conducting genuine research beyond those biases.

### **Research Design**

Anti-colonial thought serves as an epistemology of oppressed people who are colonized, and by juxtaposition sport organizations can be viewed as neo-colonial entities to investigate the beliefs of oppressed people in sport. Through acknowledging that sport organizations may operate as colonial institutions (Carrington, 2015; Hawkins, 2010), the methods for this study involved chronicling the history of the colonial situation in US professional basketball along with the objective of empowering research participants, Black male athletes, to share their experiences about engaging with a hegemonic organization and how they manage to deal with conditions of being marginalized. This study was contextualized by examining the history of professional basketball in the US with an emphasis on prominent Black male athletes. Then an exploratory case study approach was employed to investigate Black professional basketball players' perspectives about the impact of the Players Association on the welfare of Black male athletes who participated in professional basketball.

A case study is an experiential inquiry of a phenomenon within its actual context, yet more importantly a case study “allows an investigation to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events” (Yin, 1994, p. 3). Furthermore, case studies are useful in order to “focus on a particular situation, event, program or

phenomenon. They are descriptive in that they produce a rich, “thick” description of the phenomenon under study” (Creswell, 1998, p. 29). A case study approach is appropriate when the purpose of the research project is exploratory, especially when the purpose is associated with seeking knowledge of the intricacies of a particular situation (Edwards & Skinner, 2010). A case study permits flexibility in research methods whereby the researcher may take advantage of opportunities to adjust questions during the interview, which enables the chance to gain insight into the complexity of social phenomena and reveal discrepancies between participants’ perspectives in order to gain an in-depth description about social truths (Adelman, Jenkins, & Kemmis, 1983; Dick, 1990; Torraco, 1997). The researcher of a case study has the important responsibility of reconstructing the truth(s) from the participants’ perceptions, or as Merriam (1998) indicated, the interpretation process of the study is mediated by the researcher as the research instrument. Concisely, a case study is a naturalistic inquiry approach that seeks to provide rich description about the real-life meaning of a social phenomenon according to the people who have experienced it through the interpretation of the researcher. The characteristics of a case study aligns with the purpose of this study, whereby the intention of the study is to explore the real-life experiences of Black male athletes with regard to the apparent exploitation in hegemonic professional basketball organizations, including how player welfare is addressed through the influence of the Players Association.

The specific design for this study was an exploratory collective case study, investigating a selection of cases which can lead to a “better understanding and perhaps

better theorizing about a still larger collection of cases” (Stake, 2005, p. 446). The intention is to gain a deeper understanding of a phenomenon within a particular case with the aim of describing the case and attempting to provide an explanation of the phenomenon (Edwards & Skinner, 2010). The aim of this particular study was to explore the phenomenon of Black male athlete exploitation within the case of professional basketball and its relationship with the Players Association. Exploratory case studies are intended to provide more than a description but include an evaluation. The role of case study in evaluative research can serve to describe, explain, and explore in order to form judgements about a program or intervention (Edwards & Skinner, 2010), and Merriam (1998) asserts that evaluative case studies involve “description, explanation, and judgement” (p. 28). Accordingly, the objective of this case study was to describe the experiences of Black male professional basketball players to explain the notion of Black male athlete exploitation through the chronicles of professional basketball in the US and narratives of the Black male athletes themselves, and judge the impact of intervention from the Players Association.

Conventional research approaches tend to utilize the scientific method and rule-based knowledge to explain a phenomenon, however social phenomena contain intimate knowledge and cases of expertise whereas it is necessary and beneficial to emphasize context-dependent knowledge and individual experience to learn about the complexities of a phenomenon (Flyvbjerg, 2006). Researcher bias is not only something related to case study, yet it can be understood as a fundamental human characteristic that is unavoidable. Qualitative methods of inquiry are often disregarded for rigor in

comparison to quantitative deductive reasoning methods, yet the critique of qualitative inquiry's rigor due to the potential of a researcher's subjective interpretation of the analysis brings into question knowledge about the diligence required to complete a valuable qualitative study. Flyvbjerg (2006) points out, "the advantage of the case study is that it can 'close in' on real-life situations and test views directly in relation to phenomena as they unfold in practice" (p. 19). In summary, many of the limitation concerns about qualitative case study research can be addressed through conducting disciplined research.

#### *Data Collection*

In adopting a qualitative approach for this study, it was important to establish the historical background or chronology of past sport personalities, organizations, and events, in order to ask quality questions about the topic of inquiry, as "any discussion of qualitative research in sport management research must address historical methodology" (Andrew, Pedersen, & McEvoy, 2011, p. 152). Therefore, the first method was to conduct a historical inquiry where the purpose was to examine a series of events in a particular timeframe, while establishing authenticity and significance of the events (McDowell, 2002). Historical inquiry provides historical and cultural context, philosophy, reference points, and perspective on issues, whereby knowing history enables you to know what to expect (Andrew, Pedersen, & McEvoy, 2011). In this case, the researcher explored and traced the historical development of professional basketball in the US and the critical role Black male athletes played in its growth and commercial development. This research was discussed in the latter parts of the literature review.

Secondly, the researcher selected and gained access to potential participants. The selection of participants for this study was informed by purposeful sampling (Patton, 2005) whereas participants have to meet the following basic criteria: 1) identify as a Black male, 2) currently or formerly played professional basketball in America through the NBA, ABA, or HGT, and 3) serve(d) as at least a member of the NBPA or NBRPA. Potential participants were primarily identified through reviewing the NBPA and NBRPA membership listings on the NBPA and NBRPA official websites. Additionally, participants were asked to refer other qualified individuals to participate in the study; snowball sampling was used as a peer referral process to access a “hard-to reach” population (Atkinson & Flint, 2001). Snowball sampling is another method that was employed by asking participants to recommend qualified peers to participate in the study (Groenewald, 2004). The process of purposeful sampling and snowball sampling was utilized under the umbrella of convenience sampling, with the ultimate goal of selecting participants that are most accessible, willing and able to participate in this case study through the most cost-effective means of access (Marshall, 1996). The researcher planned to meet the participants at a location most convenient for the participants and accessible for the researcher, of whom resided in Houston, TX.

Professional athletes are a difficult population to access. They are a unique and exclusive population whereby accessibility cannot be provided through general means of solicitation. As such, there is a need to establish a special strategic plan to gain access to an elite population in order to achieve participation from the population (Altinay & Wang, 2009; Okumus, Altinay, & Roper, 2007). The researcher’s recruiting strategy was

to use his personal relationship with a former Black professional basketball player and member of the NBRPA as a point of access. The researcher was confident in receiving buy-in from potential research participants through using the aforementioned former player as a gatekeeper to their peers. The gatekeeper supplied the researcher with a list of potential participants to target for the study, as well as invited the researcher to a NBRPA social event to gain familiarity with potential participants. At the event the researcher met and began a relationship with the Administrative Assistant for the Houston chapter of the NBRPA who agreed to facilitate getting access to participants and scheduling interviews. Through the relationship with the gatekeeper and the Administrative Assistant for the Houston Chapter of the NBRPA specifically, and other connections to Black professional basketball players, the researcher was able to develop a strong list of potential participants.

Potential NBRPA participants in the Houston, TX area were initially contacted through the assistance of the gatekeeper and cooperation with the Administrative Assistant by an announcement about the study being made at a members-only meeting. The researcher was introduced to potential participants from the Houston Chapter of the NBRPA by at a meet and greet social event hosted by the chapter. The initial contact was followed by telephone or email solicitation from the researcher. Potential NBPA members were recruited via phone solicitation. Contact information of the potential participants was obtained through previous personal relationships with the researcher or cooperation with the Administrative Assistant of the Houston Chapter of the NBRPA whom secured permission from the participants to share contact information. With

assistance from Administrative Assistant for the Houston Chapter of the NBRPA and snowball sampling during the data collection process the researcher contacted a list of 12 former Black male professional basketball players, including 2 with HGT experience, one of which also played in the ABA, and 10 former NBA players. The recruiting efforts resulted in contacting a total of 14 potential participants and 6 committed to partake in the research.

All traveling costs associated with conducting interviews were covered at the researcher's expense. When necessary, the researcher conducted phone or video conference interviews, while prioritizing in-person interviews. The researcher engaged in semi-structured interviews with Black male athletes who are members of the NBPA or NBRPA in order to encourage them to share their perspectives about their experiences playing professional basketball in the US and the role of the Players Association in impacting the welfare of Black professional basketball players. The individual in-depth interviews ranged from about 20 to 60 minutes (occasionally longer), depending on the availability of the participant. In addition, the researcher gathered demographic information from the participants using a background questionnaire (see Appendix B), as well as public websites ([nba.com](http://nba.com), [nbpa.com](http://nbpa.com), [legendsofbasketball.com](http://legendsofbasketball.com)) to triangulate data sources. The researcher kept a reflexive journal to aid in critically thinking about the assumptions being made from the findings, considering how to interpret the realities of the participants, and for accountability of the researcher's emotions and values throughout the research process (Brannick & Coghlan, 2006; Cunliffe, 2016; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).



### *Data Analysis*

Analysis began with a description of the historical sequence of US professional basketball and the prominent Black male athlete personalities involved in the growth and commercial development of the sport. The task of the historical analysis was to choose reliable sources, read them thoroughly, and organize the narratives in a manner to provide a reliable story about the past (Howell & Prevenier, 2001). The objective was to locate and evaluate evidence, attempting to find consensus and clarification of discrepancies, and re-construct and interpret the data about the history of US professional basketball, the Players Association, and Black male athletes experience with these organizations, especially concerning the notion of exploitation and resistance against it. This analysis provided a background context for this study and was discussed in the latter part of the literature review section.

Analysis continued with the initial interview, gaining first impressions and supplying the researcher with how to adjust questions for future interviews with participants of the study (Agyemang & Singer, 2013). In addition to paying attention to common remarks throughout conducting the interviews, the interview recordings were listened to regularly throughout the research process in order to gain a better understanding of the participants' point of view (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). After all data were collected, each interview was transcribed by the researcher in order to decipher codes from the data. The coding process consisted of open coding to discover initial themes and axial coding to decipher more concise themes. Corbin and Strauss (2008) described open coding as breaking down the data, separating and outlining

concepts that represent “blocks of raw data”. The transcripts and field notes from the interviews were evaluated until there is a solid consensus about the initial themes across all the participants’ responses. In regard to axial coding, initial themes will be related and forged together into more concrete themes, such as collapsing several initial themes into one encompassing theme (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The findings discovered were disseminated to the participants to allow for member-checking (Creswell & Miller, 2000) in order for participants to check the interpretations of their narratives and ensure trustworthiness; also, peer-debriefing, involving experienced qualitative researchers’ feedback about the developed themes, was employed to further confirm trustworthiness (Creswell & Miller, 2000). This process provided the main themes for discussion about the exploitation of Black professional basketball players from the perspective of Black male athletes.

### *Ethical Considerations*

Research ethics should be considered an integral component of the research process (Edwards & Skinner, 2010). Research ethics, but are not limited to, maintaining professionalism, risk management, protecting vulnerable populations, respecting the rights of participants, and being considerate of the welfare of those engaging in research. Ethical considerations are important in each phase of the research process, especially with the means of producing trustworthy knowledge. Validity and reliability of the findings are dependent upon the ethical nature of the research conducted, and potential risks, such as physical or psychological harm, as well as privacy concerns should be contemplated. In case study research arguments are made by the researcher based on the

evidence from the findings, and it is the researcher's social responsibility to collect authentic narratives and interpret them with integrity (Bassey, 2003). This study did not include any major dangers. However, the issues of exploitation and racism are considered sensitive topics that may conjure emotional responses, as well as reveal politically sensitive ideology. It is important to take the sensitivity of social research seriously and consider how everyone involved, including the research participants and the researchers, may be negatively affected through the research process (McCosker, Barnard, & Gerber, 2001). Safety protocols were developed and used to minimize and respond to any risk that could potentially occur.

The proposal for this study was sent to the Internal Review Board (IRB) for approval to conduct research with human subjects. Additionally, each research participant received a consent form, which included a description of the study to inform the participants about the nature of the research and potential risks, the level of their involvement, acknowledgment that participation was voluntary and could be discontinued at any time, and that personal identifying information would remain confidential unless permission was given to disclose. The participants were also notified that the interviews would be audio recorded, and the recordings would be only accessible to the primary investigator and the advising researcher.

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS

To gain a deeper understanding of the history of Black males in professional basketball and how the Players Association addresses their welfare interviews were conducted with 6 Black males who have experience playing professional basketball and have served in either or both the NBPA and NBRPA. Select demographic information about the 6 participants is highlighted in Table 1 (see Appendix G). Across all 6 participants, there is 60 years of experience playing professional basketball within the NBA, ABA, and HGT. Each of the Black male professional basketball players are retired and are active members of the NBRPA within their local areas. All of the participants with NBA experience had experience in the NBPA as player representatives and one had experience serving in the Player Programs Department of the Executive Director's Office. The interviews with the participants resulted in over 260 pages of transcripts, 36 initial themes, and 6 major themes.

The general findings of this study revealed six major themes. From the perspectives of these 6 Black male professional basketball players, the first major theme was depicting a *History of Lived Experiences of Racism*. This theme refers to accounts of discrimination, oppression, and exploitation that Black people, including the participants themselves, have experienced throughout US history. These narratives describe how Black people have been treated in the past and imbue the way Black people are generally treated within society today. The second theme, *Black Players Are Insulated from*

*Racism but Not Disbarred from It* indicates that the status of a Black male professional athlete will permit them access to unique privileges and opportunities, yet does not exclude them from the omnipresent threat of racism. Black players gain celebrity status as professional athletes but still remain susceptible to acts of racial discrimination, harassment, suppression. Thus, a double consciousness (see DuBois, 2008) becomes a tactical tool to navigate society. Third, *Superstars Have the Most Social Impact Potential* recognizes that all professional athletes have a platform to be role models. Nevertheless, superstar athletes have the potential to influence masses, as well as the ability to challenge the status quo with the security of their elite status. The impact any professional athlete may make towards social change, whether for a local community or within a sport organization, is magnified through collective efforts with their peers. The fourth theme, *Progress Is Accomplished Through Strategic Responsiveness to Interest Convergence* (SRIC) (Cooper & Cooper, 2015) demonstrates how recognition of institutional racism by oppressed people often leads to empowerment towards social justice and engaging in activities to counter social situations. Black professional basketball players recognize the material conditions of racism, acknowledge their power to overcome inequitable situations, and prudently engage in activities to achieve social justice. Fifth, *The NBPA Is Serviceable but Limited* describes the National Basketball Players Association as an organization whose leadership provides programs and initiatives to facilitate the welfare of professional basketball players within restrictions regarding the structure and scope of the organization. Interest to participate in the NBPA is tenuous and involvement is inefficient. Though considered a preeminent organization,

there is room for improvement. And sixth, *Black Male Professional Basketball Players Are Leaders of Self-Determination for Black Communities* refers to the circumstance of Black male athletes being in positions of influence and affluence with the means to network among themselves in order to develop concessions for their peers and communities beyond the assistance of an overarching entity. The objective is to build a brotherhood among themselves as a vehicle for communal support, the training of youth, the development of social responsibility initiatives and financial opportunities, and the overall promotion of empowerment.

### **History of Lived Experiences of Racism**

The major theme that emerged such to begin narrating the findings was recounting an experiential history of racism in the US. The participants shared former accounts of racism concerning discrimination, oppression, and exploitation against Black people, which also influences how Black people are treated presently. Starting with the history of racism sets a foundation for understanding the impact of institutional racism on Black people's well-being and how it is deeply embedded in US society. Stephen Hughes expressed, "See I kind of look at things from a historical standpoint because history gives us an idea of where we've been and where we going. If I don't have a good understanding or grasping of history, then I'm just kind of, to me, treading water." It is believed that in order to progress from a particular situation you must first have a comprehensive understanding of the situation you are coming from. Hughes went on to describe the importance of using a historical perspective when examining social issues and different cultures saying, "What's your history? Let's go back and see if you're all

that. And if you are, then hey I take my hat off to you. But if not, hey don't get mad at me if I say something that you may not like." When cogitating about the history of social issues in the US, especially considering race and racism, there is a harsh reality of reflecting on the horrors of racial discrimination and exploitation enforced by Whites on Blacks. This pondering on the oppression of people can become even more difficult when you may be accused of the affliction of such condemned behavior. It also evokes bitter memories when sharing personal anecdotes. For example, Hank Glover was raised in the heart of the Deep South during the Civil Rights Movement era and declared, "I've seen the worst in people by living in Mississippi. When I was growing up, they still had Colored and White drinking fountains." While mentioning the opening of The National Memorial for Peace and Justice (also known as the Lynching or Hanging Memorial) in Montgomery, Alabama, Glover expressed how he believed that popular media is hesitant to disclose news about such an appalling history because White people are cognizant of their wrongdoing during that time period and choose not to broadcast it:

And because the media is the media, they can squander, just like they did with the Hanging Memorial. Just the name Hanging is enough to turn the media off because they know these sorry ass White people wasn't right. They know that. You know, they had picnics at hangings, you know 'pick-a-nigga', they were picnics.

Glover also suggested that the reason the popular media did not widely advertise the news of a memorial dedicated to victims of White supremacy is because of the tradition of treating Black people as second class citizens. He conveyed how often times victims

of racial hate crimes are described in news alerts as Black [insert gender here] with no regard of their name, thus indicating a designation of being subhuman. Glover seemed pleased with the opening of such a memorial due to the fact that it would honor the victims with revealing the names of former victims of racial homicide, but more importantly bringing awareness to the humans who suffered such diabolical deaths. According to Glover, recognizing the victims as humans was one of the most important aspects of the memorial. Expounding on growing up during the Civil Rights Movement era, Glover shared a story about when he was injured during his participation in a protest march. His father was forced to take him to receive medical attention and encountered a racist incident along the way, where it was presumed both of their lives were in danger. He explained:

...he was taking me to the hospital and so there were National Guards all around the Capitol [i.e. Jackson, Mississippi] and he was trying to take a shortcut to go the other way so we could get to the car and he could take me to the hospital. And so we were going towards the National Guard and we went passed them. And then the guy said, 'Where you going nigger?' And my father said, 'I'm trying to get my son to the hospital.' The guy said, 'You gotta go that way.' And then as my father was going the other way the guy just took his gun and hit him in the back and then just pushed us down the hill.

Other participants shared similar stories of experiencing racial discrimination and segregation while growing up, including experiences with racism while playing professional basketball. Discussing experiences with racism as a player for the Boston



Celtics touring across the US during the 1970s Bert Edmonds recalled instances of racial discrimination, “Generally, mostly housing and eating accommodations.” Elaborating on such experiences Edmonds explained, “...transportation wise, we had to go to the back of some buses when we were traveling and sit in the back seats so we experienced that and this was before, you know, it was right in the midst of the racial issues that was going on in America.” The stories shared by the participants illustrate that racism is not an illusion but something that actually exists based on empirical evidence; racism is realized by the material conditions that the participants experienced throughout their lives. Though the participants admitted to the gruesome existence of racism in different manifestations, the conversations also yielded how the participants’ participation in professional basketball assisted with the progress of race relations in the US, as well as internationally.

Edmonds asserted:

But on the other side of the coin we did a great thing in moving things forward too. So the teams were biracial and we all played together. So that was a good face to put on moving forward. When people came to games. You didn't see all the Black guys play and then all the White guys play. We all played together. We played against each other.

Sam Johnson also shared how playing basketball professionally on a national and international stage with the world famous HGT helped defuse racial tension explaining, “Well, the Globetrotters are the most unique group of people. They could go anywhere and not have no problems with nobody. Terrorists or anything.” Even though racism was prevalent in the US, as well as globally, Johnson believed that people put aside their

differences when attending HGT events. Promoters helped by introducing the HGT showcases with advertisements of the family friendly events, so the places the HGT traveled to would be prepared to cheerfully welcome the all-Black basketball team.

Johnson described:

We never had any issues crossing borders or anything. We were known worldwide and that's just how it was. I mean we brought happiness and joy to families and that was a good thing for me because it's all about the kids. When we get to a different city or a different country, we always had front people to do the public relations and all that. So once we get to the airport, the hotel, and all that, people already know we're there. And then when we went around town, I was the shortest one because we had a few 7 footers. So we stand out. So when we walked in and they see all these Blacks and they tall, automatically they knew who we were.

Black professional basketball players provide entertainment for large crowds, and many times diverse populations. They help bring people together for the common cause of playing basketball and divert fans who seek valuable leisure time. Some of the players also felt a lack of racial tension from the management because of the benefits they were providing, especially financially by generating profits. Therefore, their presence and well-being was cared for. For instance, Johnson mentioned, "Now we had White management at the time but we was making them money so they had to keep us happy...My position is just so different from most athletes, as far as racism, because it didn't creep in. Because everywhere we went it was love." Johnson then emphatically

expressed, “And we was asked to be there [beats on table]! We weren’t forced to be there. We were asked to be there, put on the show, make everybody happy.” Hughes explained how he believed the NBA became tolerant with Black players due to the relationship between the original HGT owner Abe Saperstein and a White NBA executive that helped bring Black players from the HGT to the NBA. Hughes shared, “He [Saperstein] was good friends with Red Auerbach. That’s how the first African-American got into the league [i.e. NBA]. Not with the Boston Celtics, the New York Knickerbockers then. So it’s through the working of Abe and Red Auerbach, from my understanding. Cause the guy came from the Trotters.” For Hughes, Black male athletes’ ability to be professional basketball players was not necessarily indicative of racial progress due to the hierarchical structure of the Black players being in a subordinate role to White owners and managers who exploited Black athletes to create generational wealth for their families. Hughes explained, “Historically, in the United States, you had a class. You had owners and workers. And you have people who traditionally made a lot of money and they would pass that wealth on down generationally; has been White.” Hughes believed the money that the that the Black players received isn’t comparable to the wealth that the White owners were achieving from the Black players’ labor, and that this situation of Black workers and White owners was typical and replicated throughout the US. Hughes added:

That means, the more things change the more they remain the same. It has a history of that. Now if you look at that historically, that has always been the case in this country. Now tell me if I’m wrong now. We’ve [i.e. Black people] always

supplied a bulk of the labor force, but when it comes to ownership and distributing of the wealth, it's a cutoff point. There's a ceiling.

Beyond basketball, the participants expressed concern with how they experience racism similarly to when they were younger. Glover shared how in preparation of the interview he felt inclined to do some personal research and found there are major gaps in the money that Black people make compared to White people in the city of Milwaukee. He stated, "The thing that was startling was that Black people there makes 47% of what a White person makes. Now that's jacked up! This is 2018. That's today!" Glover discussed how there is currently similar violence enacted towards Black people compared to the violence he experienced and witnessed growing up in Mississippi. He proposed the difference is now we are able to see it broadcasted in the news and social media due to instances being conveniently caught on camera. Glover mentioned, "The stuff that's happening today, the only difference is they didn't have cameras back then. It was happening. That stuff was happening but you couldn't take a picture like you can today. That's the only difference." Ben Brown also shared a story about the similarities of racism currently to when he was growing up and stated, "Man, I still go to the store and I give the lady change. And she like this [gesturing that the lady doesn't want to touch him]. Sill don't wanna grab, don't wanna touch me. And I just look and say thank you. Keep on going." During the conversation with Brown it was stated that racist beliefs and behaviors are preserved because of it being taught in homes by parents instructing their children to act in a racist manner. Brown explained how he felt where racism comes from, "Man, the parents. The bigot parents. Go to a daycare center. Park

your car and look at those kids play. Go to a playground, elementary school, they just playing! But it's the parents that say, you don't need to be playing with them. Them! Not him, them." Brown's perspective builds on the sentiment that Black people are viewed as subhuman. He believed that as a Black man you should be proud of being a Black person and also understand that a White dominated society will perceive you as the 'other.' Brown declared, "Let me just tell you, when you get up and start brushing your teeth you better start saying I am Black. And to them out there I am a nigga." The youngest of the participants, Donald Robinson, recalled how racism is systemic and Black males in particular have been a targets of violence and exploitation, both now and historically. Robinson acknowledged:

It's scary. Like the slaves, they knew they was out numbered. But let's kill them, whip them; one little man on a horse. They scared of this big Black guy, so take the women, children, put them over here. And you take the male and put them over here. The black people, we're missing a big, big piece of our army. It's the Black male. So like with the system, it worked effectively. The drugs. All of our Black males and our voices are drugged up, in jail, or dead.

Robinson made a correlation to Black male slaves being seen as threats and targets of oppression to Black men today being marked for victimization in the war on drugs and mass incarceration, ultimately being subject to being separated from their families or even worse suffering death. The adage, "The more things change the more they stay the same," was an apparent attitude throughout the interviews.

The theme of a history of lived experiences of racism captures the multiple realities of encountering moments of discrimination, segregation, exploitation, and even the threat of death as a Black male in a White supremacist society. The theme also demonstrates that Black men carry pride in who they are and their ability to contribute to progression in race relations, even though racism is something that seems to be pervasive and permanent in the US. Black male athletes are apparently valued for their talent to provide entertainment and generate wealth, yet their status as an athlete is not always respected and they remain vulnerable to ramifications of racism. As previously mentioned, Johnson talked about how he felt playing for the HGT put him in a position to avoid racism and promote harmony, but he also reflected on how experienced racism for the first time:

When I was at Wheatley [High School], we went to State every year. My brother was there 3 years; I came there 3 years after him. Boy, one time we went to Fort Worth and we went into a cafeteria to eat and this White woman didn't want to serve us. Every time somebody White come in, have a seat, take a menu. We in there 30-40 minutes and they ain't ask us anything. So coach found out he say let's go. They find out say, oh no no. He say it's too late. Now our money good just like everybody else. That's the first time I really, I say oh wow. That was the main one that stuck with me. But the coach kind of kept us away from all of it. But that was when I actually saw it for myself.

This particular example of a lived experience of racism represents the first major theme well and also leads to the following theme, whereas Black males are often shielded from racism while playing sports but are not always protected from it.

### **Black Male Athletes Are Insulated but Not Protected from Racism**

It is evident that Black male professional athletes have access to privileges and opportunities due to playing sports on an elite level and earning impressive sums of money. However, it does not exclude them from the omnipresent threat of racism. Although being granted opportunities to play sports professionally on a grand stage is normal now, Black males were not always permitted such possibilities. And despite the tolerance given to integrate sports prior to the prohibition of segregation, Black male athletes were only permitted to play professional basketball on one of two all-Black barnstorming teams. Hughes discussed this situation during his interview:

Well see, this is going back to my time, you only had two teams. Well if you go back in history you had the Harlem Renaissance. The Harlem Rens. Kareem [Abdul-Jabbar] talked about them [in the documentary *On the Shoulders of Giants: The Story of the Greatest Team You Never Heard Of*]. They was competing with the Globetrotters at the same time. From my understanding it was a much better team. They just didn't get the exposure, didn't get the opportunity to develop.

Hughes continued to describe how opportunities to play, coach, manage, or own a franchise concerning professional basketball were limited for Black people:

Those were the only two teams that you could be a part of. There was no integration. Remember, integration didn't come until 1964, then the Civil Rights Bill. The Voting Rights Bill was signed in 1965, Housing was 1968. So up until then there wasn't any integration. They had a little bit 'cause Jackie did his thing in 1948, '47, somewhere along there. And they had the guy in Minnesota. Sandy [Stephens; first Black quarterback to be named an All-American] played football in Minnesota, I think. Back in the day. But, you know, it was a quota. You could count them on one hand. How many guys was on the team? So the opportunities in ownership was just not there.

Though the Rens, owned and coached by the “Father of Black Professional Basketball” Bob Douglas [Abdul-Jabbar, 2007], were known within the Black community as the better of the all-Black teams and not until years later were more widely recognized as such, the HGT gained notoriety due to being promoted by Jewish businessman Abe Saperstein. This was a situation that apparently induced feelings of exploitation as expressed by Hughes, “You got to remember now, the Rens came out of Harlem. That’s my understanding. The Globetrotters came out of Chicago. We didn’t have nothing to do with Harlem. But they used Harlem because of the African-Americans that were there. But the team was in Hinckley, Illinois somewhere.” When Black players integrated the NBA they were still met with racist restrictions and exploitative management as Glover expressed:

Before, it was a situation where you might have 6 or 7 White guys [on a team] because in reality I don't mind paying white guys. And they paid them more



money! And then they also had an issue saying, well White people are not really going to come out and see a lot of Black guys play. You know, if you have 2 or 3 on the team then your fine but if you're talking about like now, you take a look at the teams and the whole starting 5 is Black and then they might have 1 or 2 White players on the team.

This quote demonstrates how due to racist attitudes Black male professional basketball players have been subject to discrimination and lower compensation. Not until current times were they able to fully participate in professional basketball, but evidently it is because it is very profitable for the people who own and manage professional basketball franchises.

The trend of profiting from the labor of Black males in professional basketball by exploiting their talents began with the HGT. As previously mentioned by some of the participants, racial tension was not necessarily felt by the Black players from White management because of the service they were providing by entertaining mass crowds and generating profits. However, when discussing the history of racial salary discrimination in professional basketball with Glover he stated, "That's alive and well." And shared a story that suggested displeasure with biased salary allocation by one of the HGT legends explaining:

Meadowlark Lemon [Hall of Fame Globetrotter known as the "Clown Prince"] found out that the White players [i.e. the Globetrotters' opponents who were also employed by the Globetrotter organization] were getting paid more than the

Black players so he confronted him. And what you just said, Abe Saperstein said,

‘Well it takes more money for these White guys to live.’ Ain't that some shit!

The lack of equity in regard to compensation between Black players and White players in professional basketball was another harsh reality of the racist treatment towards Black players. Understanding the history of racism and White supremacy in the US, players expected such attitudes and behavior.

Sometimes salary inequities were met without a grudge. When questioned if salary discrimination and a premium being paid for White players was discussed among Black players Brown explained, “We didn’t. Everybody knew they [i.e. NBA franchises] had to find their White Hope. Pistol Pete, first. Then Havlicek, Geoff Petrie, Bird. Hey it didn’t bother us. They all could play.” Though prefaced with information describing how a NBA executive disclosed in confidentiality that even current Black male superstar basketball players (e.g. LeBron James, Stephen Curry, etc.) are underpaid according to their value and the money they generate in the NBA, Edmonds believed that racial salary discrimination was not a major issue. His perspective was that the money being paid to respective players was reasonable and acceptable according to negotiations that were made. Edmonds professed, “I’m sure the stars themselves and their agents are satisfied with whatever it is that they're making once they sign the contract.” Edmonds also discussed how he did not perceive racial tension from any of the White administration personnel while playing professional basketball stating, “No, I didn’t experience anything with management, coaches, trainers, or scouts.” Answering if the current

political climate and racial conflict throughout the country has an impact on Black male professional basketball players Edmonds described:

Very low. The impact is small because the athletes' ability to earn money. Most professional Black athletes are very well compensated and as you know when you're very well compensated you have the ability to put your family in a position to avoid a lot of everyday issues that affect lower or even middle class families.

Edmonds' perspective demonstrates that Black male professional basketball players are granted access to financial gain and environments where racism does not feel to be an immediate threat for themselves as well as their families. Other participants shared this sort of perspective that players are shielded from the dangers of racism as Glover conveyed:

Because when you're a player, you're insulated from all of this. You're insulated by virtue of the fact that, it's kind of like the concept of people living in a neighborhood. Then they get a job and then they get a better job, and then they get a better job. Once they get that better job. They say you know what? I can afford to move outta the neighborhood.

This quote indicates that being a professional basketball player allows you to improve your economic and social status. You have the opportunity to remove yourself from threatening situations to less perilous environments. You are granted more security for you and your family, and therefore it is perceived by others that you should not have concerns about your well-being, as Robinson shared, "You making \$20M a year. What

issue do you have, son?” For some Black male professional basketball players, it becomes difficult to cope with being in a better socioeconomic position personally meanwhile understanding many people in the broader Black community continue to endure the unfortunate consequences of racism, as Robinson went on describing:

That's what they gonna ask. What issue do you have? Black people not making money. You got \$20M. You just signed your \$30M contract. Here you go. Sign it J, woo! Now what? Some of your equality and fight, it kind of just...so now all your dreams, you start doing everything you want. But you don't do the things that count. It takes you awhile to come to the things you're supposed to do. So the money blinds you for 5-10 more years. For all these years you want to fight because it ain't right [makes grunting noises]. \$50M, hmm [expression suggestive of diminishing concern] and quit. Hey, ya ya ya whoop woo woo woo. Your whole career you don't even think about what's right.

Not only are Black male professional basketball players shielded from racism but they are also essentially bribed to ignore the plight of any of their peers. It seems as though the lucrative contracts that Black male athletes receive serve as peace offerings.

The process of tranquilizing Black male athletes doesn't begin with signing a major contract but through participation in “amateur” athletics and previous socialization. Robinson shared, “They brainwash us from college. And just, we brainwashed from growing up ‘cause we just don't have the generational knowledge or the generational wealth knowledge from our families.” Robinson juxtaposed the college athletics experience to being incarcerated and slavery describing:

Oh yea, it's jail. It is. I can't go, I got a curfew. Man, when them boys should be living! Do you know them boys got, they signed a contract for \$10.8B for 10 years, just to watch the NCAA [March Madness] Tournament? Not even the season. Not for all these...just for the NCAA [Tournament]. And these guys ain't get no money? It's a high paid slave trade.

He continued to share his perspective about Black players being insensitive to injustice because of receiving large sums of money by playing sports at the professional level:

Well, you don't see it just because you just a high-paid slave worker. So you don't see it. I'm cool. I got my money, I'm cool. You just basically just a high-paid slave worker. You just getting more money so it blinds you to where you getting the money. And what's going on, because when you get the money, you kind of not try to be helping people. So you really don't understand it or it really ain't gonna affect you cause I got mine so I'm good. So it just basically, just move that slave trade back in the day to giving you just a pillow, now you got cars and a house. You just high-paid slave workers. Because we have no knowledge of what's going on at all. And we ain't trying to know. Now we think college, oou yea! It's jail. I'd probably rather go to jail when I realize what I'm doing. They give you three meals a day. They out you in a 6x9 room, with a twin bed, and they give you a duffle bag and say make me some money.

Johnson also emphasized the exploitation of Black male athletes begins before becoming a professional athlete:

The colleges are greedy. Because if it wasn't for the college players you wouldn't be getting this money. So why you not giving them a stipend because sometimes it's hard. When I was at A&M myself, man we needed some money. We had vehicles, we needed gas but we couldn't work for it. We were in class or at practice or at a game. So I'm making money for you [gives expression suggesting the desire to receive compensation in return]. If I had a choice, I would say pay them. Or if they ask for my vote. Because they deserve it. And then they talk about well, we give them a scholarship. Well if they walked on they still making money for you. I mean if you walk on and make the team, that means you good enough for a scholarship. So don't say, well we paying for their education. Nah they [i.e. the college athletes] paying for the school.

Johnson felt inclined to share an anecdote:

So I went to one year of junior college, made All-American there. So I get there, they got a White guy starting. He's a senior. He couldn't play my position at all. Now see, my favorite position was in the corner. Now see, back then they played a lot of zone. And I would just sit in the corner all day bustin, bustin, bustin. But he wouldn't let me play so I got frustrated my first year there. He let me play in one game where I couldn't get my redshirt. I ain't play no more that year.

Johnson's perspective also provided insight about how unscrupulous sport organizations or institutions seeking to benefit from Black male athlete talent can operate:

They gave me a B average and I ain't went to nan class. Now you see how crooked they can be, when they want to be? Damn, a B. You see how dirty they can be? But don't want to pay you! It's for the school sake, not for the kids' sake.

The participants encapsulated the notion of racialized exploitation. They mentioned Black male college athletes being utilized for the generation of wealth for others' benefit while giving only a modest reimbursement or bribed with a conciliatory endowment.

As described above, when Black male professional basketball players receive large monetary contracts they are often expected to be silent about any social issues that may impact their communities because they are being compensated at a level where they should not need to complain. For example, in February 2018 Fox News Laura Ingraham responded to LeBron James talking about politics and social issues in an interview by saying "It's always unwise to seek political advice from someone who gets paid \$100 million a year [a melodramatic estimate] to bounce a ball...So keep the political comments to yourselves...Shut up and dribble." Participants were asked to give their thoughts about her Ingraham's stance. Glover believed, "That's the arrogance of our society. That's the arrogance of the news industry. That something like that could go viral and now all of a sudden somebody goes, 'Yea, yea, that's right. Just shut up and play,' and then it just matriculates all throughout society." Hughes responded about Ingraham's perspective, "Well, I don't agree with it. Maybe she should just shut up and report the news [laughter]. Last time I checked this is a free country and you have the freedom of speech." Edmonds also responded referring to the liberties and rights that are supposed to be afforded to recognized citizens, "Athletes are able to vote, right?" These

responses suggest Black male professional basketball players are awarded the opportunity to make millions of dollars, but remain vulnerable to being marginalized or exploited while having restrictions on their liberty to promote social justice. Hughes asserted about the situation:

I mean, if somebody's doing you wrong, are you just supposed to sit there and take it? If you feel like you've been falsely accused, are you just supposed to sit there or are you going to fight. My old coach used to say, go out in the world and stand up and fight, or something like that. He had a saying. And that's true today.

Robinson gave his thoughts by conveying, "So it was never really for the Black athlete to say something. He got in trouble, he got banned. He got, it was just bad for him. So you got banned from a lot of things. The Black athlete standing up was never really something to do. It was always, I'm gonna get kicked out the league. I'm gonna get fired. You stand up and Kaepernick." This statement indicates that as a Black athlete you are privileged with status and a platform of influence but unfortunately if you use them in a manner that protests the consequences of systemic racism you are liable to retribution. If you choose to exercise your individual social responsibility as an advocate for social issues that impact your community, you are damned if you do and damned if you don't. Brown expressed, "Okay, if we didn't say nothing, they be talking 'bout, 'Oh you a Tiger Woods.' And, 'You're a Michael Jordan. You ain't black enough.' Now when I'm doing it, I'm overstepping my bounds." Brown also shared his beliefs on how to decide the appropriate disposition:



What's inside you. You gotta find your inner peace. Look at it that, back in the day Harry Belafonte, Martin Luther King, Malcolm X were the ones speaking up. Richard Pryor did it in his jokes. But where were the rest of them? Then came Jabbar. Then came Jim Brown. They spoke up. Didn't nobody say nothing. Don't nobody say nothing until...now you're being too black. What do you mean I'm being too Black? So you got to find it within you.

Black male athletes experience racism in various ways. It was accounted by the participants how they have been discriminated against for access to playing professionally in premiere leagues, exploited for their talents with marginal compensation, become content with ramifications, swiftly indoctrinated and silenced, and victims of racial harassment. Glover talked about how an NBA legend and greatest champion of all-time was treated, "Bill Russell winning championships in Boston and everything was going great. They go on the road to play, on a road trip. He comes back and somebody den broke into his house and doo-dooed in his basement." He also shared how the NBA legend felt afterwards and alluded to an incident where another all-time NBA great and multiple NBA champion was mistreated:

So from that standpoint on he said I'm going to, I'm playing for the Celtics. I'm not playing for Boston, if somebody could do something like that. And they didn't want him in that neighborhood. That's what it boiled down to. Last year, what did they do on LeBron's gate? [racial slur painted on the front gate of home]"

A Black man may gain notoriety as a professional basketball player but ultimately he'll still be considered a "nigger." It seems important that Black male professional basketball players have an understanding of the concept DuBois (2008) introduced in his book *The Souls of Black Folk* called "double consciousness." The concept means that Black people are challenged with having an awareness of living in a society that has been oppressive towards people of the Africana diaspora while also having dignity in your Black identity and confidence in your ability to persevere against marginalization. As a professional basketball player, this concept of double consciousness becomes intensified as the platform Black male professional athletes are given magnified. Edmonds mentioned how having such a perspective is developed and used throughout your entire lifetime:

I mean it's a lifelong job. Being presentable and just trying to do positive things when it's so easy to be negative. Because you know you're being viewed as negative off the top just because you're Black. And you're always proving yourself. You can never really just slack up. And just think things will naturally be alright. You always have to be ready to prove you can do whatever the task is and you're worthy of the recognition that comes with it.

Hughes provided some insight about the challenge of professional athletes having a platform of influence with impending condemnation:

I do believe because athletes are always put on a pedestal, they looking to shoot you down as soon as you open your mouth. So you ought to have your facts together. You ought to have your stuff together if you gonna be out there talking.

Do your research, do your homework, as my old coach used to say, do your homework.

Black male professional basketball players earn privileges and benefits as professional athletes, including financial gain. However, these opportunities are often accompanied with systemic exploitation and expectations of silence. It is necessary for Black male athletes to have a double consciousness to be aware of the realities of racism as well as employ an attitude of resistance and dignity. Due to the situation that social norms depict Black males as subordinates and even as professional athletes, Black males are subject to being victims of racialized terrorism, a desire to overcome those stipulations arises. As the next theme will discuss, any professional athlete may use their platform to engage in activism but superstar athletes are more primed for such endeavors.

### **Superstars Have the Most Social Impact Potential**

The third major theme recognizes that all professional athletes assume a platform as role models due to their celebrity status. However, superstar athletes have greater potential to have a social impact along with having security from their superior status compared with other professional athletes. Johnson believed that anyone, especially athletes, who earns their money from fan consumer contributions is by default appointed a role model as he stated:

But the thing is, everybody that take money from the public is a role model, good or bad, because they're the one paying your salary. So Charles Barkley used to say, 'Nah, I'm not a role model.' No, you're taking their money because they're buying tickets to come see you play, you're a role model, good or bad. So the

thing is we just have to take a look within ourselves and see if we can be the best we can be on and off the court. Bottom line.

He also believed that the position of influence is based on the financial status earned as well as being a person people will desire paying attention to, as he stated:

Well, having a platform you've got to have some money to get there, you have to have some type of voice or do something well to where people want to come see you, people want to come hear you, so can't have one without the other. Because if you have a big platform, somebody done put you there. You didn't get there by yourself. You see what I'm saying?

The end of the quote describes how being a role model is founded upon other people helping you to gain such prominence. The participants of this study shared how there were role models that assisted in their development of becoming a Black male professional basketball player. Johnson discussed:

And I also had a role model, my brother, ["Dan Johnson"]. He was in the league for 12 years. He played with the Hawks, he played with the Rockets, played with the Bulls and played with the Lakers. He was my mentor and that's how I kind of got in the game because I saw his work ethic. So I tried to emulate that. So I said, if he can do it, if I put my mind to it, then I can do it. So I did that and I was fortunate enough to.

Brown also mentioned the role models that had an influence on his career and perspective as a professional basketball player, "Oh yea. Dr. J, Walt Frazier, Connie Hawkins, Pete Maravich, Jamaal Wilkes, Rudy T, Calvin Murphy. You just sucked your

thumb and listened.” As a professional athlete, developing as a person of influence is something you learn from your predecessors and perpetuate by helping the generation of players that comes after you. Glover shared how this impacted him:

But for me, having an opportunity to hang with Doc [i.e. Julius Irving] and some of the other players on the team, and I had relationships as well, you know. It was kinda nice as I continued to develop and become more of a seasoned veteran, I tended to try to help the younger players to acclimate to the game.

Prominent players serve as role models for other players and for fans, yet also are the cash cows of professional basketball. The NBA became the most popular league because of the consumer demand for the most exciting players. Brown discussed how the NBA not only capitalized on getting the best players from the amateur ranks but convinced the best talent from other professional leagues to join their organization, “David Thompson, Gervin, Dr. J, Rick Barry, they all went to the ABA. Then the NBA had to come get them, to come back with the extra dollars and all.” Glover also talked about how it is the consumer demand for star players that drives the league, “People want to see Olajuwon, they want to see Drexler, they want to see Bill Russell, they want to see all these guys whose names stand out in front.”

The status of the big name players not only has an impact on other players and the affluence of the league, but it also allows them to proclaim disapproval of any league standards they dislike or engage in activism unlike the role players. For example, Craig Hodges was a great perimeter shooter for the Chicago Bulls during the early 1990s who used his platform as a professional athlete to speak out against racism and the oppression

of Black people. Consequently, he was blackballed by the NBA. Glover referred to the Hodges story to describe the circumstance:

Craig Hodges. When he came from the White House, he may's well just went on home after that year was over because they were not bringing him back. Because he gave the President a letter saying these are the issues that need to be addressed Mr. President. And he wasn't lying!

Glover also referred to a more contemporary case of a Black male professional athlete using their platform to promote social change and being blacklisted as a result of his activism:

Here's the reality. The reality, we're threatened when we stand up. Look at Colin Kaepernick. Now he's gonna get paid [e.g. through sponsorships for his foundation] but he'd much rather be playing. He'd much rather be playing. Now see, that's collusion. And teams can do that...but at the end of the day, guys are not willing to sacrifice themselves if they feel that it's goin to hurt their career. Especially if you're a marginal player.

It is assumed that if Hodges' superstar teammate, the legendary Michael Jordan, attempted the same he would not have been banned from the league. To this matter Glover agreed and explained:

The stars like LeBron. LeBron will say what he wants to say. There are a few others that will say what they want to say. But you let a role player say something like that, somebody that's giving 5,6,7 points a game 3 or 4 rebounds,

oh I can get that anywhere. If I don't want them on my team, you don't have to explain anything [indicating the can be cut without debate].

Hughes also mentioned LeBron James being the type of player necessary to participate in social advocacy and that such participation is a deliberate decision is as he explained:

I think it requires a person like LeBron, which I admire, to stand up for what you believe. I mean he could do like so many of the rest of the guys, go make his money. Say I'm crying with y'all, but I'm crying all the way to the bank. I go somewhere, make my money, I don't have to worry about somebody getting shot in the back. An African-American over here getting shot in the head.

Edmonds described how the current leaders of the NBPA are able to leverage their superstar status and their personal relationships with each other to have a favorable impact on social issues affecting their communities:

You need your superstars to stand up and make a statement. It helps that they're all proud Black professional athletes and good friends too. And so I'm sure that they, in their off time that they get together and talk about things that they can go forward with in terms of using their foundations and their financial impact on communities to further positive social change.

Robinson also discussed the impact that superstar players who serve on the NBPA board stating:

The board used to be Jordan, Ewing, Reggie, all the big name guys who made all the money. That was the board. So when they locked out, they locked out. No

thank you, that ain't right. That's not what we want, this ain't what we gonna do.

Fellas, we agree? We agree.

Edmonds shared how other NBA legends were able to organize in order to get their requests met:

There was Dave Cowens and Archie Clark who sat down with Oscar and they all had advisors and lawyers and met with the league and league had to open their books to show revenues. And they had some numbers crunchers with them that were able to look and see and say alright well you're making this much, then this ought to be given to the players.

The superstars of the league are able to use their status as the most popular players, and subsequently the sources of the wealth generated by the league, to broker their demands for social change and policy change. Brown believed that current day athletes may be perceived as naive or militant. Thus they are vulnerable to being shunned, so he suggested an approach that may be more welcoming of constructive dialogue:

Okay, right now, let the older players be the ones to speak. These people [league executives and older consumers] grew up watching us. They idolize us. They wanted to be part of us. We've gotten older and wiser. We're not as militant as these young kids today. Yea, you can sit and talk. And there's not going to be a yelling of words.

Brown continued with examples of who could potentially be the former professional athletes that could fulfill his call:



The Boston Red Sox, Big Papi. He's well liked. Basketball, Oscar, one of the older guys. David Robinson could. You look and see, Jabbar wrote 14 books. He's on dancing with the stars. There's still a couple out there who can, still...you remember Arthur Ashe, was really one of the big-timers.

The participants also talked about how it was superstars of the NBA, a majority of them being Black, who were concerned with the well-being of the former professional players and developed an organization to assist them. Hughes stated, "Oscar [Robertson], as far as I know, was the person who initiated the whole process of the Retired Players, the NBRPA." Edmonds said, "Oscar played the biggest part... Archie Clark, Oscar [Robertson], and Dave Cowens were the main guys that started the [retired] association." Another Black male professional basketball player had a major impact on developing the Houston chapter of the NBRPA. Johnson explained how Moses Malone played a critical role by setting an example for the others, "He [i.e. Moses Malone] was a major factor because he was making all the meetings. And a lot of us followed him. Because if the main one come, why shouldn't we come?" It was because of Moses' leadership that the Houston chapter was able to develop into the largest and most active chapter of the NBRPA, as Johnson went on to describe:

Well...when we try to raise funds, having like golf tournaments and stuff like that, all we had to do is say one name, Moses Malone, and then...the golf tournaments would be full just to play alongside of him. That's how it started 'cause you have to have something to bring to the table. He brought himself to the table and that's what pushed us to be greater. The biggest, the first biggest

one. They got several now but because of him, in my opinion, that's how we grew as big as we was. Because of him being a likeable person. We were able to raise funds because of him. When you do golf tournaments and get teams to buy in. Everybody wanna be with Moses...We were the first, the biggest one in the nation, Houston Chapter. From that, they have others now and they try to emulate us but the thing is we need them in all major cities where the guys live, where we can come together.

Hughes supported the claim of the Houston chapter of the NBRPA being the most flourishing chapter of all, "We have 11 chapters and the Houston chapter being the largest and over the years been the most successful."

An important takeaway from this theme is that Black male professional athletes possess the potential to impact policy and social change. Superstars have greater influence and security than other players but if they all come together for a common cause they can impose their demands as a conglomerate. Robinson talked about how a conglomerate is powerful through a conjoined effort of being aware and capitalizing on each other's resources:

Well, since we not together as players, it's all about the money. If we was all together, that's power and that's money...You can get what you want. You can come and we can lockout together. Somebody need some help, you can help him out. But if we ain't all together, we don't know what's going on. So that's what's kind of going on now. A lot of young guys in the league. You don't know what's going on.

Edmonds discussed how power in numbers is more capable of making an impact and is a smarter approach than just having a few freedom fighters struggling to make an impact:

So we need to have enough members on [the NBPA] board to get the attention of the owners. So if it was 20% of the players or 15 % of the players, the owners could ignore that. But if you got 75 or 80% of the players who want to do this and they're together as a group, perhaps you can move that issue forward.

Glover described in frustration how the NBRPA could be improved if the NBA did not poach many of the former league legends from the other organized retired players:

So the NBA said, well what we'll do is we'll go ahead and we'll give them [i.e. retired superstars] individual contracts. Now the value of our organization [i.e. NBRPA] without those guys is probably only about \$3-4M a year. And we have roughly about 700-800 members in our organization. Because see we don't have the same cash...But the reality is that if we had those guys, those former players, we're probably like a \$30-40M organization. Here's the thing. They would still get their money. We would command more money from the NBA.

The supreme status of superstar professional basketball players provides them a secure platform of influence as well as the capacity to command adherence to their demands. Realizing such potential power is a component to strategically impacting social change. The following theme describes how strategy is essential to progress in more detail.

## **Progress is Accomplished Through Strategic Responsiveness to Interest**

### **Convergence**

Strategic Responsiveness to Interest Convergence (SCRIC) (Cooper & Cooper, 2015) demonstrates how recognition of institutional racism by oppressed people often leads to empowerment towards social justice and engaging in activities to counter social issues. The participants in this study implied this perspective within their responses. This standpoint begins with awareness of the conditions of racialized oppression. Robinson shared his knowledge of a resource that explains how systemic racism and the notion of interest-convergence operates to oppress Black people:

*Stan the White Man* [i.e. title of a YouTube video]. It's gonna mess you up. But it comes from just, the money messed us [i.e. Black people] up or made us just stop believing or stop being together because we got paid. So he got paid, left the scene. So he got paid, left the scene. So they [i.e. White people] start figuring, let's just pay them and they'll just leave it all alone. They might not even fight no more. So now you got stuff like Black athletes, Black entertainers, all these guys with all this money and all this power but how many restaurants do we have together? How many hotels do we have together? Do we own any teams?

Robinson continued with discussing how players are essentially the primary stakeholders who fundamentally possess power yet are not poised to exert their power, “Cause we got the power. The players got the power. But we're scared cause, with the money. It scares them.” Not only do Black male professional athletes have power but there is a genealogy of exercising power. Brown explained how former prominent Black players

realized and deployed their power to secure media contracts and develop the popularity of the league, even though the younger generation of NBA players are reaping more of the benefits, “Our thing was, why y’all forgetting it was us that started the league? You’re forgetting about us. We’re the ones who had the first CBS contract, then NBC. Y’all worried about these young cats. What about us? Don’t forget us.” Brown extended his thoughts by stating explaining the need to be strategic when exercising your demands, “You have to have a working relationship. You gotta know how many buttons you can and can’t push, right. You gotta know give and take, take and give. And some of these cats, they don’t understand that.”

A component to knowing when and how to employ your power comes from an understanding of the predetermined results of institutional racism. This knowledge can bring upon aggravation but knowing is the beginning of overcoming. To this regard Glover expressed:

You know, the game is rigged. The game is rigged. That’s where the frustration comes in. Magic [Johnson] was able to get in. I read that [Derek] Jeter is now one of the owners of the Florida Marlins. But again I mean, they [i.e. professional sport franchise owners] keep making those idiotic statements like the owner here [for Houston Texans; Bob McNair] that made the statement that, what did he say? ‘The crazies are running the asylum’ [mis-paraphrased statement; “Can’t have inmates running the prison”].

Institutionalized racism sets a precedent for Black people, including Black male professional basketball players, and ultimately the business aspect of professional athletics is the utmost priority. Hughes discussed:

First of all, it's a business. And if I'm a businessman, and that's why I don't get too bent out of shape when owners be taking this and they don't want this to happen, because they looking at their bottom line. And if I'm a businessman I'm not going to pay you more than I'm making. If I do that, I'm not going to be in business long. As a businessman I got to always be looking at my bottom line. And if I can work it where the team can be successful and I can be successful on top, then okay.

Hughes went on by saying:

So it's a buy and sell market. I have something that you want. And that's, watch these athletes in a confined area to perform. And in order to watch these folks it's going to cost you, it's not going to be free. So as an owner, I'm not going to get into all that. I've already figured out what my bottom line gonna be, my profit. I would think. Just me, being a novice at this but trying to think like a businessman, if I can for a minute. I don't go into any venture to lose money. I may suffer a little but, break even at the most, at the beginning, but down the road I'm looking to profit. Case and point, when Wilt didn't buy the team for \$3M, \$3.5M, or whatever, the O'Neals bought it for something like 3,4,5 million, whatever or so. 4 or 5 years later, 6, 7 years later, they sold it for 12 million.

The business structure of professional sports creates a situation where managers are strictly concerned with their bottom line and will treat human resources as mere property to be possessed and disposed of, especially when dealing with Black men. Opportunities for Black men to access ownership positions are scarce and restricted. As a Black man, in order to prosper in such an environment, you must have knowledge about how professional sports organizations operate and have an understanding of financial systems. Johnson talked about how owners will contemplate when to make policy decisions on their terms, and may even make false promises:

What you gotta realize. The owners of the NBA, they gonna always say we're gonna consider it and see they can consider it for years. But until they put something on pen and paper...see they'll say I'll consider it to shut you up. See, you gotta know the game!

Hughes shared his perspective on the topic stating, “And young guys need to learn the history of this organization. If you’re in there you need to learn as much as you can about it. And also the economic, the financial side of it. If I make so much money, then I ought to put so much aside.” Glover echoed similar sentiments saying:

But the other thing was, in terms of, we knew going in weren't going to be making a whole lot of money, so we knew that once we finished playing, we knew we were going to have to get a job doing something. Compared to the guys today, you know, it's generational wealth. They've got to almost be like the 3 stooges to not walk away with something. So you know, the key was always to make sure you be on top of your finances.

Glover continued by describing how the relationship works between players and their agents:

When you talk about agents. These guys [i.e. the agents] walk on water to our guys [i.e. the players]. Because guys used to think, my agent was able to do this, my agent was able to do that. Well you know what, you don't really need an agent today because with the information that they have, okay well I averaged 20 points a game, I averaged 8 rebounds, I averaged 4 assists...what logarithm does that put me in? That puts you in the \$20-25M range. Okay, we'll start from there. It's a different animal. When we played, we thought that you had to have agents because you needed to have somebody in there fighting for you. But in reality agents be sitting in there, 'Okay, what are we gonna do? You know we need this, you know we need that. Okay what else you need? I can probably get you another player, you know.' So bottom line is, he's trying to help you but he's trying to help somebody else too.

Glover added to the conversation by discussing how being a professional athlete is an opportunity that cannot be taken for granted or expected to last, "So when you become an athlete, when you become an entertainer, it's all about giving people what they want. If you can't do it, guess what? Uh c'mon Justin, c'mon Joe. Whoever. You're throw away athletes, to a certain extent." He additionally discussed how it is smart to consider the typical duration of a professional basketball career and prepare for life after playing, "The first day that you go to training camp, you're already moving towards your retirement. You gotta look at it like that so that you can keep trying to make positive



steps because the average career in the NBA is 4.7 years. Think about that.” Johnson also referred to the length of careers as something to ponder and make appropriate preparations accordingly:

Well look at it this way. Most careers are 5, 7, 8, 10, 12 years. So whatcha going to do after that? And if you're not a good person, ain't nobody going to hire you. And the majority of all the people, all the guys who had all that money, millions, are broke after 3, 4, 5 years. So if you're not going to have a brand for afterwards, ain't nobody gonna want you.

Johnson continued stating:

So that's the main reason why you have to maintain on and off the court transparency, because you gonna want somebody to keep paying you after you play ball. 'Cause you still love the game, you just can't still play the game. So what you do now in the game will have reflection on what you do after the game. So it's really up to, well how you gonna play the game?

Throughout the interviews with the different participants the statement, “Know how to play the game,” was constantly brought up. There was a persistent attitude about knowing the expectations of Black males in society, within professional basketball, and how to strategically respond to those expectations, especially when you are vulnerable to misconceptions and potential falsehoods regarding your actions. Johnson spoke about this by testifying:

They can manufacture some stuff on you. Make it look like something that you done and you ain't done nothing. See the thing about it we have to know our

place. Bottom line. We can play the game and get something out of it, but we have to know how to play the game. You gotta know how to play the game! It don't put you out the game. Just learn the rules until you get yours...we can all get our piece of the pie if we stay in our place, to get to where we want to get to. Because when you make them like you, you still don't like them but you make them like you, just get you further up the ladder. Simple as that.

Brown described the notion of knowing how to play the game by telling a story about a job interview:

Okay, I'll put it this way. You got a job interview; corporate. You're not gonna go in there [gesturing greeting somebody with an informal handshake] how ya doing? You know. [Gesturing greeting someone with a formal handshake] You're going to go in there, “[Ben Brown], sir. I want to thank you for taking the time and opportunity for me to present myself.” You don't go in there with your pants hanging down. You don't go sit in there, sit back and hold ya self [gesturing holding his crotch] while you're talking. It's your presentation! And then the next thing is the lady sitting outside the bossman's office, she already knows who's going to get the job, and if she likes you, she'll tell you this, look here, knock three times, when he comes in, use your left hand, open the door and step in with your right, the job is yours. I know him! So what happens, you got this young cat, you don't tell me what to do! I know what I'm 'posed to do. You just lost a job homeboy.

Brown discussed how young players can be naive and would do themselves a good service by gaining wisdom about how to navigate being a Black male professional basketball player from their older peers:

Just 'cause you can walk in and buy this Rolls, you got to remember something, the man who's paying you and owns the team, you got to start thinking about his whole payroll: front office, per diem, travel, everybody's contract. At the end of the day, he's making that back from his other businesses. You spending your money, you ain't getting it back. But you trying to walk in like you got the key to the main washroom. And see, that's why I say the older players, the older people say, come here young fella have a seat. Let me pull your coat tail.

Glover also discussed about the importance of younger Black professional basketball players mentored because of the dearth of opportunities they have access to juxtaposed to White players:

I [as a former NBA Player Development Executive] didn't worry about the White guys because they got [hypothetically speaking] an Uncle Justin that's a CEO of a corporation. They got an Uncle Mickey that's a President of a bank. They've got lawyers. They've got, you know, all these different elements around them so somebody's gonna grab their hand and hold them. But for the guys that came out of the hood. Who do they have? White people will bring good opportunities to White players.

Glover also talked about the need to beware of family members who may seek to take advantage of your fortune, "Check this out! We had some players that their parents took

advantage of their money. One of the heaviest sessions that we had in our breakout room was guys coming in and asking the question, how do you say no to your parents?"

Likewise, Brown brought attention to being aware of how to manage your finances and family who will solicit funds:

One of the players told me, when you get your check, your first paycheck, you go get it. You don't give your attorney the power or opportunity. Whichever bank you want to bank at, you get on a suit or whatever you have, you go to the receptionist, you say you wanna see the president of the bank. "Well he's busy now." "Well you give him this [i.e. the check] and I'll wait right here." Give her the check. Boom! 10 seconds, he's out the door. The Milburn Drysdale effect, of the Hillbillies. He gonna take care of your money. Now when your friends or relatives come wanting money for an investment. You go to him; he picks up the phone. "Nope, not a good deal." He is the player rep, he's the bad guy. 'Cause he's gonna take care of MY money. That y'all want me to spend on YOU. Uncle Jim is mad 'cause you bought him a VW but got his sister a Lexus. "Boy, I raised you. And you gonna give her something bigger than me." Momma, who you love, she ain't happy with just a condo, she wants a mansion.

Additionally, Glover discussed how having a sincerely supportive entourage is an aspect of the system to sustaining success and one of the current Black male NBA superstars has provided an admirable example:

The key is still going to be to align yourself with the right people. And agents are never going to be okay by themselves because it's like giving me access to

everything that's in the war chest. So you don't want that. That's why you have to have 3 or 4 people looking over the shoulder of the other person. And guess what? You make enough money to do that. If you have the right people, these people will pay for themselves...But one of the things that I really admire about LeBron James is that the guys that he grew up with, he paid for them to go back to college to get their degrees and then their masters and now these guys are representing him. One of the guys is the one that negotiated that \$1B deal with Nike.

Another strategy for players to use beyond being aware of operations, educating themselves on economics, and organizing among each other and former players is developing a foundation in order to avoid individualized backlash. Robinson discussed this topic in detail:

They start just throwing stuff at you. And then we weren't together. Guys was like, I'm broke, we can't lockout. They was like man what you mean? No, no. Then they all said yea. Some guys said no. It was just sloppy. When all these guys just...it's crazy. But if you was together. Guys could be owning banks. Guys could be loaning guys stuff. They foundation could've had they funds readily...

Robinson added to the discussion by describing his perspective about Colin Kaepernick's situation with the NFL:

Well you be strategic about it. You think about it. You plan it. And how can you be heard without crossing the line of your employer. So, 'cause he's the one that started this, they started this stuff. So maybe that wasn't the right way to do it.

Now he has started his foundation. He's got all this stuff. He's got million dollar goals to help people. He should've did that one in the first place, instead of standing up for the flag. Maybe at the end. Stand up for the flag. "I'm out of here anyway. Yea, I'm done with y'all, anyway. I did what I had to do, I'm finished with y'all anyway." But see now it's a decision, they gonna be finished with you.

You know, use them. Use the wave until you need them to go.

As Robinson went on to summarize his perspective he reiterated the notion of being cunning and knowing how to play the game:

So it's kind of a fine line of fighting for your rights or securing your family. So this company gave you all this money and now you're in a platform to speak up for what's right. But it's a thin line because you can't, you can speak up but you can't speak up in certain places, certain situations where you'll get fired. You'll get blackballed. So you got to be smart. It gets a thin line because you're doing something now where you get paid so much money where we want to be so right, so right, but it ain't right, it ain't smart, it ain't tactical, it ain't strategic.

In summary, this theme demonstrated that for Black male professional basketball players there is a need to engage in strategic responsiveness to interest convergence. The need to do so starts with knowledge of the social issues that may threaten and that you possess the power to persevere. Then in order to contribute to progressing forward you should tactically engage in social justice endeavors. Due to the consequences of institutionalized racism you are prone to experiencing discrimination but there are strategies to employ that will assist you with maintaining your status and financial

standing as a Black male professional athlete while being an advocate for social change.

To this regard, Glover offered advice:

People think that the lifestyle of a professional athlete is easy but it gets more complicated the more money you get. That old adage, when you know better, you do better. But a lot of guys don't do better. The best thing that you can do when you're facing situations like this, is to succeed even with the odds against you because you're going to have the odds against you.

One of the ways Black male professional basketball players decide to apply their knowledge and work on doing better in order to continue succeeding in the presence of adverse situations is by getting involved in the National Basketball Players Association, as discussed in the succeeding section.

### **The NBPA is Serviceable but Limited**

The following theme describes the role of the NBPA as an organization that offers opportunities for players to get involved with programs and initiatives that attend to the well-being of professional basketball players and issues that may impact society. The NBPA was founded and serves as a union for professional basketball players in the US. It provides benefits for players, including addressing concerns of the predominantly Black population within the league, yet operates within limitations of the structure and scope of the organization. The limitations begin with the apparent paucity of desire to be an active team representative in the organization. Glover talked about how he became a player representative in the NBPA essentially by default due to his teammates avoiding the responsibility, "I think the main reason was because nobody else wanted to do it."

Brown gave insight about the process of becoming a Player Representative in the NBPA and a reason why players will hesitate to get involved, “Well mainly the guys will vote you in. Most guys didn’t want it because you had to go against administration. If something needed to be said and done, it was on you. 9 outta 10 you were probably traded the next year.”

Though participants admitted to the lack of interest in becoming a Player Representative with the NBPA they also acknowledged the benefits of being involved in the organization. Glover described one of the advantages as being privy to league operations:

You end up being a Player Rep and consequently you find out the inner workings of the Association. Especially back then I can remember a conversation, back in the ‘70s, with Larry Fleisher who was the Executive Director of the Players Association at that time. And he made a statement. He said, ‘I know you guys are not going to believe this but at some point in time in the future guys are going to be making over a million dollars a year in this game.

Glover continued by explaining how learning how the league functions as a Player Representative is accompanied with sharing the knowledge with your teammates and being involved with decision-making regarding policies and programs:

And then also to make sure that our guys were informed. Cause I think that that’s the big thing right there. That’s one of the main pieces that a lot of the guys take on those responsibilities. Is because you want to make sure everybody is on the



same page. Especially on your team...You're involved with making decisions about pensions, different programs that are needed.

Brown explained the Player Representative responsibilities as a means of reporting through a chain of command stating, “Whatever the national chapter was saying, you had to let everybody, keep them informed. Whether it was about worker’s comp, or anything else, per diem. ‘Wait a minute, you can’t make us do 6, 7 things in a season. You only get us twice.’ Little things like that.” Edmonds shared that he was unaware of the private matters of league agreements, but talked about the NBPA having conferences to decide on the system of governance system for the league:

I don't know what goes on in the negotiations behind the doors. All I know is there’s a set of rules that governs the actions and appearance of players on and off the court. And every so often things are negotiated based on social norms. Players get with their Player Reps and they talk about it. And when the reps get together, they come together with a set of issues that need to be addressed, as seen necessary by the current group of players. And they present that to the committee, negotiation committee, when they're talking to the league.

Edmonds extended the discussion by detailing the level of involvement Player Representatives in the NBPA tend to have:

The Player Reps are guys from each team who goes to meetings and brings issues from a particular team to the meeting. Which may be issues that other teams are sharing too. And the Player Reps, and they got through all of that. They meet themselves. How every many reps there are, they meet themselves

and they go over it. And then they compile a list which will be presented to the negotiation committee to take to the negotiation. But they don't all sit in at the negotiation at the next level with the owners, or the owners' lawyers or whatever.

Glover explained the role of a NBPA Player Representative as being a valuable liaison between the league and his teammates, especially concerning being receptive of issues players are experiencing:

And then to have guys come to you, to talk to you about different situations that's going on with them personally or what have you. That's always something I've taken on as well. You know, just be a sounding board. Cause I've had a lot of guys over the years that's come back and thanked me for always being in the middle of the road trying to just tell it like it is.

During the interviews it became clear that older player representatives had a major impact on their younger teammates. Just as Glover discussed how some of his teammates thanked him for his service as a Player Representative, Robinson revealed how he was grateful for his Player Representative, who also served as a mentor, encouraging him to become involved in the NBPA during his rookie season:

So he told me, man make sure you go, make sure you sign up, be a Player Representative. You need to know what these people are doing. In these meetings you need to know what's going on. Get all the information and when you get the information, you bring it back to the fellas and you tell us everything we need to know. Now when you got there, it was the big envelope they used to give us, back in the day, they give out to all the players with the information. Tell

everybody what's going on. And that was the whole key, just learning that information. Knowing what we're playing for, knowing what we're doing. Even though some of that stuff is unfair.

Robinson believed that some of the NBA policies and programs are unjust or not player-centered. He explained there's difficulty in lobbying for amendments because your career could be in jeopardy if your challenge is met with disdain. Responding to a question about the NBPA being helpful with providing programs and assistance to players Robinson stated:

They are but they in a microscope [under the NBA]. So they job on the line, they livelihoods on the line too. I mean they have all these programs, yes they do.

They have them but who gonna use them? With this guy in here talking like this [making squeaky voice] well you can come bring your 401k over here it can turn into 59% and you get 12% back on your return and you know [implying a lack of trust].

Brown suggested that Player Representatives may be negligent towards fulfilling their duties to advocate for players' rights because of carelessness or intimidation by the league:

Only thing you can do is get your Player Rep. And then there's some player reps that don't want to speak up. Then the national, they're not ready to get involved with the local teams. So you're out there on your own. They're trying to, they are. But we had so much front office turmoil. It got lost in the shuffle, you know. Everybody in the front office was trying to do their own thing.

Johnson believed that issues between players and league executives are tough to resolve because of the selfishness of the executives, a selfishness that may be related to racial discrimination as well. He claimed, “But these owners are just so greedy and they make their own decisions cause all of them are White. Jordan has a piece of one but it's just one. Just one vote.” Brown expressed that players may not wholehearted trust the people who are officers in the NBPA, such as the current President:

Chris Paul, everybody looks at him like an Uncle Tom. Chris Paul’s hobby is bowling. That’s his pet peeve [i.e. favorite recreation activity]. And Chris Paul doesn't really carry himself as Black. That’s what they [i.e. other players] say.

And yes, being chummy chummy with the commissioner looking out for himself.

He added that a former President of the NBPA was perceived similarly as a selfish person who was more concerned about their personal success than the well-being of the other players as well, “Well Kevin Johnson, he used to be the President. Then he became Mayor of Sacramento, then all of a sudden now he forgot us.”

The NBPA may have its limitations but it has a reputation of being one of the leading players’ associations in US professional sports in terms of addressing player issues and social issues. To this matter Edmonds asserted:

I think that there's been progression or that the NBA Players Association has been progressive. They offer a number of social programs, counseling, drug abuse for people that need them. For players and their families too. And their family members. So I think they've been progressive with that. And stepping forward and getting that issue out and to their membership. And encouraging

them to apply and take use of the programs that are available. I'm sure that the Players Association is aware of any fringe groups who try to steer racial issues regarding the makeup of the team or in that regards. The Players Association hires players and get them out in the community and they do a lot of good work in that regard. They get players out and a lot of them are Black, African-American players, who go out and visit communities, and mentor the kids, go to high schools, elementary schools.

The NBPA evidently takes a proactive approach towards getting players trained about the league's operations during the offseason. Glover mentioned how they invite all the rookies to a briefing prior to the season, "They used to have the rookie orientation camp every year in September where all the rookies came that had been drafted." Brown indicated how all the rookies attend an orientation as well acknowledging, "Well, the league and the NPBA, and the Player Reps, three weeks before they all gotta report to camp, the first round and even the second round 30, 60 guys. They're in upstate New York, a resort." Robinson emphasized how the NBPA meets annually with the player representatives to train them on the collective bargaining agreement, address current player issues, as well as treat the players and their families to a vacation:

They meet, they have their little meetings in the summer. They have like an event. Or like, we used to go to Nassau, the Bahamas. We used to go right to the Bahamas, we used to have our NBPA meetings, you bring your family. Fly your family out, they have the meetings, golf event, they have all kind of stuff. Party for your family...And they breakdown all the stuff that's going on in the CBA.

They might bring in a ref here, talk to him here and there and then we just hang out. Basically, you get the information and you try to relay it back to guys.

The participants shared how the NBPA is an organization that is very supportive of its players and the communities that they serve.

The NBPA and the NBA are leaders among similar organizations, but the participants discussed the capacity for more opportunities being available to Black people. To this regard Hughes stated:

And I would like to see, I'm sure everybody else would like to see, the majority of us would like to see anyway, more ownership. More in-office people. People that make decisions. And we do a lot better than a lot of other professional sports, you know. But we're nowhere near where we should be.

Additionally, there was a sense that there is still great potential for improvement.

Robinson expressed, "I like the NBPA. I love it. I served it. But it's weak." It seems as though the Players Association does enough to appease the players while ostensibly functioning for the benefit of the league's affluence instead of the players' well-being, which can cause friction. Robinson spoke to this deficiency of a player-centered approach by saying:

Because coming from them people [i.e. NBPA executives and consultants], we not going to listen. We got all that. Like the NBA, they come twice a year and give us all this information, but we still don't understand it. Not even listen but, we just don't understand it. Why would I listen to him? Who is this guy? Half the time I'm tired from practice. It's after practice. We meet after practice. I'm tired.

I'm hungry. We just lost last night. I'm sleepy. I'm going to see who I can text after practice, you know. By the time I get the information, it's not really...who did I get the information from? This guy with the big baggy suit and he talking like this [mocking nerdy voice]. Nah, you know they not gonna listen. But it's information they need to know.

Friction between league officials and players about privileges, programs, and resources can inform the reason for having an operative Players Association, including good counsel. Edmonds mentioned how each has their own legal associates, "Yea, the Players Association has its own negotiation team and the league has their negotiating team. And each side has their lawyers and advisors." The tension between players and league officials through the Players Association filters over from NBPA to the NBRPA too.

Glover described:

Obviously with the NBRPA, we don't have the strength that we should have as an organization. And I'll tell you why. The NBA and I guess you really can't blame them. What they've done is that they've raped and pillaged our organization by taking the superstars and putting them on individual contracts. And the reason that they do that is because they don't necessarily need role players to, fill in the blank.

When NBA players retire, many of them are still proponents of the league and the sport of basketball by being active in the NBRPA but with limited support from the NBA.

Glover explained:

It's in essence what we deal with here. So they look at it and say, well we're giving you \$2M a year, and between you and I, the NBA throws away \$1M every All-Star game. So you're telling me we're only worth a million dollars when we were responsible for, with having to build this league? But that's what we're up against. I went to the Players Association and I told them, I said it would be great for guys to give \$10K a year. \$10K a year is \$4.5M. You could do a lot with \$4.5M. And the guys would be like, I don't wanna pay that kind of money. But check this out. They'll never see that \$10K anyway because of their taxes. So psychologically, they're saying I don't wanna do it, but if you're not giving it to me, you're giving it to Uncle Sam.

The NBPA is an organization that does positive things for its players. For the most part it is in good standing because of the programs provided to players and their families and being a leader within US professional sports in regard to player benefits and acknowledging social justice. The Players Association is an organization with great utility yet players believe there is potential for more to be done. There may be instances when you feel you are not able to depend on the directors of an organization or believe in their agenda. Nevertheless, you can be the master of your fate and take more control over your destiny. The following theme discusses how Black male professional athletes autonomously apply authority over addressing their welfare and developing their communities.



## **Black Male Professional Basketball Players Are Leaders of Self-Determination**

The final theme refers to the circumstance of Black male athletes being in positions of influence and affluence with the means to network among themselves to develop concessions for their peers and communities beyond the assistance of an overarching entity. Black male professional basketball players, both current and former, are like a fraternity that unite with each other off the court for brotherhood and service. Brown talked about how being concerned for each other's well-being is how the NBRPA began, "Well see the first thing is our [Retired] Players Association mainly got started fraternizing with the old guys. How are you? Are you ok? Talk to me. Because once we all were traded or gone. We lost contact. Now we got contact back." Johnson talked about the necessity for Black males to support each other and be encouraged to strive for success, "And see us Black brothers have to stick together. Because we have to be better than other folk anyhow." His perspective was also informed by Black male professional basketball players being as an exclusive fraternity that offers social support and business opportunities. Johnson continued saying:

Well it's like a fraternity. When you retire you part of a small group because were part of the 1% of people, play professional basketball or whatever, you know, it's just like a fraternity. We talk and trade stories, and all that. Which is always nice to hang around. It also gives us an opportunity to network. Cause a lot of people don't know what the next one doing. And see we can network and help each other out and, businesses. Cause a lot of them own businesses. And like myself, I'm a city official. A lot of them doing construction and stuff like that. They come to

me and man, what do I need to do? Do this, do that, you know. So we help each other out. That's basically it.

For the participants in this study, the NBRPA served as their fraternity organization that facilitates their ability to socialize with another, host events, and do community service. It seemed as a necessary development for former Black male professional basketball players who still wanted to be connected with their peers for a variety of reasons. Edmonds shared his insight acknowledging the need, “We need to get our own thing together that was concerned specifically about players who had retired,” and talked about the gatherings for all former professional basketball players, “We have professional basketball reunions with the NBA, ABA, Harlem Globetrotters.” When questioned about his role in the NBRPA, Hughes shared what his personal responsibilities are as an executive board member of the Houston chapter, “Well, it would be a supportive member. And I’m the secretary of the organization, of the Houston chapter.” He described being a supportive member as being a companion to the members and aiding them, when capable. He also discussed how his role as the secretary is to assist the chapter’s administration board, which is a group of mainly volunteers in charge of cooperating with the players in the chapter to keep the organization operating effectively and efficiently:

Well their board [i.e. administration board] is to assist and to help us do projects or whatever initiatives that we have to put it in play and make sure it get out there and it works. We try to day on any board, there's three things that we look for: wealth, wisdom, and work. The first thing is wealth. Part of the board is to be a

fundraiser. And if you don't have the wealth we expect you to be a worker. Then if you don't work then we look for the experience and wisdom. They meet and discuss things, you know, we have certain things that come down from the national office out of Chicago. That we have to adhere to. Like so many meetings a year, so many fundraisers, what we do in the community.

When referring back to the impact of the NBRPA Johnson described:

Yea, going back to the Players Association [i.e. NBRPA], we like to stay in touch with each other. We meet on a monthly basis. We do charities for the kids, golf tournaments, and all that. But it's just to keep in touch and help out folks when we can because sometimes the guys get on hard times because, some of them didn't even graduate. And a lot of them have to end up doing stuff that's, not business like, you know. They end up like selling cars or something like that. But there's nothing wrong with that. But the thing is a lot of them don't get the degree and they need help. And this is a way to help, being a part of the Association...It's really a good thing. It keeps us focused. It keeps our minds on the community. And it keeps us wanting to keep giving back. This is our platform now to give back. To help kids, help communities. We're actually here for the community, #1. But we can make our community better. Because there's such a need for mentors, especially in the Black community. For kids that's struggling and you got so many single family homes that don't have a male figure that they can look up to, so all that's part of, bringing it together, for the community.

Another aspect of the participants' attitudes of self-determination was an emphasis on having an impact on youth and developing the future generation towards success. Johnson really focused on this at a personal level and said, "It's all about the kids, it's not about me." He also talked about how the NBRPA helps sponsor education for young minds, "Also they give scholarships for their kids, the players' kids." Being involved in the NBRPA gives the participants a platform to continue hosting community programs for the youth. Johnson provided a good example of how he impacts the youth in his community by managing the gym at his church:

Keep kids out of gangs, you know. Go talk to them at schools. Be mentors to them. This is my church. I mentor the guys here, when they get wayward, and then like in the summertime I have open gym and half the guys that come in here wear ankle bracelets. I gotta sign their papers because their probation officers, 'Oh you gonna be with Mr. [Sam]? Well you gonna be alright.' That's how it is. When I started this 4 or 5 years ago, the crime of breaking in cars went down. Way down! About 80% down because they were here, you know. Because all that nervous energy, they needed to do something.

Another component to preparing others for success is the act of passing along generational wisdom. Enlightening those you endear to evolve effectively and effectively. The participants expressed sentiments of the need to proactively educate, mentor, and perpetuate positive examples of Black excellence. Glover offered several thoughts to this regard stating, "I always try to get my kids to understand the concept of helping people so we would go to different shelters and, go to different events for some

of the organizations in the community just so that they would understand about giving back. His perspective was that of serving as veteran presence for younger people and engaging in philanthropy. Glover asserted, “What we have to do is, we have to start getting more involved in the lives of the people around us. You know, that old adage, each one teach one, or each one reach one.” He also spoke to how he was impacted by the work ethic and pride his parents had as Black business owners in Jackson, Mississippi. Glover mentioned:

My parents had a service station, a drug store, and a grocerette, right on the corner around from Jackson State so all the kids would come and buy...We could have moved in other areas but my mother said you know what, I made my money in the hood, I’m gonna build my house in the hood.

Robinson, another participant who brought up how his parents had a major impact in his life, expressed the need for parents to be involved in young Black athletes lives. He emphasized the need to know how Black student athletes should know what courses to take in order to do well in school, as well as learn something you can use in their future.

Discussing Black student athletes taking arbitrary courses he said:

Sociologies and all. Why do we choose those? Because the parents. Now the parents are here with the kids making the decision. They not knowledgeable to know that. We haven't hit the high school kids and told them, ‘Pick something that's going to make sense.’ And that's how you get to them.

Concerning Black male professional basketball players, Robinson discussed the need for players to know the intricacies of the business in order to meticulously take advantage of the opportunity of playing professional sports. He stated:

If you sit down. I bet you, 12 players, 2 of them know the CBA agreement. They ain't got to know it by heart. Just know what counts. What percentage comes back from the TV, from the clothes, from the licensing, from the apparel, all that, you need to know. Insurance, mental health, all that stuff you should know.

The notion of being aware of the history and business details of professional basketball, and building on the legacy of those that came before you, was something that Hughes spoke passionately about:

Young players now, they need to learn, the Players Association, the National Basketball Players Association, the National Basketball Retired Players Association, the Globetrotter, the WNBA, it doesn't matter. You should know your history. You should know the history of the organization. Like Kareem, we're *Standing on the Shoulders of Giants*. Now he made that statement but he knew his history. He went back and researched that. Talked about the Rens. How many guys ever talk about the Rens? That was a big bold step. And you got to know your history more than just what somebody tells you. Or what you've seen in the front, right here in the immediate.

Hughes expressed that having a knowledge of history is of the utmost importance, especially for Black people whose history in the US involves the institution of slavery. He felt it is critical to gain wisdom about the realities of being Black in the US:

You tell me that I'm a slave, and that I'm from a slave. Well if that's all I know, then I'm gonna believe what you say. But if I know there's something else to that. I go back and look at my history, I say wait a minute, the first slave came into the United States in 1820, 1819. Jesus Christ died 2000 years ago. They changed a lot of things in the Bible 325 AD. What was going on over yonder? You telling me, my whole life history, you telling me that, in 1612 or whenever they brought over the first slaves to the islands or whatever. Well if I don't go back and investigate, look at, and study for myself, you can't always rely on somebody else. The pastor, the police, the coach, they may be limited in their experience.

The ultimate objective of self-determination is being accountable for your own destiny without dependency or governance from an external entity. Black professional athletes, like Black people as a whole, have been vulnerable to social norms of being considered subordinates due to the prevalence of White supremacy attitudes in the US. Therefore, it is incumbent on those with the aptitude and resources to develop strategies to overcome the stigma and oppression Black people experience. Strategically so, Black male professional athletes engage in developing foundations, businesses and other empowerment opportunities to facilitate the development of Black communities, as well as make an impact on society at large. Speaking about the superstar Black athletes in the NBA Edmonds shared:

You know, they all have foundations that employ people to get out and do programs, and run leagues, and do mentoring. They supply food banks, and they

have feeding programs, breakfast foods, lunch, dinner programs for after school.

As far as I know, they're doing great of being involved.

While in dialogue about his personal foundation and being questioned about other players having foundations to host a variety of programs Robinson answered, "Yea. I think they do. It's a lot of guys out there that do it." He continued with describing the nature of Black male professional athletes collaborating together with their respective foundations in order to make a significant impact in society, "Hooking up with foundations. Hooking up with other brothas with foundations. It's strong." Robinson also explained some of the activities his foundation hosts:

I'm going to teach you how to set up your 529s, your kids' plans and all your insurance plans. If you get your son his insurance now, it's only like \$2K a year, a year! C'mon man. If he has that til he's like 50, 30, I don't want him to pass away but what if he's like 70 years old or what if he's 55 or 33 with this insurance plan he's had since he was 5. He's generationally now changing the whole course.

Beyond developing foundations and hosting programs, Black professional basketball players use their financial gains to invest in and create businesses. Glover talked about investments he made during his playing career and how another Black male professional basketball player was able to succeed with a major business venture:

I invested in real estate in Milwaukee and that was at the time when things were going well and then all of a sudden the real estate market started going sideways there. So we had to make some decisions there and some of the other guys had



gotten into real estate as well but a few of the guys got into franchising and things like that. Junior Bridges would be one of them. He got into the Wendy's franchise and that's worked out very very well, very very well for him.

Glover additionally disclosed how the Houston Chapter of the NBRPA uses their tax status to help solicit donations to run the organization:

And see, our organization is 501C3. So we're tax [exempt], every donation that somebody gives us is tax deductible. So guys could give us, with the money that the guys are making today, they could give us \$20K a year, which is \$8M. And they would never see it. It wouldn't make a dent. But they wouldn't get that \$20K anyway.

Johnson spoke about how the NBRPA raises funds to help sponsor events and other organizations and charities:

Well, it's not per se raising the money but you need money to do things. And see, if we're gonna help somebody out. We gotta make sure we can do it in the right manner. So that's why the funds are needed, but see the thing about it, the funds are really needed to help the organization. We find an organization and then we try to help them out. It's not really per se for us. It's just, if we got a struggling organization, like the charities, cause we 501C3, we got to go right, 'cause that's government. So we stay on point but we earmark for employees to run it but everything goes to the charities. Cause that's how people write it off.

Black male professional athletes use money earned to fulfill individual social responsibilities developing foundations and business projects, but also host other

empowerment opportunities. Johnson talked about his role in providing a physical activity space through his church and engaging with the people who use the facility:

I practice with them [i.e. youth basketball teams playing in the gym] and bring my experience to them and they're [i.e. other volunteers] just the coaches. And I give them technical skills. And I also have the women's Pilates class over here.

He went on to explain why he uses his church as a means to help develop his community:

So I opened up the gym because church ain't nothing if you're not within the community because most of the people in the church don't even live in the neighborhood no more. They done moved out and came back in. So a lot of people don't realize, most of the people that come to church, 90% don't even live in the neighborhood so if you're supposed to be opening your doors to everybody, you gotta do something for the community.

Moreover, Black male professional athletes are in a position to play a critical role in developing the communities of people that have similar lived experiences beyond athletics. Their social and financial status provide them the opportunity to make an impact through hosting programs and preparing others to improve their condition just as their lives have been enriched through being professional athletes. Robinson's comments about staying involved in the community and using your resources as a professional athlete to make an impact offer a substantial summary of the final theme as he stated:

It's like a fraternity, you know. It's like athletes, I think it's just keep going.

Keep out there just putting these conferences and putting these STEM programs,

these computer labs, career and college programs. It's build your brand. Right now, and I call it, it's not even a brand for me, I'm going bigger, it's what my foundation is, the legacy. It's your legacy. You build your legacy. And that's what it is. Just build it.

The final theme demonstrates how Black professional athletes accept the role of being leaders in developing their communities using their own multitude of resources. There is a notion of self-determination whereby these athletes do not settle for the social conditions that are present, but are motivated to influence social change towards improving conditions. Black male professional basketball players engage in benevolent activities in order to shape their society in a favorable manner and leave a positive impression on the communities they encounter.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In this section I discuss the findings beginning by engaging with the conceptual and theoretical framing of the study and examine some theoretical implications. Then I discuss the findings from the interviews described in the previous section with regard to the twofold purpose of this study: 1) to trace and explore the historical development of basketball in the US and the critical role Black male athletes played in its growth and commercial development, and 2) to illuminate the experiences and perspectives of current and former Black male professional basketball players concerning the role the NBPA and NBRPA played in their welfare and addressing issues of exploitation. In this discussion section, I also juxtapose the findings with the literature review from this dissertation. Additionally, I discuss the practical implications of the findings and the limitations of the study. I end this section with a discussion of future research streams that can flow from this study and final conclusions.

The conceptual framework that informed this study was anti-colonial thought. Additionally, due to the particular population this study focused on, an emphasis was placed on Black male experiences with regard to racism and exploitation within professional basketball and the broader society. The interviews in this study were semi-structured and intended to gain a deeper understanding of the participants' experiences according to the power dynamics within professional basketball, the existence of racial, political, and economic exploitation, and the strategies employed to resist discrimination

and exploitation towards liberation and social justice. Due to the conceptual lens and methodology of the study, it was anticipated that the findings would provide a deeper knowledge of anti-colonial ideas in the context of professional basketball. The findings aligned with some of the anticipated theoretical outcomes expected from conducting such research, yet also offered a deeper knowledge of Black maleness in sport. Therefore, it is necessary to engage in a discussion of how this study interacts with Black male studies.

Black masculinity as a topic of research is not a typical popular choice. At the base philosophical level, "...there has yet to be one text written specifically analyzing the life and experience of Black men and boys in America...because Black males are not thought to be the right subject to/*subject* of study" (Curry, 2017, p. 146). The dearth of research that has focused on Black males routinely perpetuates stereotypes about Black men and boys that often is inconclusive, confusing, and contradicting compared to the realities of the Black male experience in an anti-Black society (Curry, 2017). For example:

Because *maleness* has come to be understood as synonymous with power and patriarchy, and racially codified as white, it has no similar existential content for the Black male, who in an anti-Black world is denied maleness, and is relationally assigned the feminine. If whiteness is masculine in relation to Blackness, then Blackness becomes relationally defined as not masculine and feminine, because it lacks the power of white masculinity, so Black maleness is in fact an ungendered negation of white maleness that is feminine because of its

subordinate position to white masculinity, but not *female*, because Black maleness lacks a specific gender coordinate that corresponds to either white maleness or white femaleness. (Curry, 2017, p. 3)

As Curry (2017) explains, Black males are often deprived of a legitimate identity, history and existence based on the manner in which a White supremacist, patriarchal society situates them on the coordinate planes of race and gender, thus experiencing the world as a *Man-Not*. Not limited to identity politics and existential dilemmas, Black males are subject to the victimization of sexual violence, super-predator propaganda, inability to be vulnerable, and the omnipresence of the inevitable fate of untimely and unjust death.

The social realities of Black male youths have an epistemological relationship with hip-hop with regard to the political and economic context in which Black males tend to experience the world (Prier & Beachum, 2008). Hip-hop studies suggest that we may learn about the material conditions of Black people and the ways in which they navigate society through an analysis of hip-hop culture and music (Forman & Neal, 2011). As it relates to the contemporary state that Black males experience in America, hip-hop artist J. Cole (2016) shared his perspective in the lyrics to his song “Neighbors”:

Some things you can't escape/Death, taxes, and a ra-/Cist society that make  
Every nigga feel like a candidate/For a Trayvon kind of fate/Even when your crib  
sit on a lake/Even when your plaques hang on a wall/Even when the president  
jam your tape/Took a little break just to annotate/How I feel, damn it's late/I  
can't sleep cause I'm paranoid/Black in a White man territory/Cops bust in with

the army guns/No evidence of the harm we done/Just a couple neighbors that  
assume we slang/Only time they see us we be on the news in chains, damn

The lyrics above serve as a general summary of the modern experience of Black males in the US and are not only similar to the sentiments Curry emphatically expressed in his book *Man-Not* but also to the perspectives encapsulated in the findings of this study. J. Cole proclaimed that no matter what you have accomplished or the status that you have attained, the US is a society so entrenched with racism that all Black males are inescapably an endangered population. You do not even have to commit a crime to be policed, but merely the simple assumption of being a criminal is justification enough to be forcefully regulated. As promoted in the media, Black males are habitually in “chains,” whether in physical hand-cuffs being arrested for alleged crimes or fulfilling their roles as contemporary “slave”-laborers for the modern plantation-like institutions of sport. One of the major themes in the findings suggested that Black professional basketball players remain vulnerable to the ramifications of racism even though they gain access to elite spaces and attain a high-profile status. Examples of Bill Russell and LeBron James being elite superstar players and multi-time champions yet being victims of racial slander and vandalism were mentioned, in addition to personal anecdotes about racist incidents from the participants themselves. Robinson also shared how players are silenced by receiving large sums of money and fear of losing their fortune if they choose to speak up about any plight they or their community may experience. As mentioned in the findings, Robinson stated:

You making \$20M a year. What issue do you have son?...So the money blinds you for 5-10 more years...Your whole career you don't even think about what's right...Well, you don't see it just because you just a high-paid slave worker. So you don't see it. I'm cool. I got my money, I'm cool.

Not only are Black male professional basketball players shielded from racism, but they are also essentially bribed to ignore the plight of any of their peers. It seems as though the lucrative contracts that Black male athletes receive serve as peace offerings. The elite athletes that substantiate the NBA, such as LeBron James, have a sort of security blanket to enact their freedom to protest at their will, but the majority of Black male athletes do not share the elite superstar status of such players and therefore do not have the same liberty to speak their peace.

The experiences of Black males in a White supremacist, patriarchal society have historically and contemporarily left them vulnerable to being socially constructed to live the experiences of being a Nigger. Black men and boys are caricatured as being violent, criminal, super-predators, immoral, inferior, etc. Unfortunately, "These caricatures are accepted not because they express some truth about how to understand Black males, but because they express how society insists Black males already are" (Curry, 2017, p. 142). Predominant theories about marginalized populations, such as Black feminist thought and intersectional gender theories, overlook the realities of Black masculinity that do not fit within their conceptualizations (Curry, 2017). Black women are often the focus of intersectionality theory and generally seen as the most marginalized group based on experiencing double-discrimination from the combined



effects of being discriminated on the basis of race, as well as on the basis of sex. Black males are ignored from being victims of intersectional subordination because of their identity of being Black and male presumably offers them similar privileges of their White male counter parts. However, there is a well-documented history since slavery of the emphasis on violence against Black males and as situated by political, legal, and economic institutions there has been a denial of their maleness on the basis of excluding them from full participation in patriarchal endeavors. As Curry (2017) states, “Black male experience is a condition of victimization by white patriarchy, not the basis of emulation towards it” (p. 136). The findings in this study reveal some of the authentic lived experiences of Black males and speaks to some of the multiple truths of Black males’ complex realities, relating to the context of professional sport.

This study focused on the particular population of Black males in professional basketball, as well as organizations such as the NBA and the Players Association. Therefore, it was necessary to give attention to organizational theory. Organizational theory deals with examining the patterns of organizations and their operations, including the consequences of them (Slack & Parent, 2006). The findings in this study suggested that patterns of racism experienced in society were mirrored within the NBA and the HGT. The participants in the study shared how they were not able to escape the consequences of racism even though they gained access to integrated spaces through professional basketball. They participants also indicated that integration in professional basketball, as well as other sports, led to integration of other spaces in society and made a positive impact on race relations in the US. However, patterns of racism were

persistent as Black athletes would continue to experience instances of racial discrimination. The perpetual presence of racial salary discrimination (Naito & Takagi, 2017) supports the personal perspectives the participants shared. The existence of racism and labor exploitation, as cultural artifacts of American slavery, in organizations, such as professional basketball organizations, should not be surprising. Cooke (2003) informed that organizations were founded upon principles of slavery and that modern management theories tend to ignore the foundation of slavery-based systems and practices in business management.

Employing an anti-colonial thought framework in this study sought to identify particular patterns and consequences of plantation-like business management in professional basketball organizations, as well as recognize organizations that may serve to resist those patterns and consequences. To this objective, the Players Association was the organization of focus. Including both the NBPA and the NBRPA, the Players Association was found to be useful in terms of providing means by which players, especially disgruntled Black players, could organize, voice their concerns, and influence material changes to the unfavorable conditions they were experiencing. The findings in this study indicated that the NBPA, specifically, permitted players to the ability to challenge NBA policies that marginalized and exploited them, such as minimum salary structure and schedule obligations, yet was limited when considering issues of racism. Once Black male professional basketball players retire they are able to join the NBPA, and NBPA chapters are more loosely governed by the NBA whereby members are able to exercise initiatives with more autonomy.

In regard to the first aspect of the purpose of this project sought to investigate the history of Black male athletes' place in the evolution of the game of basketball within the context of the US. It is important to consider context because it provides a setting for the investigation. The focus on the context of the US with concern about Black males' place in a social setting implies an investigation about the impact of race within the context. In the literature review of this study, a chronicle was provided divulging a history of issues of racism, slavery, and exploitation of Black labor in the US as it relates to the institution of colonialism.

In reference to the aforementioned literature review, an investigation into US history, in which about three-fourths has been grounded in slavery and Jim Crow oppression, will reveal that much of the White male leadership that fought for freedom from Britain also fought for the opportunity to preserve the country's slavery-based economic system (Feagin, 2016). At the center of this economic system is the exploitation of Black labor in order to generate wealth for White managers. In this economic system, the predominant group of workers were Black [male] people who supplied profitable labor for White employers in socially constructed positions of power, such as plantation owner, farm overseer, and government official. Also, at the nucleus of this oppressive system is a counter-force of Black people striving for liberation and improved conditions. Not depending on reparations being surrendered to them, Black people, especially Black men, have been at the forefront of advancing social justice in the US and fostering the welfare of marginalized groups of people (DuBois, 2008; Feagin, 2016).

The findings in this study demonstrate the aforementioned situation of how predominately White male leadership has preserved an economic system that operated in congruence to the system of colonialism in the US to exploit Black male labor. The data mentioned how institutional racism is embedded in professional basketball organizations but is not always felt by Black male professional athletes because they are compensated well and granted privileges many others wish to experience. The rationale for Black males being treated better as professional athletes in comparison to Black males in general is because they generate profits for their sport franchise, thus their well-being is considered in order to protect those profits. The findings indicate that Black male athletes are paid large sums of money, not only for compensation for their work but to appease them. When you are rewarded handsomely, the expectation is that you will not stir any issues, regardless of what you may have experienced in the past or what you may currently witness in society. This situation is indicative of the interest-convergence principle in sport (see Bell, 1980; Hylton, 2010; Singer, 2005).

The relationship between Black male professional basketball player and White male franchise owner is comparable to that of Black male slave and White male slave owner. The findings suggest that professional basketball players are like high paid slave workers. The sentiment aligns with previous research pronouncing high-profile athletes as 40 million-dollar slaves (Rhoden, 2006). It is necessary to acknowledge that professional athletes do not experience the level of exploitation, oppression, and violence that slaves endured early in US history. It is also necessary to admit to the perpetuation of the economic system and management structure that operates to produce

similar results and ramifications (Cooke, 2003). The participants in this study believed the exploitation of Black male athletes is something that happens in professional sports but begins earlier.

It was discussed in this study how college athletics uses Black athletes to help build successful sports programs and promote the school while offering minimum remuneration. This matches with how Hawkins (2010) examined the relationship between Black athletes and predominately White NCAA Division I Institutions using an internal colonial model, whereby Black athletes are exploited for their physical talents to generate revenue while experiencing challenges with matriculating through college. As previously discussing in chapter II, many scholars have supported the argument of Black college athletes being exploited in the NCAA while experiencing various issues with racism and oppression at PWIs.

Despite the issues that Black athletes experience in college some enjoy the opportunity to reach the professional ranks. Black athletes have played a major role in the development of college sport programs across the US and have also made a major impact on the globalization of professional basketball. Before entering the NBA, Black male professional basketball players showcased their talents across the US on legendary all Black teams such as the Harlem Rens and the Harlem Globetrotters, and the Globetrotters even had exhibitions overseas. The findings in this study indicated that Black professional basketball players contributed to the game of basketball, as well as race relations domestically and abroad. As it was stated previously, the presence of Black professional athletes on teams like the HGT was welcomed at showcases as events

were people could bring their families and put aside the pressures of social issues. The presence of Black athletes in the NBA showed how Black people and White people could work together in order to accomplish a common goal, setting an example for the broader society to follow. Sport organizations can imitate cultures and vice versa; related to the notion of sports as a microcosm of society, the culture of a sport organization is “concerned with the shared values and meanings that create the reality of organizational life” (Slack & Parent, 2006, p. 11). The culture of professional basketball promotes inclusivity by showcasing diversity among its teams, and thus serves as a stimulus for sport consumers to adopt a similar culture outside of sport. The comradery between people of diverse backgrounds is one of the positive aspects of sport. Beyond various other good aspects of sport such as, learning to overcome adversity, developing teamwork skills and instilling discipline, a critical social science approach to examining sport can also reveal the bad and ugly aspects (Frisby, 2005). It is common to consider sport organizations to be positive institutions that create a plethora of benefits. However, sport organizations can also operate as instruments of domination, whereas organizations are structured and function as mechanisms that benefit a few privileged individuals at the expense of a larger group of people (Morgan, 1986). Using a critical social science lens to investigate potential bad aspects of sport with regard to how sport organizations may operate as instruments of domination was the approach used in this study.

More specifically, this study used an anti-colonialism paradigm approach to explore the manner in which professional basketball organizations function to exploit a large group of Black male athletes in order to generate great wealth for the elite group of

predominately White owners. As such, the history of professional basketball in the US was examined with concern about the power relationship between predominately Black players and predominately White owners and managers, similar to the power relationship between colonizer and colonized (Memmi, 2013). Adopting an anti-colonial approach calls for centralizing the economic and racial exploitation of institutional structures and practices (Allen, 1970). This study sought to gain meaning of the existence of racial discrimination in professional basketball regarding access to leagues, salary discrimination, and overall treatment with respect to Black male athletes. A key component of an anti-colonial thought approach is exploring the strategies oppressed groups used to liberate themselves from colonial situations (Fanon, 1969, 2007). This study targeted the Players Association, including the NBPA and NBRPA, as an organization whose objective is to address the welfare of current and former professional basketball players with the participation of players themselves. An anti-colonialism paradigm approach serves as an epistemology of colonized people while reclaiming the voice of the people determined to resist oppression (Simmons & Dei, 2012), as well as a methodology of gathering empirical evidence of the conditions of colonialism and illuminating the narratives of the lived experiences of the colonized (DuBois, 1996). The interviews with Black male professional basketball players conducted in this study served to collect stories about the lived experiences of Black male professional basketball players regarding issues of racial discrimination and economic exploitation. Data collection in this study involved participants discussing the role of the Players Association in attending to the welfare of Black male professional basketball players and

how these particular players are able to get involved in to addressing their own well-being. This informed the second purpose of the study.

The second aspect of the purpose of this project sought to explore the role the NBPA and NBRPA played concerning the welfare of Black male professional basketball players and addressing issues of exploitation. This aspect of the purpose was accomplished through questioning former Black male athletes with experience playing professional basketball and at least membership experience in either the NBPA or NBRPA. The existence of racism and exploitation, as evidenced by racial salary discrimination, conjures concern for the well-being of Black male professional basketball players. The Players Association promotes itself as an organization that addresses the concerns, health, and success of professional basketball players. The NBPA carries a reputation of being a leading organization in regard to the benefits and programs it offers to NBA players. However, the findings in this study suggest that the organization stands to improve upon the manner in which it engages with and manages the welfare of Black male professional basketball players. According to Hamilton and Ture (2011), it is not in the interest of the colonial power to liberate the colonized in order to maintain the colonial system. In comparison, it is not imperative for the NBA to utilize the NBRPA in order to grant players liberties that will overthrow the economic system that lends towards the exploitation of Black athletes. The findings described how at the core of professional basketball operations the objective is to generate profits for ownership. Compensating players justly and having concern for their welfare are secondary objectives and will be addressed if it impacts the profit margin. Thus, if Black



male professional basketball players are to receive reprieve from their exploitative situation they ought not rely on reparations and voluntarily strive for social justice. As King Jr. (2010) asserted, White people in positions of power will not simply relinquish power for the sake of equity but have to be compelled to adhere to Black people's demands for justice.

This endeavor may prove difficult because of the social norms that inhibit the freedoms of Black men in the US. The fate of the Black man in America may seem so dire that freedom from an oppressive society seems impossible to attain (Malcolm X, 2015). Black men are often villainized for speaking up for themselves and engaging in activism to improve their conditions. On several occasions during the data collection process, participants referred to the case of Colin Kaepernick being blackballed by the NFL because of his kneeling protest against police brutality against people of color and the casualties of systemic racism. The findings of this study suggest that Black male professional athletes that choose to use their platform to advocate for social justice as it pertains to the rights and liberties of people of color are vulnerable to being relieved of that platform and the privileges of being a professional athlete. This is an unfortunate reality for Black men. Curry (2018) explains how Black men are the only particular racial gender group that suffer from ridicule for engaging in advocating for their welfare and social justice:

While other subjects have been afforded the ability to speak individually as members of oppressed or marginalized groups, Black men are censored—told that that any mention of their oppression, vulnerability, or death is patriarchal,

because it inappropriately centers their experience over women's oppression writ large, and thereby not worthy of more intellectual concern or research. This logic is peculiarly tailored toward Black males. Other race/sex groups, be they white or Black, who enjoy much higher incomes, life expectancy, social mobility, and institutional representation in schools, universities, and industry, are not told they should not speak. (Curry, 2018, p. 2)

A seemingly pervasive attitude about Black male professional athletes using their platform to promote social justice is to be silent about sociopolitical issues and focus solely on playing sports. This attitude is evidenced by Fox's Laura Ingraham stating how Black male professional basketball players, such as LeBron James, should, "Shut up and dribble."

The temperament of Black people is not to surrender to exploitation and oppression. Dating back to the time of the thirteen colonies, history shows that Black slaves participated in revolts, the Civil Rights Movement era of the mid-20th century is famous for mass protests, and the modern Black Lives Matter Movement has followed in the tradition of Black people coming together to fight for their liberty. Colin Kaepernick can be considered as a martyr in a sense for having his professional football career killed due to initiating a wave of protests on the stage of NFL pre-game anthem presentations. Black athletes, and non-Black athlete allies, in other major sports leagues, including the NBA, were inspired by Kaepernick's kneeling protests during the national anthem and the many accounts of unjust police brutality against people of color to participate in demonstrations of their own. For example, players from the perennial champion

Minnesota Lynx in the WNBA wore warm-up t-shirts with the phrase, “Change Starts With Us,” on the front and, “Black Lives Matter,” on the back along with the names of recent police shooting victims Philando Castile and Alton Sterling (Kahn, 2017). At the 2016 ESPY Awards, NBA superstars LeBron James, Carmelo Anthony, Dwyane Wade, and Chris Paul opened the ceremony with a power speech bringing attention to the issue of police violence against people of color (Coombs & Cassilo, 2017). Having some of the biggest names in professional basketball, and arguably the biggest name in LeBron James, using their platform to bring awareness to a sociopolitical issue was monumental due to the lack of such a presence in recent years. Since the 1990s, where Jordan reigned as the biggest name in the sport and maybe the biggest celebrity in all of sports, professional athletes were less likely to publicly participate in social justice movements (Agyemang, Singer, & DeLorme, 2010). Just as the findings in this study suggest, previous research indicates that athletes were more concerned with their personal athletic performance and were concerned that engaging in activism would hinder their financial status (Cunningham & Regan Jr., 2011). LeBron James has not always been at the forefront of social issues, particularly those concerning race, but has chosen recently to forego remaining silent. It can be assumed that the numerous contemporary incidents of violence against Black people that have gone viral could influence an athlete to fail ignoring the obvious issue and speak up about the need for the problem to be addressed.

Superstar athletes do not have to worry about hindering their financial status like athletes with more marginal team roles and celebrity platforms. Whereas a role player, with only a few endorsements and a short-term contract with uncertainty of renewal,

may feel justified in abstaining from engaging in athlete activism, superstars have an advantage in the matter based on their financial security and prestige. Most superstar athletes have multiple streams of endorsement income, large and lengthy salary contracts, and a superior celebrity status. The potential of backlash is less threatening because a superstar athlete is less dependent on the sport organization for their well-being and more likely to have support from their enormous group of fans. It is important to recognize that the circumstance of a superstar athletes having more of a sense of security to engage in advocating for social change, does not require them to use their platform for such a cause. A superstar Black male professional basketball player using his platform to have a positive social impact in response to the ongoing racism, discrimination, and oppression experienced by people of color in the US is definitely a conscious decision. A decision increasingly being made more often. The findings in this study would encourage this movement of conscious athletes, Black and non-Black, to continue developing such efforts.

Previous research suggested that modern prominent Black male athletes, such as Michael Jordan, chose to engage in social activism at a minimal level as compared to their predecessors, such as Muhammad Ali (Agyemang, 2012). Though there was an era where we did not witness many athletes participating in activism work, Colin Kaepernick has inspired a new generation of athletes willing to use their platform to promote social justice (McNeal, 2017). Contemporary Black male professional basketball players have joined the recent movement of athletes taking advantage of their lofty platform and broad reaching voice to initiate difficult dialogue about sociopolitical

issues and develop programs to combat major social ills. The findings in this study emphasized the role LeBron James has in the current movement of conscious athletes making a social impact.

That current movement would align with what distinguished sport sociologist Dr. Harry Edwards spoke about in his keynote speech at the 2016 North American Society for the Sociology of Sport (NASSS) conference entitled “The Fourth Wave: Black Athlete Protests in the Second Decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century” (Edwards, 2016). In his speech he delineated each of what he described as the four waves of athlete activism.

The first wave at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century was fueled by trailblazers such as boxers Jack Johnson, the first Black American world heavyweight champion, and Joe Louis, also known as the “Brown Bomber” and one of the greatest heavyweight boxers of all time, as well as one of the greatest Olympians of all time, Jesse Owens, and renowned athlete-entertainer-activist Paul Robeson. In the first wave, Black athlete activists, many of whom participated in individual sports, focused on legitimacy and were able to claim their name to fame, yet during a time of Jim Crow segregation they were readily met with economic, legal, and political exploitation.

The second wave featured athletes who were able to gain improved access as team sports became desegregated because of the feats of people such as Jackie Robinson, the first Black athlete in Major League Baseball, Kenny Washington, the first Black athlete to sign a professional contract in the National Football League, and Chuck Cooper, the first Black athlete to be drafted in the National Basketball Association. This wave was a symbol of progress in race relations due to desegregated locker rooms

leading to other desegregated spaces in America, but was also marked by disabling the lure and legitimacy of America's Negro leagues and athletic programs at historically Black colleges and universities.

The third wave built upon the second wave and coincided with the broader liberation endeavor of the Civil Rights Movement, whereas Black athletes challenged the notion of progress while demanding dignity and respect. This wave represented a greater collective social consciousness and included prominent athletes such as Muhammad Ali, Jim Brown, Tommie Smith, John Carlos, Bill Russell, and Kareem Abdul-Jabbar. The third wave of Black athlete activism was characterized by challenging cultural norms of Whiteness through wearing dashikis and sporting afros, resisting racial discrimination and oppression through hosting protests and organizing boycotts, and disputing dominant theories of White supremacy through giving speeches and writing books (Cooper, Macaulay, & Rodriguez, 2017). Most of the participants in this study were professional athletes during the second and more particularly the third wave. Many of the sentiments shared when discussing racism and handling the effects of racism are similar to what Edwards describes as being typical traits of the third wave.

The fourth wave of Black athlete activism involves modern Black athletes whose focus is on securing and transferring power via economic and technological capital (Cooper, Macaulay, & Rodriguez, 2017). Modern Black athletes have very well accomplished the legitimacy the first wave sought after, have unparalleled access compared to the second wave, and reinforce the dignity and respect demanded by the third wave. Unlike the Black athletes of the previous waves of activism, modern athletes

garner unprecedented values of money, which can be utilized as a resource to impact liberation motives and endeavors. In addition, modern Black athletes have exponentially more visibility influence with the use of social media as a resource to develop awareness and create a following towards galvanizing others to engage in social justice initiatives. An exemplar of the third wave would be Colin Kaepernick, as he became a cultural emblem and social media sensation for taking a knee during the playing of the National Anthem during the opening ceremony of NFL games in protest of the unjust violent public killing of Black people across America including Trayvon Martin in Florida, Eric Garner in New York, Tamir Rice in Ohio, and Sandra Bland in Texas, to name a few. LeBron James can also be considered a prime example of a fourth wave Black athlete activist for the myriad of ways he uses his monetary assets and social media platform to expend his high-profile status as a NBA superstar in a socially responsible manner. Many of the participants in this study mentioned how LeBron James is a good example for modern Black athletes to follow when considering how one may use their platform to have a positive influence on the Black community as well as society as a whole.

The findings indicated that professional athletes can establish and use foundations to provide programs that can empower communities through charitable donations, as well as educational and employment opportunities. LeBron James' recent founding of his I Promise School tailored to serve at-risk students in his hometown of Akron, Ohio through the LeBron James Family Foundation is a monumental example of one of the most prominent Black male professional basketball players using their platform and resources to develop opportunities for marginalized populations. The

unorthodox school is a public school established in collaboration between James' foundation and the Akron Public School system and offers unique privileges such as extended school days equaling 8 hours; free bikes to facilitate transportation and exploration of local neighborhoods; complimentary breakfast, lunch, and snacks; a "support circle" to help students refocus after lunch; STEM-based learning camps during the summer; and GED courses and job placement opportunities for the students' parents; which all services were inspired by James' experience with and knowledge of the issues people of a lower socioeconomic status face (Zahn, 2018). Most athletes will not have the platform and resources to accomplish what LeBron James has accomplished with his foundation and hybrid charter-public school. However, as this study indicated, many athletes, including many Black male professional basketball players, have established foundations to facilitate philanthropy work in across a diversity of communities. The use of professional athletes' foundations and use of resources to facilitate philanthropic endeavors, no matter how major or minor the efforts, can contribute to social change for communities of need. This stands true for Black professional basketball players in particular and their ability to have a social impact on people who share similar characteristics or backgrounds in communities of color. This strategy of empowerment and application of self-determination to support marginalized groups of people is indicative of an anti-colonial thought approach of colonized people not being dependent upon colonizers to gift them liberating opportunities and seizing those opportunities for self while using resources that are accessible. This also leads to a discussion of practical implications of this study.



## **Practical Implications**

The findings indicate that racism and exploitation are real issues that Black male professional athletes experience. There are strategies to help cope with and combat these issues, but there is also room for more improvement. The Players Association, including both the NBPA and the NBRPA, provide opportunities that cater to the financial and physical well-being of professional basketball's primary human resource. Black male athletes have played an important role in the commercial development and globalization of professional basketball, and it is just as important to manage the welfare of the group of people who have such a great impact on the wealth of a great enterprise. To begin, it is necessary to have Players Association personnel that are relatable to the Black players. The findings demonstrated that programs are provided by the NBPA to educate players on various topics. However, it was told that sessions to administer the programs are done at inopportune times, and an apparent chasm between players and administration personnel suggests the need for providing programs that are player-centered. Meaning the programs are delivered by people that players trust, and programs are scheduled at times that are convenient for the players' schedules.

The findings suggest practical implications for Black male athletes entering the NBA. This study suggests that Black male professional basketball players should have a fundamental knowledge of the business of basketball. Professional basketball organizational structure and business operations have an impact on athletes' socioeconomic status. Having a knowledge of the organizational structure and function of the NBA will prepare Black male professional basketball players for potential rewards

and ramifications. Black male athletes in the NBPA can gather some of this knowledge through getting involved in the NBPA.

As such, another practical implication of this study is encouraging authentic participation in the NBPA. The findings revealed how Player Representatives in the NBPA may not always be fully in tune with the programming of the organization. Thus, strategies to improve NBPA recruitment and retention are necessary. In this study, Robinson discussed how one of his teammates who served as a mentor and was a Player Representative facilitated his involvement in the NBPA during his rookie season. This may be a situation for NBA teams to follow; a current NBPA Player Representative mentors an incoming rookie in order to train them on the operations of basketball from a veteran player's perspective. Likewise, the NBRPA could also benefit from improved involvement. NBRPA chapters may seek to adopt a strategy to increase recruitment and retention by having current NBRPA members seek recently retired players to facilitate the transition from active to retired professional basketball player, while continuing to be related to the league, fraternizing with other former players and making a social impact.

Lastly, this study informs practical implications regarding the perpetuation of Black male professional athletes engaging in collaboration that have a positive social impact. Professional athletes are offered privileges and opportunities to improve their socioeconomic status and participate in philanthropic activities. A strategy to build upon those privileges and opportunities is to develop a foundation that can help maintain them for self and for extending them to communities of people in need of assistance. The participants in this study shared how many prominent Black male professional basketball

players have established foundations that offer employment and provide programs that give back to the community. The findings also suggest that a consortium of foundations provides the most potential for influencing positive social change. Therefore, this study encourages further development of foundations by athletes who have the resources to establish such organizations, as well as partnering with similar foundations for co-programming and enhancement of resources.

### **Limitations**

This study comes with its limitations. The participants in this study were all former professional basketball players. Data collection took place during the end of the 2017-2018 NBA season. This made it difficult to gain a commitment from current players to participate in the study during the season. Therefore, this study focused on the perspectives of retired Black male professional basketball players. This limitation may have an advantage, whereas retired players are potentially more candid in their responses during research because they no longer are directly connected to a professional basketball organization and risk retaliation. Retired players who are no longer directly affiliated with a professional basketball organization can share their perspectives free from ridicule or ramification from such an organization. Albeit, future research should seek to collect data at a time period that is convenient for currently active players to consider participating.

In addition, the sample size for this study was relatively small. The sample size was expected to be small due to conducting research with an exclusive population of professional basketball players, yet the short list of participants presents a limitation on

the extent of perspectives gathered. As previously stated, this study focused on retired players due to the difficulty of accessing current players during the ongoing season. Out of convenience of proximity, this study also focused on active members in the Houston Chapter of the NBRPA. Only one participant in the small sample was from another NBRPA chapter. Though sample size is a potential constraint on this study, all of the participants were very qualified to provide valuable insight for this study. All participants had multiple years of experience playing professional basketball, and all with NBA experience during their playing career had experience being involved with the NBPA. The interviews provided rich descriptive narratives about their experiences with racism, exploitation, professional basketball history, and the role of the Players Association regarding the welfare of Black players.

In reference of the Players Association, potential participants for this study were targeted based on being at least members in the NBPA or NBRPA. This limitation restricts this study from gaining insight from Black male professional basketball players who do not meet that requirement. The focus on involvement in the Players Association was to add a particular scope to this study targeting players who have shown an interest in player welfare based on their participation in an organization that emphasizes player well-being.

In summary, this study has its limitations but it offers valuable insight from highly qualified resources about Black male basketball players' role and lived experience in the development of professional basketball organizations in the US. It also provides suggestions for strategies to engage in to address the welfare of Black

professional basketball players, as the prominent racial group in professional basketball leagues. While additional research can build on the findings of this research, this study offers strategies Black players to employ in response to the exploitative nature of interest-convergence within the business of professional sports primarily owned and managed by White people.

### **Future Research Directions**

The previously mentioned findings, implications, and limitations of this study leads to prospective future research directions. First, this study emphasized the perspective of retired Black male professional basketball players. Conducting a study that collaborates with currently active Black male professional basketball players would build on what the participants provided in this study from a retrospective position. Conducting a study with current player may offer different insights and more contemporary discernment about issues of exploitation in professional basketball. The NBPA has a reputation for being a leader among similar organizations that focus on the welfare of its players. Current players may have a more thorough and modern knowledge of the details about current NBPA policies and operations, and its impact on the well-being of Black players.

Future research may seek to concentrate on a different sport as the context of the study. For example, professional football in the NFL is notorious for the violent nature of the game and the often egregious non-guaranteed contracts offered to players in comparison to other professional sports leagues in America. A future study could do similar research investigating the role of the predominantly Black population of players

in the NFL within the commercial development of the NFL and examine the influence of the NFLPA on the welfare of Black professional football players.

Another research direction that could build on this study is to analyze salary equity among professional basketball players. To further explore the notion of the exploitation of Black athletes in professional basketball, future research may take a sports analytics approach to investigate racial salary discrimination. Previous research on racial salary discrimination has revealed a reemergence of a premium being paid for White players, yet it remains uncertain as to why the premium exists (Naito & Takagi, 2017). Applying innovative analytics research to examine the racial salary gap, along with seeking qualitative data in order to probe for explanations regarding the issue could potentially help develop a better understanding of the existence of racial salary discrimination in the NBA. Thus, I propose employing a mixed methods approach to build on the findings in this study exploring the impact Players Association has on the welfare of Black professional basketball players and previous studies examining evidence of a salary gap between White and non-White players in the NBA.

### **Conclusions**

The social occurrences that happen in the world of sports are very similar to the social occurrences in the rest of the world. That means that the sports industry is a microcosm of society. The world of professional basketball is an iteration of the society of sports and this study offers historical and experiential insight about the social conditions of professional basketball in American society. The findings of this research are contextual, however this study offers an understanding of the experiences of Black

male professional basketball players. This study emphasized their role in contributing to the development of professional basketball organizations founded in America. Using an anti-colonial thought lens, the study focused on the perspectives of the participants being vulnerable to racist ramifications of a White supremacist society, which often operates to oppress people of color. This study can serve as a component of the body of research designed to address social justice endeavors in sport with regard to race and racism. It can also serve as a contribution to the development of Black male studies, as there is an apparent need to focus research on the complex realities of Black male experiences due to common theories failing to elucidate the meaning of Black maleness and Black masculinity. Furthermore, it builds on the anti-colonialism literature in sport, in which sport organizations are examined with the investigative purpose of researching the impact of institutional racism of people of color and the strategies oppressed people employ to liberate themselves from the marginalization of colonial control. The struggle is real and the persistence to prosper is too legit to quit.

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APPENDIX A  
INFORMATION SHEET

A Case Study of Black Professional Basketball Players involvement in the Players  
Association Addressing Welfare Issues

The purpose of this study is to gain the perspectives and experiential knowledge of Black male professional basketball players participating in the Players Association aimed at addressing welfare concerns and protecting the rights of the athletes that play basketball for professional organizations in the United States. The objective is to explore the notion of Black male exploitation in professional basketball through investigating the history of professional basketball and illuminating the experiences of current and former Black male athletes, including their involvement with the NBPA and/or NBRPA towards addressing the well-being of athletes in a predominately Black sport.

The findings may provide insight and information concerning strategies for emphasizing the well-being of Black athletes that play or have played professional basketball in America, including providing the participants with an additional platform to share their voice. If you agree to participate in this study you will be asked to engage in a face-to-face, video conference, or telephone interview pertaining to the subject matter. Furthermore, you may be asked to participate in a follow-up interview.

Please note the following characteristics of the study:

- There are no risks associated with this study that are greater than the risks encountered in daily life.

- You may receive no direct benefit for your participation. However, your dialogue may lead to a greater understanding of Black male professional basketball player welfare concerns.
- You are not required to participate in this study. You may decide to withdraw or not to participate at any time with no repercussions. You may also refuse to answer any question at any time with no repercussions and still continue to participate in the study if you wish.
- This study is confidential and the records of this study will be kept private. No identifiers linking you to this study will be included in any sort of report that might be published. Research notes and records will be stored securely by the primary investigator (Justin R. Garner) and advisor (Dr. John N. Singer); they will be the only ones with access to them.
- If you choose to participate in this study, you will participate in a face-to-face interview, video conference, or telephone interview. All responses will be stored securely, and only Justin R. Garner and Dr. John N. Singer will have access to the notes. Any completed interview notes will be kept for no more than five years and then will be disregarded and shredded/deleted.
- If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study you may contact Justin R. Garner at [j.garner11@tamu.edu](mailto:j.garner11@tamu.edu), or (832) 630-1369.

This research study has been reviewed and approved by the Human Subjects' Protection Program and/or Institutional Review Board at Texas A&M University. In the event that you have any questions pertaining to your rights as a research participant, you may contact these offices at (979) 458-4067 or [irb@tamu.edu](mailto:irb@tamu.edu).

APPENDIX B  
BACKGROUND QUESTIONNAIRE

Please be sure you have read, agreed to, and signed the informed consent documents.

Below, please provide the demographic information requested:

Name (Print): \_\_\_\_\_ Pseudonym:

\_\_\_\_\_

Professional basketball league(s) participated in (i.e. NBA, ABA, and/or HGT):

\_\_\_\_\_

Years in professional basketball: \_\_\_\_\_ Team(s) played for:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Active NBPA member: Y / N (Please circle)      Years active in NBPA: \_\_\_\_\_

Active NBRPA member: Y / N (Please circle)      Years active in NBRPA: \_\_\_\_\_

Position(s) held in Players Association:

\_\_\_\_\_

Race/Ethnicity: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Gender: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail address: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_



## APPENDIX C

### E-MAIL RECRUITING SCRIPT

Greetings \_\_\_\_\_,

Hello, my name is Justin Garner and I am currently conducting research investigating the experiences of Black male professional basketball players addressing their welfare concerns through participation in the Players Association. I have a passion for protecting the well-being of athletes, especially athletes of marginalized populations or backgrounds that may experience exploitation. I believe your experience as a professional basketball player and member of the Players Association will be an excellent resource to gain a better understanding of how to improve upon concerns for athlete well-being within the professional basketball industry. Basically, I would like to have a conversation with you and gain your insight on a few questions. Your participation is strictly voluntary, and you can choose to skip a question or stop participating at any time. All that is required of you is to participate in a face-to-face, video conference, or telephone interview, which will take anywhere from 20 minutes to 1 hour of your time, depending on your availability. Any help you may be willing to provide will be of great assistance to me as I conduct my research. Finally, I would like to tape record your responses to the questions to assist me with my analysis of the interview. If you would like to help me out by participating, all you have to do is fill out the short information sheet attached in this email, and then we can move forward to scheduling a great conversation. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Justin R. Garner

APPENDIX D

E-MAIL FOLLOW UP INTERVIEW SCRIPT

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

Hello again. This is Justin Garner and we discussed your experiences as a professional basketball player and your participation in the Players Association towards addressing the well-being of Black male athletes in the professional basketball industry. During my analysis of the interviews, I reflected some very interesting responses from you on several questions. I would really like to ask you a few more questions to gain some more detail and allow you to expound upon your thoughts. If you would like to help me out by conducting a follow-up interview, please feel free to contact me anytime by replying to this email or by calling me anytime at (832) 630-1369. Your participation will be of great assistance and I am eager to learn from your insight and experience. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Justin R. Garner

APPENDIX E  
INTERVIEW GUIDE

\*Bold means mandatory question.

- **Talk to me about what it is/was like being a professional basketball player.**
  - What is most memorable about your career as a professional basketball player, on and off the court?
- **Discuss what encouraged you to get involved with the Players Association.**
  - **How would you describe your role in the Players Association?**
- **How would you describe your role in the Players Association?**
- **According to Lapchick's Racial and Gender Report Card, about 70% of professional basketball players in the NBA are Black and the majority of principal team owners in the NBA are White. Describe what that means to you.**
- **Talk to me about your thoughts about the history of labor exploitation in the United States.**
  - **How might professional basketball relate to that history?**
  - **How might athletes who feel exploited address their concerns of exploitation?**
- **Discuss with me how players involved with the Players Association have assisted with protecting players' rights and liberties?**
  - Are there any particular leaders that have significantly contributed to the advancements made by the Players Association, and what were those accomplishments?
- **How might race factor into the agenda of the Players Association?**
  - Are there differences in the benefits that Black players receive compared to the benefits white players receive?

- How do you feel about the NBA and NBPA being considered as the most progressive organizations in the US sports industry?
- How do you feel about the current leadership and direction of the Players Association?
- **How do you feel about Fox News' Laura Ingraham's remarks, "Shut up and dribble"?**
  - How might the current political climate in the U.S, impact Black male profession basketball players?
- **Is there anything that I have not asked that you feel I should ask?**
- **Is there anything you would like to share to conclude?**
- **Are there others you can recommend participating in this research?**

APPENDIX F  
THEMES AND CODES

**Participant Key**

Hank Glover

Bert Edmonds

Donald Robinson

Stephen Hughes

Sam Johnson

Ben Brown

**Initial and Major Themes**

History of lived experiences of racism

- Historical perspective creates a foundation for expectations
- Multiple realities of racism's ramifications
- Sport as a remedy to race relations
- Interest-convergence perpetuates oppression
- Racism continues contemporarily
- Black males are specifically and strategically victimized

Black players are insulated from racism but not disbarred from it

- Discrimination from access to playing in premiere leagues
- Exploited for their talents with marginal compensation
- Become content with ramifications
- Swiftly indoctrinated and silenced
- Victims of racial harassment
- A double consciousness becomes tactical

Superstar players have the most social impact potential

- Star players are role models
- Superstars have a social and financial impact

- Status of star players offers security
- NBPA board brokers demands
- Former stars have lasting influence
- Conglomerate more powerful than the individual

Progress is accomplished through strategic responsiveness to interest convergence

- Begins with an awareness of issues and potential power to persevere
- Acknowledge genealogy of deploying power
- Institutionalized racism predetermines outcomes
- Have a knowledge of sport organization operations and financial systems
- Opportunity is not a lengthy visitor
- Garner wisdom from your predecessors and fraternize wisely
- Engage in social justice activities as a collective

NBPA is serviceable but limited

- Restrained interest in player representation
- Exclusive access to the detailed operations of the league
- Player representatives serve as liaisons
- Involvement is often inefficient
- NBPA considered a preeminent organization
- Potential for improvement

Black male professional basketball players are leaders of self-determination for Black communities

- Build brotherhood with other Black male professional basketball players
- Train the next generation for success
- Transfer generational wisdom and dignity
- Develop foundations, businesses, & other empowerment opportunities

*History of Lived Experiences of Racism*

You know the cops hung out, a lot of people in the hood hung out, it was a nice area. Then we started having issues with White people coming through and throwing stuff and things like that.

I ended up somehow walking down the street and there was a piece of metal sticking out. You remember how the old cars used to have that metal molding? Yea, a piece of that was sticking out and as I was walking down the street and people were forcing me closer, and closer to the side of the street, so I messed around and had a piece of that metal go up into my leg. Boy, you talk about an unbelievable feeling.

He was taking me to the hospital and so there were national guards all around the capitol and he was trying to take a shortcut to go the other way so we could get to the car and he could take me to the hospital. And so we were going towards the national guard and we went passed them. And then the guy said, “where you going nigger?” And my father said...I’m trying to get my son to the hospital. The guy said you gotta go that way. And then as my father was going the other way the guy just took his gun and hit him in the back and then just pushed us down the hill.

the stuff that's happening today, the only difference is they didn't have cameras back then. It was happening. That stuff was happening but you couldn't take a picture like you can today. That's the only difference.

this is how racism works. What have you read about it? What have you heard about it in the media? [discussing the National Hanging Museum in Birmingham, AL]

Nothing! You've heard nothing. Because...the reason that they have the memorial is because when somebody got hung back in those days. It would be a Black man got hung. A Black woman got hung. A Black boy got hung. What they wanted to do here is, they

wanted to give them names. Make them human. That's what they wanted to do. These are human beings.

Each one has a name. Each one has a...county that they lived in or that they died in, and they also have a date of birth if they have that. The thing is, they said just think about the thousands that we couldn't find.

And I mean...it's so deep that the Black people that are still there are scared. They're like, why would you wanna dig this up? Why didn't you just leave this alone?

The other thing that is racist is the fact that a White woman is considered a minority.

That's the world we live in. Like when you see this stuff....take a look at the average Black person, has an estate worth about \$5k. The average white person has an estate that's worth about \$75-100K. These are stats that are readily available.

Well, here's the thing. And it goes back to 1865, when they said, you guys are free. Oh wow, we're free?! Oh okay. What do we get? Well, you get your freedom. I mean, no money? No resources to get started with? No. Now, if you want you can work for me and I'll pay you a wage or...we'll split whatever the crops produce. We never got the start.

And because the media is the media, they can squander, just like they did with the Hanging Memorial. Just the name Hanging is enough to turn the media off because they know these sorry ass White people wasn't right. [laughter] They know that. You know, they had picnics at hangings, you know "pick-a-nigga", they were picnics.

I've seen the worst in people by living in Mississippi. When I was growing up, they still had Colored and White drinking fountains.



I was reading something the other day. And they were talking about, and I know that this is a sideline but they talked about the worst 10 cities for Blacks in this country. And one of them is Milwaukee. And I used to live in Milwaukee when I was in Milwaukee.

But it said that, the thing that was startling was that black people there makes 47% of what a white person makes. Now that's jacked up! ...this is 2018. That's today!

early on, there was a time when we ate a restaurants that had to be guarded off from the public because we ate together.

In those rural communities we experienced some form of racism. Generally, mostly housing and eating accommodations.

transportation wise, we had to go to the back of some buses when we were traveling and sit in the back seats so we experienced that and this was before, you know, it was right in the midst of the racial issues that was going on in America.

But on the other side of the coin we did a great thing in moving things forward too. So the teams were biracial, and we all played together...so that was a good face to put on moving forward. When people came to games...you didn't see all the black guys play and then all the white guys play. We all played together. We played against each other.

The black people, we're missing a big, big piece of our army. It's the Black male. So like with the system, it worked effectively. The drugs. All of our black males and our voices are drugged up, in jail, or dead.\* [end with this to go into the next section]

It ain't even about the physical. The physical part is scare the mess out of them. Kill em where they lay. Let them lay out there. Let them lay out in the street and let everybody

see them. You know what that's gonna do? Man, them po-po [police] ain't playing...it messes with, I don't know what I was watching. I seen a thing it talked about those characteristics things, what they do to take over the world and get your whole mind...it just weew.

Fear. It's scary. Like the slaves. They knew they was out numbered. But let's kill them, whip them. One little man on a horse. They scared of this big black guy, so take the women, children, put them over here. And you take the male and put them over here. Now you got the women and children...same way they doing now. They got the black male in jail, on drugs, and they got the women and children. Put her on child support. Make her go against her...aw man.

Well the Globetrotters are the most unique group of people. They could go anywhere and not have no problems with nobody. Terrorists or anything.

But they stayed to watch the game. So that means we never had any issues, crossing borders or anything...we were known worldwide and that's just how it was. I mean we brought happiness and joy to families.

So when we get to a different city or a different country, we always had front people to do the public relations and all that. So once we get to the airport, the hotel, and all that, people already know we're there. And then when we went around town, I was the shortest one because we had a few 7 footers, so we stand out...[greeting guests entering the gym] so when we walked in and they see all these Blacks and they tall, automatically they knew who we were.

Being a Globetrotter, that puts us in a different position than any other athlete because #1...[talking with another guest; laughter] because #1 we were just so loved everywhere. And it didn't seep in with us. Because the White folk were glad to see us because we

were different...we brought a different thing to the table so...and then it was all Black. So...now we had **White management at the time but we was making them money so they had to keep us happy**...my position is just so different from most athletes, as far as racism, because it didn't creep it, because everywhere we went it was love. [use as transition]\*

And we was asked to be there [beats on table]! We weren't forced to be there, we were asked to be there, put on the show, make everybody happy. So that's a little bit different than like the NBA, and all that racism, and all that. This probably the only team that's a lot different than any other sport.

Nah, because on my team it was Marques Haynes and that was the Dribbler, at that time it was the two Dribblers. It was Marques Haynes and Curly Neal, and they was on separate teams, international and national. So my management as far as on the road was with him...we never really got to be with the White management. All our stuff was at the team, wherever the team was. So we didn't have to experience none of the management. So what Marcus Haynes said at the time, that was the law.

Well...the majority of the White guys are doing something. And then the majority of the Black guys come from lower income families. So yea it's a little more pressure to do it because there's so much need out there! There's not as much need in the White neighborhoods, where they come from. A lot of them come from privilege.

Nah I mean it's just, I'm in the position where, like you talk about the racism in the NBA and all that. It just was void with the Globetrotters. You know what I mean, we were just a different animal...we didn't have it. We was well liked all over the world. And it never...

When I was at Wheatley, we went to state every year. My brother was there 3 years, I came there 3 years after him. Boy, one time we went to Fort Worth, and we went into a cafeteria to eat and this white woman didn't want to serve us. Every time somebody White come in, have a seat, take a menu. We in there 30-40 minutes and they ain't ask us anything. So coach found out he say let's go. They find out say, oh no no. He say it's too late. Now our money good just like everybody else. That's the first time I really...I say oh wow...that was the main one that stuck with me but the coach kind of kept us away from all of it but that was...when I actually saw it for myself.

**That means, the more things change the more they remain the same...**it has a history of that. Now if you look at that historically, that has always been the case in this country. Now tell me if I'm wrong now. We've always supplied a bulk of the labor force, but when it comes to ownership and distributing of the wealth, it's a cut off point. There's a ceiling.

Wilt Chamberlain wanted to buy the team. He had cash money. The guys told me that, when I got out of there in 1967, they say he had cash money, he wanted to buy the team and they wouldn't sell it to him.

Historically, in the United States, you had a class. You had owners and workers. And you have people who traditionally made a lot of money and they would pass that wealth on down generationally, has been White.

Historically, in the United States, you had a class. You had owners and workers. And you have people who traditionally made a lot of money and they would pass that wealth on down generationally, has been White.

The only African-American I know in the Globetrotter organization, and somebody can check me on it, he owned I think 1 percent, 2 percent, that's through Abe Saperstein, his

name is Mr. Jackson, Edmond Jackson...I heard Mr. Jackson owned a percent of the Globetrotters. Which was a lot of money. They say that the Globetrotter had so much money back in the day, they was hiding it in the Swiss bank and they don't know how much it was [laughter].

He was good friends with Red Auerbach. That's how the first African-American got into the league. Not with the Boston Celtics, the New York Knickerbockers then...so it's through the working of Abe and Red Auerbach, from my understanding...cause the guy came from the Trotters.

If you got money, you can gripe about anything you wanna gripe about. And more likely than not, sometimes if you are of a certain hue you may...Bill Cosby. I'm not saying he's right, but hey I don't see nobody else getting bbq'd like him. What's that? All these other guys they been lining up. Been calling out. What he did was wrong. If he did it he ought to serve time but now, is he the only one? Why you single him out? What about these line of guys over here? What about your President?

See I kind of look at things from a historical standpoint because history gives us an idea of where we've been and where we going. If I don't have a good understanding or grasping of history, then I'm just kind of, to me, treading water.\* [start with this]

I can look back and tell who's doing what. You look at it, you say I'm a Christian, I'm a this, I'm a that, I'm a Jew, I'm a whatever. What's your history? Let's go back and see if you're all that. And if you are then hey I take my hat off to you. But if not, hey don't get mad at me if I say something that you may not like.\*

If one person say I got all the sense, I got all the technology. Well you may have it but how did you get it?...I heard a guy on 60 minutes or whatever, say for every wealthy individual or family or whatever, there's a great crime. If you look back in history, if you

got a lot of money, somewhere along there you been stepping on some people. Not always. I mean I don't know. I'm just saying, I'm just piggybacking off of what I heard somebody else say. And I look back on it historically...Give me a name. Pull me a name and if you look back far enough we gonna see, they've been doing some funny stuff.

It was different times. You kind of knew certain things going on...we in Boston and I wanna say it was 78. We're on a yellow school bus driving through south Boston. You don't do something like this! [laughter]...so you kind of knew. But you didn't exploit it or anything.

Well going back to when...let's be honest, you had White corporate America teach the other Whites how to make money...they didn't come to us, we didn't get invited to the board room. So they wanted to keep it in the family. And that's what they did.

Man...the parents. The bigot parents. Go to a daycare center...park your car and look at those kids play. Go to a playground, elementary school, they just playing! But it's the parents that say, you don't need to be playing with them. Them! Not him, them.  
{discussing where racism comes from}

Let me just tell you...when you get up and start brushing your teeth, you better start saying I am Black. And to them out there, I am a nigga.\*

You look at, Selma march, it's our voice, okay. You look at Malcolm X, how he changed his voice. Muhammad Ali, being invited to all the White universities cause his voice. He dressed still, and he let them know why I'm not gonna go fight the Viet Cong. Because why go over there, when I come back, you still gonna keep me like a nigga...his voice was being heard.

Man I still go to the store, and I give the lady change. And she change like this [gesturing that the lady doesn't want to touch him]...still dont wanna grab, don't wanna touch me. And I just look and say thank you. Keep on going.

For example, back in the day there were the older farmers. My mom's from Waycross, GA. Her uncle and her pappa, they owned at one point, 10 thousand acres of land...watermelon, corn, wheat, boom, boom, you knew it. They also owned the bus station which was a train station and the hotel connected, the barbershop there. Everybody get in there on Mondays and see what's going on and here come old Mr. Charlie, Mr., White, Charlie, with his 75 acres. How you boys doing? We fine, Mr. Charlie. Okay now, you boys know, you need any help with your crop come see me, I'll let you know. We will Mr. Charlie. Have a good day. [He] walk away, old redneck pecker-wood cracker [laughter]. That covered all the bases. Redneck, upper Georgia, pecker-wood, middle georgia, cracker, cause you're near the south in florida. But back in the day, think about it, back in the day, I don't even remember wearing jeans to school. We dressed. I had to shine my shoe severyday at night. We very rarely wore tennis shoes cause we only got one pair.

*Players are shielded from racism but not protected from it.*

that's alive and well. [racial pay discrimination]

You know, when I came into the league, during my era, we faced a situation where they said that 7 out of 12 players on every team had a drug issue. In reality that wasn't it.

and then they also has an issue saying, well White people are not really going to come out and see a lot of Black guys play. You know, if you have 2 or 3 on the team then your fine but if youre talking about...like now you take a look at the teams and the whole starting 5 is Black and then they might have 1 or 2 White players on the team.

Whereas before it was a situation where you might have 6 or 7 white guys because in reality I don't mind paying white guys. And they paid them more money!

Because when you're a player, you're insulated from all of this. You're insulated by virtue of the fact that...it's kind of like the concept of people living in a neighborhood, then they get a job and then they get a better job, and then they get a better job. Once they get that better job. They say you know what? I can afford to move outta the neighborhood. So all of the legs and the arms that used to be in the neighborhood that held it up, now they're going to the neighborhood. Because they're saying look, I know better so I can do better...to themselves, you know.

Bill Russell winning championships in Boston and everything was going great. They go on the road to play...on a road trip. He comes back and somebody den broke into his house and doo-dooed in his basement.

so from that standpoint on, he said I'm going to...I'm playing for the Celtics. I'm not playing for Boston, if somebody could do something like that. And they didn't want him in that neighborhood. That's what it boiled down to. Last year, what did they do on Lebron's gate? [racial slur painted on gate]

Meadowlark Lemon found out that the White players were getting paid more than the black players so he confronted him. And what you just said, Abe Saperstein said, well it takes more money for these white guys to live. Ain't that some shit!

That's the arrogance of our society. That's the arrogance of the news industry. That something like that could go viral and now all of a sudden somebody goes, "Yea, yea, that's right. Just shut up and play," and then it just matriculates all throughout society.



I don't have any idea on that. I'm sure the stars themselves and their agents are satisfied with whatever it is that they're making once they sign the contract.

No, I didn't experience anything with management, coaches, trainers, or scouts.

Athletes are able to vote, right?

Very low. The impact is small because the athletes ability to earn money. Most professional Black athletes are very well compensated and as you know when you're very well compensated you have the ability to put your family in a position to avoid a lot of everyday issues that affect lower or even middle class families. {discussing the social climate impacting Black male athletes}

They brainwash us from college. And just...we brainwashed from growing up cause we just don't have the generational knowledge or the generational wealth knowledge from our families.

Now we think college, oou yea. It's jail. I'd probably rather go to jail when I realize what I'm doing. They give you three meals a day. They out you in a 6x9 room, with a twin bed, and they give you a duffle bag and say make me some money.

Okay, now what if you're a guy that don't get drafted? You end up by the time you get done, in debt. Nowhere to live, no car, no clothes, you cant even get money from nobody. You can't get a job.

So by the time you get to the league, you just thinking, your 3-4 years of been doing like in a jail cell, thinking of what you want. You go buy it all. And now you're broke.

Oh yea, it's jail...it is. I can't go, I got a curfew. Man. when them boys should be living...do you know. Them boys got, they signed a contract for \$10.8B for 10 years, just to watch the NCAA tournament. Not even the season. Not for all these...just for the NCAA [tournament]. And these guys ain't get no money? It's a high paid slave trade.\*

Well, you don't see it just because you just a high-paid slave worker. So you don't see it. Im cool. I got my money, I'm cool...you just basically just a high-paid slave worker. You just getting more money so it blinds you to where you getting the money and what's going on. Because when you get the money you kind of not try to be helping people. So you really don't understand it or it really ain't gonna affect you cause I got mine so I'm good. So it just basically just move that slave trade back in the day to giving you just a pillow, now you got cars and a house. You just high-paid slave workers. Because we have no knowledge of what's going on at all. And we ain't trying to know.

So it was never really for the black athlete to say something. He got in trouble, he got banned. He got...it was just bad for him. So you got banned from a lot of things. The black athlete standing up was never really something to do. It was always, I'm gonna get kicked out the league. Im gonna get fired. You stand up and Kaepernick.

It was 90% Black then. It's still 90% almost. Except for maybe you got the Europeans. I don't even classify them a White. Which is smart. That's a whole nother venture the NBA has. Which I understand. Why go get this guy from Duke, when he has 100k followers. When I can go get this guy from Turkey, he got 2,3,4 million. He got the whole country on his back. They gonna buy a whole team revenue. Jerseys and...

You making \$20M a year. What issue do you have, son?\*

That's what they gonna ask. What issue do you have? Black people not making money. You got \$20M. You just signed your \$30M contract. Here you go. Sign it J, woo! Now what? Some of your equality and fight, it kind of just...

So now all your dreams, you start doing everything you want. But you don't do the things that count. It takes you awhile to come to the things you're supposed to do. So the money blinds you for 5-10 more years. For all these years you want to fight because it aint right [makes grunting noises]. \$50M, hmm and quit. Hey, ay ya ya ya whoop woo woo woo. You're whole career you don't even think about what's right.

when I was at A&M, you know, they were prejudice at my school and still now. But we did not touch it or feel it anytime we was out the country.

The colleges are greedy. Because if it wasn't for the college players you wouldn't be getting this money. So why you not giving them a stipend because sometimes it's hard. When I was at A&M myself, man we needed some money. We had vehicles, we needed gas but we couldn't work for it. We were in class or at practice, or at a game. So I'm making money for you...if I had a choice, I would say pay them. Or if they ask for my vote. Because they deserve it. And then they talk about well, we give them a scholarship. Well if they walked on they still making money for you.

I mean if you walk on and make the team, that means you good enough for a scholarship. So don't say, well we paying for their education. Nah they paying for the school.

So I went to one year of junior college, made All-American there. So I get there...they got a White guy starting. He's a senior. He couldn't play my position at all. Now see, my favorite position was in the corner. Now see, back then they played a lot of zone. And I would just sit in the corner all day bustin, bustin, bustin. But he wouldn't let me play so I

got frustrated my first year there. He let me play in one game where I couldn't get my redshirt. I ain't play no more that year. Shelby Metcalf.

They gave me a B average and I ain't went to nan class. Now you see how crooked they can be, when they want to be? ...damn a B. you see how dirty they can be? But don't want to pay you! It's for the school sake, not for the kids' sake.

But 5 of the Blacks, of African-American [descent], met in his office...It wasn't you individually negotiating. 5 of us met in his office, sitting a table, sitting in his office like where we sit now, and he said to us, guys I have to sign 6 Whites and 6 Blacks...I thought it was strange but it didn't bother me cause I just wanted to sign [a job].

Well see, this is going back to my time, you only had two teams, well if you go back in history you had the Harlem Renaissance. The Harlem Rens. Kareem talked about them...they was competing with the Globetrotters at the same time. From my understanding it was a much better team...they just didn't get the exposure, didn't get the opportunity to develop.

Those were the only two teams that you could be a part of. There was no integration. Remember, integration didn't come until 1964, then the Civil Rights Bill...the Voting Rights Bill was signed in 1965, Housing was 1968. So up until then there wasn't any integration. They had a little bit cause Jackie did his thing in 1948, '47, somewhere along there. And they had the guy in minnesota, Sandy...played football in Minnesota, I think. Back in the day. But, you know, it was a quota. You could count them on one hand. How many guys was on the team....so the opportunities in ownership was just not there.

No, I didn't. The other guys, on the other side of the fence The White guys had the no cut contract....Two of them. I don't know about the rest of them.

I got cut. Coach told...now this is strange to me, but I appreciate coach doing it...he said you can stay here as long as you want. I was in the hotel. I had to pack up my stuff and go home but he said nah, you stay here as long as you want. Cause we gonna try to see if we can get you on...we'll put your name on the wire and see if some team wants to pick you up...That's what he did for me. And I really appreciate it. I appreciate it to this day.

Well, I don't agree with it...maybe she should just shut up and report the news [laughter] last time I checked this is a free country and you have the freedom of speech.

Now sometimes, I do believe because athletes are always put on a pedestal, they looking to shoot you down as soon as you open your mouth. So you ought to have your facts together. You ought to have your stuff together if you gonna be out there talking. Do your research, do your homework, as my old coach used to say, do your homework.

We didn't. Everybody knew they had to find their White Hope. Pistol Pete, first. Then Havlicek, Jeff Patry, Bird. Hey it didn't bother us. They all could play.

Okay, if we didn't say nothing, they be talking bout, oh you a Tiger Woods. And you're a Michael Jordan. You ain't black enough. Now when I'm doing it, I'm overstepping my bounds.

What's inside you. You gotta find your inner peace...look at it that, back in the day Harry Belafonte, Martin Luther King, Malcolm X were the ones speaking up. Richard Pryor did it in his jokes. But where were the rest of them? Then came Jabbar. Then came Jim Brown. They spoke up. Didn't nobody say nothing. Don't nobody say nothing until...now you're being too black. What do you mean I'm being too Black? So you got to find it within you.

Oh, when we were playing, you didn't date White. You didn't go to the White clubs. You stayed on your side of the tracks. Now, we can get invited to the functions. Cause I was an athlete, sign autographs, but don't go knocking on the door, here I is.

Case and point, 1986. Adam Leavell and I got invited to Pasadena High School off of Red Bluff, career day. Coming back, Klu Klux Klan building. Right next to the stop and go. Pick up truck, pick up truck, space, pick up truck. There were about 6 of them. In their robes in front of a pick up truck. We drove by there, I looked at him and say, I gotta do it. Did a U turn. Parked in there, went and got a soda. Came out, we just looking at them, they looking at us. Finally one of them said, wait a minute, ain't you Robert Reid from the Rockets? Yea. Shoot, give my son an autograph, he love the way you play! For an half hour we were talking about the Boston Celtics. How we need to beat them. Now when we got ready to leave, the guy say, now Mr. Reid...now hey, I won't be knocking on your door tonight, don't worry about it he say, ok.

Yea. Well in Boston, NBA championship, I come on the floor, pre-shooting, there was this dad and his two kids, one boy was 6, girl about 4. Man said Reid! I said, yea, how ya doing? Larry Bird gonna kick your ass, nigga! You ain't that good! He kept yelling all throughout the game. Then after the game, I'm dressed I'm going to the bus. Here he comes. I say, oh shit. I put my bag in my left hand. He come up and say, Mr. Reid I want to apologize the way I carried myself tonight. You are one fine man and a good ball player. I was wrong. And we shook hands. I had a fan for forever in Boston. Cause I didn't let it get to me...you know it's there, so you just look ahead and keep walking.

*Prominent players have the most social impact*

But for me, having an opportunity to hang with Doc and some of the other players on the team, and I had relationships as well, you know...it was kinda nice as I continued to develop and become more of a seasoned veteran, I tended to try to help the younger players to acclimate to the game.

People want to see Olajuwon, they want to see Drexler, they want to see Bill Russell, they want to see all these guys whose names stand out in front.

So the NBA said, well what we'll do is we'll go ahead and we'll give them individual contracts. Now the value of our organization without those guys is probably only about \$3-4M a year. And we have roughly about 700-800 members in our organization. Because see we don't have the same cash.

But the reality is that if we had those guys, those former players, we're probably like a \$30-40M organization. Here's the thing. They would still get their money. We would command more money from the NBA.

The stars like LeBron. LeBron will say what he wants to say. There are a few others that will say what they want to say. But you let a role player say something like that...somebody that's giving 5,6,7 points a game 3 or 4 rebounds, oh I can get that anywhere. If I don't want them on my team, you don't have to explain anything.

Craig Hodges. When he came from the White House, he may's well just went on home after that year was over because they were not bringing him back. Because he gave the President a letter saying these are the issues that need to be addressed Mr. President. And he wasn't lying!

They'll look the other way. There are rapist in the league, there are wife abusers in the league, there are thieves in the league. But guess what? They can play. So we look the other way. Well that ain't got nothing to do with us. [discussing if a star player were to protest instead of a role player, like Craig Hodges]

but at the end of the day, guys are not willing to sacrifice themselves if they feel that it's goin to hurt their career. Especially if you're a marginal player.\*

Here's the reality. The reality we're threatened when we stand up. Look at Colin Kaepernick. Now he's gonna get paid but he'd much rather be playing. He'd much rather be playing. Now see, that's collusion. And teams can do that.

Oscar played the biggest part....Archie Clark, Oscar [Robertson], and Dave Cowens were the main guys that started the association.

We would have player meetings and we had a team captain. And all the team captains would meet and bring the information back to the team and try to sell on whatever they met or get our opinions and take it back to the next meeting.

So we need to have enough members on board to get the attention of the owners. So if it was 20% of the players or 15 % of the players, the owners could ignore that. But if you got 75 or 80% of the players who want to do this and they're together as a group, perhaps you can move that issue forward.\* [use as last quote]

you need your superstars to stand up and make a statement. It helps that they're all proud Black professional athletes and good friends too. And so I'm sure that they in their off time that they get together and talk about things that they can go forward with in terms of using their foundations and their financial impact on communities to further positive social change.

Like I said, there was Dave Cowens and Archie Clark who sat down with Oscar and they all had advisors and lawyers and met with the league and league had to open their books to show revenues. And they had some numbers crunchers with them that were able to



look and see and say alright well you're making this much, then this ought to be given to the players.

The [PA] board used to be Jordan, Ewing, Reggie, all the big name guys who made all the money. That was the board. So when they locked out, they locked out. No thank you, that ain't right. That's not what we want, this ain't what we gonna do. Fellas, we agree? We agree.

He's [Chris Paul; President of NBPA] a strong guy for it but it shouldn't be him. It should be LeBron. This is LeBron James we're talking about right? Think LeBron James, Chris Paul [gestures a gap being between the two] hello.

And I also had a role model, my brother, Dwight Jones. He was in the league for 12 years. He played with the Hawks, he played with the Rockets play with the Bulls and play with the Lakers.

He was my mentor and that's how I kind of got in the game because I saw his work ethic. So I tried to emulate that. So I said, if he can do it, if I put my mind to it, then I can do it. So I did that and I was fortunate enough to.

Yea, and then Sweet Lou Dunbar. I played with the Globetrotters with him. He's also a coach with the Globetrotters at this point right now. And just people, everyday people to me, that was great all over the nation...I saw how they done it and I tried to stick with it as well.

Well #1 it helps for us to have Moses Malone here...One of the top 50...Calvin Murphy, let me see who else is here?...my brother was here [Dwight Jones], Major Jones is here. A lot of guys that played are still here and a lot of guys from other cities move here because #1 the economy is a lot cheaper. You get more bang for your buck here, than

like west coast or east coast. But then it was just a good place to be. [answering why Houston chapter is the biggest of NBRPA]

But the thing is, everybody that take money from the public is a role model, good or bad, because they're the one paying your salary...so Charles Barkley used to say, nah I'm not a role model. No, you're taking their money because they're buying tickets to come see you play, you're a role model, good or bad. So the thing is we just have to take a look within ourselves and see if we can be the best we can be on and off the court. Bottom line. [start with this concept]

Well...having a platform you've got to have some money to get there, you have to have some type of voice or do something well to where people want to come see you, people want to come hear you, so can't have one without the other. Because if you have a big platform, somebody done put you there. You didn't get there by yourself. You see what I'm saying?

He (Moses Malone) was a major factor because he was making all the meetings. And a lot of us followed him. Because if the main one come, why shouldn't we come? {it's about leadership}

Well...when we try to raise funds, having like golf tournaments and stuff like that, all we had to do is say one name, Moses Malone, and then...the golf tournaments would be full just to play alongside of him. That's how it started cause you have to have something to bring to the table. He brought himself to the table and that's what pushed us to be greater. The biggest, the first biggest one. They got several now but because of him, in my opinion, that's how we grew as big as we was. Because of him being a likeable person. We were able to raise funds because of him. When you do golf tournaments and get teams to buy in. Everybody wanna be with Moses.

Oscar, as far as I know, was the person who initiated the whole process of the Retired Players, the NBRPA.

I think it requires a person like LeBron, which I admire, to stand up for what you believe...I mean he could do like so many of the rest of the guys, go make his money. Say I'm crying with y'all, but I'm crying all the way to the bank. I go somewhere, make my money, I don't have to worry about somebody getting shot in the back. An African-American over here getting shot in the head.

Oh yea. Dr. J, Walt Frazier, Connie Hawkins, Pete Maravich, Jamaal Wilkes, Rudy T, Calvin Murphy...you just sucked your thumb and listened.

David Thompson, Gervin, Dr. J, Rick Barry, they all went to the ABA. Then the NBA had to come get them to come back with the extra dollars and all.

Okay, right now, let the older players be the ones to speak. These people grew up watching us. They idolize us. They wanted to be part of us. We've gotten older and wiser. We're not as militant as these young kids today.\* {use at the end} ...Yea...you can sit and talk. And there's not going to be a yelling of words.

The way he [Muhammad Ali] carried himself...he made people come to him, he was a magnet...he was still the people's champion...who is this guy. I want to go hear him speak. And then you got to look at it too...the vietnam war, them young cats, kids, didn't want to go fight. So they wanted him to come to the campus.

Uh...the Boston Red Sox, Big Papi. Hes well liked...basketball, Oscar, one of the older guys. David Robinson could...you look and see, Jabbar wrote 14 books. He's on dancing with the stars. There's still a couple out there who can, still...you remember arthur ashe,

was really one of the big-timers. Tiger in his heyday was...Chi-Chi Rodriguez, golfer, he came...

Chi-Chi Rodriguez is Mexican [Puerto Rican] but he wasn't really welcomed, but he carried himself with class and style.

*“Know how to play the game” [Strategic Responses to Interest Convergence (SRIC)].*

But the other thing was, in terms of, we knew going in weren't going to be making a whole lot of money, so we knew that once we finished playing, we knew we were going to have to get a job doing something. Compared to the guys today, you know, it's generational wealth. They've got to almost be like the 3 stooges to not walk away with something. So you know, the key was always to make sure you be on top of your finances.

I was mentioning something to my wife not long ago. I said, the concept of moving somewhere where somebody does not want you, can be in their area, you know that's something that you have to live with. You know, you deal with it. Just think about that.

You know, the game is rigged. The game is rigged. That's where the frustration comes in. Magic was able to get in...I read that Jeter is now one of the owners of the Florida Marlins...but again I mean...they keep making those idiotic statements like the owner here [Houston Texans Bob McNAir] that made the statement that...what did he say...the crazies are running the asylum [mis-paraphrased statement; “inmates running the prison”]

the best thing that you can do when you're facing situations like this. Is to succeed even with the odds against you because you're going to have the odds against you.

Check this out! We had some players that their parents took advantage of their money.

So don't think these people...a lot of them have your best interest at heart.

Chris Bosh said, I've made a lot of money in my life but I don't know anything about money. Here's a guy that's been in the league, what? 10-12 years. You'd think that his agent would align him with somebody that would teach him what he needed to be taught. This guy's probably made about \$200M..and you have other guys like that.

White people will bring good opportunities to White players.

people think that the lifestyle of a professional athlete is easy but it gets more complicated the more money you get.

that old adage, when you know better, you do better. But a lot of guys don't do better.

Yea, there's things that I want, there are things that I'm going to buy. And I might get out of control. But at the end of the day, I have no concept of the money that I'm making. I have no concept. Because I've never been around it.

But one of the things that I really admire about LeBron James is that the guys that he grew up with, he paid for them to go back to college to get their degrees and then their masters and now these guys are representing him. One of the guys is the one that negotiated that \$1B deal with Nike.

The key is still going to be to align yourself with the right people. And agents are never going to be okay by themselves because it's like giving me access to everything that's in the warchest. So you don't want that. That's why you have to have 3 or 4 people looking over the shoulder of the other person. And guess what? You make enough money to do that. If you have the right people, these people will pay for themselves.

when you talk about agents...these guys walk on water to our guys. Because guys used to think...my agent was able to do this, my agent was able to do that.

Well you know what, you don't really need an agent today because with the information that they have, okay well I averaged 20 points a game, I averaged 8 rebounds, I averaged 4 assists...what logarithm does that put me in? That puts you in the \$20-25M range. Okay, we'll start from there.

It's a different animal. When we played, we thought that you had to have agents because you needed to have somebody in there fighting for you.

But in reality agents be sitting in there...okay, what are we gonna do? You know we need this, you know we need that. Okay what else you need? I can probably get you another player, you know. So bottom line is, he's trying to help you but he's trying to help somebody else too.

The first day that you go to training camp, you're already moving towards your retirement. You gotta look at it like that so that you can keep trying to make positive steps because the average career in the nba is 4.7 years. Think about that.

So when you become an athlete, when you become an entertainer, it's all about giving people what they want. If you can't do it, guess what? Uh c'mon Justin, c'mon Joe. Whoever. You're throw away athletes, to a certain extent.

Cause we got the power. The players got the power. But we're scared cause, with the money. It scares them.

Well, since we not together as players, it's all about the money. If we was all together, that's power and that's money.\*

You can get what you want. You can come and we can lockout together. Somebody need some help, you can help him out. But if we ain't all together, we don't know what's going on. So that's what's kind of going on now. A lot of young guys in the league. You don't know what's going on.

Stan the White man. It's gonna mess you up [laughter] But it comes from just, the money messed us up or made us just stop believing or stop being together because we got paid. So he got paid, left the scene. So he got paid, left the scene. So they start figuring, let's just pay them and they'll just leave it all alone. They might not even fight no more. So now you got stuff like black athletes, black entertainers, all these guys with all this money and all this power but how many restaurants do we have together? How many hotels do we have together? Do we own any teams?\*

So we just, the money just kind of, I think pushing everybody away. Athletes, everybody with a voice. It's pushing them away. Because if we were all still together that money would just be, it would be powerful.

So it's kind of a fine line of fighting for your rights or securing your family...so this company gave you all this money and now you're in a platform to speak up for what's right. But it's a thin line because you can't...you can speak up but you can't speak up in certain places, certain situations where you'll get fired. You'll get blackballed. So you got to be smart.\*\*

Like everybody mad that they didn't hire Kaepernick back but then I step in they shoes and say why would they? Why? Well was he supposed to do that on that platform?

It gets a thin line because you're doing something now where you get paid so much money where we want to be so right, so right, but it ain't right, it ain't smart, it ain't tactical, it ain't strategic, and we missing the black pieces, the black brothas. They gone.

They start just throwing stuff at you. And then we weren't together. Guys was like, I'm broke, we can't lockout. They was like man what you mean? No, no. Then they all said yea. Some guys said no. It was just sloppy. When all these guys just...it's crazy. But if you was together. Guys could be owning banks. Guys could be loaning guys stuff. They foundation could've had they funds readily...

How you get this platform to be able to speak can be taken from you. And when it's taken, you have no platform, so that's why a lot of guys don't even step up on the platform cause they don't want it. But they don't know they can still affect people without going up and being Kaepernick. You don't have to do all that.

Well you be strategic about it. You think about it. You plan it. And how can you be heard without crossing the line of your employer. so ...cause he's the one that started this, they started this stuff. So maybe that wasn't the right way to do it. Now he has started his foundation. He's got all this stuff. He's got million dollar goals to help people. He should've did that one in the first place, instead of standing up for the flag. Maybe at the end. Stand up for the flag. I'm out of here anyway. Yea, I'm done with yall, anyway...I did what I had to do, I'm finished with yall anyway. But see now it's a decision, they gonna be finished with you. You know, use them. Use the wave until you need them to go.

Well look at it this way...most careers are 5, 7, 8, 10, 12 years. So watcha going to do after that? And if you're not a good person, ain't nobody going to hire you. And the majority of all the people, all the guys who had all that money, millions, are broke after



3, 4, 5 years. So if you're not going to have a brand for afterwards...ain't nobody gonna want you.

So that's the main reason why you have to maintain on and off the court, transparency, because you gonna want somebody to keep paying you after you play ball. Cause you still love the game, you just can't still play the game. So what you do now in the game will have reflection on what you do after the game. So it's really up to, well how you gonna play the game?\*

Yea, if I sign something, you know...but see I knew enough people that go back and forth overseas every year, that I played during the summer every year. You know, they got a place for you, and so I got a hold of the team.

But see the thing about it, you can talk the game, but you gotta have something to back it up for the White folks to listen to you. You can't just be loud cause White folks dont like a loud Black person. They don't like that cause they say he's trouble. Then they gonna black ball you. They good at that. They can manufacture some stuff on you. Make it look like something that you done and you ain't done nothing. **See the thing about it we have to know our place. Bottom line. We can play the game and get something out of it, but we have to know how to play the game.\***

See he came into the game wrong., all loud and boastful and didnt have nothing to back it up. So now that you don't have nothing to back it up, now what you gonna do? Now you talking bout you got the tennis shoes and gonna do another league and all that. Where your backers? All your backers is White, so now they dont like you, so what ya gonna do?

You gotta know how to play the game! It don't put you out the game. Just learn the rules until you get yours [42:50]. But you know, come up from get go saying you know the

game, man that's all wrong...we can all get our piece of the pie if we stay in our place, to get to where we want to get to [43:00]. Because when you make them like you, you still don't like them but you make them like you, just get you further up the ladder. Simple as that.\*

What you gotta realize. The owners of the NBA, they gonna always say we're gonna consider it and see they can consider it for years. But until they put something on pen and paper...see they'll say I'll consider it to shut you up. See, you gotta know the game!

First of all, it's a business. And if I'm a businessman...and that's why I don't get too bent out of shape when owners be taking this and they don't want this to happen, because they looking at their bottom line. And if I'm a businessman I'm not going to pay you more than I'm making. If I do that, I'm not going to be in business long. As a businessman I got to always be looking at my bottom line. And if I can work it where the team can be successful and I can be successful on top, then okay.

So...it's a buy and sell market. I have something that you want. And that's, watch these athletes in a confined area to perform. And in order to watch these folks it's going to cost you, it's not going to be free...so as an owner, I'm not going to get into all that. I've already figured out what my bottom line gonna be, my profit. I would think. Just me, bring a novice at this...but trying to think like a businessman, if I can for a minute. I don't go into any venture to lose money...I may suffer a little but, break even at the most, at the beginning, but down the road I'm looking to profit. Case and point, when Wilt didn't buy the team for \$3M, \$3.5M, or whatever, the O'Neals bought it for something like 3,4,5 million, whatever or so. 4 or 5 years later, , 7 years later, they sold it for 12 million.

And young guys need to learn the history of this organization. If you're in there you need to learn as much as you can about it. And also the economic...the financial side of it. If I make so much money, then I ought to put so much aside.

No. Our thing was...why y'all forgetting it was us that started the league?...you're forgetting about us. We're the ones who had the first CBS contract, then NBC. Y'all worried about these young cats. What about us? Don't forget us.

everybody was going to see this young guy Dr. J, Charley Scott, Rick Barry, you know. You wanted to go see the ABA then you wanted to the NBA and that's why the NBA said, we gotta do something. We gotta bring these young guys into the fold.

You have to have a working relationship. You gotta know how many buttons you can and can't push, right. You gotta know...give and take, take and give. And some of these cats, they don't understand that.

*Okay, I'll put it this way. You got a job interview, corporate. You're not gonna go in there [gesturing greeting somebody informally] how ya doing? You know. [Gesturing greeting someone formally] You're going to go in there [Ben Brown], sir. I want to thank you for taking the time and opportunity for me to present myself. You don't go in there with your pants hanging down. You don't go sit in there, sit back and hold ya self [gesturing holding his crotch] while you're talking. It's your presentation, and then the next thing is the lady sitting outside the bossman's office, she already knows who's going to get the job, and if she likes you, she'll tell you this, look here, knock three times, when he comes in, use your left hand, open the door and step in with your right, the job is yours. I know him! So what happens, you got this young cat, you don't tell me what to do! I know what I'm 'possed to do. You just lost a job homeboy.*

Okay...you getting ready to have the NBA draft come up. You're going to see 30 young men, suits, name get called, they're given a hat, they wanna thank the commissioner, thank Cleveland and thank Houston, and I can't wait to be part of the team and the community. As soon as they come in, the first day of practice, looking like the tattoo lady from the circus. They didn't have that when they were in college. So now you get em all tattooed up, and that catches corporate america right there. They say look at this [gesturing somebody that is acting informal]...it's just like the group NWA. They were good until they found out. NWA? Yea, niggas with attitude [laughter]...off the presses.

One of the players told me, when you get your check, your first paycheck, you go get it. You don't give your attorney the power or opportunity. Whichever bank you want to bank at, you get on a suit or whatever you have, you go to the receptionist, you say you wanna see the president of the bank, well he's busy now, well you give her this and I'll wait right here. Give her the check. Boom! 10 seconds, he's out the door. The Milburn Drysdale effect, of the Hillbillies. He gonna take care of your money. Now when your friends or relatives come wanting money for an investment. You go to him, he picks up the phone. Nope, not a good deal. He is the player rep, he's the bad guy. Cause he's gonna take care of MY money. That y'all want me to spend on YOU...Uncle Jim is mad cause you bought him a VW but got his sister a Lexus. Boy, I raised you. And you gonna give her something bigger than me. Momma, who you love, she aint happy with just a condo, she wants a mansion.

So there was a way you could have stayed as a 49er with his voice, but when you're little you don't have a voice. They don't want to hear you. We're not going to bring you over here. We don't want to hear your voice.\*

They probably still think we supposed to be like the guys in the Mexico Olympics [gestures a clenched fist in the air]...I'm at the Galleria one Sunday, coming from church, we go to Cheesecake Factory. My wife and I, we walking. We're walking

towards Macy's. I see these three young brothers, they're high school age, pajama pants hanging down, bedroom slippers, getting ready to walk through macys. I said young brothers, come here. What's up with this? What do you mean, man? I say, you walk in there looking like that, don't say nothing when the man start following you around. Cause you look broke and poor and you look like you gonna steal something. Man, this [gesturing how the boys were acting; attitudes like don't tell me what to do, this is cool]...you don't do that. They went in there anyway.

Just cause you can walk in and buy this Rolls, you got to remember something, the man who's paying you and owns the team, you got to start thinking about his whole payroll: front office, per diem, travel, everybody's contract. At the end of the day, he's making that back from his other businesses. You spending your money, you ain't getting it back. But you trying to walk in like you got the key to the main washroom. And see, that's why I say the older players, the older people say, come here young fella have a seat. Let me pull your coat tail.

And then when you've got a one and done. Goes to a team, gets traded, then traded, finally released. Now you want to go back to school, to the alumni with a hand out. Whoa, you left us. You didn't come back to help us when you had it all. See that's what these kids forget.

*NBPA is useful but limited*

I think the main reason was because nobody else wanted to do it. {why got involved in PA}

You end up being a player rep and consequently you find out the inner workings of the Association. Especially back then I can remember a conversation, back in the '70s, with Larry Fleisher who was the Executive Director of the Players Association at that time. And he made a statement. He said, "I know you guys are not going to believe this but at

some point in time in the future guys are going to be making over a million dollars a year in this game.”

and then also to make sure that our guys were informed. Cause I think that that’s the big thing right there. That’s one of the main pieces that a lot of the guys take on those responsibilities. Is because you want to make sure everybody is on the same page. Especially on your team.

and then to have guys come to you, to talk to you about different situations that’s going on with them personally or what have you. Thats always something I’ve taken on as well. You know, just be a sounding board. Cause I’ve had a lot of guys over the years that’s come back and thanked me for always being in the middle of the road trying to just tell it like it is.

I didn’t worry about the White guys because they got...[hypothetically speaking] a uncle Justin that’s a CEO of a corporation. They got a uncle Mickey that’s a president of a bank, they've got lawyers. They've got, you know, all these different elements around them so somebody’s gonna grab their hand and hold them. But for the guys that came out of the hood. Who do they have?

one of the heaviest sessions that we had in our breakout room was guys coming in and asking the question, how do you say no to your parents?

they used to have the rookie orientation camp every year in September where all the rookies came that had been drafted.

The Players Association...here's the thing. All of those programs are in place.

Well here's the thing about being a player rep. You have access to information about the Association. You have access to information about the NBA.

you're involved with making decisions about...pensions...different programs that are needed.

obviously with the NBRPA, we don't have the strength that we should have as an organization. And I'll tell you why. The NBA...and I guess you really can't blame them. What they've done is that they've raped and pillaged our organization by taking the "superstars" and putting them on individual contracts. And the reason that they do that is because they don't necessarily need role players to...fill in the blank.

It's in essence what we deal with here. So they look at it and say, well we're giving you \$2M a year, and between you and I, the NBA throws away \$1M every All-Star game. So you're telling me were only worth a million dollars when we were responsible for...with having to build this league? But that's what we're up against.

I went to the Players Association and I told them, I said it would be great for guys to give \$10K a year. \$10K a year is \$4.5M. You could do a lot with \$4.5M. And the guys would be like, I don't wanna pay that kind of money. But check this out. They'll never see that \$10K anyway because of their taxes. So psychologically, they're saying I don't wanna do it, but if you're not giving it to me, you're giving it to uncle Sam.

I don't know what goes on in the negotiations behind the doors. All I know is there's a set of rules that governs the actions and appearance of players on and off the court. And every so often things are negotiated based on social norms.

Players get with their player reps and they talk about it. And when the reps get together, they come together with a set of issues that need to be addressed, as seen necessary by

the current group of players. And they present that to the committee, negotiation committee, when they're talking to the league.

The player reps are guys from each teams who goes to meetings and brings issues from a particular team to the meeting. Which may be issues that other teams are sharing too. And the player reps, and they got through all of that.

They meet themselves. How every many reps there are, they meet themselves and they go over it. And then they compile a list which will be presented to the negotiation committee to take to the negotiation. But they don't all sit in at the negotiation at the next level with the owners, or the owners lawyers or whatever.

Right, they bring the concerns of players, scattered all across the country, wherever the area where the players are. The players in that area, they get together and they vote to have a player rep. And they all express their grievances or what they think is good and what they think is bad. And the player takes that to the player rep meeting and they go over that in the player rep meeting. And sometimes issues are voted on to move forward and sometimes it's just one team...is beefing about something and it's not an issue with all the other teams. And maybe that'll be something they want to handle locally. And they would talk to their coach about and it wouldn't be a negotiation item for the entire league, you know what I'm saying?

Yea, the Players Association has it's on negotiation team...and the league has their negotiating team. And each side has their lawyers and advisors.

I think that there's been progression or that the NBA Players Association has been progressive. They offer a number of social programs; counseling, drug abuse...for people that need them. For players and their families too. And their family members. So I think they've been progressive with that. And stepping forward and getting that issue out and



to their membership. And encouraging them to apply and take use of the programs that are available.

I'm sure that the Players Association is aware of any fringe groups who try to steer racial issues regarding the makeup of the team or...in that regards. The Players Association hires players and get them out in the community and they do a lot of good work in that regard. They get players out and a lot of them are Black, African-American players, who go out and visit communities, and mentor the kids, go to high schools, elementary schools. **[Proactive instead of reactive]**

Well some of the things we did were the manner in which we carried ourselves and presented ourselves to the public.

I mean it's a lifelong job. Being presentable and just trying to do positive things when it's so easy to be negative. Because you know you're being viewed as negative off the top just because you're Black. And you're always proving yourself. You can never really just slack up. And just think things will naturally be alright.

You always have to be ready to prove you can do whatever the task is and you're worthy of the recognition that comes with it.\*

We have professional basketball reunions with the NBA, ABA, Harlem Globetrotters.

So he told me, man make sure you go, make sure you sign up, be a player representative. You need to know what these people are doing. In these meetings you need to know what's going on.

Get all the information and when you get the information, you bring it back to the fellas and you tell us everything we need to know. Now when you got there, it was the big

envelope they used to give us, back in the day, they give out to all the players with the information. Tell everybody what's going on.

And that was the whole key, just learning that information. Knowing what we're playing for, knowing what we're doing. Even though some of that stuff is unfair.\*

They meet, they have their little meetings in the summer. They have like an event.

Fly your family out, they have the meetings, golf event, they have all kind of stuff. Party for your family, that's where the NBA wives and the fathers, they didn't want to do the fathers.

And they breakdown all the stuff that's going on in the CBA. They might bring in a ref here, talk to him here and there and then we just hang out. Basically you get the information and you try to relay it back to guys.\*

Once or twice in the summer for the NBPA collective bargaining meetings.

So when the NBPA has those trips, most of it's for the collective bargaining agreement. Make them get together, talk about what they want to do, when they want to do it, stuff like that.

Yea have it every year. Cause certain things are maybe running out of...it's weird cause...certain things may expire, I think they're all supposed to expire at the same time but some of them don't. Some of them do.

How are you adding things but you didn't go through it with us or it wasn't...like stuff, different rules and different things just may be added. But how are they added? Who voted for them? So we would address the new things, that they're bringing in or wanted

to try, were we comfortable with it? Before the CBA agreement comes up...cause you can keep renewing before it come up. So that's basically what those meetings were.

We were going to address A, B, C, D, E, F, G are okay. But we want to address these top ones. We want to change it? They want some, no we do, no we dont...so if we don't agree or we do agree, that's where it goes to an ends. If we don't agree, we lock out. But if we do agree, we just renew it and keep going. That's how that happens.

The only time you can meet is All-Star Weekend. Everybody comes in, basic hey guys, woopy woop woop. Basically the new stuff. Whatever they got new or what's going on this year. What they need to address for something, if something happened.

The NBPA will have, they'll come out and do like two mandatory meetings for each team, where they come out with the wealth management, CBA rules, or some other stuff, if they have new stuff, collective bargaining agreement, they'll give it to the representative agent or rep and he'll kind of hand it out to everybody, if they have some stuff.

They go through some training as a rookie. And then you got one meeting, two meetings, yea two meetings a year...the NBA comes in and reminds you about gambling, the ref, sex, all that crazy stuff...harassment in the jobs, life insurance, wealth management, all these things that you can go, all these programs that they have, all that stuff so...

You basically either call them or email them or you send the, you got some stuff, you send it out. That's what used to happen. But now they just send it all to the players themselves. Now, it all just goes to the players, and if you got some information you want to relay for the CBA, cause you the only one that's in that meeting, and then you just relay it to them.

Most of the guys don't even go and relay the information to the rooks or to the other guys. That's why I say it's changing now.

Cause when you're the older players, they bring you under their wing or they explain what you're getting. Cause back in the day you wasn't getting a lot. So they knew what they was getting. They know what's going on. Nowadays these guys getting paid so much, they probably don't even know why. They probably don't even know from what. It's amazing.

And that young guy should be their first pick. First round pick. It should be him. That top 10 pick, you better come in here boy. You learning all this stuff, you better learn it. It's your league, you know.

because coming from them people, we not going to listen. We got all that. Like the NBA, they come twice a year and give us all this information, but we still don't understand it. Not even listen but, we just don't understand it. Why would I listen to him? Who is this guy? Half the time I'm tired from practice. It's after practice. We meet after practice. I'm tired. I'm hungry. We just lost last night. I'm sleepy. I'm going to see who I can text after practice, you know. By the time I get the information, it's not really...who did I get the information from? This guy with the big baggy suit and he talking like this [mocking nerdy voice]. Nah, you know they not gonna listen. But it's information they need to know.\*

If you sit down. I bet you, 12 players, 2 of them know the CBA agreement. They ain't got to know it by heart. Just know what counts. What percentage comes back from the tv, from the clothes, from the licensing, from the apparel, all that, you need to know. Insurance, mental health, all that stuff you should know.

They are but they in a microscope. So they jobs on the line, they livelihoods on the line too. I mean they have all these programs, yes they do. They have them but who gonna use them? With this guy in here talking like this [making squeaky voice] well you can come bring your 401k over here it can turn into 59% and you get 12% back on your return and you know.

**I like the NBPA. I love it. It's weak.\***

I like it cause it got readily available programs and things that can help players. They do have all these things. They do. But more, I want to use the word lazy or comfortable. They're comfortable. And they shouldn't be comfortable because most of the guys are Black that run the NBPA. Purvis short and these Levy's and and these guys. They're Black and they went through all this stuff so. They're just comfortable. They're just another high paid, comfortable, plantation worker. And they go [sigh of relief] my family's good. I'm okay, I'm good. What y'all want to do? Cool. I'll tell the players, they want to do it. Cool, what you want to do? I'll tell the players, they want to do it. cool. And every year that's what it is. You want to do it? Cool, cool, cool. But it's never like hey guys, this what's going on, this what you need to do, this where you need to be, this what y'all, whatever y'all want, you can do. It should be more...like the small things. You know how many guys got embarrassed, I was one of them, got embarrassed or just fined, lost a lot of money, for marijuana? Why the fuck?! Excuse my language Lord [gestures looking up to the heavens]. Why? And it's all the players. Man, if y'all don't get out of here. You know, it's embarrassing. Just those little small things man. How we dress. Okay, now it got out of hand with all the dress codes and all that stuff, because we wanted to where the stuff, I don't believe in all that stuff. I believe you need to look according to how you are, you need to be at least in a collared shirt. Not no damn 5 below things with chains hanging all, with hats, walking in the locker room. That's not...but the Black folks want to be like that so it's just a lot of stuff man. Guys lost money off of wearing clothes to the game.

Find out what's going on. Yea, you right. You right. Well let's talk to, now you got to call the chain. CP and all them, and we get together and in those meetings we address this. We don't like how we have to come in here, we don't like the media coming in here at certain times looking at our dingalings, booties and stuff, we don't know who gay who not, we dont know whats going on. Nothing against no one. It just all these people in here. Man, what's going on? I feel like a show. If you really cared...so yea and then you get the issues and then you address it and you try to...but most guys ain't even gonna have no issues.

But these owners are just so greedy and they make their own decisions cause all of them are White. Jordan has a piece of one but it's just one. Just one vote.

Well mainly the guys will vote you in. Most guys didn't want it because you had to go against administration. If something needed to be said and done, it was on you. 9 outta 10 you were probably traded the next year.

Well...whatever the national chapter was saying, you had to let everybody, keep them informed. ..whether it was about workers comp, or anything else...per diem, wait a minute, you can't make us do 6, 7 things in a season. You only get us twice. ..little things like that.

You report to the national what was going on and they came in.

Well...say when workers comp, per diem was rising, going up for road trips, and team functions we were asked to do and all.

Only thing you can do [talks to waitress who asked if were okay, answers yes] is get your player rep. And then there's some player reps that don't want to speak up. Then the

national, they're not ready to get involved with the local teams. So you're out there on your own.

Well...the league and the NBA, and the player reps, three weeks before they all gotta report to camp, the first round and even the second round 30, 60 guys. They're in upstate New York, a resort, they bring the soap opera stars, and let them play role. Yea coach, yea, okay I'll be there tomorrow [gesturing talking to phone with coach]. All of a sudden they go, so who was that? Coach from LA. I gotta go up there tomorrow. Well wait a minute. We ain't finished talking yet. You need to call them, and let them know you aint coming. What you mean I ain't coming? It's my job. Well what about me? It's much more out there than day-to-day life.

They're trying to, they are. But we had so much front office turmoil. It got lost in the shuffle, you know. Everybody in the front office was trying to do their own thing. Wait a minute man...you didn't come here to make this a career.

Chris Paul, everybody looks at him like an Uncle Tom. Chris Paul's hobby is bowling. That's his pet peeve. And Chris Paul doesn't really carry himself as Black. That's what they say. And yes, being chummy chummy with the commissioner looking out for himself.

Well Kevin Johnson...he used to be the president. Then he became Mayor of Sacramento then all of a sudden now he forgot us.

*Self determination [not NBPA but own organizations/businesses/foundations/programs; NBRPA].*

And see, our organization is 501C3. So we're tax...every donation that somebody gives us it tax deductible. So guys could give us...with the money that the guys are making

today, they could give us \$20K a year, which is \$8M. And they would never see it. It wouldn't make a dent. But they wouldn't get that \$20K anyway.

Right, well one of the things I really had a passion for back then was real estate.

...not making a lot of money, you tend to take more risks to try to put yourself in a position where you can have the flexibility to put money aside for your family. So I invested in real estate in Milwaukee and that was at the time when things were going well and then all of a sudden the real estate market started going sideways there. So we had to make some decisions there and some of the other guys had gotten into real estate as well but a few of the guys got into franchising and things like that. Junior Bridges would be one of them. He got into the Wendy's franchise and that's worked out very very well, very very well for him.

My parents were business owners. Which was really unusual back in that era. So even back then we were kind of insulated to a certain degree because we were able to get pretty much what we wanted.

we could have moved in other areas but my mother said you know what, I made my money in the hood, I'm gonna build my house in the hood.

I always try to get my kids to understand the concept of helping people so we would go to different shelters and...go to different events for some of the organizations in the community just so that they would understand about giving back.

my parents had a service station, a drug store, and a grocerette, right on the corner around from Jackson State so all the kids would come and buy and steal [laughter] the bottom line is that this what at the corner of Dalton and Flint, which was an area where pretty much everybody hung out.



what we have to do is, we have to start getting more involved in the lives of the people around us. You know, that old adage, each one teach one, or each one reach one.

and that's what money does, Justin, it gives you the opportunity to take from over here and put it somewhere else and build a company, build an organization because you have the resources.

we need to get our own thing together that was concerned specifically about players who had retired.

You know, they all have foundations that employ people to get out and do programs, and run leagues, and do mentoring...they supply food banks, and they have feeding programs, breakfast foods, lunch, dinner programs for after school...as far as I know, they're doing a great of being involved.

Now with my foundation, what my foundation is trying to do is change the generational curse.

Yea, and that's what me and my brother, we trying to start up. This thing called the Generational Wealth Conference...and we got a bunch of insurance guys, a bunch of real estate commercial investors, all those kind of small companies.

I mean, you know, we kind of just went backwards as a black nation, we kind of went backwards from what we was fighting for and kind of being together because of the money. Once the money came in we kind of lost our way. When the money should've made us a little more grounded and stronger. And buy more things to get more stronger.

The foundations. It's not no Ricky Davis anymore. It's his foundation. And now I'm, even though i have a job, and i got this thing but i still got to be careful because i will lose my power and my money if I dont be careful. So you use the foundation. It's the foundation.\*

And it's the kids. You got to attack the kids. Because that's the only thing thats gonna change, is the kids...junior high, high school. That's when you got to get them. And the foundation starts the mentoring programs and stemming the kids and that's how you change it. That's the only way.

You just got to basically set it up on your own. And that's what I'm trying to do. My foundation right now is trying to start a Generational Wealth Conference. And with those Generational Wealth Conferences we got all these investment people that don't want to cut the ties. You know, we made you \$100k but we snuck \$30k...you got a \$100k woop oop oop. Now, no I need that \$30K to go to my entourage. Or my cousin, or my auntie, or my kids, cause I got all my kids set up. So all this stuff. All these IRAs these kids got and can't touch. So they think they can't touch but you can touch IRA accounts, put them in special investments. I'm trying to start these Generational Wealth Conferences. And with the conferences we attack the older guys. We remold them, whatever they need. Starting this fund woop oop oop. That's how we get to the older guys that need help now. They need help now cause they family they may pass in 5-6 years their health may be, so they need help now. So that's gonna help that curse right there. Then with this mentoring and the stem and all this stuff for the young generation. To open their eyes to realize you don't have to be a rapper or ball player. You can actually be something that make the rapper's microphone. You can make the athlete's shoe. What about the astroturf? What about the pad in here that needs to absorb the shock, the concussion? You know you can still be in the game but not be the athlete. That's the STEM.

Yea. I think they do. It's a lot of guys out there that do it. [other players with foundations]

Hooking up with foundations. Hooking up with other brothas with foundations. It's strong. {what's beneficial with the NBRPA is that *it keeps the guys connected so they can continue to network. And do things with their foundations and businesses*}

It's build your brand. Right now, and I call it, it's not even a brand for me, I'm going bigger, it's what my foundation is, the legacy. It's your legacy. You build your legacy. And that's what it is...just build it.

Sociologies and all. Why do we choose those? Because the parents. Now the parents are here with the kids making the decision. They not knowledgeable to know that. We haven't hit the high school kids and told them. Pick something that's going to make sense and that's how you get to them. Those little small little workshops. I did a thing. It's called, our program, one of our programs, its a CCP program. It's the career and college compass. I'm sorry the collegiate career compass. CCP. I'm sorry, collegiate compass program. I apologize.

And there we teach the kids about their core courses. The ACT. How the ACT and the SAT how to match to your core courses. Not your GPA, your core courses. So those and how the clearing house and how all those things work. That's the CCP program. How to get all your stuff, woop woo woo. And with the CCP program. We went to Rice and it was called gamebreakers and we talked about and I was telling them about those things and how to be aware but that's a good one. Pick your stuff. And those are situations in conferences where you get the young kids and that's how you get them and that's how you start them. Right there boom, right there boom.

I want to try to hit the athletes. You know, cause athletes are a strong part of this world with who they know and who they can touch. So I'm trying to do it with all athletes. All sports all athletes. It's like a fraternity, you know. It's like athletes...I think its just keep going. Keep out there just putting these conferences and putting these STEM programs, these computer labs, career and college programs.

Cause with these things, it's not only about the money, it's about the relationship. It's about what I gave you, you gave me and we can work, and how to get better and that's what I think it's about. That's how I feel it gets better.

Just having these conferences. You don't have to put your money in it but I bet you, you found a way to run your foundation that you can do it.

I'm going to teach you how to set up your 529s, your kids' plans and all your insurance plans. If you get your son his insurance now, it's only like \$2K a year, a year! C'mon man. If he has that til he's like 50, 30, I don't want him to pass away but what if hes like 70 years old or what if hes 55 or 33 with this insurance plan he's had since he was 5. He's generationally now changing the whole course. That's it.

And see us Black brothers have to stick together. Because we have to be better than other folk anyhow.

Well it's like a fraternity...when you retire you part of a small group because were part of the 1% of people, play professional basketball or whatever, you know, it's just like a fraternity.

Yea...I practice with them [teams playing on court] and bring my experience with them and they're just the coaches and I give them technical skills. And I also have the women's pilates class over here. [discussing the church gym that he manages]

Yea, going back to the Players Association...we like to stay in touch with each other. We meet on a monthly basis. We do charities for the kids, golf tournaments, and all that. But it's just to keep in touch and help out folks when we can because sometimes the guys get on hard times because...some of them didn't even graduate. And a lot of them have to end up doing stuff that's...not business like, you know, they end up like selling cars or something like that. But there's nothing wrong with that. But the thing is a lot of them don't get the degree and they need help. And this is a way to help...being apart of the Association. And now the NBA is trying to help the guys that's retired and do a lot more for them.

Also they give scholarships for their kids, the players' kids.

We were the first, the biggest one in the nation, Houston Chapter...from that, they have others now and they try to emulate us but the thing is we need them in all major cities where the guys live...where we can come together.\*

Well we can say a little bit more about the Retired Players Association. It's really a good thing. It keeps us focused. It keeps our minds on the community. And it keeps us wanting to keep giving back. This is our platform now to give back. To help kids, help communities.

Keep kids out of gangs, you know. Go talk to them at schools. Be mentors to them...this is my church. I mentor the guys here, when they get wayward, and then like in the summertime I have open gym and half the guys that come in here wear ankle bracelets. I gotta sign their papers because...their probations officers, oh you gonna be with Mr. Steve well you gonna be alright...that's how it is.

When I started this 4 or 5 years ago, the crime of breaking in cars went down. Way down! About 80% down because they were here, you know. Because all that nervous energy, they needed to do something.

So I opened up the gym because church ain't nothing if you're not within the community because most of the people in the church don't even live in the neighborhood no more. They done moved out and came back in. So a lot of people don't realize, most of the people that come to church, 90% don't even live in the neighborhood so if you're supposed to opening your doors to everybody, you gotta do something for the community.

You're accountable to your brother. You know my rules. I'm not gonna wane. So that's what it was. They got to respect me because I don't bend the rules and they see this was a safe place to be.

If you're hungry, they even feed ya. So right here it's the same. These kids, a lot of them athletic, if they can't do nothing, they gonna find some kind of ways to do something. Either good or bad. So provide some kind of avenue where they can do good. So that's why we're here.

It's all about the kids, it's not about me.

Well...it's not per se raising the money but you need money to do things...and see, if we're gonna help somebody out. We gotta make sure we can do it in the right manner. So that's why the funds are needed, but see the thing about it, the funds are really needed to help the organization. We find an organization and then we try to help them out. It's not really per se for us. It's just...if we got a struggling organization, like the charities, cause we 501C3, we got to go right, cause that's government. So we stay on point but..we

earmark for employees to run it but everything goes to the charities. Cause that's how people write it off.

We talk and trade stories, and all that. Which is always nice to hang around. It also gives us an opportunity to network. Cause a lot of people don't know what the next one doing. And see we can network and help each other out and...businesses. Cause a lot of them own businesses. And like myself, im a city official. A lot of them doing construction and stuff like that. They come to me and man, what do I need to do? Do this, do that, you know. So we help each other out. That's basically it.\*

Well...#1 it gives us a presence in the community to do more things for the community. So when we do something good. We let it be known what we're doing and why we're here. We're actually here for the community, #1. But we can make our community better. Because there's such a need for mentors, especially in the Black community. For kids thats struggling and you got so many single family homes that don't have a male figure that they can look up to, so all that's part of, bringing it together, for the community.

But I would assume membership is important cause that what drives the organization. You gotta have members. And if you are a member, they try to get as many retired guys, as early as possible, instead of waiting on down the road. Get em in, get em activated on any level.

Well...it would be a supportive member. And I'm the Secretary of the organization, of the Houston chapter. We have 11 chapters and the Houston chapter being the largest and over the years been the most successful.

Guys could fall on hard times, or you need some help with your kids, school, the DeBusschere scholarship fund. They have now, out of Detroit, the coach. He was the

first African-American basketball coach for the Detroit Pistons. He has a scholarship fund. So there's a lot of things that's in the works.

Well their board [executive board] is to assist and to help us do projects or whatever initiatives that we have to put it in play and make sure it get out there and it works. We try to day on any board, there's three things that we look for: wealth, wisdom, and work. The first thing is wealth. Part of the board is to be a fundraiser. And if you don't have the wealth we expect you to be a worker. Then if you don't work then we look for the experience and wisdom...they meet and discuss things, you know, we have certain things that come down from the national office out of Chicago. That we have to adhere to. Like so many meetings a year, so many fundraisers, what we do in the community.

And I would like to see, I'm sure everybody else would like to see, the majority of us would like to see anyway, more ownership. More in-office people. People that make decisions. And we do a lot better than a lot of other professional sports, you know. But we're nowhere near where we should be.

I mean, if somebody's doing you wrong, are you just supposed to sit there and take it? If you feel like you've been falsely accused, are you just supposed to sit there or are you going to fight...my old coach used to say, go out in the world and stand up and fight, or something like that. He had a saying...and that's true today. No, I don't agree with that.

If you think you're right, you stand up for it, you fight for it. Because if you don't believe in what you're saying and what you're doing, then I'm not going to believe it...I never forget when I was trying to sell insurance, I was just all fired up ready to go, and this guy stopped me one day and said, do you have this insurance plan? I said, no [laughter]...And he wasn't ugly. I was just young. It was my first year. He said, boy look here, you can't sell something you don't believe in. and I said, man...now right there, I said, look here, either I'm gonna do this right or I'm a get out. And I got out. [laughter]



cause I didn't see myself being that involved. So I mean, some people just to be talking. Just to hear themselves talk. And unfortunately in this country, money talks, BS walks.

Young players now, they need to learn, the Players Association, the National Basketball Players Association, the National Basketball Retired Players Association, the Globetrotter, the WNBA, it doesn't matter. You should know your history. You should know the history of the organization.\*

Like Kareem...we're standing on the shoulders of giants. Now he made that statement but he knew his history. He went back and researched that. Talked about the Rens. How many guys ever talk about the Rens? That was a big bold step. And you got to know your history more than just what somebody tells you. Or what you've seen in the front, right here in the immediate.

You tell me that I'm a slave, and that I'm from a slave. Well if that's all I know, then I'm gonna believe what you say. But if I know there's something else to that. I go back and look at my history, I say wait a minute, the first slave came into the United States in 1820, 1819. Jesus Christ died 2000 years ago. They changed a lot of things in the Bible 325 AD. What was going on over yonder? You telling me, my whole life history, you telling me that, in 1612 or whenever they brought over the first slaves to the islands or whatever. Well if I don't go back and investigate, look at, and study for myself...you can't always rely on somebody else. The pastor, the police, the coach, they may be limited in their experience.\*

That would be my advice to young players. Hey man don't just be running around here on the court, as soon as you hurt a leg, back hurt, you can't perform, and you don't know anything else. And you go back to the streets cause that's all you know.

That's why I like what John Lucas is doing with a lot of guys, man he mentors a lot of guys. I go to John's camp quite often...he talk to them like they got a tail [laughter] but boy he get them up and he make them understand that...there's something other to this game than just running up and down the court. You got to be smart about it.

Man, I wanted to be a coach. Like my coach, my high school coaches were...I wanted to give back in that way.

Well see the first thing is our Players Association mainly got started fraternizing with the old guys. How are you? Are you ok? Talk to me. Because once we all were traded or gone. We lost contact. Now we got contact back. And so that's one biggest thing.

Because we still listen. You got your godfather, Howard. He was in the league for a bit then the Globetrotters. He traveled. He saw that even with the Globetrotters, he still couldn't go into certain hotels, okay. You got...Harvey Catchings, Major Jones, you still listen. You still don't know everything. And that's your sounding board. What do you think? There's nothing wrong with asking, what do you think? You just sit there, and just [gestures as though actively listening] feed off.\* {generational wisdom}

In some cities they are. Some of the players, former players, go back and talk. Case and point, Fellowship of Christian Athletes. They go and speak to the kids but it's the Christian kids.

APPENDIX G

TABLE 1: PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Pseudonym	Race/ Ethnicity	Age	Seasons of Pro. Exp.	Team(s) Played For	NBPA Exp.	NBRPA Chapter	Highest Level of PA Exp.
Ben Brown	Black	62	14	Rockets, Hornets, Blazers, 76ers	Y	Houston	Player Rep.
Bert Edmonds	Black	79	8	Knicks, Celtics, Braves	Y	Chicago	Player Rep.
Hank Glover	African American	66	12	76ers, Nets, Bucks, Clippers	Y	Houston	Director of Player Programs
Stephen Hughes	African American	74	5	Globetrotters	N	Houston	Secretary
Sam Johnson	Black	N/A	7	Globetrotters	N	Houston	Member
Donald Robinson	African American	38	14	Hornets, Heat, Cavaliers, Celtics, Timberwolves, Clippers	Y	Houston	Player Rep.