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Abstract

The NCAA has a long history embedded in racism due to systemic abuse and unfairness for people of color. This paper will examine how the NCAA is a racist institution, which includes exclusion of most blacks from the college system while still making revenue off of black athletes, not valuing the education of these black athletes, and tight control over these black athletes by the NCAA and college institutions. All of these factors create a different educational experience than white students receive. The paper will also highlight multiple cases showing this and propose the course of actions for changes to be made.

Keywords

NCAA, Structural Racism, Racism in NCAA, HBCU

Disciplines

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Comments

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The NCAA: A Racist Institution

Institutional racism is a major problem in our society today, and the NCAA is not an exception. Institutional Racism is defined as “the systematic distribution of resources, power and opportunity in our society to the benefit of people who are white and the exclusion of people of color” (Plain). Institutional racism is present throughout the framework of our society, from our criminal justice system to our education system. The NCAA has a long history embedded in racism due to systemic abuse and unfairness for people of color. This paper will examine how the NCAA is a racist institution, which includes exclusion of most blacks from the college system while still making revenue off of black athletes, not valuing the education of these black athletes, and tight control over these black athletes by the NCAA and college institutions. All of these factors create a different educational experience than white students receive. The paper will also highlight multiple cases showing this and propose the course of actions for changes to be made.

The NCAA stands for the National Collegiate Athletic Association and it was founded in 1910. Its role is to oversee and organize all athletics played at the collegiate level, being made up of 24 sports and 1,117 schools (Rollins, 2018). The NCAA includes strict rules and regulations for student athletes and colleges, most notably is that student athletes are not allowed to be paid. The NCAA made \$1.1 Billion in 2017, with a majority of that coming from TV deals, championships and tournaments, yet the

players receive no financial compensation (Garcia, 2018). They are given academic scholarships that cover the costs of tuition, but they see none of the profitable revenue they are responsible for the NCAA making. Until recently, they were not allowed to even market off of their names in private, which the NCAA only allowed due to increasing pressure from state laws. While playing a sport at this level, many players do not have the time to work a job, so the cost of attendance does not help them with outside expenses. Players and schools have faced long-lasting repercussions for violating these rules, with multiple players having been suspended or banned, and college teams have also been suspended and had wins vacated. These strict rules and regulations are targeted at college athletes who are a majority black, while the average students, who are majority white, do not operate on a daily basis under any guidelines.

On top of the \$1.1 billion having been made by the NCAA organization, about 30 Division 1 schools bring in at least \$100 million in athletic revenue. Hill says, “Almost all of these schools are majority white—in fact, black men make up only 2.4 percent of the total undergraduate population of the 65 schools in the so-called Power Five athletic conferences. Yet black men make up 55 percent of the football players in those conferences, and 56 percent of basketball players” (Hill 2019). This means that blacks are not even represented at these universities, yet they are the ones bringing in all of the university’s revenues. In this scenario, it implies they do not care about the academics of these black athletes, they simply care about the money they can bring in from exploiting their athletic talent. This is institutional racism by definition, as systematic unfairness of youth education does not give blacks the proper education to move on to these universities, but they still want the black athletes to bring in revenue,

even though only less than 3% of them make up the college. Furthermore, they are not giving money to any of these athletes for the billions of dollars in revenue they are bringing in.

The systematic unfair treatment of blacks by the NCAA, is further displayed by black student athletes struggling at a higher rate academically. Through the years, there have been several academic minimum requirements put in place. To understand how this is an example of institutional racism, one must know the history behind it. In the beginning, black male athletes were not permitted to play NCAA sports with white men. Overtime, they were permitted at the same time academic minimums were put in. This was meant to stop integration, as it was seen that blacks at the time before civil rights would not be able to keep up academically. One piece of literature on the matter says,

“It has become impossible to deny the institutional racist practices of the NCAA—arbitrary cutoff scores and academic requirements that run counter to the average academic achievement of black male athletes. Much has been written about the not-so-coincidental alignment of more stringent academic standards with the influx of black college athletes. Systematic disadvantages have stifled the academic progression of black male athletes with their average GPAs always trailing behind their white male counterparts; the same applies to their test scores.” (Nwadike, et al 2016, p. 543.)

When these eligibility standards were put in, the NCAA was aware of College Board findings that African-American students tested a full 100 points lower than whites on the SAT (Covell and Barr 2001). In essence, the NCAA originally started these policies around the time when integration was occurring, with the hope that they could exclude black athletes while not formally doing so.

Even though the policies had racist roots, they are still in place today. In 2016, the NCAA increased the GPA standard for an entering collegiate athlete from 2.0 to 2.3. There has been clear evidence that this eligibility requirement is disparately hurting

black athletes. Nwadike, et al (2016) discusses prop 16 which raised the minimum from GPA from 2.0 to 2.5, which led to 46% of black high school seniors reaching the requirements versus 67% of white high school seniors reaching the requirements. Because of those statistics, it was proven to violate the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which defends against disparate treatment of any group in the nation. With this proof that the policies disparately affect black students, it is clear that these policies are institutionally racist. The fact they are still enacted today, even after the Civil Rights Act proved it illegal, is an example of the institutional racism posed by the NCAA.

The NCAA includes disparate treatment against black athletes through the graduation rates. London says, "A recent survey conducted by the Chronicle of Higher Education indicates that at nearly half of 248 Division I colleges fewer than one-third of black male athletes graduate in a six-year period. At eighty of the colleges, fewer than one in every four black male athletes receives a degree in six years--a graduation rate two times lower than their white counterparts" (London 1992, p. 10). Despite being older data, the rate is disturbing, as a majority of these black athletes were getting into the colleges for their athletic talents, than never go on to graduate. This makes their academic scholarship a waste, as they will never reap the benefits of a college degree. London discusses a few reasons why the graduation rate is so low for black athletes in relation to whites. Once they show signs of athleticism at a young age, from high school on they are given many privileges that come with being recruited except for a good quality education. Their attention becomes drawn all on sports as they get pushed through high school classes. These black athletes have as much of an ability as white athletes to become good students, but the universities are more concerned with the

revenue from sports and will not make any strides to get these black athletes to focus on school. This disparate treatment is another example of institutional racism, as the NCAA only cares about the money it can generate from these athletes, not what they are actually learning or if they will finish with a degree at all.

Black athletes are also affected in their daily lives by this structural racism. Many black athletes face discrimination at these predominately white institutions. Negative stereotypes are associated with these black athletes as they are seen as intellectually inferior by coaches, classmates, and professors, and it causes a more hyper-surveillance of them which gives these institutions and coaches control over the athletes who are making them money. Comeaux says, "Black male athletes in particular tend to be more susceptible to these surveillance practices, largely because they are viewed more negatively by the campus community than their non-Black counterparts regarding their intellectual abilities" (Comeaux 2018, p. 33.). When black athletes are given negative stereotypes, this creates a negative racial environment on the campus, a low expectation of academic achievement, and a fear associated with the increased surveillance. When black athletes feel they are being watched, it creates more of a fear of losing their scholarships, which are the only thing keeping a majority of them at these institutions. This scholarship becomes a contractual obligation to adhere to, and when they are feeling that all their steps are watched, this creates extra pressure that hinders their academic and collegiate experience. This disparate treatment is targeted at black male athletes and prevents them from receiving the same academic experience as their white counter parts. This form of excessive control is a connection to slavery. The black student athletes are the source of all of their money, while they are not paying them

anything. The free tuition is used as power over them, as the athletes feel like they cannot make a mistake or they will lose their scholarship. This power and control tactics are very similar to slavery, as slave owners used control over their black slaves for their free labor that made them their money. Also, Beamon discussed more examples of racism against black athletes, saying even though they make up a majority of the teams, there is stacking of black athletes at skilled positions as opposed to thinking positions and an absence of blacks in decision-making and leadership positions at universities. Black athletes are treated as intellectually inferior (2014).

There are also several individual cases surrounding the NCAA and racist practices. One NCAA policy change became known as, "The Rich Paul Rule." Gibbs discusses the rule as if a player wants to return to college after consulting an agent, the agent must pass an in-person exam administered at the NCAA headquarters, be certified by the NBA Players Association for three years, and have a bachelor's degree. Rich Paul is an agent that owns Klutch Sports where he represents superstars like LeBron James, Anthony Davis, and Draymond Greene (2019). The catch is: Rich Paul does not have a college degree and is also black. The NCAA defense to this rule is that they do not want student athletes to be taken advantage of, so they need to pass a test and have a college degree. Meanwhile there already is a test to confirm agents, and a college degree should have no effect. Many agents with college degrees have taken advantage of athletes. This rule is structurally racist as black men are less likely to have college degrees, as it has been seen through enrollment and graduation rates. This rule also relates to the control factor, the NCAA seeks more power and control over these athletes while preaching that a degree is the end goal, which is mostly to avoid having

to discuss the low graduation rates of these black student athletes. In further evidence of this power structure, Gibbs discusses how with the “1 and Done” rule nearing an end, (the rule which makes players play in the NCAA for one year before joining the NBA), the NCAA is nervous it is losing their power over these black athletes (2019). Right before the “Rich Paul Rule” came out, Rich Paul was engaged in convincing a high school player to skip the NCAA and make money in advertising. The NCAA feels they are losing control over its black athletes, which again connects to slavery, showing the institutional racism.

Another case example comes from Ohio State football player Chase Young and Memphis basketball player James Wiseman. Both are projected top picks in next drafts by their prospective sports. Young took a loan from a friend to fly his girlfriend to the Rose Bowl, and Wiseman took a loan of \$11,500 from his high school coach (Johnson 2019). Meanwhile, Georgia quarterback Jake Fromm receives access to a Georgia farm from Georgia fans that is worth 1.2 million whenever he pleases. Young was suspended, Wiseman was ruled ineligible, and Fromm has not received any discipline. They are all equal NCAA rule violations, as the players are receiving benefits for being an NCAA star, yet Fromm did not get punished. Fromm is white, Young and Wiseman are black. This is another example of tighter surveillance of black athletes and all of their actions, whereas white athletes are not treated the same. It is also the NCAA restraining black athletes that are making them the money. The white quarterback can get away with more than black superstars can. The NCAA does not want to lose control over superstars because then it loses all of its money and revenue. When an organization is not paying a player, yet keeps a strict control over the player’s actions,

similarities to slavery cannot be unnoticed. These rules and regulations do not only apply to all these players on the field or court, but are imposed on every aspect of their life. This control mirrors slavery.

The NCAA is embedded with institutional racism and there must be a course of action for black athletes. This institutional racism is based on the revenue from the black athletes which leads to disparate treatment, as a disproportionate amount of blacks are excluded from the college systems, their education is not valued, and there is tight control over them by the NCAA and institutions. These factors create a parallel experience for black athletes who exists in a world separate from their fellow white classmates. Greene (1984) discussed ways for the NCAA to still make money while giving the players a chance to get a good education too. While she struggles to find a solution to make academics as important of a value for black college athletes, she does propose the NCAA get rid of standardized testing requirements, and revert the GPA minimum to a 1.6, which took multiple testing factors to account. Overall, she suggests paying college athletes in some well deigned scheme, as these two things would get rid of the eligibility disparity and lessen some of the NCAA control.

London (1992) feels there is no way to truly change the NCAA to be academic focused as long as they are accumulating massive profits. Even the increased transparency of graduation rates will just lead to colleges pushing black athletes through regardless of how well they do in school. His solution is based on seeing a blurring of amateur and professional athletes at the Olympics. The large athletic programs could potentially be disaffiliated from colleges. There could be some connection to colleges, like the teams can rent out the college's fields, and students from the college can be the

team's fans, but this way academic programs can retain academic integrity without having to give concessions to athletes. He says,

“If this proposal were adopted, the disparity in graduation rates would become irrelevant. There would be no need for compromising admission or graduation requirements. The adoption of this recommendation would eliminate the cynicism that now surrounds student athletes and their academic programs. And, finally, we would be able to address more honestly our responsibility to provide quality higher education to black Americans.” (London 1992, p. 11).

Perhaps if colleges and sports were separated, we would be able to address academics separately as then sports would not be valued higher than academics. Also, as he points out, the societal issue of low black graduation and admission rates would be more transparent.

Though separating from the NCAA seems unrealistic due to their massive power and control, one feasible solution could be black athletes going to play at Historically Black College or University, or HBCU's. The HBCU's have lesser quality facilities and less press than power five conference schools. But if all black athletes were to go there, these schools would become dominant at sports, and revenue would increase. This move to HBCU's would get black athletes out of Predominately White Institutions where the majority of the team is black while less than 3% of the school is black. They are bringing revenue to schools that do not represent them. Research has shown that HBCU's provide a more welcoming and supportive environment for black students that is not present at predominately white institutions (Van Camp et. Al 2009). They can escape cultures of racism on the campuses and can escape the control the NCAA has on them. If black athletes cannot make their own money and are just making money for the NCAA and Predominately White Institutions, they should just make this money for HBCU's. The timing now is also perfect. A new rule recently passed allows athletes to

be able to make money marketing their own image and likeness. If the only way they can make money is off their own image, they might as well do it at an HBCU that appreciates their cultural heritage.

For many reasons, the NCAA is racist institution. Evans (1999) compares the NCAA to a plantation saying since the breakthrough of blacks in the universities in the '60s, with the domination of black athletes ever since, every major rule legislated has impacted blacks more than any other race of students. Their rules and regulations disproportionately affect black athletes. The system is not built for black students so most of these schools are majority white, yet the sports teams, which bring in a majority of the school's revenues, are mostly black. The graduation rate for black athletes is disproportionately low, showing their academics are not valued. The NCAA and universities keep a tight control over these black athletes, while they make money off them but do not pay them, which represents modern slavery. They are treated as mentally inferior on the playing field and in the classrooms, creating a college experience for black athletes that is much different for them. Some solutions were pointed out centered around paying athletes, separating sports from colleges, but the best solution would be for black athletes to play for HBCU's and make themselves and these institutions money in an environment where their education is valued.

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