

## *Journal of Issues in* **Intercollegiate Athletics**

### **A Critical Race Theory Analysis of Big-Time College Sports:**

### **Implications for Culturally Responsive and Race-Conscious Sport Leadership**

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*The growing commercialization of major intercollegiate athletics in the United States (U.S.) has created a values paradox between the rhetoric purported by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) and its member institutions and the realities of their practices. Similar to the broader U.S., the structure of the NCAA often reinforces widespread racial hierarchies and inequities. Racial disparities are reflected in graduation rate gaps among and between college athletes and non-athlete college students, disproportionate representations on high revenue-generating teams and concurrent underrepresentation in athletic leadership positions, and numerous adverse impacts associated with economically exploitative policies. The aforementioned trends are a few of the many problematic outcomes that are a byproduct of institutional arrangements rooted in color-blind racism. Using critical race theory (CRT), this manuscript examines how de facto race neutral policies, practices, and enforcements create and perpetuate disparate racial outcomes. In particular, the following five NCAA policies and practices are analyzed: 1) amateurism, 2) initial eligibility standards, 3) graduation success rates (GSRs) and academic progress rates (APRs), 4) lack of racial diversity in leadership positions, and 5) lack of required cultural competency trainings for athletic leadership and staff. Implications for culturally responsive and race-conscious sport leadership are presented and discussed.*

*Keywords: critical race theory, sport leadership, culturally responsive pedagogy, intercollegiate athletics, National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA)*

The structure of intercollegiate athletics in the United States (U.S.) has evolved significantly from informal student-led activities during the late 19th century to a multi-billion dollar sport entity in the early 21st century (Byers, 1995; Nocera & Strauss, 2016). Although, commercialization has been present since its inception, the level of athletic commodification has increased exponentially as evidenced in the most recent 14-year media rights deal with Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS) Sports and Turner Broadcasting System (TBS) networks worth an estimated \$10.8 billion (NCAA, 2017). Given these significant changes, the National Collegiate Athletic Association<sup>1</sup> (NCAA) has morphed accordingly. From 1906 to 2017, the association shifted from a small group of Ivy League presidents overseeing policies to a multi-level corporate bureaucratic entity with multiple stakeholders within and beyond institutions of higher education (e.g., university presidents, conference commissioners, commercial sponsors, etc.). Despite the adaptation of its business practices, one major area where the NCAA has fallen short in terms of effective sport leadership lies in their inability to address prevailing issues of race and racism. Similar to broader U.S. society, the demographics of athletic participants within the NCAA has changed drastically from being all-White during its inception in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century through the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to individuals representing a range of racial<sup>2</sup> and ethnic backgrounds including Black, Latinx, Asian, Asian American, Indigenous, Native American, Pacific Islander, and Multi-Racial in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Conversely, the racial composition of top-tier leadership in the NCAA and at its member institutions has remain largely White and subsequently policies and practices have resulted in disparate racial outcomes via color-blind racism (Lapchick, Malveaux, Davison, & Grant, 2016). As a result, the purpose of this manuscript is to incorporate a critical race theory (CRT) analysis of the impact of the NCAA's color-blind racism policies and practices and more importantly offer a call to action for culturally responsive and race-conscious college sport leadership.

Within the NCAA's mission statement, the organization touts the prioritization of fairness and "student"-athlete well-being (NCAA, 2017). The NCAA has consistently clung to the message that they are an exemplar in the sport industry upholding the banner of the collegiate model of athletics (Brand, 2006). Despite this claim of exemplary status, the NCAA's lack of commitment to racial diversity and equity is reflected in its leadership composition, policy creation and enforcement, informal practices, and related disparate outcomes (discussed in greater detail later) (Brooks & Althouse, 2013; Cooper, 2012; Harper, 2016). A major issue with the current arrangement lies in the fact that race and ethnicity are situated on the *periphery* as opposed to being *centralized*. This subordination of race is particularly disconcerting given social, cultural, and economic importance of athletics at NCAA membership institutions (a majority of which are historically White institutions (HWIs)). Juxtaposed with the racial

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<sup>1</sup> The current analysis will focus on the Division I Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) level of the NCAA, which is the most visible, profitable, and corporate functioning unit of the association.

<sup>2</sup> For the purposes of this study, the analysis will focus on Black college athletes and the underrepresentation of Blacks in sport leadership positions within the NCAA due to their historical exclusion as well as their significant representation in the two highest profile and revenue-generating sports of football and basketball (both men's and women's). The authors acknowledge racial diversity expands across a range of groups (racial, cultural, and ethnic), but examining groups aside from Blacks was beyond the scope of this analysis.

composition of the two highest revenue-generating sports of football and men's basketball and concurrent graduation gaps, the lack of explicit focus on issues of race and equity within the NCAA mission statement is revealing. Similar to the foundation of the U.S., without the racial exploitation of talented Blacks, the NCAA would not exist in its current form and thus addressing racial inequities is imperative in order to more fully uphold its purported values of diversity and inclusion (Cooper, 2012; West, 1993).

As opposed to centralizing the importance of racial equity, the NCAA references diversity and inclusion separately as an ancillary core value and clusters multiple identity groups in a single category (i.e., NCAA Inclusion Department and related resources) with a prioritization on the collegiate model of athletics (Brand, 2006; NCAA, 2017). The NCAA's broad based approach to diversity reflects a growing trend in sporting spaces, educational environments, and society at large that seeks to shift attention away from specific racial inequities and emphasize issues of multiculturalism (i.e., the deflection of focus from "Black Lives Matter" to the more socially acceptable and racially invalidating terminology of "All Lives Matter"). The aforementioned trends at both the meso (NCAA) and macro (HWIs in the U.S.) levels underscore the prevailing ideology of abstract liberalism, which according to Bonilla-Silva (2010) serves as one of the central frames of color-blind racism whereby the systemic impacts of race and racism on both individual and group outcomes are disregarded and subordinated. More specifically, the enactment of color-blind policies by sport organizations that ignore the detrimental impacts of systemic racism and prevailing racialized norms in society are likely to reinforce dominant racial ideologies, hierarchies, and inequities (Bimper & Harrison, 2015; Cooper, Cavil, & Cheeks, 2014; Singer, 2005).

While the NCAA offers a number of well-intentioned statements, policies, and practices, the persistent racial academic performance gaps (Cooper, 2012), disproportionate number of Black college athletes represented in football and basketball (men's and women's) and concurrent underrepresentation in athletic leadership positions (Cunningham, 2010), disparate impact of economic deprivation on Black college athletes (Huma & Staurowsky, 2012), and consistent issues related to racially stigmatizing and discriminatory athletic departments and campus climates (Brooks & Althouse, 2013) underscore the need for a broad base critical examination of color-blind NCAA policies and practices. Previous research has analyzed how the NCAA's lack of emphasis on race and racism has contributed to negative outcomes for historically Black college/universities (HBCUs) (Cooper et al., 2014) as well as the impact of color-blind racist messaging and strategizing (i.e., omitting race) at the member institutional level creates disparate racialized outcomes (Bimper & Harrison, 2015). As such, the current analysis seeks to build upon the aforementioned literature by critically analyzing select NCAA policies and practices that result in racial disparities via color-blind racism.

## **College Sport Reform Efforts**

The contested debate over the role of intercollegiate athletics within broader educational missions has been longstanding and dates back to the NCAA's inception in 1906 (e.g., The Carnegie Foundation Report in 1929, the adoption and revocation Sanity Code in 1948, American Council on Education (ACE) report in 1952, etc.) (Byers, 1995; Sack & Staurowsky, 1998). However, prior the 1960s, the NCAA primarily focused on regulating safety and competitive parity issues related to intercollegiate athletics such as athletic eligibility, recruitment, and constitutive sport rules. Consequently, ethical issues related to breaches in

academic integrity began to arise and resulted in the creation of policies designed to enhance academic standards for prospective and participating college athletes (Byers, 1995; Sack & Staurowsky, 1998; NCAA, 2017). From the creation of the 1.6 rule in 1965 to the establishment of the Academic Performance Program (APP) in early 2000s (described in greater detail later), the NCAA has attempted to maintain an image as an educational-based entity upholding the collegiate model of athletics (Brand, 2006). Contrarily, their organizational actions particularly at the Division I Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) level have been more similar to professional sport organizations in the U.S. with less emphasis on traditional educational values (e.g., academic integrity, intellectual development, critical thinking skills regarding societal norms, etc.) (Byers, 1995; Sack and Staurowsky, 1998; Zimbalist, 2001).

Dating back to the implementation of the 1.6 rule in 1965 (later eliminated in 1972), which required incoming college athletes to earn a high school grade point average (GPA) and baseline college admission test scores that would predict a minimum college GPA of 1.6 (Byers, 1995), critics asserted low academic standards coupled with increased commercialization would result in unethical actions by institutions to secure talented athletes with little to no regard for their academic preparedness and development (Davis, 1992; Donnor, 2005; Sack, 2009; Sack & Staurowsky, 1998). Later when Proposition 48 was instituted in 1983, a standard requiring all incoming college athletes to earn either a 700 Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) or 15 American College Test (ACT) score and maintain a minimum 2.0 high school GPA in 11 core academic courses for freshman athletic eligibility (NCAA, 2014), critics argued these culturally bias standardized tests would result in access discrimination for certain groups such as Black prospective college athletes who attended underfunded K-12 schools (Cooper, 2012; Davis, 1992; Donnor, 2005; Sellers, 2000). More recently, in the early 2000s the NCAA created the APP, which included the use of graduation success rates (GSRs; six-year average of college athlete graduation rates disaggregated by team/sport, race, and gender) and academic progress rates (APRs; one year snapshot of progress towards degree) as metrics to enhance institutional accountability for college athlete academic outcomes (NCAA, 2014).

In response to these pressing issues and related topics, numerous faculty-led groups emerged to serve as watchdogs of the NCAA's academic reform efforts. Groups such as The Drake Group (TDG) (founded in 1990), The Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics (founded in 1989), and the Coalition on Intercollegiate Athletics (COIA) (founded in 2002) have primarily focused on shifting intercollegiate athletics to a more academic-centered operation with more faculty oversight (see Sack (2009) for an extensive discussion of these organizations and their respective models). TDG's goals focus on institutional accountability and transparency, academic integrity of university/college educational missions, and serving as one of the leading voices on reform efforts in college sport. The Knight Commission's "one-plus-three model" emphasizes presidential control and leadership with a focus on academic integrity, fiscal integrity and institutional accountability. While COIA's framework centralizes faculty governance in the following foci areas: a) academic integrity, b) athlete welfare, c) athletics governance, d) fiscal responsibility, and e) overcommercialization. Each of the aforementioned organizations view the commercialization of big-time college sports as incompatible with foundational purposes of higher education (Sack, 2009).

Additional groups such as the College Athletes Rights and Empowerment Faculty Coalition (CARE-FC), National College Players Association (NCPA), and College Athletes Players Association (CAPA) have emphasized the importance of increasing college athletes' rights, access to equitable compensation, increased medical coverage, and educational

opportunities and support both during and beyond athletic eligibility (CAPA, 2017; CARE-FC, 2017; NCPA, 2017). Even though, each of the aforementioned college reform groups possess strengths and have contributed to a more equitable college sport landscape, a major limitation of each organization is the lack of emphasis on or centralization of race and prevailing racial hierarchies within the NCAA structure. Despite a few notable exceptions (Comeaux, 2013; Cooper, 2016; Davis, 1992; Hawkins, 2010), much of the college sport reform recommendations have been void of an explicit recognition of and attention on the role of race in organizational protocol and procedures. Even previous race-conscious critics have primarily focused on the principle of amateurism or broader campus climate issues while omitting an in-depth critical analysis of interlocking policies and practices that undergird the NCAA's collegiate model of athletics. Thus, the current manuscript fills this gap in the literature and offers a comprehensive and innovative approach to sport leadership focused on culturally responsive and race-conscious strategies grounded in critical race theory (CRT).

## Critical Race Theory and Sport Leadership

In a 2005 issue of the *Journal of Sport Management*, Dr. John N. Singer called for the need to address epistemological racism in sport management. In particular, the author articulated the need for sport management researchers to incorporate race-based epistemologies, theories, and frameworks to better understand the ways in which race, racism, power, and privilege influence organizational arrangements and outcomes (Singer, 2005). In concert with this charge, the current analysis employs CRT as an analytic tool to investigate how *de facto* race neutral policies and practices that contribute to disparate racial outcomes via color-blind racism. The authors express the importance of a paradigm shift in big-time college sport towards culturally responsive and race-conscious leadership. This analysis expands upon previous literature that has utilized CRT as a framework for critically examining race and racism within sport management organizations and practices (Bimper, 2017; Bimper & Harrison, 2015; Cooper et al., 2014; Donnor, 2005). Given the distinct history of racism against Blacks in the U.S. and particularly in educational and sport contexts (Cooper, 2012), CRT serves as a relevant and illuminating framework to analyze the influence and impact of race and racism within the NCAA on this particular sub-group.

In an effort to examine disparate racial outcomes within the U.S. judicial and legal system, critical legal scholars in 1970s created CRT as explanatory framework to highlight the ubiquitous influence of racism against Black Americans at the hands of judges, lawyers, police officers, politicians, and other state actors (Bell, 1992; Crenshaw et al., 1995; Delgado & Stefanic, 2001). According to the CRT pioneers, the U.S. judicial and legal systems as well as all social institutions (e.g., business, political, education, health, sport, music, and art) were and remain deeply embedded with racist assumptions, values, and beliefs that perpetuate a racial hierarchy whereby Whiteness is privileged and Blackness is positioned as the most inferior. Since its inception, CRT has expanded into the various fields beyond legal studies such as education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Decuir & Dixson, 2005; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Taylor, Gillborn, & Ladson-Billings, 2009) and sport (Hawkins, Carter-Francique, & Cooper, 2016; Hylton, 2008). As the theory has evolved, several core tenets have been identified as central to CRT aims: a) the permanence of racism, b) Whiteness as property norm, c) interest convergence, d) critique of liberalism, e) counter-storytelling and the centrality of experiential knowledge, f) intersectionality and interdisciplinary examinations of racism with other forms of

oppression, subjugation, and marginalization, g) challenges to the dominant ideology, and h) commitment to social justice. Within the current analysis, the tenets of interest convergence, critique of liberalism, and commitment to social justice will be incorporated.

In the case of the NCAA, as a sport governing body established in the pre-Civil Rights era, color-blind racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2010) has been deeply entrenched in its policies and practices (Cooper et al., 2014). The interest convergence tenet of CRT posits the advances of groups that have been subjected to oppression and marginalization only occur when there is an intersection between their interests and benefits to the dominant group (Bell, 1992). Historically, increased opportunities for Blacks in the U.S. has been accompanied with advantages for Whites (i.e., the assimilation of Black athletes at HWIs starting in the 1970s through the modern day providing athletic opportunities for the former while economically benefitting the latter) (Cooper, 2012; Donnor, 2005; Hawkins, 2010; Sellers, 2000). Recommendations provided throughout the manuscript underscore the interest convergence for both the NCAA and Black college athletes as well as HBCUs. The critique of liberalism tenet aims to shift the NCAA's current adherence to color-blind policies towards an honest recognition of systemic racism in the U.S. as well as its role as a sport institution that perpetuates racially disparate outcomes through their actions and inactions.

Furthermore, the authors support critical scholars who have asserted that racism and related discriminatory acts in the post-Civil Rights era should be analyzed based on *outcomes* rather solely based on intent. For example, in concert with CRT scholars, Ibram X. Kendi, author of the national award-winning book titled, *Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America*, postulated the troubling nature of the Civil Rights Act and subsequent misguided hubris regarding true equality along racial lines in U.S. social institutions:

Ignoring the past, the 1964 act ended up principally outlawing “intention to discriminate” in the present. Intent – not outcome – became the preferred proof of discrimination. Evidence of intent to create the racial disparity – like the “white only” sign – became the principal marker of discrimination, not the racial disparity itself, nor the absence of people of color (Kendi, 2017, p. 1).

More germane to the current analysis, the authors do not assert that the NCAA is intentionally engaging in racial discrimination, but rather argue the perpetual disparate *racial outcomes* associated with its current policies and practices serve as a marker of color-blind racism. In a related vein, Wooten (2006) posited race should be viewed beyond the individual level and rather as “a complete social structural system” that must be addressed through strategic organizational processes; from ideological assumptions to procedural practices (p. 191). The author asserted that racial ideology is institutionalized through policy creation and implementation (Wooten, 2006). Thus, in connection to the current analysis, without the recognition of race and racism and subsequent implementation of targeted approaches (read: culturally responsive and race-conscious), the status quo racial ideology and inequities will persist and/or be exacerbated.

Furthermore, the NCAA's ancillary core value of diversity and inclusion suggests it has a level of interest in improving equity related issues. By adopting a CRT approach within their leadership model, organizational strategies could be more effective in demonstrating a commitment to social justice via redressing disparate racial outcomes. A CRT approach to race-conscious sport leadership would also involve the adoption of culturally relevant pedagogies

(CRP) (also referenced synonymously with culturally responsive and culturally sustaining pedagogy). CRP, originally conceived by Ladson-Billings (1995), involves teaching practices that “develop cultural competence, academic excellence, and socio-political consciousness in students” (Lopez, 2011, pp. 76). CRP requires the development of a critical consciousness within educators (including sport leaders), centering culture, language, and experiences to more fully reflect organizational diversity (Lopez, 2011). If the NCAA seeks to continue declaring itself as a leader in college sport, the authors recommend the adoption of culturally responsive and race-conscious approaches.

## **CRT Analysis of NCAA Policies, Practices, and Outcomes**

Within this section, five NCAA policies and practices are analyzed using a CRT lens. First, the policy will be presented and related racial outcomes outlined. Next, the authors offer specific recommendations for altering each policy or practice that reflect a culturally responsive and race-conscious approach. CRT tenets will be incorporated throughout the analysis to highlight the value added of adopting a race-based framework within sport leadership practices. It is also worth noting, in addition to the prescribed changes, the authors recommend the inclusion of race *and* an explicit commitment to the pursuit of redressing organization-related inequities in the NCAA mission statement.

### *The Principle of Amateuism*

The cornerstone of the NCAA’s collegiate model of athletics is the principle of amateurism (Brand, 2006). As outlined in Bylaw, 12.01.1-2 Article, the NCAA (2016a) asserts, “member institution’s athletics programs are designed to be an integral part of the educational program. The student-athlete is considered an integral part of the student body, thus maintaining a clear line of demarcation between college athletics and professional sports” (p. 53). In order to delineate an amateur from a professional athlete, the NCAA (2016a) defines the latter as “one who receives any kind of payment, directly or indirectly, for athletics participation except as permitted by the governing legislation of the Association” (p. 54). According to former NCAA Executive Director, Walter Byers, the term “student-athlete” was not created to protect those who participated in intercollegiate athletics or to prioritize academics, but rather devised to protect the NCAA and its member institutions from costly liability lawsuits related to worker’s compensation claims and related employee benefits (Byers, 1995; Finkel & Martin, 2013; Sack & Staurowsky, 1998; Zimbalist, 2001). Thus, the term “student-athlete” and the rule of amateurism as applied in the NCAA was rooted in economic exploitative motives.

Furthermore, in Bylaw 12.1.2, the NCAA states an individual will relinquish their amateur status if they receive payment (directly or indirectly) based on their athletic skill, access promise of pay, and/or signs a contract to play professionally. Several critics have asserted the grant-in-aid and cost of attendance stipends are indeed a form of payment (despite Bylaw 12.1.01) albeit grossly inequitable based on market value for the services for at least Division I FBS football and men’s (and in some cases women’s) basketball players’ labor (Byers, 1995; Hawkins, 2010; Huma & Staurowsky, 2012; Sack & Staurowsky, 1998; Zimbalist, 2001). According to Huma and Staurowsky (2012), the following formula can be used to determine college athlete market value:

The revenue sharing percentages to determine the fair market of FBS football and men's basketball are based on the minimum percentage of revenue guaranteed by NFL (national football league) players (46.5%) and NBA (national basketball association) players (50%) as agreed to in the current NFL and NBA collective bargaining agreements... Those standards were applied to revenue reported by colleges' and universities' football and basketball revenues to better gauge the value of the college players that participate in these sports (p. 11-12).

Furthermore, the grant-in-aid and cost of attendance stipend (increased after the ruling on the *O'Bannon v. NCAA* case) is primarily based on athletic performance; hence, the term athletic scholarship. All related expectations for grant-in-aid emphasize athletic performance and academic eligibility (based on institutional standards which can be as low as 2.00) as opposed to educational growth and holistic development. Given the fact that Black male college athletes are overrepresented in the two highest revenue-generating sports of football and men's basketball (i.e., in 2014-2015, Black males constituted 56.3% and 60.8% of Division I FBS football and men's basketball players, respectively), the amateurism rule has a disparate impact on this subgroup (Harper, 2016).

During this same time, the NCAA March Madness Basketball tournament generated a payout of roughly \$871 million and the College Football Playoff (CFP) generated a payout to participating conferences between \$55 million and \$83.5 million (CFP, 2017). Regarding March Madness payouts, each conference is awarded a unit for each member team competing in a tournament game (excluding the championship game) and each unit is retained over a six year period (Smith, 2017). For example, according to a Forbes report (Smith, 2017), in 2017 participating conferences received \$264,859 per unit and every year this amount is adjusted based on inflation. The recent men's basketball national championship team, North Carolina Tar Heels, generated \$8.5 million for the Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC) for their five game (units) win streak and this does not include the other eight ACC teams who participated in the tournament (Smith, 2017). Similar for the CFP, when teams compete in playoff or bowl games they generate monies for their respective conferences and subsequently these revenues are divided based on conference rules (Dosh, 2016). Beyond payouts, travels expenses are covered for CFP playoff teams as well as the Cotton Bowl, which this past year resulted in \$2.16 million per team. The success of ACC teams in the 2017 post-season resulted in \$88 million in revenues for the conference (Dosh, 2016).

Relatedly, previous research has documented how Black college athletes are more likely to come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds compared to their non-Black college athlete peers and thus the missed (or rather unjustly prohibited) earnings from not being compensated equitably for their contributions during their intercollegiate careers also serves a compounded disadvantage (Donnor, 2005; Hawkins, 2010; Huma & Staurowsky, 2012; Sellers, 2000). The aforementioned factors combined with culturally unresponsive, unsupportive, and hostile campus climates and commercialized athletic-centric sub-cultures have contributed to poor academic performance levels and educational outcomes for Black college athletes (Beamon, 2008, 2012; Benson, 2000; Brooks & Althouse, 2013; Cooper, 2012, 2016; Donnor, 2005). Proponents of the current policy argue college athletes including Black college athletes are afforded with scholarship monies and access to quality educational opportunities (Brand, 2006). However, an abundance of research and exposés on Black college athletes have debunked this myth and highlighted how many of them often experience educational neglect/academic exploitation via a

lack of adequate learning support, academic clustering, limited course and major selection options, a dearth of opportunities to develop through engagement in co-curricular activities, a lack of post-college career readiness, and a range of mental health challenges during and after their athletic careers conclude (Beamon, 2008, 2012; Benson, 2000; Cooper & Cooper, 2015; Davis, 1992; Donnor, 2005; Smith & Willingham, 2015).

### *Culturally Responsive Recommendations for Addressing The Principle of Amateurism*

In the critically acclaimed film titled, *Schooled: The Price of College Sports* (Finkel & Martin, 2013), renowned college basketball analyst, NCAA critic, and lawyer, Jay Bilas posed the following pertinent question: “What benefit does amateurism have on the student-athlete?” NCAA proponents argue the policy is in place to protect “student”-athletes from being exploited by sport agents and other commercialized entities (Brand, 2006). However, this assertion ignores the fact that the NCAA generates billions of dollars (and millions for numerous stakeholders) from the labor of Division I FBS football and men’s basketball players while not equitably compensating them or allowing them (or their college athlete peers) to generate outside revenues based on their athletic status and abilities during their years in college. Coincidentally, several college students who are non-athletes earn wages and/or salaries while completing their studies and there is little evidence to suggest *earning these monies* (as opposed to the time, energy, and nature of employment) detracts from their academic motivation and performance or hinders the institutions where they are enrolled.

A popular explanation for avoiding equitable payment of college football and men’s basketball players is the notion that Division I FBS programs cannot afford to pay football and men’s basketball players (and in some instances women’s college basketball players) and still support all Olympic sports (see Schwarz (2011) for a detailed debunking of this assertion particularly myths 1, 3, and 5). In a comprehensive economic analysis of these claims, Schwarz (2011) outlined how the equity driven option of compensating Division I FBS football and men’s basketball players based on market value is not only feasible with current resources, but also plausible with new monies that will be procured by these programs via future broadcasting rights deals at the conference level. Related to competitive parity concerns, similar to how the Power 5 conferences have begun to branch off from their Division I Football Championship Subdivision (FCS) peer institutions, we believe the adoption of the proposed recommendations would result in a more comparable classification of programs who can offer certain resources and those who cannot. Schwarz (2011) outlined how certain FBS schools would be able to adopt equitable compensation models and those who could not could reclassify to Division I FCS, Division II, Division III, and/or a new division could be created. Thus, the proposed recommendation would heightened competition among the elite revenue-generating schools and allow for a clear demarcation between and among FBS and non-FBS schools.

Regarding Title IX and related equity concerns with this proposed idea, similar to how postsecondary institutions continue to operate efficiently when certain departments and faculty generate more money and thus earn higher profits, equitable compensation of college athletes based on monies generated could function in the same manner (Huma & Staurowsky, 2012; Schwarz, 2011). Within these models, football and men’s basketball players would earn higher compensation because they generate more revenue similar to how the coaches in these sports are currently paid higher salaries compared to their counterparts who coach non-profit generating sports. It is also worth noting differences in salaries among players has not conclusively

contributed to poorer team outcomes in U.S. professional sports (Frick, Prinz, & Winkelmann, 2003; Ramaswamy & Rowthorn, 1991) and the authors do not surmise big-time college sport would be any different. Notwithstanding, compliance with legal standards and adequate support within athletic departments could be maintained by fiscally responsible and ethical means with effective culturally responsive leadership.

Another explanation (or excuse) offered as a rationale for not compensating college athletes equitably is the racist and ageist stereotype that they would not use the monies wisely (Schwarz, 2011). Ironically, these assertions are often applied when discussing the equitable compensation (market-based value for associated labor/service production – see Huma & Staurowsky (2012) and Schwarz (2011) for detailed discussion) of Division I football and men's basketball (a majority of which are Black) college athletes and not applied to students who are non-athletes who receive large sums of monies from wealthy family members or even individuals who earn exorbitant salaries and wages through various employment endeavors ranging from entertainment to technology. From a CRT lens, this misguided taken-for-granted assertion detracts attention away from the equity focal point and reinforce racial undertones whereby Black college athletes are unjustly perceived as less financially responsible and deserving. This stance stands in stark contrast to free market principles guiding the NCAA's business practices (e.g., broadcasting rights, sponsorships, coaches' salaries, etc.) with the lone exception being not compensating college athletes equitably (Finkel & Martin, 2013).

As a result, the authors offer a number of culturally responsive recommendations for redressing the color-blind racism issue of amateurism. First, we recommend Division I college athletes be allowed the option of either receiving equitable compensation during and/or after their years of eligibility/competition (Schwarz, 2011) and/or having the option to access their earned wages in an educational trust fund upon graduation (Huma & Staurowsky, 2012; NCPA, 2017). Each institution would manage compensation and educational trust funds in a transparent manner similar to how they manage endowments, scholarships, and other university related funds. The use of new monies from upcoming broadcasting rights revenues could be used during the initial implementation of this policy and thereby not removing any current funding away from teams that do not generate a profit (Schwarz, 2011). This policy change would address the athletic exploitation realities that have had a disparate impact on Black college athletes in Division I FBS football and men's basketball (in some cases women's basketball as well). Acknowledging and responding to the fact that a majority of the athletic laborers who generate a lion's share of the NCAA's revenues are Black and many of which emerge from economically disadvantaged backgrounds is the first step (Hawkins, 2010; Finkel & Martin, 2013). Next, it is incumbent upon the NCAA to adopt a culturally responsive and race-conscious approach to foster equitable outcomes and more accurately reflect its core value of fairness especially given the exorbitant coaches' salaries and benefits derived from various stakeholders including universities, corporate sponsors, and local and state economies from these athletic teams. Fairness in this sense is based on equitable compensation off revenues generated while also providing all college athletes with the opportunity and freedom to generate income utilizing their own image, likeness, and status (Huma & Staurowsky, 2012; Nocera & Strauss, 2016; Schwarz, 2011).

Additionally, proposals such as Schwarz, Volante, and Bayne's (2017) compensation model should be considered given its foundational premise on eliminating sub-market wages and providing more equitable economic power to currently disadvantaged groups such as HBCUs and Black college athletes. In essence, the proposal includes the following changes: a) the

dissolution of the amateurism principle, b) the adoption of market-based compensation for college athletes' services (as opposed to current artificial cap via athletic grant-in-aid), c) college athletes' freedom to pursue endorsement deals, d) increased flexibility for college athletes who pursue professional sport draft options (retain college eligibility if undrafted), and e) academic standards maintained by each institution with increased involvement across stakeholders (e.g., college athletes, athletic staff, faculty, etc.) to determine the most effective way to support educational and professional development. The primary strength of this proposal involves reducing the economic exploitation and dependency of marginalized groups (HBCUs and Black college athletes in the highest revenue-producing sports) and systematizing increased economic empowerment among these groups.

In conjunction with the aforementioned strategies, the NCAA should also consider working with member institutions to create financial management and entrepreneurship courses that all college athletes would be required to complete. Similar to how current orientations and trainings are mandated, the NCAA could create a series of courses that inform all college athletes about healthy financial management practices as well as provide a more robust informational session on the system of professional sports including the role of sport agents, contracts, taxes, and related topics. These courses could be collaboratively created by the NCAA, U.S. professional sport leagues (which already offer a version of this type of orientation for their rookies and unionized players in certain leagues), and knowledgeable stakeholders to ensure information about financial literacy, money management, and wealth building is systematically shared to college athletes who would greatly benefit from this process prior to the conclusion of their athletic careers. These courses could also be counted as academic credit and/or be included in athletic related time allocated during the off-season whereby this programming could replace time already spent on academic and athletic related tasks. Given the reality that NBA and NFL players (a significant portion of whom are Black) are more likely to be bankrupt after their professional sport careers conclude (Corben, 2011), this practice would be a culturally responsive and race-conscious approach that would yield benefits to all college athletes and particularly Black college athletes in the highest revenue-producing sports.

Moreover, we assert the NCAA should initiate these efforts as opposed to individual institutions. Spearheading these efforts would add more credence to the NCAA's self-proclaimed aim of using their influence to contribute to the paramount educational experience for all college athletes. Demonstrating a commitment to enhancing financial literacy for all college athletes reflects authentic leadership that is concerned with the well-being of individuals beyond athletic performance or in other words as the NCAA has stated preparing the 98% of the college athletes "who will go pro in something other than sports" (NCAA, 2017). Secondly, by systematizing financial management and entrepreneurship courses, the NCAA would signal to its member institutions, college athletes, and all key stakeholders that this type of education is valued and a part of their core values in terms developing the whole college athlete. Similar to APR standards, all institutions would be expected to implement these courses with the assistance of the NCAA, but they would also have the flexibility to adapt the content based on institutional preferences and resources. The NCAA could review and approve procedures and content delivery to ensure optimal positive outcomes such as the completion of specific workshops/trainings assessing college athletes' understanding of key financial literacy concepts.

The interest convergence tenet of CRT would be reflected in the proposed changes whereby the NCAA could remove the hypocrisy and negative press they receive for exploiting deserving college athletes and concomitantly allow all college athletes to receive rights afforded

to their peers and all other U.S. citizens (Nocera & Strauss, 2016; Finkel & Martin, 2013). Along the same lines, promoting the unionization of college athletes is another culturally responsive leadership approach that would reflect the NCAA's commitment to social justice (CAPA, 2017; NCPA, 2017). By supporting college athletes' rights to negotiate and advocate on their own behalf would mitigate a plethora of current policies that contribute to disparate racial outcomes. As Pulitzer prize-winning author and renowned NCAA critic, Taylor Branch stated, "First give them their rights and after that everything else is an adjustment...until you do that...you are involved in a fraud" (Finkel & Martin, 2013).

Furthermore, if the NCAA seeks to redress persistent racial inequities (as well as ethical and moral dilemmas) associated with its economically exploitative practices, it is recommended that the association more strongly advocate for the NBA and NFL along with its respective players' associations to create and/or strengthen developmental leagues that allow talented athletes to pursue professional sport opportunities at an earlier age. Lobbying these professional sport organizations to create practical feeder systems comparable to Major League Baseball's (MLB) minor league system and professional club systems across the globe (e.g., European Premier Fútbol system, Spanish Basketball club system, etc.) is recommended. Even though coaches and media officials are currently advocating for this change, the NCAA as a governing body has not yet to express a formal stance beyond the status quo on this issue. The authors posit that if the NCAA takes a more explicit stance, then proposed changes would materialize. Although, this recommendation will involve extended coordination, a review of the evolution of the NCAA (and its corresponding relationship with U.S. professional sport leagues) since its inception in 1906 (from an informal student-led group to a small Ivy league-led organization to a multi-billion dollar and multi-conference bureaucratic entity) suggests adaptability to current realities is not an insurmountable task, but rather requires committed authentic leadership.

Thus, the NCAA must not only alter their current practices by eliminating amateurism, but also leverage their influence to change problematic rules at the professional level that disproportionately disadvantage Black college athletes. For example, the "one-and-done" trend in Division I men's college basketball is a result of the relationship between the NBA, its Players' Association (NBAPA) collective bargaining agreement, and the NCAA's commercialized practices. This arrangement is a prime example of the hypocrisy and undermining of the foundational aims of higher education and concurrent exploitation of talented athletes. The creation of this viable alternative would reduce the likelihood of academically underprepared college athletes being recruited or choosing to attend these institutions, which would strengthen the brand of the NCAA and more importantly expand options for prospective college and professional athletes.

### *Initial Eligibility Standards and Related Issues*

As previously noted, Division I football and men's basketball players were predominantly White until the 1970s (Cooper et al., 2014). As the Black college athlete participation numbers began to increase in these high revenue-generating sports, social stereotypes guiding lower academic standards were implemented by the NCAA. Increased criticism led to the NCAA passing a uniform academic rule designed to mirror the standards of its member institutions (e.g., 1.6 rule, Propositions 48, 16, and 42) (Nwadike, Baker, Brackenbusch, & Hawkins, 2016). Many saw this as a racially bias strategy designed to control the influx of Black college athletes (Davis, 1992). For example, in the four years following the

passage of Proposition 48 in 1986, Black college athletic participation steadily decreased. This decrease was primarily attributed to the fact that Black high school athletes performed at lower levels than their White peers on the SAT and ACT standards associated with Proposition 48 (Sellers, 1992). For example, a study conducted by the NCAA (1984) two years prior to passage of Proposition 48 revealed that 54% of Black male and 48% of Black female college athletes (compared to 9% of White males and females), who would not have been eligible for admission under the new legislation, graduated from their respective institutions (Sellers, 1992). The aforementioned statistics suggested SAT and ACT metrics were not accurate predictors (also referred to as culturally and racially bias) for Black college athletes' likelihood of academic progress towards degree completion whereas high school GPA has been found to be a more consistent predictor (Sellers, 1992).

Hence, following the adoption of Proposition 48 backlash followed, including criticism from *The College Board* president, who opposed the arbitrary cutoff and discriminatory practices associated with it (Nwadike et al., 2016). Additionally, John Chaney, former legendary men's basketball coach at Temple University, and John Thompson, Hall of Fame former men's basketball coach at Georgetown University, were direct in their accusations against the NCAA calling Proposition 48 a racist policy designed to punish Black male prospective college athletes. The NCAA posited that its aim with these policy reforms was to combat negative stereotypes associated with college athletes in high revenue-generating sports (read: Black college athletes). However, the authors argue this response reflected what Feagin, Vera, and Batur (2000) describe as White racial framing whereby racist actions are justified in the minds of Whites via distorting perceptions of underlying assumptions privileging Whiteness while ignoring the visceral impacts of systemic racism on Blacks and additional racial groups facing oppressive beliefs, systems, and practices. Increasing academic standards without concurrent efforts to improve preparedness and support for the groups more disparately impacted by these policies and broader systemic oppression reinforces status quo racial hierarchies that disadvantage Blacks.

Following two high profile lawsuits—*Cureton V. NCAA* and *Pryor V. NCAA*—more initial eligibility policy changes were instituted (Nwadike et al., 2016). The new eligibility standards were designed to optimize academic success without adversely affecting students from low-income and historically marginalized backgrounds. Though more core courses were required, a SAT score as low as 400 was acceptable with a specified GPA. This policy remained until 2016 when the introduction of “2.3 or Take a Knee” policy was passed, which reflected the NCAA's most intensive change ever and once again reignited arguments of racism against Black prospective college athletes (Nwadike et al., 2016). With so much focus on the standards set by the NCAA, many overlooked the additional disparity between the standards from incoming college athletes compared to the academic profile of the general student body at these institutions and the racist implications therein. Based on these standards and related practices, it comes as no surprise that Black football and men's basketball college athletes persistently experience the lowest academic performance levels among all college athletes (NCAA, 2016b).

At many of these institutions, upwards of half or more of the high revenue-generating college athletes are granted entry through the special admissions process (Barker, 2012; Smith & Willingham, 2015). Coaches of these teams target players who are athletically valuable, but often have inadequate academic preparation for college (Sellers, 2000). Though failing to meet the standards of the average student admitted to the institution, flexible standards are instituted for these prized recruits (Southall & Staurowsky, 2011). For example, *The Baltimore Sun*, while studying college athletes in the ACC, uncovered during one year at Georgia Institute of

Technology (Georgia Tech) that incoming students averaged a 3.91 high school GPA compared to 21 football players who were specially admitted averaged an incoming high school GPA of 2.19. Five of their specially admitted men's basketball players had high school GPAs ranging from 2.16 to 2.42 (Barker, 2012). Those same five players maintained a group average of 2.16 while enrolled; only two maintained good standing, two were placed on academic warning, and one received academic probation (Barker, 2012). With higher attrition rates, retention problems, low graduation rates, and alleged academic inabilities, current policies create conditions to reinforce the myth of innate Black athletic superiority and intellectual inferiority (Cooper, 2012; Donnor, 2005).

More specifically, the current academic structure allows this academic underdevelopment to occur while profiting from the athletic labor of these individuals (Sellers, 2000). The Black athletic talent pool has created all of the most powerful and wealthiest college athletic conferences (Hawkins, 2010). However, the less-than-desired academic returns supports claims of academic exploitation (Beamon, 2008; Cooper, 2012; Davis, 1992; Donnor, 2005; Smith & Willingham, 2015). While empirical evidence exists to disprove the intellectual inferiority stereotype about Black interscholastic and college athletes, racialized systems such as the NCAA's initial eligibility standards sustain the exploitation at the intercollegiate level while ignoring inequitable education systems at the K-12 levels (Cooper, 2012; Sellers, 2000). This self-condemnation about academic incompetence aids in the development of strong athletic identities for Black college athletes (Beamon, 2012; Harrison & Bimper, 2011). The combination of identity foreclosure, negative stereotype influence, exploitation, and under preparedness caused by K-12 systemic inequities highlights a system that is not equipped to serve this important stakeholder group (Beamon, 2012; Cooper, 2012).

### *Culturally Responsive Recommendations for Addressing Initial Eligibility Standards and Related Issues*

Access does not constitute legitimate and quality educational opportunities. Instead, success can be defined as when preparation meets opportunity; both components must be present in order for positive developmental outcomes to manifest. Scholars have delineated access discrimination from treatment discrimination in workplaces in general (Greenhaus, Parasuraman, & Wormley, 1990) and in sport organizations more specifically (Cunningham, 2015). Access discrimination refers to processes that "prevent members of a subgroup of the population from entering a job or an organization" (Greenhaus, Parasuraman, & Wormley, 1990, p. 64). Whereas, treatment discrimination refers to instances "when subgroup members receive fewer rewards, resources, or opportunities on the job than they legitimately deserve on the basis of job-related criteria" (Greenhaus, Parasuraman, & Wormley, 1990, p. 64-65). Beyond explaining the underrepresentation of Blacks in leadership positions in sport (Cunningham, 2015), the aforementioned types of discriminations also underscore the disturbing issues with the color-blind racism associated with a number of the NCAA's policies and practices more broadly. A culturally relevant approach to initial eligibility standards, and related issues, would address both access and treatment discrimination in ways that place the long-term success of the Black college athletes at the forefront.

Moreover, Ladson-Billings (1995) outlined three CRP propositions for all students: a) academic success, b) cultural competence, and c) critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo social order. In addressing the first proposition, academic development

and achievement need to be reaffirmed as an achievable mission for all, but individualized to address the gaps caused by educational inequities. First, the number of special admissions should be monitored with strict scrutiny at all member institutions. Special admits are defined as students whose pre-college academic profiles are distinct from the general student body admitted at an institution (Barker, 2012). We recommend special admissions should be limited by only allowing an equal or lower percentage of college athletes within an athletic department (number of special admits divided by total number of college athletes at the institution) as the average percentage of special admissions provided in the general student body and/or within comparable size academic departments on campus. In other words, athletic departments would not be afforded more special admissions than any other comparable academic department on campus, which reiterates intra-university equity and situates athletics on a similar level as their peer departments. Similar to the intent of Proposition 48, even if initially racial disparate outcomes manifest, then it would heighten institutional responsiveness to inequities across the K-12 pipeline and provide more adequate support to enhance prospective college athletes' academic preparedness particularly those who attended historically underserved schools. As previously higher standards without concomitant culturally responsive supports reflect color-blind racism. Thus, our proposal is a bridge between previous reform groups who propose more rigid admission standards (e.g., TDG, KCIA, and COIA) and current NCAA policies that prioritize athletic revenue generation over academic integrity and development (i.e., low minimum institutional eligibility standards).

Beyond limiting the number of special admissions, schools who enroll special admits must also demonstrate concrete developmental progress each year with regards to specific areas of concern (e.g., cognitive functioning, reasonable autonomous academic task completion, academic skill gains, etc.). Third-party academic learning specialists/experts could be consulted to evaluate individual progress. Similar to penalties yielded for low GSRs and APRs, schools that do not show adequate educational progress for individual and group college athletes should face progressive consequences (e.g., financial penalties, reduction of scholarships, etc.) to enhance institutional accountability for learning and development as opposed to eligibility and exploitation. Without this stricter scrutiny, widespread academic neglect will persist and disproportionately impact Black college athletes (see the cases of Kevin Ross (Creighton University), Dexter Manley (Oklahoma State University), and Malcolm Mitchell (University of Georgia)) who are more likely to enroll in college academically underprepared, be academically and holistically underserved throughout their college tenures, less likely to graduate, and more likely to experience post-college career challenges (Beamon, 2008, 2012; Cooper, 2012, 2016; Donnor, 2005; Smith & Willingham, 2015).

In a related vein, we also recommend the NCAA and/or its member institutions allocate funds to K-12 school districts where college athletes are being recruited from and experiencing persistent underfunding. Analogous to the culturally responsive recommendations for addressing amateurism, select monies generated from the new broadcasting deal could be earmarked to improve resources and conditions to school systems where college athletes who are academically underprepared previously attended. Unlike previous reform group recommendations, our proposal takes into account widespread racial inequities in the broader U.S. K-12 educational system and attempts to redress them in a culturally responsive manner. Essentially, we seek to minimize the penalization of individuals who suffer the most from systemic racism (i.e., Black college athletes and their families) and rather increase accountability and responsiveness from institutions charged with fostering more equity and inclusion.

Moreover, Black college athletes often experience intersectional marginalization and stigmatization at HWIs when they are admitted to environments where a mismatch between their academic preparedness and the rigor at the institution exist. Consequently, this system creates conditions that lead to academic fraud (see Smith and Willingham (2015) for an extensive overview of this practice at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill) and more importantly have the potential of demoralizing college athletes' psyche and perpetuate negative stereotypes attributed to Blacks (Beamon, 2008; Donnor, 2005). For talented college athletes who are academically underprepared (as determined by an independent university faculty committee and academic admissions specialists without the oversight or influence of an athletic department), alternative options should be recommended to them including other postsecondary institutions (i.e., community colleges) where the academic fit may be stronger as well as alternative professional sport options (i.e., the professional sport developmental leagues idea presented in the previous section).

Along the same lines, success should also be measured through growth and not only proficiency. Proficiency targets establish a minimum level of achievement that all students are expected to meet regardless of starting point (Lachlan-Haché & Castro, 2015); this echoes the one-size-fits approach to education since it ignores the systemic inequities that disallow national proficiency for all students due to systemic and systematic racism (Ladson-Billings, 1995). In contrast, growth targets are customized for each student using baseline data, such as pre-test scores; it better acknowledges the different needs for each student and challenges educators to recognize them as well as embodying the student-centeredness of CRP. Growth targets can foster critical discussions around closing conditions-relationships-expectations (CRE) gaps (Cooper & Cooper, 2015), developing the critical consciousness required in CRP, and improving academic output (Lachlan-Haché & Castro, 2015; Vavrus, 2008). In order to address prevailing racial inequities, the authors assert the NCAA create a metric that assesses growth and proficiency outcomes (disaggregated by team/sport, race, and gender) to add onto current GSR and APR standards. Thus, institutions that show positive growth and proficiency along racial and gender lines can be highlighted and celebrated and those who do not meet these benchmarks could be required to participate in trainings to improve these outcomes and/or required to collaborate with academic services on their campuses to create action plans for improvement. Without said reinforcement, viable ideas for improvement will continue to be deprioritized and current racialized outcomes will persist.

Furthermore, as opposed to simply increasing academic standards, the NCAA could engage in systematic data-driven research to identify key focal areas of intervention and support to increase the number and percentage of academically prepared college athletes (Comeaux, 2013). These efforts could be collaborative with the Department of Education as well as state and district level entities. Related to improving academic preparation and matriculation among Black college athletes, the NCAA should create more research grants on this topic and collaborate with sponsoring organizations to increase support to school districts that historically produce college athletes who are underprepared to enhance academic readiness. In concert with other college reform groups (e.g., TDG, KCIA, and COIA), the authors surmise the admittance of more academically prepared college athletes would drastically reduce the likelihood of academic fraud and blatant unethical actions exhibited by NCAA schools. Thus, utilizing the interest convergence principle of CRT whereby academic preparedness and college athlete overall well-being is prioritized over athletic exploitation would serve as a meaningful approach to redress these disturbing and socially unjust outcomes as well as enhance the NCAA brand.

In addition, race-neutral assistance should be replaced with culturally responsive curriculums offered in athletic academic centers that are specifically designed for academic under preparedness; they should be designed with CRT-level awareness of the systemic inequities that perpetuate the problem. In working with Black college athletes, these centers must remember that societal structures condition this sub-group to internalize race and athletic identities in an interconnected fashion at the expense of their holistic identities (Cooper, 2016; Harrison & Bimper, 2011). Academic assistance will not be successful if identities and systems where they were developed are treated as mutually exclusive. The curriculum design must be sensitive, yet explicit to this knowledge (see Cooper (2016) for an extensive description of this process). Finally, in developing the critical consciousness required for CRP, intervention must begin early. In order to bridge the gap for many Black college athletes, a CRT and CRP intervention should begin upon the signing of a national letter of intent while they are still enrolled in high school. These curriculums could also be embedded in current required first year experience courses for college athletes as well as with set time currently being spent on athletic related tasks could be replaced with this programming. With more time to understand their roles at the institution as “students” first, they will have a greater probability of being more responsive to curriculum upon transition to college and its effects should be more feasible to sustain throughout their college tenure.

### *Graduation Success Rate (GSR) and Academic Progress Rate (APR)*

Similar to previous academic reform efforts, GSRs and APRs were primarily instituted as a public relations propaganda to convey the illusion of prioritizing academic success while diverting attention away from pervasive forms of institutional racism (Beamon, 2008; Donnor, 2005; Smith & Willingham, 2015; Southall & Staurowsky, 2011). GSR is a metric that reflects the percentage of college athletes (including transfers) who graduate within a six-year period from an institution divided by the total number of college athletes who were enrolled at the institution during that period (NCAA, 2014). APR measures the percentage of eligible and retained college athletes in a given year divided by the total number of college athletes within the cohort times 1000. The resulting number reflects whether the institution is on track to graduate at least 50% of its college athletes on a specific team within a given period (APR score of 930) (NCAA, 2014). Nonetheless, it is important to note the underlying idea of holding institutions accountable for progressing college athletes towards graduation is commendable and has yielded positive results (albeit ambiguous – eligibility and graduation vs. well-rounded education and intellectual growth).

However, the challenging issues lie in the lack of institutional accountability regarding the standards by which certain college athletes are admitted to the university (as highlighted in the previous section) and the ways in which institutions exploit this policy post-college athlete enrollment. This academic exploitation is evident via low minimum eligibility standards after admittance (in many cases as low as 2.0), the enrollment of college athletes in athletic friendly courses with minimum workloads, coaches’ influences over academic major selection and subsequent academic clustering, artificial grade inflation/academic fraud, and other ethically questionable tactics (Beamon, 2008; Benson, 2000; Cooper & Cooper, 2015; Southall & Starowsky, 2011; Smith & Willingham, 2015). Black male college athletes across all sports, but particularly in football and men’s basketball have experienced the lowest GSRs compared to their athlete peers. In the most recent GSR report (NCAA, 2016b), the GSR for the 2016 cohort

of African American male college athletes at the Division I level was 70 percent, which was significantly lower than their peers (87 percent for White males, 95 percent for White females, and 84 percent for African American females). More specifically, African American male football players at Division I FBS schools (70 percent) was 19 percentage points lower than their White male football FBS counterparts (89 percent) (NCAA, 2016b). Despite the reported overall progress, the aforementioned racial and gender gaps have been persistent since the initial implementation of the GSR metric in 2002.

Regarding APR, HBCUs have been disproportionately penalized. Cooper et al. (2014) surmised the NCAA reinforces systemic racism by ignoring the unique educational missions of certain postsecondary institutions and related economic inequities that exist between athletic departments and universities with different classifications (i.e., Power 5 HWIs and Division I HBCUs). One of the consequences from the GSR and APR is the rewarding of well-funded and more academically selective HWIs who have the human and fiscal resources to either circumvent rules and/or provide more support for its college athletes (Southall & Staurowsky, 2011). In contrast, less well-funded schools such as limited resource institutions (LRIs) and schools with less stringent admission standards geared towards addressing systemic inequalities in the K-12 educational system such as HBCUs and minority serving institutions (MSIs) are disadvantaged (Cooper et al., 2014). As such, the authors posit that in order to counter the unintended outcomes of color-blind racism policies such as GSR and APR, the NCAA should consider adopting culturally responsive and race conscious standards.

### *Culturally Responsive Recommendations for Addressing GSRs and APRs*

Among Black college athletes who do graduate, studies have cited how many express feelings of being underprepared to pursue careers post-college because they majored in “athletic eligibility” and experienced limited engagement in their personal development beyond their sport as opposed to be provided with a true well-rounded education (Beamon, 2008, 2012; Benson, 2000; Cooper & Cooper, 2015; Donnor, 2005; Smith & Willingham, 2015). Although, the trend of career unpreparedness is also found among the general college student population, the implications for Black college students (including athletes) is exacerbated given racialized trends in the broader U.S. society that highlight their increased likelihood of unemployment even with similar education compared to their White counterparts (Wilson, 2014). Relatedly, these trends combined with other alarming patterns among Blacks such as poorer health outcomes, lack of home ownership, lower average household median incomes, and more likely to live in lower-income communities underscore the importance of adopting race-conscious policies to affirm commitment to equity for all (Cooper, 2012; Lewis & Burd-Sharps, 2010). Hence, in order to provide more culturally responsive and race-conscious sport leadership, the authors offer the following recommendations.

First, the NCAA should institute a penalty structure whereby institutions that have racial gaps in GSRs are penalized. These penalties should reflect a stronger commitment to redressing racial inequities and thus enhance institutional accountability for supporting college athletes across racial groups. Based on our review of previous reform group recommendations, the aforementioned race-based penalty has yet to be presented or considered; hence, reinforcing the uniqueness of our proposals grounded in CRT and centralizing racial equity. In addition, adopting the adjusted graduation gap (AGG; Southall et al., 2016) metric as a viable tool for comparing college athletes to their non-college athlete peers is also recommended. With this

adoption, schools with significant AGG gaps along racial lines should be required to implement comprehensive action plans to improve these gaps and if not improved over a specified time period penalties will be initiated (e.g., institutional fines, coaches' suspensions, etc.).

Beyond GSR, APR, and AGG metrics, the NCAA should create a metric that holds athletic departments accountable for engaging their college athletes in best practices for college student development such as faculty-student interactions, internships, research opportunities, study abroad experiences, and engagement in educationally purposeful activities (Comeaux, 2013; Cooper, 2016). Along the same lines, it is recommended the NCAA implement a standard measuring the extent to which college athletes complete academic major-related internships and involvement in co-curricular/educationally purposeful activities particularly culturally relevant programming (Bimper, 2017; Cooper, 2016; Comeaux, 2013). College athletes particularly Black college athletes could benefit from this type of involvement and it would allow them to be more integrated into the broader university. Similar to current GSR reports, data for this involvement should be disaggregated by sub-groups (e.g., race, gender, first-generation status, etc.) to enhance transparency of equity in terms cultural responsiveness as well as institute penalties for institutions that have significant gaps across sub-groups.

It is also recommended collaborations between campus cultural centers and racially empowering and social justice oriented groups and athletic departments and/or teams be incentivized, celebrated, and normalized (see Bimper (2017) and Cooper (2016) for detailed examples). This approach would acknowledge the importance of developing college athletes holistically. A mandate requiring all college athletes to complete career development workshops throughout their time at the institution with the university's career development centers would also address issues cited in the previous literature on specific racial sub-groups of college athletes. In addition, the NCAA currently collects data on former college athletes via the Study of College Outcomes and Recent Experiences (SCORE) survey and this instrument or a similar tool could be analyzed and disaggregated by institution, teams, and identity sub-groups to identify key trends in terms of former college athletes' experiences. Findings from this data could enhance the creation of more targeted and effective culturally responsive and race-conscious policies. Increasing documentation and transparency of attrition rates would be another useful strategy for identifying reasons association with lower GSRs and APRs.

Another recommendation is the creation of athletic-based educational leadership courses. College athletes are very knowledgeable within their respective sports and develop a host of cognitive and non-cognitive skills. However, aside from sport management and physical education programs, there is a dearth of athletic-based leadership courses for college athletes to pursue across institution types (notable exceptions include the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, University of Wisconsin at Whitewater, and a select few others). These programs and courses could be collaborative endeavors with departments and programs such as educational leadership, educational psychology, communication, and business. Similar to the financial education course recommendation, the authors assert the NCAA as the leading governing body of intercollegiate athletics in the U.S. should embrace this title by initiating and supporting the development of these courses to optimize systematization of content delivery and programming. These leadership courses could be instituted with required first year experience courses as well as incorporated in study hall and/or team meeting sessions for all college athletes, particularly those who are typically underserved and overlooked, as opposed to a select few who already excel in leadership roles (i.e., Student Athlete Advisory Committee (SAAC)).

It is also recommended the NCAA increase the minimum GPA for athletic eligibility. Many institutions have standards as low as 2.0, which signals academic achievement is not prioritized. Thus, the NCAA should require a minimum of a 2.5 GPA within a given semester (a minimum 3 courses or 9 credit hours earned) or over a period of a year for athletic competition, which would reflect a stronger commitment to academic performance. The authors posit the restriction of special admissions and increased minimum academic GPA for athletic eligibility would encourage institutions to focus on recruiting and supporting college athletes with a stronger emphasis academic proficiency. Some argue this recommendation would lead to more academic fraud and exploitation. We acknowledge unethical tactics may still be pursued to evade the intent of this standard (Smith & Willingham, 2015; Southall & Staurowsky, 2011), but we also argue these standards would increase better academic fits/matches between college athletes and respective institutions. Practices such as those outlined by Southall and Staurowsky (2011) as well as academic clustering trends could be monitored and examined with scrutiny to minimize unethical behavior contrary to educational missions. In addition, the creation of viable professional sport alternatives presented earlier in the manuscript would also curb academic fraud at these institutions.

In terms of possible racialized outcomes similar to Proposition 48, the authors posit that if these trends emerge, then it would only serve to spotlight the need for enhanced institutional accountability and seriousness as it pertains to *supporting, developing, and educating* (as opposed to simply retaining and graduating) Black college athletes (Cooper, 2016; Harper, 2016). Similarly, we recommend college athletes be allowed to take reduced course loads during their athletic season (minimum of 6 credits) while not being at risk of losing their grant-in-aid (Hawkins, 2010). We purport college athletes would excel at higher rates academically if able to complete degrees over a period longer than the traditional four to six years. This change would require corresponding adjustments to current GSR and APR metrics such that degree progress and completion be measured over a period of eight years or at least a tiered time scale (e.g., four, six, and eight year tracks). Athletic eligibility can remain at a four-year limit, but financial support from institutions should continue until degree completion. These changes would alter institutional practices to the extent that financial investments would be attached to academic progress (not just athletic performance) and institutions would have an even stronger incentive to engage in ethical academic-centric best practices.

The NCAA should also work with LRIs, HBCUs, and MSIs to discuss, identify, and co-construct standards applicable to their unique educational missions. The NCAA has initiated this process with the Accelerating Academic Performance Program (AAPP) conference held annually in New Orleans, Louisiana, but this initiative could be expanded. One idea related to improvement involves the adoption of a multi-pronged approach similar to Title IX requirements, which would enable a range of options for compliance for different institutional types such as HBCUs. Exemptions could include: a) college athlete sub-groups are performing at rates higher than the general study body or non-athlete sub-group, b) demonstrating growth over a period of time, and c) demonstrating achievement compared to peer institutions with similar resources among any other culturally responsive ideas. This approach does not devalue the importance having high academic standards, but rather adopts a more culturally responsive approach to fostering positive outcomes for all member institutions.

### *Underrepresentation of Racially Diverse Professionals in Leadership Positions*

As previously mentioned, a group of White Ivy League presidents founded the NCAA and reserved institutional membership, athletic leadership, and athletic participation to Whites until the mid-twentieth century (Cooper et al., 2014). Despite the fact that composition of athletic teams have become increasingly diverse racially post *Brown v. Board of Education (1954)* decision and post-Civil Rights era, the racial composition among the leadership positions within the NCAA and its member institutions' athletic departments remain disproportionately White and male. In an effort to generate heightened awareness of this problematic trend, under the guidance of Dr. Richard Lapchick, The Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport (TIDES) was established in 2004. TIDES publishes annual reports on various professional and intercollegiate sport organizations in the U.S. to document progress (or a lack thereof) in terms of racial, ethnic, and gender diversity in leadership positions. The first TIDES report on college sports was published in 2005 (Lapchick, Marfatia, Bloom, & Sylverain, 2017).

Since the initial report, college sport has lagged behind its sport organization peers in terms of racial diversity in leadership positions. For example, according to a recent 2016 Racial and Gender Report Card, college sport received a C+ grade for its racial hiring practices, which was the lowest among all college and professional sport report cards (Lapchick et al., 2017). In summary, the report revealed university presidents, athletic directors, head coaches in football and basketball, NCAA executives and directors, conference commissioners, athletic department staff across all three divisions remain overwhelmingly White and male. In another report specifically examining Division I FBS institutions, key findings indicated that Whites comprised 87.9% (341 out of 388) of all campus leadership positions including in the roles of presidents, athletics directors, and faculty athletics representatives (Laphick et al., 2017). The perpetual underrepresentation of Blacks, Latinx, Asians, Asian Americans, Indigenous People, Native Americans, and Pacific Islanders in leadership positions in college sport reflects a lack of commitment to diversity and equity.

Cunningham (2015) outlined a multi-level framework for analyzing the trends of racial disparities within leadership positions in sport organizations. The macro-level includes institutionalized practices, political climate, and stakeholder expectations. At the meso-level, key influences include bias and discrimination, leadership prototypes, and organizational culture of similarity versus diversity. The micro-level includes head coaching expectations, intentions, and occupational turnover intentions. The author asserts, "the end result is an "othering" of racial minorities, a privileging of Whites, and institutionalized, legitimated forms of racism in the hiring process and in work environments" (Cunningham, 2015, p. 78). In order to redress the persistent racial inequities in college sport, the NCAA must first recognize how and why these trends are detrimental. Next, the association must understand the interconnectedness between multi-level factors and aforementioned outcomes. Lastly, the NCAA must adopt culturally responsive and race-conscious policies in order to counter the abstract liberalism (Bonilla-Silva, 2010) and institutional racism that exists within its association.

### *Culturally Responsive Recommendations for Addressing the Underrepresentation of Racially Diverse Professionals in Leadership Positions*

One culturally responsive and race-conscious recommendation for addressing the underrepresentation of racially diverse professionals in college sport leadership is to recognize

schools that adhere to a Rooney Rule type approach to hiring (i.e., Diversity and Inclusion awards). In 2003, named after the late progressive owner of the Pittsburgh Steelers, Dan Rooney, the NFL implemented a policy requiring teams to interview at least one candidate from a racially underrepresented background prior to fulfilling a position. The establishment of these race-conscious policies created an immediate impact on the racial diversity in head and assistant coaching positions. Subsequent ripple effects of this policy resulted in the NFL earning an A grade for racial hiring practices in 2016 from TIDES (Lapchick et al., 2016). The NCAA has taken progressive steps by creating a Diversity and Inclusion pledge given the association's limitations with regards to mandating diversity-based hiring practices (also referred to as the Eddie Robinson rule proposal by the National Association for Coaching Equity and Development) among its private and public member institutions (New, 2016). Nonetheless, the authors surmise if the NCAA championed institutions who adopt a Rooney/Eddie Robinson type rule in their hiring approaches for all athletic related leadership positions including athletic director, coaching, faculty athletic representatives, athletic department staff, and college athlete academic support staff, then current trends could possibly shift towards a more racially diverse and inclusive staff.

Another recommendation is to require institutions who perpetually maintain disparities between the racial composition of its college athletes and its athletic leaders to create comprehensive diversity and racial equity action plans. Athletic departments could collaborate with university chief diversity officers (CDOs) and related departments to create and implement culturally responsive strategies for increasing racial and ethnic diversity among their leadership positions. Similar to how institutions are currently penalized for not meeting GSR and APR standards, consequences for non-compliance could be implemented to reinforce the NCAA's commitment to racial equity, diversity, and inclusion. These action plans could have multiple components focused on recruiting strategies, hiring protocol, retention plans, and programming practices designed to enhance cultural inclusivity within respective organizational environments/cultures. Comeaux's (2013) Career Transition Scorecard (CTS) is one example of a model that could inform the formulation of institution's diversity and racial equity action plans. The NCAA's Leadership Institute (NCAA, 2017) could be expanded to the conference level to enhance awareness and intentionality regarding the creation of pathways for leadership career attainment for racial groups who have been historically and contemporarily limited from access and mobility in the field.

Relatedly, similar to how the NCAA requires academic support services for college athletes, the association could also mandate the creation of athletic chief diversity officers (ACDOs) dedicated to fostering inclusion and addressing issues of diversity inequities within athletic programs (Bimper, 2017). These leaders could work in concert with university-wide CDOs to improve coordination efforts and streamline communication regarding best practices. The authors assert diversity can be constituted in similar ways to how diversity is operationalized at these institutions beyond athletics. This definition would include various identity and experience categories including, but not limited to race, ethnicity, nationality, sex, gender, sexuality, unique ability (often referred to as disability), age, religion, socioeconomic status, geographical background, college generation legacy status, linguistics, etc. Collectively, these strategies would reflect a deeper level of dedication to racial equity and more importantly could increase diversity in college sport leadership positions.

### *Lack of Cultural Competence Emphasis in College Sport Leadership*

In 1991, the NCAA adopted Rule 16.3 and academic support for college athletes became mandatory (Sack & Staurowsky, 1998). With this, came the hiring of hundreds of academic advisors and counselors housed with athletic departments. These individuals were charged with monitoring the academic progress of college athletes along with recognizing potential academic challenges and finding methods to address them. They also oversee course selection, major selections, and 4-year plans. For those counselors assigned to men's basketball and football, a major duty is to assist college athletes labeled as "at-risk" with transitioning into college life and developing a well-rounded learning experience. However, issues and challenges with the actual advising process have been pervasive since the inception of these efforts (Benson, 2000).

The constant rising standards of the NCAA has caused advisors to focus primarily on APR and eligibility rules rather than on college athletes' academic development and maturation into individuals prepared for post-collegiate life (Grasgreen, 2012). In 2012, the NCAA imposed a nine-credit rule, where college athletes were expected to take 12 credits per semester and pass at least nine credit hours. To preserve eligibility, advisors crafted academic paths of least resistance. Even advisors who entered the profession wanting to make a difference and change the system (and often accomplishing these aims albeit in ways beyond the scope of NCAA metrics) become part of it due to systemic pressures related to the growing commercialization of big-time college sports (Grasgreen, 2012; Smith & Willingham, 2015). Notwithstanding, the lack of training or certifications, which is required in virtually any other academic position, remains a prevailing issue. Furthermore, similar to most K-16 classrooms, a mostly homogenous group of White advisors is expected to meet the needs of all athletes including Black college athletes who often come from vastly different pre-college backgrounds (Hawkins, 2010). While teachers undergo pedagogical training in how to work in academic settings, many athletic departments include academic athletic advisor positions that only require a college degree. Often times these individuals do not possess degrees or experience in education broadly or in CRP strategies more specifically. Along the same lines, there is a lack of systematized (as opposed to single institution efforts) culturally competence trainings among college sport leadership staff. As previously mentioned diversity in representation in one measure of racially equitable practices ((Lapchick et al., 2017), but CRP strategies is yet another progressive step that must be taken regardless of the demographic composition of the staff. Thus, there is a need to institutionalize on-going cultural competency trainings across all levels of athletic leadership positions including administrators, coaches, staff, and college athletes.

### *Culturally Responsive Recommendations for Addressing the Lack of Cultural Competence Emphasis in College Sport Leadership*

In considering the three dimensions proposed by Lynch (2011), within the hiring and training process as well as the institutional, personal, and instructional approaches, CRP should be infused into initial and annual training programs for athletic leadership and staff. Institutional approaches call for changes in policies and procedures, including how funds and resources are allocated. The Division I Men's Basketball March Madness Championship generates \$797 million annually for NCAA-membered institutions; the new CFP system will provide NCAA college football programs with an additional \$345 million annually (Hawkins & Nwadike, 2017). Considering the majority of those teams are comprised of Black males, it seems appropriate to

allocate specific funding to curriculums and practices designed to enhance their academic development and achievement as well as their same race female peers and additional groups that racially underrepresented such as those across Latinx, Indigenous, and Asian Diasporas. CRP should be adapted into a specific policy with procedures on how to teach all staff and college athletes in the most effectively manner. In hiring, preferences should be afforded to prospects who are familiar with and/or receptive to culturally responsive training. During the hiring process, CRP training could be highlighted as organizational expectation to gauge whether prospective employees are receptive to this type of development. Ongoing cultural competency workshops and evaluations should be instituted and cross campus and institutional collaborations should be encouraged and facilitated. Additional funding should be made available to provide this training and teach them how to implement individualized growth-plans-of-study. Annual recertification should also be required. These types of trainings are already prevalent in the higher education and student affairs field among many others (i.e., counseling education). In concert with the academic GPA recommendations, these culturally responsive supports could increase academic, psychosocial, and career development outcomes for racially diverse college athletes (Brooks & Althouse, 2013; Cooper, 2016). These recommendations echo Cunningham's (2010) suggestions regarding the need for a multi-levels systems approach to college sport leadership change.

Furthermore, the personal dimension is about the process. Just as culturally responsive curriculums are individualized, the training program should follow the same format. Each individual will have to work through overcoming cultural biases in order to learn about the unique and diverse cultural backgrounds of college athletes. In incorporating this into the training, this recommendation would follow the three-step process suggested by Lynch (2011): a) exploring one's own culture, engaging in reflection, and self-appraisal; b) learning about other cultures, acknowledging lack of awareness, misconceptions, and abandoning race-blind ideologies; and c) learning about students' cultures, investigating, and learning to appreciate their traditions in order to teach in a culturally responsive fashion. For deeper cultural engagement, partnerships can also be formed with on-campus and off-campus groups such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), campus cultural centers, Pan-Hellenic Council organizations, and any culturally relevant entities.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, leaders create conditions through formal policies and informal practices that reflect and enact core values. As the leading governing body of intercollegiate sport in the U.S., the NCAA professes diversity and inclusion as ancillary core value. However, persistent trends have indicated this "core value" has been more rhetoric than reality particularly as it pertains to racial equity. As such, the authors call for a shift from abstract liberalism and color-blind racism towards a culturally responsive and race-conscious leadership approach whereby race is centralized in policy creation, enactment, and enforcement. Specifically, the authors set forth a range of race-conscious and culturally responsive recommendations to improve policies and practices related to the principle of amateurism, initial eligibility standards, GSRs and APRs, a lack of racial diversity in leadership positions, and a lack of required cultural competency trainings for athletic leadership and staff. In concert with Ospina and Foldy's (2009) analysis, the authors surmise that without an intentional recognition of and concerted efforts towards redressing prevailing racial disparities, minimal meaningful progress will not occur and sport

leadership efforts geared towards diversity, equity, and inclusion will either be stagnated (at best) or exacerbated (at worse). Analyzing current policies and practices via CRT enabled the authors to identify the ways in which racial inequities are created and perpetuated, but more importantly pathways to improve these outcomes. Incorporating CRT and CRP in NCAA policies and practices is a salient theme throughout our recommendations. One of the most celebrated aspects of sport is its ability to bring people together from diverse backgrounds to experience positive developmental and social outcomes. In order for this mantra to hold true in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, sport organizations including the NCAA must adopt new and evolving leadership practices that unapologetically reflect *a true commitment to racial equity and diversity in rhetoric and reality*.

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