Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative 2020 Volume II: Teaching about Race and Racism Across the Disciplines

# Collusion in the Owner's Box: How Racism and Oppression Have Built the American Sports Industry

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# **Demographics:**

Pittsburgh Westinghouse is a 6-12 school located on the East End of Pittsburgh serving the Homewood, Garfield, Lincoln-Larimer, Wilkinsburg and East Hills communities. It is a Title-I school and is currently in school improvement. According to the PA School Performance Profile, the school's enrollment hovers just under 708 students ("Future Ready PA Index" 2020). The racial demographic of the student body is 93.8 percent African American, 1.3 percent White, and 3.7 percent other. Of those students, 85.6 percent of households are identified as economically disadvantaged and 30.1 percent currently utilize special education services. According to the district's data, the attendance rate for the 2019-2020 school year was 81.4 percent (Pittsburgh Public Schools 2020). During the 2019-2020 school year, Keystone exam results show 17.9 percent of students were proficient or advanced in Algebra, 10.1 percent in Biology, and 30.7 percent in English. The PSSA exams for the 2019-2020 year resulted in 16 percent of students proficient or advanced in English, 3.3 percent in Math, and 9.4 percent in Science (Pittsburgh Public Schools 2020).

### **Rationale:**

Teachers are introduced to the classroom through instructors who are often academics and don't have recent experience teaching young people. In these K-12 programs, we're encouraged to "unpack the standards" and implement backwards design lesson planning. In professional developments, coaches preach Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, Action Research, Bloom's Taxonomy, etc. These concepts are important, yet I'd honestly argue they hold little weight with students if the educator hasn't established a certain level of credibility. Too often, teachers lack the respect of their students.

At Westinghouse two members of our team are Phyllis Jones and Donta Green. Jones has been coaching girls' basketball at the school for over 35 years. Green is the head football coach, who led the team to the city championship during his first year as head coach. Jones is in the twilight of her career and Green has just begun to write his story, but both are held in high regard by our students because their investment on the

Curriculum Unit 20.02.06 1 of 20

field, but much more because of their care once they've stepped off of it.

Sports aren't everything. The window for collegiate participation quickly closes, yet when it comes to building character and resiliency, competition is standard aligned with life's rigor. Those who serve as the models within the athletics arenas must carry themselves with a certain swagger, confidence and sense of morality because children will emulate them, the good and the bad. I've yet to see a kid rock a pair of "Shakespeare's" but "Jordan's" keep perfect attendance in my class.

In the 2019-2020 school year, two students, Tarik Hamilton and Jaray Henry, reminded me why sports are so important. It was their 11<sup>th</sup> grade year and they were both ineligible to play football. Yet the promise of a senior season on the gridiron served as more motivation than any behavioral or academic prize. Every day the two would sit side by side and argue about "who's the G.O.A.T, Lebron or MJ? "Who's the better QB, Roethlisberger or Tom Brady?" If you didn't know the kids, you'd swear they were arguing, but the bolstering and badgering was simply a show of passion that the game brings out in the young. Athletics are a form of pedagogy within themselves; student engagement in its most organic form. In fact, according to the National Council of Youth Sports, 44 million boys and girls aged 5-18 years old participate in sports in the United States in 2008 (Duncan, Strycker, and Chaumeton 2015).

The often-heard narrative is that sports should only serve as entertainment and that athletes should not exploit their positions for their individual interests. Regulating discourse on social issues is a calculated and intentional tool of oppression. Objectors of athlete advocates understand the immense platform athletes hold and intend to use silence to throw a rug over the stains of injustice. Think about the autumn Saturday's in Athens, Tuscaloosa, Gainesville, Happy Valley, Columbus and Clemson. To have a crowd of over 100,000, that is 95 percent white, cheering for a product that is predominantly a cast of African American athletic actors is powerful. This reality is mirrored in professional ranks in the NFL, NBA, and WNBA.

Hence, these athletes have a platform, and it is vital they use it for more than just ball bouncing and personal gain. In addition to the touchdowns, slam-dunks, trophies and shoe deals comes a sense of responsibility to help bring awareness to less attractive issues that often plague the communities just outside of downtown stadiums and arenas. Those who are fortunate enough to get a morsel of attention from the dominant class should understand their platform and use it to the benefit of others who are less fortunate. Courage doesn't come without consequences; nevertheless, it is an indispensable ingredient in the recipe of change. As an educator, I am thankful for those who hold their heads high and who don't cower in fear when it comes to doing what is right. These examples have lasting power, far beyond the gridiron.

As a teacher at Westinghouse, I currently teach U.S. History and Social Justice. I believe this unit should be taught by teachers who teach U.S. History, Civics, Sociology, Social Justice, African American History, Economics, and Leadership. If you know your students, you understand why this topic is so important. While sports are no means the only way out of their current situation, it is an avenue. It has served as a motivator for Chance to get his grades together, to create his own ticket, when countless other conversations, resources, and consequences could no produce that result. It is why Coach Green and his assistant coaches are so passionate about the opportunities sports can provide the young men under their care.

Students should expect to be challenged to think of how they can leverage their own platforms to create change both in their schools and within their communities. From the lessons embedded in the unit, students should expect to gain and grow as far as leaders while becoming more aware of how economics are controlled by people in the owner's boxes, not the athletes on the field.

Curriculum Unit 20.02.06 2 of 20

# Introduction

The question that I am investigating this year is how professional sports owners and the NCAA have attempted and often succeeded in controlling the social platform and economic bottom lines in the sporting industries while at the same time highlighting those brave enough to disrupt and challenge the systems that govern their sport.

Although sports often bring out the best in us, when an individual turns through the history books, they often discover the underlying scars of systematic oppression that come from an ownership mentality in big time sporting industries that are reliant on the performance of its athletes and not their personal or professional growth. For the number of African American athletes that perform on the field, very few have transitioned into the Owner's Box or taken on administrative titles in the front office. When one examines the power dynamics that govern the sporting industries, they'll unequivocally find a lack of minority representation amongst those who govern and coach at elite institutions. This reality is mirrored at the professional level too, as there is only one African American owner, Michael Jordan of the Charlotte Bobcats, who has a majority stake in one of the three most profitable sporting businesses: The National Basketball Association, The National Football League and Major League Baseball. Although it's important to note that these franchises have made marginal strides in their front office hiring practices, they have made almost no progress when it comes to majority ownership stakes. The consequences of that lack of diversity at the ownership table has led to the modern- day tensions that have boiled over recently. These feelings of unrest didn't simply start with a 49er's Quarterback's decision to kneel; they have been festering and emerging throughout the history of American sports, and the "The Puppet Masters" have been ready to enforce submission at every turn.

The content will continue to examine the judicial and political systems that have been used to oppress and financially bankrupt athletes who are out of step with the party line. Clay vs. The United States will serve as our case study regarding these systems and how they're implemented. In this section of the unit we will look at the biographical history of Cassis Clay, who is later Muhamad Ali, the evolution of his mindset when it came to race relations, his rational for defying his call into the United States military and the lengths the government went to end his career. By the end of this section, students should be able to deconstruct the case using timelines, evidence and testimony from both sides to form their own conclusions regarding Ali's handling. If instructed at a proficient level, educators should anticipate that their students will make connections between Clay vs. The United States and Colin Kaepernick's case against the National Football League.

Moving forward to the NBA, we'll look at the events surrounding Donald Sterling and the Los Angeles Clippers. Teachers will use the transcript of the tapes provided by V.Stivano to understand what Sterling really believed about his players and the power that his position as owner provided him. The unit will then look at how the Clippers, Player's Union and media pressure would eventually lead to his exile from the sport.

Although the expulsion of Sterling could be considered a win for justice, it is a far cry from reforming the power dynamic of major franchises within "The Good Old Boy" network that governs their policies. In order to inspire students to become more active in movements, the final pages of the unit will underline organized movements that were successful and how specific athletes have helped to usher in reform within their professions through solo or unified action. If mastered, students should finish the unit with a better understanding of the evolution of sports and race, how sports can be used as a vehicle to effect change and how that change can sometimes be stifled by those with an opposing agenda.

Curriculum Unit 20.02.06 3 of 20

# Who is in Control of College Football Grid-Iron?

To understand the platform and the power of athletics, one needs to start at the amateur level and work their way up. For instance, according to "Donna Desrocher's for Research (2013), she explains that athletics at public colleges and universities at the Division-I level were a \$6 billion enterprise in 2010. Desrocher goes further explaining that while schools spend less on athletics than they do academics, student athletics represent about 5-11 percent of the entire academic institutions operating budget.

The amount universities spend on a student versus an athlete is substantial. They spend about six times the amount on a student athlete compared to the \$11-13 thousand the average institution spends on a student who attends the university for only academic reasons (Desrocher 2013). The Power Conferences'—South-Eastern, Big 12, Pacific-10, Atlantic Coast, Big Ten, and Big East—median athletic spending per a median student athlete is \$163, 931 a year compared to \$13,390 for the median student (Desrocher 2013)). According to Desrocher (2013), the SEC spends more than any other conference, spending 60 percent more than the most economical BCS conference. Many would beg the question, "why?" Why would people invest so much money into a pastime that is supposed to be recreational and does not align with the overall goal of the institution? Why are these sports so important to the collegiate landscape?

Simply put, the investment has proven to provide a great deal of financial dividends for the institutions both on and off the field. Winning is everything, and the schools that are able to create a culture of winning on the field see their bank accounts rise as quickly as their athletes and coaches raise the trophies over their heads. Adam G. Walker, author of Division-I Intercollegiate Athletics Success and the Financial Impact on Universities writes, "when a male graduate's former team wins its conference championship, his donations for general purposes program increase by about 7% and his donations to the athletic programs increase by about the same percentage." Moreover, a study from Humphreys and Mondello (2005) reviewed a comprehensive data set for 320 colleges and universities from the years of 1976 to 1996. From that data set, they found that restricted giving appeared to rise when an institution's basketball team was successful, and the same was true when the football team reached some measure of success (Humphreys and Mondello 2005).

Humphreys and Mondello (2005) noted that athletic success can have direct and indirect benefits. Direct benefits can range from higher attendance at the school, increase in ticket prices, parking prices and concession stand revenue. The indirect, non-financial benefits of having a successful athletic program can be viewed as increased applications and enrollment and an enhanced ability to attract higher quality students from around the nation. Additionally, having a high successful program can increase the donation pull from alumni and other groups. Winning matters and people are prepared to pay for it.

Martin Greensberg (2008) explains in "College Athletics-Chasing the Big Bucks" that from 2002 to 2007, the nation's most profitable athletic conferences, made \$3.9 billion in just capital expenditures. In the Chronical, he found that 27 athletic programs raised more than \$20 million for their university and 10 programs brought more than \$30 million into their universities (Greensberg 2008). Boosters such as T. Boone Pickens, who made his fortune in the oil industry and stock market, pledged \$30 million to Oklahoma State so that it could update its stadium (Greensberg 2008). Pickens also gave \$165 million to build an athletic village on campus. Such a generous donation could only be rivalled by Philip Knight, the co-founder of Nike, who gave \$100 million to The University of Oregon.

According to Martin (2008), the top athletic programs have seen an astronomical improvement in the amount

Curriculum Unit 20.02.06 4 of 20

of fundraising dollars that have been stimulated by athletics, creating a financial artery of funds that many schools now see as a critical lifeline. With many campus facilities growing to keep-up-with-the-Joneses fashion, university leaders have found themselves in an arms race that depends on the money winning programs generate and they will go to any lengths to make sure the well doesn't run dry.

Take, for instance, the University of Alabama. In 2016, the football team reported \$103.9 million in revenue along with a \$47 million profit, which was 3.6 percent higher than the previous year. Moreover, the school has profited from a lucrative deal with The Collegiate Licensing Company which it netted \$98 million in royalties since its founding in 1981 (Garcia 2017). In the case of the SEC, its self-operated cable network enjoys over 75 million subscribers which, at an average of \$1.40 per subscriber, produces over \$611 million in revenue (Dahab 2016). Advertisements on the network channels contributes another \$70 million to this total, making SEC college athletic departments among the most profitable in the country (Dahab 2016).

However, winning does not come without an aggressive financial commitment. Alabama's football head coach, Nick Saban, winner of six national championships, five at the University of Alabama, made \$7.6 million in 2019 (Potter 2019). His offensive coordinator, Steve Sarkisian, made \$1.6 million and his defensive coordinator, Pete Golding, made \$1.1 million (Potter 2019). Before Saban, the Tide were on probation and struggled to put winning seasons together. Now that things are turned around, many people who remember the tougher times would consider his salary a bargain.

According to Business Insider, there are several schools willing to bid on this arms race and make that commitment because they know what type of financial pay-out awaits if they're successful. Clemson coach Dabo Swinney, a young and energetic coach in South Carolina, took over the program and has led the team to three national championships and five ACC championships. Jim Harbaugh of the University of Michigan and Jimbo Fisher at Texas A&M each made over \$7.5 million a year. Head coaches Kirby Smart at the University of Georgia, Gus Malzahn at Auburn, Tom Herman at Texas, Jeff Brohm at Purdue, Lincoln Riley at Oklahoma, and Dan Mullen at Florida all make over \$6 million a year (Cash 2019). And yet of these top ten highest paid coaches, not one is African American.

A lack of diversity has been an unfortunate reality when it comes to leadership roles within major college sports from the beginning. James Franklin is the highest paid African American coach as the leader of the Penn State Nittany Lions, making \$5.65 million (Cash 2019). A handsome amount, yet he often finds himself alone in leadership rooms due to the lack of African American Head coaches. Paul Newberry of The Chicago Tribune, reports that of the 130 FBS schools in division-I college football, which is the most competitive division, only 13 coaches were African American. The Pac-12 has more diversity of than any conference with five African American coaches out of 12 teams and the Big Ten currently has three African American head coaches out of its 14 teams. Syracuse's Dino Baber is the only member of the ACC and there are none in the Big 12. The South Eastern Conference has one, Derek Mason, who heads a Vanderbilt program that is unable to compete due to higher academic requirements and fewer resources. This is the breakdown of the demographic system of leadership on the field of play in college football.

In Keith Michaels Champagne's "Black Male Intercollegiate Administrators: Ascending the Career Ladder A Qualitative Analysis of a Cast Study" (2014) the writer refers to the race and Gender Report Card (RGRC) report from the Institute for Diversity and Race in Sports that found;

White men held the overwhelming percentage of positions in all three of the NCAA's divisions at 88.8%, 92.7%, and 96.2% in Divisions I, II, and III, respectively. This compared to 90.0%, 92.0%

Curriculum Unit 20.02.06 5 of 20

and 97.0% in 2007-2008 respectively. In comparison, African-Americans (Black men) held 7.4%, 3.1%, and 2.2% of the positions respectively in Divisions I, II and III. This is in comparison to 7.2%, 3.8% and 1.8% in 2006 respectively. In addition, at the Associate Director-level positions, White men comprised 88.5%, 82.8%, and 92.6% of the total population at Division I, II and III respectively. And, African Americans held 8.2%, 14.4%, and 5.4% of the positions at each level. Moreover, as of October 2010, there were eight African American athletic directors at Football Bowl Series (FBS) institutions; and of the 120 Athletic Directors who oversee FBS football-programs; there were 106 (88.3%) who were White men.

What makes this even more unacceptable is that the young men on the field are predominantly African American. According to Ramsey Dahab, in "Class, Race, and Corporate Power" (2016) when looking at the South Eastern Conference, "69 percent of all SEC football players who received athletic aid from their college or university in the 2013 fall semester self-identified as black, race differentials among declared majors could be assessed across a team's depth chart" (Dahab 2016). So, what does it say for the uplift and organizational long-term investment that just one coach in the entire conference is African American?

Simply put, there doesn't seem to be much of a long-term investment in the students. The red carpet that was so freely laid out during their high school recruitment is just as quickly rolled up when their eligibility is exhausted. When student athletes are given a stage, they should use that platform to advocate not only for themselves, but for social change both in the school and in the world.

# The King of the World, a Criminal to his Country

Jack Johnson was the first African American heavyweight champion of the world, defeating Tommy Burns in 1908 (Gems 2005). Joe Lewis, the Brown Bomber, reached hero status for knocking out Germany's Max Schmeling in 1938 (Gems 2005). Although these men made their marks in the history books, it is not until Muhammad Ali that you find an individual that is so in tune with the struggle for others that he would sacrifice his career for a cause greater than himself.

Muhammad Ali is arguably the most famous athlete that ever walked the earth. The Olympic champion and three-time heavyweight champion found few equals in the ring. According to himself, he was too pretty, too fast and indeed king of the world. With all of that fame and skill, it would have been easy for Ali to make his money and leave his people to fend for themselves.

In 1964, the Vietnam War was heating up. Lyndon B. Johnson, the president in 1964, made it his business to quell any discourse that could be seen as unsupportive to the war effort. The nation was trying to promote the war as "the North Vietnamese were the bad guys with the Black hats killing innocent South Vietnamese democrats, while the United States acted as the sheriff's posse riding to the rescue" (Bowman 2018). Johnson and the federal government made it their business to torpedo anyone who spoke out against the war.

African Americans were over 20 percent of the fatality rate in the war. However, they only made up 10 percent of the entire military force in Vietnam and were 13 percent of the United States population. In 1965, they were one-fourth of all fatal casualties (Calamur 2016). Ali's fight would be for more than just himself, but for a people, who had not only been oppressed but also sent to die at a disproportionate rate, compared to

Curriculum Unit 20.02.06 6 of 20

their eligible peers.

On March 9, 1966, Ali's draft status was revised so that he would be able to fight in the Vietnam (Calamur 2016). His rational for not joining the United States military was that he was a conscientious objector as well as a minister, which would prevent him from taking up arms. Ali had converted to Islam, joining the Nation of Islam under the leadership of Elijah Muhammad and the personal mentorship of Malcolm-X. On April 28, 1967, Ali walked into a Houston building that at one time had served as a courthouse. There he refused induction into the military. By not stepping forward and raising his right hand, Ali accepted the fact that he would be tried in federal court (Bowman 2018). The federal government marked Ali as a threat to the social and political mindset of the American people and an effort would be created to make an example out of Ali.

The example of Ali was easily organized and implemented. Of Kentucky's 641 local draft board officials, only one person was African American (0.2 percent), even though African Americans made up over 7 percent of the state's population. Out of the 26,900 eligible males for the draft, some 15,410 were "deferred, exempted or disqualified." Around 200,000 became "accused of draft offenders and twice that number became apparent draft offenders. Ali's claim that he was a "Conscientious Objector" was a status that was not easily substantiated. Those that were accepted belonged to church organizations that the government felt met certain pacifist qualifications. According to "The Muhammad Ali Draft Case and The Vietnam War", the Nation of Islam did not have a successful case in terms of granted exemption until Muhammad Ali's case.

In August 1966, Ali appeared before Judge Lawrence Grauman. Ali claimed that he had been reclassified because of his membership in the Nation of Islam: "Why are they so anxious to pay me \$80 a month—me, who in two fights pay for six new jet planes. I pay the salaries of at least 200,000 men a year. I'm fighting for the Government every day." (Harrison 2016). This hearing went well for Ali. Judge Grauman even wrote "the registrant was of good character, morals and integrity and sincere in his objection on religion grounds to participation in war in any form" (Harrison 2016). Hearing this news, the Department of Justice wrote to the appeals board in opposition of Judge Grauman and Ali's appeal was denied. The judicial fight went on.

On May 8, 1967, Ali was indicted by a federal grand jury and ordered to stand trial. On June 19,1967, the trial began. Judge Joe Ingraham presided over the case. After the arguments were heard, it took the all-white jury 20 minutes to deliberate over the mountains of paperwork and evidence. Ali received a maximum sentence of five years and up to a \$10,000 fine (Bowman 2018). Moreover, the government stripped him of his boxing license and had his passport revoked, making it nearly impossible for him to earn a living in the ring. Yet, Ali stood firm. When questioned by reporters, he explained, "What can you give me, America, for turning down my religion? You want me to do what the white man says, to go fight a war against some people I know nothing about, get some freedom for some other people when my own people can't get theirs here?" (Bowman 2018)

In the months to come, Ali would work in a number of avenues to make ends meet. He endorsed a fast food chain called Champ Burger and even worked on a Broadway play, never losing his conviction or his pride. Luckily, "in 1970, Ali had regained the right to fight. An important part of that process came in a federal civil suit in the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York. Judge Walter Mansfield found that the New York Athletic Commission had unfairly singled Ali out for sanctions in violation of the Fourteenth Amendment's Equal Protection Clause" (Bowman 2018). This ruling allowed Ali to fight again and earn a living. He fought Joe Frazier in a bout that was dubbed "The Fight of the Century." Unfortunately, the time on the sidelines took a toll on Ali and he lost to Frazier in a grueling match.

Although he was able to continue his boxing career, the legal battle surrounding Ali's draft status continued.

Curriculum Unit 20.02.06

7 of 20

During those months Ali continued to lose in the lower courts and in-turn, he appealed his case to the Supreme Court. There were only eight of the nine justices because the ninth, Justice Thurgood Marshall, "had disqualified himself because he had been the Justice Department's Solicitor General when Ali's case originated" (Anderson 2016). After hearing the arguments, the justices convened in chambers and they had a 5-3 vote at first against Ali. While deliberation continued, a Clerk handed John Marshall Harlan, the justice assigned to write the majority decision, a book titled, "The Brethren," a book by Bob Woodward and Scott Armstrong (Anderson 2016).

After reading the book, the Justice had a better understanding of Islam and its practices. He changed his vote and encouraged the other justices to do the same. At that time, they were at a 4-4 vote which would still have sent Ali to prison. Harlan explained that the lower courts had made a technical error in the case and that error made his previous ruling flawed (Anderson 2016). Ali was set free and regained his championship defeating George Foreman in the "Rumble in the Jungle"

# **Somethings Brewing in Syracuse**

In terms of college football, Syracuse was one of first to make a significant mark in terms of integration. The university had African American football players Jim Brown, Floyd Little, Jim Nance, and the great Ernie Davis, who led The Orangemen to the 1959 National Championship. Davis was the first African American to win the Heisman Trophy. In subsequent years, Syracuse lost some of its reformative momentum. In 1969, nine African American student-athletes, who later become 8, organized a protest in the form of boycotting for the ill and inequitable treatment of student athletes on campus.

The students who were behind the boycott were comprised of Gregory Allen, Richard Bulls, Danna Harrell, John Godbolt, John Lobon, Clarence "Bucky" McGill, A. Alif Muhammad, Duane Walker and Ron Womack, known as the Syracuse 8 (Carr 2019). In an interview with PBS, Harell and Muhammad explained that they wanted four things: assignments based on merit, academic advisors, better healthcare, and for African American coaches to be hired on team's staff (Carr 2019). The players demand for rigorous academic options focused in the majors and careers they wanted to pursue. Fully aware that most wouldn't be pursuing professional careers, the players wanted to leave school with the best education and degrees they could acquire, hence they demanded that they be provided with the same academic advisement as their white teammates. Alif Muhammad stated, "You'd get a grade and you'd be eligible to play, but by the time it came to graduate, you didn't meet the school's requirements" (Carr 2019).

Alif went further, "They wouldn't allow me to take a calculus course, a math course, because it was during football practice," he says. "And the only option was to take a calculus honors class. And the assumption was, 'You're a football player, what are you doing over here?' And I felt, kind of, insulted. And it was kind of like, you know, they wanted me to take general reading classes and general education classes. And it was like, 'Wait a minute — no, no, no." (Given and Springer 2017).

Their request for proper medical care was based on them wanting to protect their long-term health. The players felt that many of the universities' athletes had been subject to malpractice by the universities' training staff that had made multiple errors in the treatment of both black and white students. Greg Allen explains "Our medical doctor for our football team was a gynecologist by training" (Given and Springer 2017).

Curriculum Unit 20.02.06 8 of 20

Finally, their request for African American coaches stemmed from their additional request for more playing time based on performance. According to the Players Tribune, Syracuse had not had a coach of color since 1893 in any sport on their entire campus. For years, the practice on Syracuse's university and throughout the nation was that there would only be a cap on the number of African American athletes on the field at a time. This limited contribution and exposure opportunities for these players, which had disadvantageous implications if they wanted to pursue professional careers, Ronald Womack explained. Ali Muhammad remembers "Give us a shot based on our ability. One week you'd be the second-string fullback and then it'd be time to travel to an away game and all of a sudden, you'd be the third string defensive end, and left off the team bus" (Carr 2019). If African American coaches were hired onto the staff, the players believed they would have advocates in the coaches, which would create a system where playing time was provided based on ability and not color.

According to the players, they began to lobby the assistant coaches for a platform. After being dismissed by the assistant staff, Greg Allen spoke on behalf of the eight, presenting the discrimination concerns to Floyd Ben Schwartzwalder, head coach of the Orangemen. After hearing his concerns, Allen said his coach said "Well then, you have a decision to make. You can't be black and be a football player" (Given and Springer 2017). Disappointed in their coach's indifference to their cause, the players continued to plead with him. When refused, they sat out a spring practice and were subsequently suspended from the team. Jim Brown returned to campus to help ease some of the tensions between the players and the coaching staff but it was to little avail. To the university's credit, they did hire an African American assistant the next year, however he wasn't even placed on the football program. In a half-handed consolation effort, the players were allowed to keep their scholarships and graduate, but they never played football for the Orangemen again.

# The Black 14

Another example of African Americans advocating for social change was found at the University of Wyoming in the October of 1969. At the time, Wyoming had one of the best teams in its school's history, ranked second in the nation. They returned a team that had senior leadership, skilled players both on the offensive and defensive sides of the ball and were poised to make another run at their league's championship.

The nation was in the midst of several social movements, and those movements had come to college football, too. BYU's football team had boycotted their football team after The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints doubled-down on their policy barring African American pastors from the priesthood. With some student athletes of rival colleges boycotting games against BYU, the pressure to change the school's policies began to grow (Yang 2020).

The news of BYU's African American players and their protest swept across the nation. Wanting to play their part in the struggle, 14 of the African American players on the University of Wyoming team organized. Willie Black was chancellor of the University's Black Student Alliance and leader of various social movements on campus. He presented his plan for a peaceful protest to the athletic director and president of the University. The protest would be held outside of the stadium and it would take place prior to the game.

Having heard of a possible protest, the head coach, Lloyd Eaton, told the team's tri-captain Joe Williams that if anyone on his team participated in any type of demonstration, they would lose their spot on the team. Fully

Curriculum Unit 20.02.06 9 of 20

aware of what might happen if they disobeyed their coach. Earl Lee, John Griffin, Willie Hysaw, Don Meadows, Ivie Moore, Tony Gibson, Jerry Berry, Joe Williams, Mel Hamilton, Jim Isaac, Tony Magee, Ted Williams, Lionel Grimes and Ron Hill came together with a plan to protest BYU (Yang 2020).

On October 17<sup>th</sup>, a Friday morning the young men came together in the Washakie Center, a dorm on campus, to organize and create a list of objectives. The student athletes wanted a platform to speak on BYU's treatment of African Americans at their school. Their goal was to bring attention to the power structure of the Mormon church and how that church systematically barred people of color from earning positions in the priesthood, positions of power within the denomination.

They wore armbands as a show of solidarity as various civil rights groups throughout the nation were wearing the bands uniformly (Yang 2020). The young men thought they would be supported, but they were wrong. Joe Williams told Sports Illustrated, "Like hell he gave us 10 minutes," said Williams. "He came in, sneered at us and yelled that we were off the squad. He said our very presence defied him. He said he has had some good Negro boys. Just like that." (Yang 2020) Pat Putman of Sports Illustrated reported that Ted Williams, another Wyoming player said, " "Then he said it was stupid for us to be protesting against a faith and a religion none of us knew about," said Willie Hysaw, an ex-receiver. "Talk about stupid! Do you know that Ted Williams [another of the 14] is a Mormon?" (Yang 2020)

Although Wyoming was undefeated at the time, and its African American players made up the bulk of the talent for the team, Coach Eaton kicked all 14 of the players off of the team and they never played football at the University of Wyoming again. In the months that followed, there would be contrasting stories of what really happened. Athletic Director, Red Jacoby said, "ample notice was given to all members of the football team regarding rules and regulations of the squad, some of which cover a ban on participation in student demonstrations of any kind. Our football coaching staff has made it perfectly clear to all members of the team that groups, or factions, will not be tolerated and that team members will be treated as individuals." (White 2014). Jacoby would go further saying ""We had no choice but to drop them from the squad. It is unfortunate this happened, but an open defiance of a coaching staff regulation cannot be tolerated." (White 2014).

After the coach tried to justify his stance on the matter, the UW Student Senate took it upon themselves to resolve the issue. In a 15-3 vote that alleged, "coach Eaton refused to grant a rational forum for discussion, choosing instead to degrade and arbitrarily dismiss each player...." The resolution said the ASUW Senate "expresses its shock at the callous, insensitive treatment afforded 14 Black athletes. . . .[T]he actions of coach Eaton and the Board of Trustees were not only uncompromising, but unjust and totally wrong" (White 2014).

Moreover, the students also received support from the faculty members who believed that the students were unjustly treated. On Oct. 30, 1969, the faculty of the UW College of, Arts and Sciences—the university's largest—voted 114-38 to pass a resolution charging that "fourteen black athletes have been given deep human injury and have been dismissed without a trace of due process by Coach Lloyd Eaton. . . .[T]his faculty believes that the action. . .was unjust, unconstitutional, and unwise, bringing the entire University into disrepute" (White 2014). Acting in alliance with the Wyoming faculty, the president barred any competition with its institution and schools that were aligned with the Mormon church. With all of this support the players still had a great deal of work cut out for them.

In the following months, the NAACP would take the case to federal court where they filed against the State of Wyoming. The NAACP lost the case however it was later discovered the judge presiding over the case, Judge Ewing T. Kerr, had attended a booster event that honored Lloyd Eaton on November 25th of that year. This,

Curriculum Unit 20.02.06 10 of 20

without a doubt, was a conflict of interest yet Ewing had the last word in the case, dismissing the charges against the state. The following season Eaton would have his worst record and would be moved to an administrative job in the athletic department, a promotion. It wasn't until 1978 that the Mormon church lifted its ban on African Americans and allowed them to join the priesthood.

# **Mahmoud Abdul-Rauf:**

Today many people have looked towards Colin Kaepernick as the first person to stand-up while kneeling down against the oppression created by the dominant society. However, in a time not long before his demonstration, there was Mahmoud Abdul-Rauf. Ahead of his time, he was star player at Louisiana State University. A 6-1 guard who could split through defenders like butter, Abdul could also demoralize his opponent's morale from long range, averaging thirty points a game for the Tigers. Abdul was picked 3<sup>rd</sup> in the 1990 NBA draft. That same year, he converted to Islam (Washington 2016).

During the 1995-96 season, Abdul was coming into his prime, presenting a game that resembled the likes of today's Steph Curry. He was one of the few players that was able to lead his team to a win over Michael Jordan. During that season, he had been troubled with the league's pregame patriotic salute to America and its flag. At first, the organization allowed Abdul to stay back in the locker room during the anthem. This was a collective effort, agreed upon by Abdul, The Nuggets front office and the NBA.

In March of the 1996 season, fans noticed that Abdul was absent from the opening lineup and anthem routines. Angered by what they felt was a blatant and disrespectful demonstration, they flooded Denver's front office with calls demanding answers. Under pressure, both the NBA and the Nuggets reversed course and demanded that Abdul take his place with the rest of the team during the pre-game rituals. Kelly Koning of the Washington Law Review reported that Abdul initially refused and he was suspended by the NBA, a move that cost him more than \$30,000 per game. Abdul was extremely disappointed by the leagues decision telling The Undefeated, "You can't be for God and for oppression. It's clear in the Quran, Islam is the only way," he said at the time. "I don't criticize those who stand, so don't criticize me for sitting" (Washington 2016). Bryan Mclentrye, Spokesmen for the NBA presented a rebuttal saying, "The ball's in his court. This is not a religious issue, it's a simple procedural rule" (Denlinger 1996). According to the NBA, his refusal to stand violates a league rule requiring all players to "line up in a dignified posture" for the anthem (Denlinger 1996).

Abdul returned to the line-up the next game and prayed while the anthem and processions commenced prior to the game. Still, the bleeding continued and "the Denver Nuggets received more than two hundred phone calls from irate fans threatening to boycott games as long as Abdul-Rauf remained with the team. During this time,138 fans threatened to cancel their season tickets. Moreover, the league itself feared that the economic consequences of fan reprisals might translate into a reduction in support from advertisers and television networks" (Washington 2016).

While this might have seen like a solution at the time, the wheels of collusion had begun to turn. Abdul, who by most experts would have been considered the team's star was averaging 19.2 points and 6.8 assist a game found himself traded to the Sacramento Kings at season's end (Washington 2016). In Sacramento, Abdul found his role diminished, and without the opportunity to earn adequate playing time, he couldn't find a rhythm and was out of the league at the end of his season. Years later, he believes that ownership and the

Curriculum Unit 20.02.06 11 of 20

league colluded to blackball him. He tells Jesse Washington of the Undefeated (2016), "They begin to try to put you in vulnerable positions. They play with your minutes, trying to mess up your rhythm. Then they sit you more. Then what it looks like is, well, the guy just doesn't have it anymore."

In the years that followed, Abdul played overseas in Turkey but would never again step foot on the NBA hardwood. The owners and the NBA, the players puppet-masters, successfully made an example out of him. Kelly B. Koeing of the Washington Law Review (1998), made the case that Abdul may have been able to potentially take legal action against the league by "asserting claims under Title VII of The Civil Rights Act of 1964 as amended in 1972. This says that Title VII makes it "an unlawful employment practice for an employer to ... discriminate against any individual with respect to his compensation, terms, conditions, or privileges of employment because of such individual's race, color, religion, sex or national origin. Such a suit would come at a massive legal cost that could be held up in court for years. Abdul wouldn't have been fighting for compensation by the Nuggets, he'd be taking on the entire league, "The NBA exercised the requisite "monumental control" over each franchise team, including the Denver Nuggets" (Koenig 1998). Hence, it was the league who made the final decision.

# Maya Moore: The Definition of Personal Sacrifice

Maya is considered "The Goat" to most people who follow women's basketball. She's been to the WNBA finals six times where she's won four championships. She's won two NCAA championships and won two Gold medals in the Olympics. She has even won a WNBA MVP. In high school, she won three state championships. At the age of 29, Moore was still in the prime of her career, yet like Michael Jordan who took a baseball sabbatical at 29 and Barry Sanders who left at 30, Moore made the decision to leave the sport, but her decision was based on servicing others (Herring and Paine 2020).

Enter Jefferson Correctional facility, a maximum state penitentiary in the heart of Missouri. There you'd find Jonathan Irons, who was 40 years old and had been imprisoned for a crime that took place in 1997. According to the New York Times, the crime took place in, "O'Fallon, Mo., a predominantly white, working-class suburb of St. Louis, on the evening of Jan. 14, 1997. A 38-year-old man, Stanley Stotler, returned to his home and was confronted by a burglar, court records say. Shots were fired, two by the burglar with a .25-caliber handgun, and one by Stotler in self-defense..." (Marchi 2020). Stotler was able to call the police and get help. A few days later, Irons was arrested. He was 16 years old.

According to Irons, he had been in the community and had a gun, but he didn't commit this crime. When he had his court date in 1998, there were not any tapes from the investigation. The prosecution could not present any tapes with Irons confessing and the detective in the case was unable to be cross-examined because he was sick at the time of the trial. Although Irons did say he had a gun that day, he was adamant that he did not have a .25 caliber, the one that was used at the crime scene. This situation occurred during the Three Strikes, You're Out legislation and Tough on Crime era. In the prosecutors' closing arguments, they said, "Don't be soft on him because he is young." A prosecutor urged during Irons' trial, "He is as dangerous as somebody five times that age. We need to send a message to some of these younger people that if you are going to act like somebody old, you are going to be treated like somebody old." (Marchi 2020). The court did just that, and Irons was sentenced with no irrefutable evidence to substantiate the prosecutions claim to 50 years in prison (Hurd 2020).

Curriculum Unit 20.02.06 12 of 20

Maya Moore's connection to Irons comes from her godparent, Reggie Williams, who played an instrumental part in Maya's upbringing. Williams, a man of staunch faith, organized a volunteer prison ministry that Maya had taken interest in. During her senior year in high school, Williams began talking to her about Iron's case, that he was a child when he was convicted, had little support in terms of defense and that he had been in a white neighborhood when the crime had occurred, which made it more likely that someone was going to have to pay a heavy price for the damage that had been done. Moore was intrigued and in 2007, she met Irons and the two hit-it-off, developing a brother/sister like bond.

When Moore left the WNBA, she did so without a clear purpose, but she quickly found in the realm of prison reform and Irons' case would be the first initiative she'd set out on. Because Moore was the best female player on the planet, she was able to provide something that Irons, and many African Americans navigating the judicial system, often go without: resources in the form of financial and human capital.

Moreover, by attaching her name and fame to the case, she was able to bring attention to it and Missouri's judicial system, turning up the pressure in order to garnish the necessary attention by decision makers. In a Change.org petition, she explains, "I'm dedicating my life to freeing Jonathan the same way I dedicated myself to each game in the WNBA. And it's why I need your help today. I urge you to join me in asking Judge Daniel Green and Missouri Assistant Attorney General Patrick J. Logang, the Office of the Missouri State Attorney General and the Office of the District Attorney of Saint Charles County to take into account the undeniable facts of Jonathan's case, and provide justice for Jonathan Irons once and for all."

From that petition, she was able to gather 272,034 signatures from supporters demanding justice for Irons. Moore would go on to tell Time Magazine that she believed in Irons and that she wanted justice because "there were highly unreliable eyewitness testimony practices, eyewitness testimony procedures with no physical evidence, no footprints, DNA, blood. He had alibi witnesses that were never brought to the stand, and there were unidentified fingerprints that didn't belong to Jonathan or the victim. That was never acknowledged during the trial" (Gregory 2020).

After assembling a strong legal team of professionals and pushing Missouri legislators to take action, Iron's had a chance through fingerprint evidence and new expert testimony. In May of 2019, Judge Daniel Green agreed to a new hearing of the case. Both the prosecution and defense gave strong arguments and another hearing was granted. In March of 2020, Judge Green threw out the case, citing "found the defense for Irons provided enough evidence to prove he was wrongfully convicted (Feinberg 2020). The Missouri Attorney General's office appealed but they were not successful (Feinberg 2020). Because of Mya's selfless sacrifice, Irons was able to walk free an innocent man.

# **Objectives**

Students gain a better understanding of the History of Activism within sports.

Students gain an appreciation for the sacrifices that African American athletes have made in the name of justice, equality and collective progression.

Students should expect to acquire an understanding of how systems and power structures are created and maintained by the dominant class.

Curriculum Unit 20.02.06 13 of 20

Students should expect to reflect on how sports have been manipulated by money, greed and classism over time and why those structures are functioning entities today.

# **Activities**

# The Ali Enters the Supreme Court:

Students receive a lecture on The Trial of Muhammad Ali. They will use the notes and the articles provided by the instructor, the media used in class, personal notes taken from close reading in and out of class in addition to their peer to peer conversations regarding the topic. Once the instructor feels that the class has enough collective evidence, he/she will split the class in two different groups, the prosecution and the defense. The jury will be made up of parent volunteers and support staff. There will be nine people on the jury. The jury will then vote with paper ballets to see if Ali walks free or not.

# **Comparing and Contrasting Kaepernick to Other Protests in America:**

For the term paper, the students will write an essay connecting Kaepernick's protest to The Syracuse 8, The Black 14, Mahmoud Abdul-Rauf or any other African American athlete(s) who sacrificed their careers to prove a point. The essay will compare and contrast the different events. The student should be prepared to provide evidence as to how the two are similar and how are they different. After the necessary connections have been established, the writer should be prepared to provide a conclusive statement that explains whether they agree with the actions of the athletes and if those actions actually helped to bring about the social change they were trying to implement.

### Additional Resources:

- 1. https://www.forbes.com/sites/vincentfrank/2019/11/16/colin-kaepernick-situation-proves-nfl-collusion-is-real-and-has-no-bounds/#73ca14366aa2
- 2. https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/15/sports/nfl-colin-kaepernick-protests-timeline.html

#### Dinner and a Movie:

Teachers will volunteer their time after school to watch films based on the social impacts of the various cases we've discussed. The teacher should tell all of their students two weeks before they plan to have the event. They should make sure they have permission forms from each student, and everyone has a ride home. As students watch the film, they should take notes based on overarching ideas within the film. Once the film is over, they should respond to a five-paragraph prompt provided by the educator that connects what they're learning about in class to the film that was surveyed after school. This should be for extra credit as the film's viewing was voluntary. The films are as follows:

# Films:

"Muhammad Ali's Greatest Fight," https://www.imdb.com/title/tt2061756/

"The Black 14" https://www.topic.com/black-14

Curriculum Unit 20.02.06 14 of 20

### **African American Journalist Speak Out:**

Students will be immediately indoctrinated into their own version of a Black Student Union at a local state-run university. They will use a series of different articles and clips to create an evidence based persuasive argument to the NCAA. They will take evidence from a series of different articles and clips that highlight the injustice that is College Football and the lack of opportunities that are provided to players of color when it comes to leadership both on the sidelines and in the school's athletic departments. If the student chooses to, they can have their essay sent to the NCAA's offices in Indianapolis.

African American Journalist Articles:

- Shame on College Football for Lack of Black Coacheshttps://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8PxgltN7-H4
- Reason for Lack of Black Coaches in College Football: Irresponsible Journalism?
   https://bleacherreport.com/articles/83354-reason-for-lack-of-black-coaches-in-college-football-irresponsible-journalism
- Challenges Persist in Hiring Black Head Coaches in College Football https://diverseeducation.com/article/108462/
- Lack of black head coaches in major college football still crucial issue for universitieshttps://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/ncaaf/2018/09/27/black-head-coaches-fbs-adopt-roo ney-rule-policy/1437792002/

Lack of African American Coaches in Professional Leagues:

Video:

ESPN's Steven A. Smith Speaks NFL- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E70Oj9ZbMIM

ESPN'S Steven A. Smith Speaks NBA

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ojMtAGm6-78

Steven A Smith Final Take Black Coaches

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LF5Pbw1v5ew

College Football Doesn't Give Black Coaches Many Chances, But For Other Folks ... Chances Abound https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8PxgltN7-H4&t=969s

BBC - Arthur Ashe: More Than a Champion (2015)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FX09hjb4XYA

# Women in Social Justice:

Every student in the class should research a female athlete whose had a social impact on society. The athlete is of their choosing and should be presented in a PowerPoint or Prezi presentation of no more than ten minutes and no less than five. Once they've found their athlete, they should explain how that athlete has had a positive impact on people and issues that need attention, resources and reform.

Curriculum Unit 20.02.06 15 of 20

#### Arthur's Actions:

The following article and film give a detailed account of Arthur Ashe and how he used sports to create change. Students should read the article, watch the film and compare Ashe's actions to other athletes. They should be prepared to write a two page compare and contrast response explaining the contrasts and similarities between Ashe and other Athletes' pursuit of justice through sports.

Articles:

Arthur Ashe's real legacy was his activism, not his tennis

https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2018/sep/09/arthur-ashe-legacy-activism-tennis

Media:

BBC - Arthur Ashe: More Than a Champion (2015)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FX09hjb4XYA

# **A Conversation with Morehouse:**

Morehouse College has made an unapologetic effort to create a pipeline of African American journalists to help document the stories of athletes, especially athletes of color. The Program is called Journalism and Sports and Ron Thomas is the head of this effort. Teachers should reach out to Mr. Thomas and schedule a time to speak with the director on why it's important for people of color to have some level of representation in sports journalism. This can be done over Zoom and students should have questions prepared before the meeting. If students are not able to connect with Morehouse. The teacher should reach out to a local HBCU or new reporter of color who covers sports. They should learn the preparation process of professional journalist, why they are important to telling a more authentic story when it comes to athletes of color and how student can become involved if they are interested. Note: The writer of this unit was the first graduate of this program.

### The Story of Jemele Hill and Michael Smith:

Student will review the timelines, financial implications and politics of Jemele Hill and Michael Smith's times with ESPN. What actions were taken by the reporters before, during and after their time with ESPN? How did politics come into play and what were the president and networks roles and how did they impact the anchors professional careers? Once the proper information is presented, students will be asked to decide if they felt the anchors and the network made the right decision in how they went about handling the controversy.

### Resources:

The Story of Jemele Hill and Michael Smith Resources:

CS6 ON Kaepernick-Video

The Breakfast Club- Jemele Hill and Michael Smith

Michael Smith's exit brings an end to ESPN's 'SC6' experiment

Curriculum Unit 20.02.06 16 of 20

# **Appendix for Implementing District Standards**

Common Core National:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.1

Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.9

Integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies among sources

### **History PA Standards:**

CC.8.6.11-12.C.

Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience

CC.8.6.11-12.H.

Draw evidence from informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

### **English:**

CC.1.5.11-12.B

Evaluate how the speaker's perspective, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric affect the credibility of an argument through the author's stance, premises, links among ideas, word choice, points of emphasis, and tone.

CC.1.4.11-12.D

Organize complex ideas, concepts, and information so that each new element builds on that which precedes it to create a whole; use appropriate and varied transitions and syntax to link the major sections of the text; provide a concluding statement or section that supports the information presented; include formatting when useful to aiding comprehension.

CC.1.5.11-12.G

Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English when speaking based on Grades 11-12 level and content.

Curriculum Unit 20.02.06 17 of 20

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Curriculum Unit 20.02.06 19 of 20



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Curriculum Unit 20.02.06 20 of 20