“WE’VE BEEN DOING THIS. BUT FOR THE FIRST TIME, PEOPLE ARE PAYING ATTENTION.” HBCU ATHLETICS AND RACIAL JUSTICE MOTIVATED COLLEGE CHOICE

By

KONADU Y. GYAMFI

(Under the Direction of Merrily Dunn)

ABSTRACT

Black people in America have proven to be able to survive against the racial tensions and attacks endured throughout history (Love, 2019). In our present context, continued racism and violence against Black bodies has shifted the narrative from merely surviving to a journey towards advancement. In this dissertation study, I use endarkened feminist epistemology (Dillard, 2000) as a lens owned by and familiar to Black experiences to explore how the recent violence against Black bodies such as Trayvon Martin, Eric Garner, Sandra Bland, Philando Castile, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, George Floyd, and others has sparked a paradigm shift among Black student athletes. A few highly ranked Black student athlete recruits have made intentional choices after recent racial injustices by electing to attend historically Black institutions over their primarily White Power 5 counterparts. I utilize narrative inquiry with an endarkened feminist epistemological framework to explore the perspective of HBCU athletics professionals as they watch this paradigm shift unfold.

INDEX WORDS: HBCU, Racial Justice, Student Athletes, Activism

“WE’VE BEEN DOING THIS. BUT FOR THE FIRST TIME, PEOPLE ARE PAYING ATTENTION.” HBCU ATHLETICS AND RACIAL JUSTICE MOTIVATED COLLEGE

by

KONADU Y. GYAMFI

B.A., Quinnipiac University, 2012

M.Ed., Virginia Commonwealth University, 2015

A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial

Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2022

“WE’VE BEEN DOING THIS. BUT FOR THE FIRST TIME, PEOPLE ARE PAYING ATTENTION.” HBCU ATHLETICS AND RACIAL JUSTICE MOTIVATED COLLEGE
by

KONADU Y. GYAMFI

Major Professor:	Merrily Dunn
Committee:	Ginny Jones Boss
	Courtney Gay

Electronic Version Approved:

Ron Walcott
Vice Provost for Graduate Education and Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
August 2022

DEDICATION

Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. James 1:17

I am only a vessel, doing the work the Lord called me to do. I dedicate this work back to God. Thank you for choosing me and using me.

I also dedicate this degree to:

My mother. You told me I was going to get a PhD and here I am, getting a PhD

My father. You always support and sponsor all my endeavors.

My sister Adwoa Prah. You are my biggest cheerleader and motivator.

My brother. You were one of the few people I knew that wanted to attend an HBCU

To my good friend Melanie. You were the one person actively trying to get me to consider HBCUs in high school. I'm finally paying attention.

To Reverend Isaac M. Arku. For a long time, you were the only person I knew with a PhD, and you pushed us, the young people, to pursue education

And to Isaac M. Arku, Junior. I didn't know how I could finish this degree after you left this world. But here I am, PhinisheD.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Isaiah 54:17 say “No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD, and their righteousness is of me, saith the LORD.” In this season of writing my dissertation, the weapons most certainly formed but they did not prosper. I give all honor and thanks first to God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit for bringing me to and through this program. If it wasn’t for my faith, and the promises in the word of God, I would have never completed this program.

Thank you to my mom, dad, and brother. I love you dearly.

My committee, Dr. Ginny Jones-Boss, Dr. Courtney Gay, and my advisor, Dr. Merrily Dunn. It has been quite the roller coaster! Thank you for helping me get here.

Dr. Michael Fulford for being a supervisor and pseudo advisor, counselor, and career coach.

My first advisor, Dr. Darris Means and the one who gave me my first opportunity as a research assistant, Dr. Diane Cooper. Thank You

Dr. Carrie LeCrom and the faculty at the Center for Sport Leadership at VCU, Greg Burton, Dr. Brenden Dwyer, Dr. Greg Greenhalgh*, and Dr. Tim Lampe- thank you.

Thank you to my family at Light of the World Ministries: Bishop Reverend Isaac Arku, Reverend Maureen, Pastor and First Lady Konadu, Pastor Emmanuel, and Sis. Beatrice, Pastor (best friend) Brown and Sis. Rose, Pastor Daniel, and Sis. Ama, Pastor Veejay, and Aunty Victoria, Minister Patrick and Sis Josephine, Elder Calvin, and the entire congregation for all your prayers and encouragement.

Special thanks to Reverend Anthony Buckner. You always believed so much in me and my potential. I wish you were here to see me finish.

Special thanks to Alexis Achiah, Grace Agyepong, and Charity Kerene for being there every single day.

Thank you to my sisters Adwoa Prah, Ama Amoako, Deborah McKoy, Judith Asante, Lesly Boateng, Theresa Eduful, Darlene Buahin, Alexis Amankwanor, Melanie Prosper, Faith Arku, Adriel Mckoy, Wendy Tackie-Blackson, Deidre Mensah, Dorothy F, Pastor/Soon to be Dr. Gabrielle Dixon, Nana Gyesi, Amma Siribo, Sis. Agnes, Sis. Akos, Hannah Konadu, Renee Harley, Shanea Allen, Tatiana Hyman, Elizabeth Tetteh, Joyce Tetteh, Judith Agyepong, Andrea Evelyn, Christina Kwarteng, Karise Baxter, Naima Chowdhury, Sarah Darko, Amanda H., and Lericia Harris, for your cheers and your prayers.

To my brothers: Audel McKoy (for every flight and lounge access), Emmanuel Asante, D.J. Codner, William Buo, Andrew Prah, Kevin Acquah, Persius Mensah, Alvin Kumaga, Michael Cello, Mahdi, Kofi Mensah, Kevin Opoku-Gyamfi, Josiah Matthews, Joshua Konadu, Ephraim Asante, Kwasi Ayimadu, Peter Agyemang, Edmund Williams, Dominic Adams, Derek Ntiamoah, Chris Tackie, Dennis Amoateng, Andrew Johnson.

Athens community: “The Bobbettes” (Dr. Roshaunda Breeden, Dr. Niah Grimes, and soon to be Dr. Jenay Willis), My other soon to be Drs. Kristian Hogans, Shlon Smith, Marques Dexter, Narke Norton, My Black girl Caucus (Soon to be Drs. Bri Price, Tia Adelson)… thank you for writing sessions, talks, reviews, “podcasts,” voice notes, library sessions, zoom meetings, dinners, and all the things that helped me get here. Thank you to Dr. Prince Nkansah-Dwamena, my Ghana in Athens community, for the laughs, rides, and meals.

To my cohort mates Naoko Nemoto, Lauren Braun, Kevin Crawford, Dr. Carlton Smith, Aaron George, Maggie FitzSimmons, Ben Wentworth. Can't wait to see us all here. Thank you.

CSAA-D, CSAA-M, and Black CSAA past, present, and future, finish strong.

To all my nieces, nephews, godchildren, and cousins, y'all got next.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background

Black people in America have proven to be able to survive against the racial tensions and attacks endured throughout history (Love, 2019). In our present context, continued racism and violence against Black bodies has shifted the narrative from merely surviving to a journey towards advancement. In this study, I use endarkened feminist epistemology (Dillard, 2000) as a lens owned by and familiar to Black experiences to explore how the recent violence against Black bodies such as Trayvon Martin, Eric Garner, Sandra Bland, Philando Castile, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, George Floyd and others has sparked a paradigm shift among Black student athletes. A few highly ranked Black student athlete recruits have made intentional choices after recent racial injustices by electing to attend historically Black institutions over their primarily White Power 5 counterparts. I utilize narrative inquiry with an endarkened feminist epistemological framework to explore the perspective of HBCU athletics professionals as they watch this paradigm shift unfold.

Surviving to Thriving

I perceive that Black people have an internal guiding force; something similar to the natural bend of a plant towards the sun as its sustenance. Perhaps this guiding force within Black people began somewhere along the waves between Africa and the Americas at the onset of four hundred years of enslavement. Or perhaps, it was stirred up long before we reached these lands, sometime during our inception as a race on this planet. Either way, my life experiences as a Black woman and observations of Blackness have led me to this perception that deep within Black people, is an internal guiding force that directs us towards life.

Towards the end of the Disney film Black Panther, the antagonist character, Killmonger, utters an infamous line, crafted by the late actor Chadwick Boseman, saying “bury me in the ocean, with my ancestors that jumped from the ships, 'cause they knew death was better than bondage” (Coogler, 2018). Although a fictional film, what we do know as true from historical accounts is that some enslaved people on ships en route from Africa to the Americas did jump off into the ocean (Synder, 2015). Perhaps, enslaved people knew that they would live much longer in a watery grave than what lie before them in an unknown world.

Science tells us that substances in the ocean endure what is called residence time, which is the time it takes for that substance to leave the ocean once it enters (Sharpe, 2016). Human blood has a residence time of 260 million years therefore, maybe the enslaved people that jumped understood “the meaning of life as a process shared with the dead below the river or the sea” (Bolster, 1998, p. 65). Maybe their guiding force helped them understand a greater survival.

I perceive this internal guiding force for Black people as part of their epistemology. Epistemology responds to the question, “how we know” (Tennis, 2008, para. 9). We as Black people “know how” possibly because something within us guides us there. As Black people, it appears there is something deeply rooted, almost embedded into our DNA where we inherently know how to survive, evidenced through the ways enslaved Black people survived being stolen from their native lands and relocated to a foreign place (Synder, 2015). As centuries passed, the will to survive appears to have transitioned to a desire for more than just survival; it looked like thriving. Dr. Bettina Love (2019) acknowledges in her book, *We Want to do more Than Survive: Abolitionist Teaching and the Pursuit of Educational Freedom,* writing:

> We who are dark people see- which White Americans cannot- a country with enough promise to capture four hundred years of freedom dreams while systematically attacking,

> reducing, and/or destroying each and every aspiration. So, what do we want, knowing what we know...We who are dark want to matter and live, not just survive but to thrive. (p. 5)

The Movement for Black Lives

Racial tension between White people and people of color, particularly Black people is not a new phenomenon in America. America's history has been rooted in the mistreatment and destruction of people who were racially different from its founding fathers. Racial injustice, in the form of anti-Blackness, has not been tolerated by members of the Black community and their co-conspirators as evidenced by countless marches, protests, boycotts, and other forms of activism from as early as the days of the 1950s/1960s Civil Rights Movement (Favors, 2019). Presently, America is experiencing a resurgence of protest, disruption, pushback, and racial unrest with a similar intensity as the 1960s (Matthews, 2020). The racial unrest happening in current day is the result of an eruption of the countless acts of violence and inequity that the Black community has endured at the hands of law enforcement and a system of social stratification that places White people in a place of power above all communities of color (Williams, 2021).

The organization Black Lives Matter, founded in 2013, is a global organization that focuses on the simple truth that Black bodies are important (BLM, 2021). It was created in response to the acquittal of Trayvon Martin's murderer with a mission to "eradicate White supremacy and build local power to intervene in violence inflicted on Black communities by the state and vigilantes" (BLM, 2021, para. 1). The consistent prevalence of racial injustice and violence against Black people fuels a communal understanding of the opposite, that we do not matter to the state, White supremacists, and vigilantes. Dr. Love writes, "I am certain the dark

people have never truly mattered in this country except as property and labor. However, we have mattered to our communities, to our families, and to ourselves" (Love, 2019, p. 10).

Today, Black people are showing this mattering by embracing the essence of the Black Lives Matter movement and counteracting anti-Blackness in ways that make life better. "By combating and countering acts of violence, creating space for Black imagination and innovation, and centering Black joy, we are winning immediate improvements in our lives" (BLM, 2021)

From the onset of the Black Lives Matter movement, Black people have been searching for ways to not just escape violence, but to flourish and thrive in the spaces that seem to systemically target them for demise. The emergence of the Black Lives Matter movement prompted a resurgence of Black athlete activism at all competition levels (Edwards, 2016) which was catalyzed when the global pandemic Covid-19 paused all athletic activity in Spring of 2020 and athletes had time to reflect and act on racial injustice. The pressures of the pandemic paired with the frustration of witnessing the violent loss of Black life has brought student athletes to a place where they are taking action. In spring of 2020, the gruesome murder of George Floyd under the knee of a police officer can be equated to the pinnacle or the "straw that broke the camel's back," unleashing a wave of activism across the world and among groups like student athletes. Floyd's murder, along with the murder/violence against Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and Jacob Blake are a few of the recent Black bodies whose harm prompted such an intense activist response (Holmes, 2020). Student athletes used their platforms and positions of influence to magnify the message that Black lives matter. They have marched, protested, demonstrated, called out coaches and their universities, and refused to participate in athletic activities (Blinder & Witz, 2020). Another, more recent response has been the deliberate choice of some top performing Black student athletes considering and/or committing to Historically

Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) over Primarily White Institutions (PWIs; Mollo, 2021).

Black Student Athletes and Primarily White Institutions

In Fall of 2019, sport journalist Jemele Hill published an article in *The Atlantic* titled "Black Athletes Should Leave White Colleges." The title alone sparked controversy. Critics claimed that Hill's call to action was essentially calling for segregated schools; an American practice legally abolished in 1954 with the Brown v. Board of Education verdict. However, the premise for Hill's (2019) article actually was a plea for Black student athletes to return to HBCUs so that the financial rewards of revenue generating sports like football and men's basketball could benefit HBCUs. At many PWIs, revenue garnered from football and men's basketball are produced from the labor of teams where a majority of players are Black student athletes (Harper, 2018). The additional revenue can be of benefit, as research shows that many HBCUs struggle financially (Jones & Bell, 2016).

While Hill's (2019) argument resonated with some, another point for Black student athletes to join the rosters of HBCUs was stirring in the media. Prominent high school recruits were visiting HBCU campuses, thus alluding that they may attend an HBCU over NCAA Division I athletic programs at PWIs. It has been known that HBCU campuses have been a safe haven for Black students in general (Williams & Palmer, 2019). In many cases, especially in the southern United States, HBCUS were the only colleges and universities Black students could attend prior to 1954 when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Brown v. Board of Education* that racial segregation at public schools was unconstitutional (*Brown v. Board of Education,* 1954). Black students have felt more comfortable at HBCUs. One student athlete, quoted in the Jemele Hill (2019) article, remarked that transferring from a PWI to an HBCU felt like "you're back at

home in your neighborhood" (para. 8). What is it about HBCU campuses that feel like such a safe haven?

With the rise in racial tensions in this country, HBCUs appear to continue to be a safe space for Black college students now more than ever (Hill, 2019; Williams & Palmer, 2019). The resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement in the Spring/Summer of 2020, sparked an interest and ultimately a commitment of a few Black players, to attend a HBCU (Hammerschlag, 2020). It appears to be a direct response to Hill's (2019) call for Black athletes to attend Black schools. This act "invites more range and depth for what type of behaviors and engagement are recognized as resistance and activism," making the actions of these highly ranked student athletes a social movement of both resistance and activism (Stewart, 2019, p. 6).

George Floyd: The Pinnacle of Athlete Activism Today

The NBA, its players' union, and the WNBA challenged Congress to pass the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act on the one-year anniversary of his death (Hill, 2021). The legislation would ban choke holds, no-knock warrants, lower the legal barrier to prosecuting police misconduct, and establish a national database for police misconduct. Not only did the killing of George Floyd spark massive outrage and protests, but it forced athletes in professional sports to take actions to invoke change. Months after George Floyd's murder, police in Kenosha, Wisconsin shot civilian Jacob Blake multiple times. Blake did not die but was paralyzed from the shooting. In response, NBA and WNBA players boycotted games which encouraged teams in other sports leagues to also boycott (Stein, 2020). Former Georgia U.S. Senator Kelly Loeffler's dismissive comments on the Black Lives Matter Movement that led players from the WNBA to band together to help oust her from her position as Senator by pushing for the election of Reverend Raphael Warnock. Warnock's election to the Senate seat not only lost Loeffler her

position of governmental power, but also pressured her to sell her stake as co-owner of the Georgia WNBA team the Atlanta Dream (Deb & Draper, 2021).

George Floyd's murder also created a zero tolerance for racism attitude on the collegiate level as well. In June 2020, former Mississippi State University football student athlete (now member of the NFL's Green Bay Packers), Kylin Hill challenged the state of Mississippi in a tweet warning that he would no longer represent Mississippi if the Confederate symbol was not removed from the state flag. His strong stance moved his coach and the head coach of the University of Mississippi football team to lobby legislators to change the flag. Eight days after Kylin Hill's tweet, Mississippi Governor Tate Reeves signed a bill that ended use of the Confederate flag and its emblems in Mississippi (Hill, 2021).

"Daddy changed the world"

When George Floyd was murdered by subsequently fired and convicted police officer Derek Chauvin, it was estimated that between 15 and 26 million people in all 50 states and all over the world (except for Antarctica) participated in some form of protest (Suddler, 2021). One week after his death, Floyd's daughter Gianna made the statement, "Daddy changed the world" in response to the worldwide protests against Derek Chauvin kneeling on and ultimately killing George Floyd. Gianna's statement was accurate as it was reported that the killing of George Floyd "sparked the largest protest movement in U.S. history" (Suddler, 2021, para. 3). Floyd's death sparked a larger wave of athlete activism among professional and student athletes than that which was being revived by athletes with the Black Lives Matter movement beginning in 2013. Before 2013, athlete activism had been dormant since around the 1980s (Bryant, 2019).

The killing of George Floyd by a police officer made Black student athletes, yet again, live through the gruesome murder of another Black body. However, what resulted from such a

terrible act was a charge for student athletes to use their platforms to protest against police violence and racial injustice. Similar to the actions of the professional sports counterparts, using their platform forced the communities that these student athletes engaged in to reflect on how they would join in the efforts towards social justice. College coaches and university presidents crafted statements in solidarity to the racial trauma and civil unrest being protested all over America and the world (Blinder & Witz, 2020; McKenzie, 2020).

The passion and boldness within student athletes to fight for social justice amplified the way they challenged their universities short comings. To hold their schools accountable to the statements crafted, student athletes used tactics such as refusing to participate in athletic activities that generate revenue and publicity for the institution. At the University of Texas, student athletes requested the renaming of certain buildings and replacement of the school song "Eyes of Texas" because of its racist undertones. University of Florida football players chose to stop voluntary workouts and publicly exposed their head coach for lying to a reporter about having individual conversations with the players regarding the murder of George Floyd (Blinder & Witz, 2020).

Black Student Athletes at Historically Black Colleges and Universities

In June 2020, five-star high school basketball recruit Makur committed to attending and playing for Howard University, a HBCU in Washington D.C., over PWIs with strong basketball programs such as University of Kentucky and UCLA (Schad, 2020). In a Twitter statement Maker wrote "I need to make the HBCU movement real so that others will follow" (Schad, 2020, para. 3). In the same month, another top basketball recruit withdrew his commitment from the PWI, St. John's University, to attend Norfolk State University, a small HBCU in Virginia. Daniel Ingram, a star football player from Ohio, de-committed from the University of Cincinnati

and chose to attend the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff, another HBCU (Hammerschlag, 2020). In September 2020, twin volleyball student athletes Bria and Cimone Woodward decommitted from playing at Power 5 school Texas A&M University to attend and play for Howard University instead. The sisters shared that their shift to Howard was a "culturally-based decision" stating:

> We had to recognize that and decided that we wanted more. At first when we went through the recruiting process, we wanted a big conference and a big school. We had to take a step back and see that we can still play at a great school [at Howard] and make more of a decision that is culturally based. At Howard, we get the best of both worlds — excellent academics and athletics. (Rashad, 2020, para. 5).

Bria and Cimone's decision is an example of a trend happening post the murder of George Floyd where high school student athletes, many time highly sought-after recruits, have made intentional decisions to attend HBCUs because of the racial unrest they have witnessed in society. These two student athletes knew that they wanted more and knew that they could receive that by attending an HBCU over a PWI. Also, during this time, high profile student athletes committed to HBCUs with the promise of "changing the narrative" (Rhinehart, 2021). Shariq and Amirah O'Neal, children of former NBA player Shaquille O'Neal, committed to play basketball at Texas Southern University in Houston Texas and music mogul Master P's son Hercy Miller committed to Tennessee State in Nashville for basketball.

In December 2021, in what the New York Times calls "one of the most significant signings in the modern college football recruiting era", the class of 2022's No. 1 recruit, Travis Hunter, signed with Jackson State University over SEC schools Florida State University and the University of Georgia (Thames, 2021b, para. 3). While neither O'Neal, Miller, nor Hunter ever

stated that the social content of racial injustice was their reason for choosing HBCUs over the Power 5 PWIs that recruited them, their desire to change the narrative of where top recruits choose to attend college is still valuable to what Black student athletes are doing at this time. Hunter stated that he wanted to "light the way for others to follow…make it a little easier for the next player to recognize that HBUCs may be everything you want and more" (Thames, 2021b, para. 12). Hunter's statement can be perceived as an ode to epistemology and his knowing that an HBCU can be the place for he and other student athletes to thrive.

Black Professionals at Historically Black Colleges and Universities

Current Black student athletes witnessed their professional counterparts speak and act on issues of social injustice and similarly, have used their platform as student athletes to bring awareness and cultivate change. An article in the Associated Press states "…several high-profile former pro-athletes give up their lavish retirement lifestyles, roll up their sleeves and accept historically Black colleges and universities coaching positions at a time when the country seems ready to embrace social change" (Walker, 2021, para. 2). Tyrone Wheatley, a former NFL player, is in his third season as head football coach at Morgan State, an HBCU in Baltimore Maryland. Wheatley played at PWI University of Michigan before joining the NFL and understood how the aura of an HBCU is different when it comes to social justice issues. Wheatley states,

> [at Morgan State] this is the first time ever in my professional career that I've ever felt comfortable doing a situation like Black Lives Matter… I don't have to explain if I want to take a knee … or me supporting the young men who want to take a knee. (Mollo, 2021, para 11)

Other examples of this include former NFL players Deion Sanders and Eddie George who took on head coach positions at HBCUs in the 2021 season. Sanders is the head football coach at Jackson State University in Mississippi and George at Tennessee State University. George and Sanders equate their choice to coach at their respective HBCUs as "a calling." After learning of the murder of George Floyd, Sanders intentionally changed focus and redirected his job search away from the PWIs that were recruiting him and towards HBCUs which he explicitly states in interviews as "God led me to Jackson state" (Horka, 2020, para. 5). Since 2019, seven former professional athletes have been hired at HBCUs, bringing the currently total to at least thirteen at various HBCUs.

Jasmine Gurley, co-founder of HBCU Jump, an advocacy group for recruiting talented student athletes to HBCUs, uses the organization's platform to remind folks that HBCUs have always been doing the work that celebrities and professional athletes are starting in the wake of George Floyd's murder. "They've been there. Pouring back into communities and trying to uplift Black and brown people, that's what they've been doing since their founding" (Faris, 2021, para 17). NBA player Chris Paul is the first person in his family not to attend an HBCU but has been very outspoken in his support of these institutions. Besides raising funding for HBCU institutions, Chris Paul also raises exposure for them. Paul's pre-game and post-game outfits mostly always promote an HBCU or the institutions as a collective. He has also hosted HBCU basketball tournaments aired on ESPN networks and supporting a documentary being created about North Carolina HBCU Winston-Salem University, his parents' alma mater.

Former NBA star Shaquille O'Neal, whose youngest son attends an HBCU in Texas, has also done work to support HBCU institutions. In 2019, O'Neal launched an initiative with Miles College, an HBCU in Birmingham Alabama, that would bring the Papa John's franchise to every

HBCU in the nation with the goal of the business venture creating more opportunities for HBCUs (Byington, 2020). Current NBA star LeBron James also started a business partnership, through Nike, with Tallahassee Florida's HBCU Florida A & M. James' brand will be the official uniform for Florida A & M's athletic department.

Statement of the Problem

The problem in higher education is that NCAA Division I student athletes tend to select a college based on athletic-related factors (Andrew et al., 2016; Pauline, 2010) and these selections tend to be at PWIs because of the abundance of resources they can offer. Research has shown that the greatest factors influencing student athletes' college choice tend to be athletic-related items such as sport facilities (Andrew et al., 2016; Chard & Potwarka, 2017; Magnusen et al., 2014), television exposure (Andrew et al., 2016), and athletic equipment and apparel (Smart & Wolfe, 2000). These athletic related items have greater influence on student athlete college choice when student athletes have promising athletic ability that could lead to professional careers (Pauline, 2010).

However, due to the current racial injustice, it is possible that student athletes are using the present social context of racial injustice to make long-term decisions and intentional college choices (Cates, 2020). In the present social context, we are seeing a paradigm shift towards HBCUs among Black student athletes and that shift is being attributed the racial injustice faced by Black people in America. Highly sought-after Black student athletes that had been considering, were recruited by, or already committed to Power 5 PWIs have been attracted to the HBCUs (Mollo, 2021). Dr. Billy Hawkins, author and professor commented that the next few years could become a time when more five-star recruits consider attending HBCUs (Mollo, 2021). What has yet to be commented on is how other professionals are making sense of this

move to HBCUs. Moreover, a gap exists in the literature on the perspective of HBCU athletics professionals have on the matter. Knowing that resources and funding are connected to NCAA student athletes choosing PWIs, what does it look like for a few talented and highly sought-after Black student athletes to forgo resources and opt for a school that does not offer something as competitive.

The decision to attend an HBCU over a PWI as a student athlete reflects a paradigm shift as HBCU athletics traditionally did not have the same allure as PWIs to attract highly ranked players. Student athletes can be enticed by updated facilities such as weight rooms, practice spaces, and locker rooms which are funded by PWIs' athletic revenue and not always present at HBCUs (Hill, 2019). However, recent studies have shown that HBCUs have seen an uprise in applications and attendance which researchers attribute to resurgence of race-based harassment towards Black people over the years (Williams & Palmer, 2019).

Williams and Palmer (2019) use the term "Missouri Effect," coined by Dillard University President Walter Kimbrough to describe how the series of social justice protests at the University of Missouri and Black Lives Matter movement paired with the negative experiences of Black students at PWIs may be responsible for various HBCUs experiencing an uptick in applications and enrollment in 2016–2018 (Williams & Palmer, 2019). Looking at the social climate of 2016–2018, former President Donald Trump secured the nomination for president and ultimately won. Although Trump's tenure lasted only one term, researchers perceived that the effects of his platform and rhetoric, rooted in negative racial overtones, may have led to the increasing number of Black Students returning to HBCUs because they provided a safe haven from the impact of White supremacy sparked from Trump's campaign (Gasman, 2013; Kimbrough, 2016; Smith, 2017). Dr. Hawkins makes note of this idea in an interview stating,

> I think there is ... some racial fear when you talk about the radicalization, or the weaponization, of white supremacy. I think a lot of individuals in the Black community are concerned about where we send our children and want to make sure they're going to safe places. (Mollo, 2021, para 15)

Those safe places are perceived to be HBCUs.

More recently, the call for racial justice, attack on the U.S. Capitol, and overall political climate have attributed to increased student enrollment at HBCUs (Wilkins, 2021). In Fall 2020, Howard University in Washington D.C. saw a 15% increase in enrollment despite the Covid-19 pandemic and Bowie State in Maryland expects an 8% increase in enrollment for Fall 2021 (Wilkins, 2021). Other reasons for this paradigm shift in recruits include a desire to explore an experience not traditionally considered and to empower the idea that a HBCU can also be a choice for Black student athletes (Dermer, 2020). I argue that a similar sentiment reflected in the Missouri effect and the murder of George Floyd is also encouraging Black student athletes to find refuge in attending HBCUs.

Media outlets have reported about HBCU efforts to recruit top student athletes amidst their interest in being in the HBCU environment. News reports have shared stories of what some HBCUs are doing in response to the peaked interest of top ranked recruits that expressed interest in HBCUs through tweets, campus visits and enrollment. HBCU North Carolina Central University offered an athletic scholarship to LeBron James' son. When Deion Sanders started at Jackson State, he offered scholarships to "some of the best recruits in the south" stating that "we're not recruiting low-caliber kids. We're recruiting some of the same kids as some of the major universities are recruiting them. And we plan on landing them" (Horka, 2020, para. 8). Sanders did just that by the start of the 2021 season, producing the top recruiting class within

football subdivision schools and 11 of the highest rated recruits in the history of the Jackson State program (Thames, 2021a).

Through Sanders, the Jackson State football team received custom made suits funded by HBCU Texas Southern Alum Michael Strahan as well as having eight of the eleven regular season games broadcast on ESPN networks and streaming services (Thames, 2021a). Other HBCUs have also had increased national television coverage this season. With the hire of Eddie George at Tennessee State, the pitch to attract high caliber student athletes is centered on these players being the forefathers of the program that will "lay the groundwork for the next layer of success" (Walker, 2021, para. 22). George also made more tangible promises such as a new stadium and better facilities.

Purpose Statement and Research Questions

Beyond scholarships and other recruiting tactics, what are HBCU athletics doing for student athletes that want to attend their institutions based on the type of environment created there for Black students? Given the current racial justice climate and its influence on recruit's college choice, the paradigm shift in Black student athlete recruits is a new phenomenon as it relates to current calls for racial justice. While some literature exists about Black students intentionally enrolling in HBCUs because of racial tensions (Jones & Bell, 2016), gaps in the literature exist on how athletics departments make meaning of student athletes participating in this action.

The case can be made that student athletes choosing to play at HBCUs over PWIs is their recognition that they indeed matter to their communities, families, and selves and thus know that HBCUS can allow them to thrive in ways they cannot see happening at PWIs. The purpose of this study is to explore how athletics professionals at HBCUs make meaning of highly ranked

student athletes choosing to attend HBCUs post the spring 2020 Black Lives Matter movement. I use post spring 2020 because it is after the murder of George Floyd in spring 2020 that media reports begin to highlight stories and make connections about highly ranked recruits choosing HBCUs. The following research questions will guide this study:

> RQ1: What do HBCU athletics professionals perceive is influencing highly ranked Black student athletes to consider attending HBCUs over PWIs?
>
> RQ2: In what ways, if any, have HBCUs athletics departments been influenced by highly ranked Black student athletes attending HBCUs?

With the problem being resources and funding traditionally influencing student athletes' college choice, the connection this statement has to the purpose of the study is it is important to understand how HBCUs are thinking about the implications now that highly ranked Black student athletes' college choices are shifting. Racialized and historical underfunding of HBCUs has helped researchers understand why HBCUs were never able to be as competitive when it comes to athletic related factors tied to funding. Now more exploration needs to be done as to how HBCU athletics professionals are thinking about what is means for these students to forgo schools that offer better resource and come to historically Black institutions that may not have as competitive resources?

Significance of the Study

Sociologist Dr. Harry Edwards wrote,

> America's response to what the Black athlete is saying and doing will undoubtedly not only determine the future course and direction of the American athletics but will also affect all racial and social relations between Blacks and Whites in this country. (Edwards, 1969, p. 8)

Here, Dr. Edwards is referring to the racial tensions experienced in the 1960s and the stance Black athletes of that time took to combat it. Former NFL player Colin Kaepernick is a present-day athlete whose actions pose a similar response in race and social relations. In the 2016 football season, Kaepernick refused to stand for the playing of the national anthem and instead, knelt in protest of racial injustice and police brutality towards Black people (Britannica, 2021). His protest sparked strong support and criticism and ultimately influenced the landscape of American sport as professional and student athletes followed with similar protests and changed the trajectory of Kaepernick's life because he was blackballed from the NFL.

The significance of Dr. Edwards' quote today and Kaepernick's protest is tied to the significance of this study in that the way the environment responds to the actions of the Black athlete will direct both the course of sport and societal racial relationships. The same can be said of today's student athletes and their actions towards choosing HBCUs. The HBCU response to what highly ranked recruits are saying and doing can impact the trajectory of HBCUs as spaces of higher education in addition to society's racial climate.

In his YouTube documentary called *Coach Prime*, Deion Sanders calls the response of young Black people to racial injustice as "A movement not a moment. A movement doesn't end, it moves this forward and brings people with them" (Coach Prime, 2021). Therefore, our liberation is tied to one another. Justice for the Black community unlocks justice for other minoritized identities and people of color. The way people with power respond to what Black people are doing with activism and what talented Black student athletes are doing with their college choice has the potential to move racial justice forward. With that, it also has the potential to bring other groups along in the quest for justice. This study is significant because it is about equity. In the essence of a Black person's humanity is the knowing that we matter, that we must

not only survive in the world, but we deserve just as much right to thrive in this world as any other White person. What Black student athletes are doing with their college choice is inevitably saying that they want to level the playing field and how HBCUs choose to respond will show society just how that can be done.

Shaping Black minds, especially the minds of those with a platform that attracts listeners can unlock more resources for HBCUs that have been underfunded since inception. It can bring more ideas and more pressure to those in power to change outdated policies and harmful systems that have oppressed many groups for centuries. The passing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which stemmed from the early Civil Rights Movement, not only ended segregation in public spaces, but it also banned discrimination for all based on race, ethnicity, religion, sex, or national origin (Civil Rights Act, 1964). The act paved way for greater access to resources low-income families, women, religious minorities in addition to Black people. It also set the foundation for other civil rights' legislation such as the Voting Rights Act of 1965, the Fair Housing Act of 1968, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (Jones-Castro & Johns, 2016), the Disability Rights Movement and the Rehabilitation Act (ADL, 2017).

There has always been transformative work happening at HBCUs and it did not stop with the Civil Rights era of the 1950s and 60s. HBCUs served as training and educational sites for the Civil rights movements (Favors, 2019). It is necessary to recognize what these sites did for Black people, which then spilled into other movements towards justice for other groups of people, because equity has always been necessary. When Black student athletes choose to go to HBCUs over PWIs because of racial injustice, they are moving in equity. Their actions, and sometimes their words, are saying "my skin color is not being treated fairly. I want to be in an environment where it will be treated fairly."

HBCUs, the Black community, and now Black student athletes are doing this right now, in ways like Black women of the 1970s and 1980s did when they spoke up about the oppression they were experiencing; they did so by claiming the power from the margins (Hill-Collins, 2000). Black student athletes are operating in the post-modernism term called decentering by claiming what society, through racial injustice/ anti-Blackness, has treated as a marginalized and devalued space, rejected it as solely tragedy, and claimed with creativity and power (Hill-Collins, 2000). This moves towards equity. Black student athletes are using the marginalized and devalued treatment of Black people in society in a new way, with creativity and power, when they choose to attend an HBCU over a PWI. Having all of this in mind is important while looking to how HBCU will respond to the movement.

Key Words and Phrases

Included are some key words and their definitions used throughout the study. These definitions will be helpful to those that may be unfamiliar to collegiate athletics and/or desire a basic understanding of how these words are used in this study.

***Activism*:** engagement in intentional actions that disrupt oppressive hegemonic systems by challenging a clearly defined opposition while simultaneously empowering individuals and groups disadvantaged by inequitable arrangements (Cooper et al., 2019, p. 154).

***Athletic Conference*:** institutions' athletic affiliation group based on "desire to compete against other that are similar to them in profile, approach to athletics, and geographic region" (Sweitzer, 2009, p. 55). Also defined primarily on geographical region for competition, conferences are a collection of teams that play against each other more often than they will other teams in that sport (Fischer, 2014).

***Division*:** created by the NCAA in 1973, divisions keep similar campuses aligned in the areas of philosophy, competition, and opportunity (NCAA, 2020). Comprised of divisions I, II, and III, NCAA divisions each have between 300-400 participating schools, however Division I has the most student athletes, averaging at almost 182,681 compared to the approximately 122,722 in Division II and 193,814 in Division III.

***NCAA*:** The NCAA, National Collegiate Athletic Association, is a member-led, governing body that oversees the overall well-being and success of student athletes (NCAA, 2020). It is made up of 1,098 colleges and universities across 102 athletics conferences divided between three divisions (I, II, III), with nearly half a million collegiate student athletes competing within 24 sports.

***Power 5*:** a group of five athletic conferences considered to be the elite of college football: ACC, Big 10, Big 12, Pac 12, and SEC.

Social Justice: "full participation in society and the balancing of benefits and burdens by all citizens, resulting in equitable living and a just ordering of society" (Buettner-Schmidt & Lobo, 2012, p. 948).

***Student Athlete Activism*:** organized and collective forms of protest and conflict' advancing student athletes interests (Agyemang et al., 2010, p. 420). In this study, I consider the actions of Black student athletes intentionally committing to HBCUs in response to racial injustice as activism.

Student athlete: "an individual who engages in, is eligible to engage in, or may be eligible in the future to engage in, any intercollegiate sport" (Pub. L. 108–304, § 2, 2004).

Racial Justice: "movements that build toward a society that is free of racial hierarchy; a society where all people, including people of color have dignity, resources, power and self-determination to fully thrive" (Race Forward, n.d., para. 6)

The South (Mason Dixon Line): The U.S. South is identified by the line of demarcation known as the Mason-Dixon line that separates what is known as the Southern states (the South) and Northern states (the North) (Boyd, 2019). States below the Mason-Dixon line comprise the South and include South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Kentucky, Tennessee, North Carolina, West Virginia, Virginia, Arkansas, Texas, Maryland, and Florida. These states became home to most Black people post slavery (Bracey, 2017).

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this section I will provide a brief foundation on the establishment of HBCUs and what the literature says about the relationship between HBCUs, collegiate athletics, and activism. Endarkened feminist epistemology informed the literature I used as I was led to explore the rich culture HBCUs built for themselves within the turmoil of White supremacy and how through that culture and atmosphere they cultivated students that were able to fight back against White supremacy. I wanted to explore the atmosphere HBCUs were situated in as well as the atmosphere they created for themselves and how this created atmosphere shaped the survival Black student amidst racial turmoil.

Using endarkened feminist epistemology as a lens for this literature review allowed me to understand how HBCUs built equitable educational spaces for Black students based on what they (HBCU institutions) perceived they needed in that social context in time. This epistemological framework helped me understand the HBCU response to "how do you know" by shaping how HBCU athletics professionals and faculty used the social injustices against the Black community during their time of inception and during the segregation era to create educational spaces that were safe for Black students and conducive to their educational pursuits and civic well-being.

I discuss how activism and civil rights for Black people was birthed on HBCU campuses while simultaneously utilizing racial consciousness and appreciation to foster a community within historically Black colleges and universities. I then transition into how the attainment of those rights made way for Black students/student athletes to attends PWIs, with the presence of mind to use their spirit of activism to fight for their social and political rights on PWI campus as

well as within society. Lastly, I end the section with examples of present-day student athlete activism towards modern day racial injustices.

Inception of Historically Black Colleges and Universities

To conceptualize the establishment of HBCUs, one must fully understand the educational and socioeconomic status of the Black community in the antebellum era (Lovett, 2015). As a result of legal segregation in the Southern America, Black people were isolated from existing colleges and universities which were PWIs. To participate in higher education, Black people were forced to create their own institutions, which were very limited and restricted in legal, educational, economic, political, and social resources. In the early nineteenth century, colleges in the North admitted Black people which was pivotal in the development of HBCUs. The opportunity to attend these non-segregated institutions led to the education of those who were to become the faculty of soon to be established HBCUs (Lovett, 2015).

Morrill Land Grant Acts

The Higher Education Act of 1965 officially recognized HBCUs as institutions of higher education that were established before 1964 with a primary mission to educate of Black people (Cavil, 2015). In the antebellum period, Black people had very limited opportunities to receive a formal education, especially in the South. Every Southern state except Tennessee outlawed formal education of free or enslaved Black people (Roebuck & Murty, 1993). Although they attempted to attain education for themselves, limited resources led to limited chances for Black people to be formally educated (Collins & Norris, 2015). By the end of the Civil War in 1865, only 28 out of 4 million Black people had an undergraduate degree (Harper et al., 2009; Roebuck & Murty, 1993).

The enactment of the Morrill Land Grant Acts of 1862 and 1890 gave access to public higher education for Black people. Justin Smith Morrill introduced the first Morrill Act which was signed into law by President Abraham Lincoln in 1862. The Morrill Land Grant Act was a land grant legislation that gave each state 30,000 acres of federal land to finance the creation of public colleges that specialized in agricultural and mechanical arts (Bracey, 2017). It provided this public land to states that could be sold to finance the creation of public higher education institutions.

The Northern states created land grant colleges and enrolled Black people however, because of racial segregation, Black people were unable to enroll in land grant institutions in the South (Lovett, 2015). Even while receiving this federal funding for public education, Southern states still denied access to higher education to Black people which led Congress to enact the second Morrill Act of 1890. The Morrill Act of 1890 included stronger language supporting the equal treatment of races or loss of funding (Lovett, 2015). Further, it required states to admit Black people to existing land grant institutions or fund the creation of schools that would serve Black people (Bracey, 2017; Harper et al., 2009; Museus et al., 2015). In order to continue receiving federal funds for their White institutions, Southern states opted for the second option and allowed for the development of colleges and universities that would serve Black students; a segregated system very similar to the existent education system of primary and secondary schools in the South (Bracey, 2017).

Although the Morrill Act 1890 allowed for the creation and thus education of Black people mainly in the South, HBCUs still operated with a segregated and racist system where funding was controlled by White policy makers and thus disproportionately distributed to HBCUs resulting in unequal educational opportunities for Black college students (Bracey, 2017;

Collins & Norris, 2015). Per pupil allocations and teacher salaries were much less than that of their PWI counterparts (Collins & Norris, 2015). The Morrill Land Grant Acts meant that Black people could pursue higher education, however, the lack of resources and adequate funding at HBCUs made these institutions less desirable. The Morrill acts reinforced the ideology of separate but equal and the intellectual inferiority of Black people however, despite such inequities and limited options for higher education, thousands of Black students attended and graduated from HBCUs (Collins & Norris, 2015).

HBCU Education, Culture, and the Second Curriculum

In 1933, 97% of the 38,000 Black college students in the South were attending HBCUs (Demas, 2011). When racial segregation denied Black students the right to choose where they desired to attend college, HBCUs provided them the space to fulfill their educational goals. HBCUs are unique and unlike other institutions because of the identity they share in the Black community's struggle for survival (Roebuck & Murty, 1993). Students that may have never been able to attend college due to social, financial, or academic barriers are provided the opportunity to do so at HBCUs. In their spaces, HBCUs crafted an atmosphere conducive to not only for an intellectual community, but one that nurtured the whole essence of the Black community. Not only did HBCUs exist to and continue to nurture Black underserved students, but they offer "specialized instruction such as exploring the deepest questions about it means to be a Black college student" (Bracey, 2017, p. 678). Students and faculty did not simply mimic the operations of PWIs but instead, formed their own academic and institutional culture rooted in relationships (Favors, 2019). This concept is informally known as the second curriculum and is defined as the "bond between teacher and student, inspiring youths to develop a 'linked sense of

fate' with the race… a pedagogy of hope grounded in idealism, race consciousness, and cultural nationalism" (Favors, 2019, p. 5).

The second curriculum connected students and faculty at HBCUs through mentorship that was "beyond the reach of outsiders" and "shielded from the hostilities of Whites who, despite their best efforts, remained unaware of how fruitful this association would become" (Favors, 2019, p. 5). This connection, rooted in Black culture, supported members of HBCU campuses and the greater Black community during the turbulence of White supremacy in the nation, particularly in the South. It is the second curriculum paired with the conceptual framework "communitas" coined by cultural anthropologist Victor Turner that allows one to see the intensity of HBCU culture that allowed it to flourish beyond its academic capacities. The communitas describes the vital space provided by HBCUs which sheltered Black students from the "worst elements of a White supremacist society that sought to undermine, overlook, and render impotent the intellectual capacity of Black youths (Favors, 2019, p. 5). The communitas was collectively a shared space, open society, and social relationship community at HBCUs where students would be cared for and diligently prepped to face the storms of racism beyond the campus. Understanding the second curriculum and communitas together illuminates the reality that Black colleges were and potentially still are a safe haven and the only "non collapsible space for Black people" (Favors, 2019, p. 3). That is, because it was a space dedicated to Black education, White people did not have to worry about much about Black people at their universities. Therefore, Black colleges became the only space that could not be taken away or destroyed by White supremacy.

Black students at HBCUs escaped the tensions that existed between Black and White students at PWI and were able to develop a sense of Black consciousness, identity, history, racial

pride, and ethnic traditions (Roebuck & Murty, 1993). Roebuck and Murty (1993) explain this Black consciousness as the development and encouragement of Black culture in areas such as language form/style (Black English), everyday customs/dress/dance styles, body language cues, uneasiness among Whites, and a Black worldview. This cultural ambiance became essential for Black students' social functioning, leading faculty and students at HBCUs to embody a social responsibility of sharing the second curriculum with their peers in this space (Favors, 2019; Roebuck & Murty, 1993).

The level of social support from the second curriculum is perceived to account for the undergraduate graduation rate being 50% higher at HBCUs than PWIs (Bracey, 2017; Wyllie, 2018). HBCUs provide a unique academic experience that attend to the individual talents and educational needs of students that historically, have been undercut in education while enduring racism, poverty, and overall systemic oppression (Bracey, 2017; Liontas, 2016). The second curriculum at HBCUs provided its students a chance to "not only learn, but learn for a purpose that served the social, political, and economic needs of the race" (Favors, 2019, p. 26).

The academic curriculum in the social sciences served an important role in the dismantling racial oppression and cultivating student activists through its focus on teaching students to "think critically and act locally against white supremacy" (Favors, 2019, p. 15). However, focus shifted to science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) and away from these social science program at many HBCUs because of the research funding STEM could bring into these historically underfunded schools (Favors, 2019). But hope remained in the pedagogy of the second curriculum because it provided HBCU students the "potent tools to articulate the concerns and demands of an oppressed people" (Favors, 2019, p. 8).

HBCU Athletic Culture

The racial demographic in the United States began to change after World War I when Black people left the South to live in urban areas in the North and West (Cavil, 2015). Because of this shift, PWIs in the North, Midwest, and West saw increased enrollment of Black students and subsequently, Black students began competing in collegiate sport teams at these schools (Cavil, 2015). Popular Black athletes such as Jesse Owens and Jackie Robinson competed at PWIs such as Ohio State University and the University of California Los Angeles, respectively, and were highly admired for their athletic ability (Cavil, 2015; Demas, 2011). Black student athletes at PWIs were being selected as All-Americans, an honorific title gives to elite high school and collegiate athletes (Britannica, n.d.) and Black professional athletes such as the Negro Leagues in baseball, Black Fives in basketball, and those Black athletes winning medals in the Olympics brought excitement to the Black community (Cavil, 2015).

Parallel to this migration from the South and achievement of Black professional athletes and student athletes at PWIs came the introduction of collegiate competition at HBCUs. Segregation was still existent in the South so Black student athletes were unable to compete with or against teams at White schools until after the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Often, the first Black undergraduate students accepted at many of the Southern flagship schools were either NAACP plaintiffs or "badly needed Negro athletes" (Lovett, 2015, p. 142). By 1966, the Southeastern Conference (SEC) still did not have any Black players (Demas, 2011). As a result of the highlights happening in the college sports world, HBCUs in the South added football and basketball programs, formed their own athletic conferences, and competed with one another (Cavil, 2015).

Athletics programs at HBCUs cultivated a sense of community, school pride, and distinction within campus (Jones & Bell, 2016). HBCUs established their own post season bowl games, the first being at Prairie View A&M University in 1928 (Cavil, 2015). HBCU bowl games created a culture that not only showcased the talent of a college football team, but also the relationship between HBCUs and their community, racial pride, and cultural empowerment. The same goes for HBCU classics, games played during the regular season but are unique in that they include special events beyond the game that highlight the HBCU and Black experience. Such events include "golf tournaments, step shows, beauty pageants, parades, battle of the bands performances, concerts and tailgating" (Cavil, 2015, p. 29).

Before the Brown v. Board of Education verdict in 1954 which outlawed racial segregation in public schools, Black students only had HBCUs as an option in the South. The athletic experience and talent at HBCUs were overall entertaining and drew crowds from the Black community into the audience. These crowds also drove the Black dollar back in HBCUs and the surrounding Black community. The talent and skill of the Black athlete was so great that PWIs began to see the value of adding Black players to their rosters. One infamous example was when Jimmy Jones, Sam "Bam" Cunningham and Clarence Davis, Black football players from the University of Southern California led their team in a triumphant defeat of the all-White University of Alabama football team in 1970. It was then that football programs in the South realized that Black players would give them the competitive advance they needed (Hill, 2019).

The overall academic and social experience at HBCUs showcase how special the environment was and continues to be for Black students. The attention received by Black athletes and student athletes gives way to the impact their status and platform could have for themselves and within society. In 2018, highly ranked football recruit Kayvon Thiobeaux visited HBCU

Florida A&M University, garnering national attention for himself and the university (Hill, 2019). Today, a few top ranked recruits have visited and committed to various HBCUs with the purpose of showing other Black recruits that HBCUs are viable options and should be considered (Dermer, 2020). Such an act shows the power of student athletes have in their position and how they recognize that the attention they attract can be used to influence others.

Activism at HBCUs

Understanding the second curriculum and communitas builds the foundation for understanding the role HBCUs play in social justice movements. It is what sociologist Charles Payne described as the "vision of ex-slaves" in which "maintaining a deep sense of community was itself an act of resistance" (Payne, 1995, p. 405). Through the histories retold of several HBCUs, the second curriculum and communitas gave Black students the knowledge and power to push back against oppression and injustice during and after the Civil Rights movement. Unlike other Black organizations, HBCUs provided protection within a space that was producing dissent and activism against White supremacy (Favors, 2019). HBCUs possess a spirit of activism within the institution and were vital contributors to the civil and human rights movements because of the students they trained as agents of social and political change (Favors, 2019).

Activism is defined as "engagement in intentional actions that disrupt oppressive hegemonic systems by challenging a clearly defined opposition while simultaneously empowering individuals and groups disadvantaged by inequitable arrangements" (Cooper et al., 2019, p. 154–155). Activism by Black students at higher education institutions has been an important part of the history in the United States and has allowed for college campuses to be the base of powerful social movements (Gibson & Williams, 2020). Moreover, many HBCUs were the locus points of events of the modern-day civil rights movements and the alma mater for many

notable leaders in the movement (Bracey, 2017). Zora Neal Hurston, Ella Baker, Thurgood Marshall, Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King Jr, John Lewis, and Jesse Jackson are just a few HBCU graduates who led and still lead movements against injustice and towards the liberation of Black people.

Timeline of HBCU Student Activism

As mentioned, activism is an embedded part of HBCU culture. The Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s and 1960s is credited for much of HBCU activism however, this was not a new phenomenon and Black students at HBCUs were engaging in a fight for their civil rights before this period. In his book, *America's Historically Black Colleges & Universities; A Narrative History, 1837 – 2009*, author Bobby L. Lovett details the numerous accounts of activism at HBCUs beginning with student revolts on HBCU campuses against Jim Crow related laws in the 1800s (Lovett, 2015). Jim Crow began as a character that portrayed Black people as unintelligent and then in the nineteenth century, grew to describe the climate of the South with "laws and codes of social conduct that racially segregated Black people in housing, education, and public places" (Brown, 2020).

Students at Talladega College, HBCU in Alabama, had a history of resistance to Jim Crow. In 1914, they participated in a strike against White paternalism and mistreatment from their White faculty (Lovett, 2015). In the 1930s, another Alabama HBCU, Oakwood College, was also challenged by student strikes. The oppression Oakwood students felt from their paternalistic White administration led them to strike and demand Black faculty and president at the college, in addition to an increased emphasis on liberal arts education. Washington D.C. HBCU Howard University students marched against Jim Crow laws at restaurants in 1942. Fort Valley State College in Georgia had a NAACP chapter that led successful campaigns for local

Black voter registration. In the late 1940s, close to fifty students from Savannah State University in coastal Georgia were arrested for attempting to desegregate city buses. In 1955, students at Alabama State University helped fuel the Montgomery Bus boycott by printing and distributing flyers that encouraged Black people to stay off the bus (Lovett, 2015).

Sit-Ins and HBCU Students

Occupying public spaces as a civil rights and desegregation strategy became a popular tactic among HBCU students in the South. Four students from the HBCU North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University were coined the "Greensboro Four" when they sat at a Whites only lunch counter at a Woolworth department store in North Carolina. They were not served but returned the next day with two additional students and then a third day with 63 students taking up majority of the restaurant's 66 seats. After 5 months of sit-ins, Woolworth department stores agreed to desegregate its lunch counters (Wallace, 2012).

The actions of the "Greensboro Four" led to similar sit-ins within nine states throughout the South. Students from Atlanta Georgia area HBCUs Spelman College, Morehouse College, Morris Brown College, Atlanta University (Now Clark-Atlanta University) and the Interdenominational Theological Center organized student sit-ins at public, private, and government spaces with close to two hundred student participants all between 1957 and 1961 (Lovett, 2015). In 1960, all White members of Louisiana's Board of Education warned students in the state against staging sit-ins to which activist students at Southern University accepted as a challenge. Students from the Baton Rouge HBCU dispersed to lunch counters, bus stations, and drugstores to participate in sit-ins which resulted in arrests and subsequently massive protests over the arrests (Favors, 2019). Alabama HBCUs Alabama A&M University and Oakwood College (now University) had students participate in lunch counter sit-ins and were met with

heavy resistance. The state underfunded Alabama A&M so harshly that in 1962, it lost regional accreditation from the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) (Charles, 2020; Lovett, 2015).

In the same year, students from the NAACP chapter at LeMoyne College (now LeMoyne-Owens College) began civil rights demonstrations in Memphis Tennessee (Lovett, 2015). They participated in sit-ins at segregated public libraries demanding more books for their schooling. Notable Civil Rights activist Ella Baker along with others hosted a Black College retreat at Shaw University, a HBCU in North Carolina, in 1960. This retreat led to the formation of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) whose mission was to bring focus and discipline to student movements through pro-union and community activist trainings and anti-poverty programs.

Freedom Rides and HBCU Students

In 1961, the Civil Rights Movement of various HBCU students shifted from sit-ins to Freedom Rides. Freedom Rides were designed in response to the U.S. Supreme Court's December 1960 ruling in Boynton v. Virginia that "racial segregation in public transportation, including terminals, was illegal" (Smith & Wynn, 2009, p. 164). Tom Gaither and Gordon Carey, members of the civil rights group Congress of Racial Equality, CORE, came up with the idea to participate in Freedom Rides as a method to push the federal government to enforce this law of desegregation (Wallace, 2012).

The Freedom Riders, which were composed of both Black and White people, would travel from Washington D.C. to New Orleans over 13 days passing through Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi on two different bus lines. Black freedom riders were instructed to sit in the front of the bus and use the Whites only waiting

room, restroom, and water fountain at rest stops while White Freedom riders did the same at the Colored people only sections of the rest stop and sat in the rear of the bus (Wallace, 2012). To further challenge segregation laws, Freedom Riders designated one interracial pair to sit next to each other on the rides.

Tom Gaither scouted cities in the South prior to the first rides. He found that Alabama and Mississippi would be the states with the most resistance and violence towards riders (Wallace, 2012). After Klansmen burned a bus in and beat Freedom Riders in Alabama in May 1961, student activists in Nashville Tennessee feared that movement would die if discontinued because of this act of violence. Ten students from Nashville, two White students one from HBCU Fisk University and the other from what is now Vanderbilt University, and eight others from Tennessee HBCUs American Baptist, and Tennessee A&I (now Tennessee State University) took a Freedom Ride from Nashville Tennessee to Birmingham Alabama but were arrested and transported to the Alabama Tennessee border (Lovett, 2015). The resilient student activists found their way back to Birmingham Alabama bus station where they were joined by none more Freedom Riders that joined them in demonstration at the bus station. Simultaneously, students from Talladega College went to the site of the bus burning and began protests that lasted into 1962. Tennessee A&I provided the greatest number of Freedom Riders among HBCUs followed by Howard, Fisk, American Baptist, Central State, Johnson Smith, Virginia Union, Tougaloo, Claflin, Southern, Morehouse, Dillard, Spelman, Alabama State, Florida A&M, and riders from PWIs (Lovett, 2015).

HBCU Activism Beyond Jim Crow

HBCU student activism was not limited to issues of segregation in the Jim Crow era. Protests began over the construction of interstate highways that cut directly through Black

businesses in the HBCU communities of Fisk University, Tennessee State University and Meharry Medical College. Along with creating a noise disturbance for campuses, the interstate's construction displaced hundreds of Black homes and business and created no local ramp access for the nearby HBCUs (Lovett, 2015). HBCU students also protested the disproportionate number of Black casualties in the Vietnam War. The exclusion of Black members on local draft boards created challenges for Black people to obtain deferment and exemptions from the draft, resulting in American casualties in Vietnam to be 25 percent Black soldiers (Lovett, 2015; Lucks, 2017).

In 1969, students at HBCUs Mississippi Valley State College (now University) and Wiley College in Texas used the momentum from HBCU student unrest to protest their campus conditions and policies on curfew and dress code (Lovett, 2015). In the same year, students at Morehouse College took over a Board of Trustees meeting demanding the resignation of the White trustees and that the college be renamed after the late Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr (Rogers, 2012). In 1972, Southern University students also protested intolerable treatment from their campus administration, resulting in an FBI investigation and ten-day closure of campus. Lastly, the disdain for the Vietnam War and the treatment of Black soldiers fueled a student movement at Alabama A&M University to revolt against the campus ROTC (Lovett, 2015).

The events of HBCU student activism reflected in this section highlights a few of the hundreds of demonstrations that took place on HBCU campus and/or by HBCU students. It does not capture the movements happening at HBCUs outside of the South or the movements of Black students attending PWIs in other parts of the country. What it does provide is an overview of issues surrounding Jim Crow laws, racism, and segregation in the South that HBCU students took a stance against in the timeframe prior, during, and shortly after the Civil Rights Era.

Student Athlete Activism

Sport in general has typically been perceived as an apolitical space where athletes are expected to focus on their performance and consent to the expectations of coaches, stakeholders, and fans (Cooper et al., 2019). However, it is also an institution where social issues and the oppression of minoritized groups have been "reproduced, exacerbated and/or ignored" (Cooper et al., 2019, p. 151). In response to such injustice, research suggests that an athlete's position in society should lead them to "articulate their concerns of current social injustices" (Agyemang et al., 2010, p. 428). An athlete has the power to push for change and speak up for others because their position and platform that reaches several audiences (New, 2017).

Examples of Black Student Athlete Activism

Student athletes have a history in engaging in activism on a myriad of social injustices. Black football players on integrated teams were aggressively assaulted during games, never voted to team captain, and often had to succumb to the "gentlemen's agreement" which barred them from playing against teams in the Jim Crow South (Demas, 2011). Many of these players spoke out against the racism experienced on their teams, campus, and community.

In 1967, student-athletes at San Jose State University engaged in a series of activist efforts to protest the anti-Black racism and discrimination rooted in the institution's policies and practices such as segregated fraternities, sororities, and housing, lack of recruitment and retention of Black non-athlete students, and lack of recruitment and retention of Black faculty and staff across the university (Edwards, 2016). Within their athletics department student athletes cited discrimination as "overbearing coaches, lack of academic assistance, and exploitative demands made on Black participants" (Demas, 2011, p. 106).

In 1968 alone, over 100 complaints and demonstrations by Black student athletes against their university policies and practices were registered. Demas (2011) lists such complaints and demonstrations as follows: Black football players at the University of Washington threatened to boycott all athletic events in response to discrimination from the head coach when the coach suspended four Black players for "lack of commitment" following a lost game (Reese, 2017), San Jose State football Black players wore black arm bands during a game against Brigham Young University (BYU) to protest their religious affiliate the Mormon Church's refusal to ordain Black people into the priesthood. For the same reason, eight Black track student athletes from University of Texas El Paso refused to participate in meets against BYU. Twenty-four student athletes at Iowa State University submitted a list of grievances to their athletic council with requests to be referred to as Black or Afro-American and that their institution hire more Black coaches and administrators. Thirty-eight football student athletes at Michigan State University also demanded their school hire more Black coaches in addition to nine student athletes at Syracuse University along with those at Michigan State calling for more academic counseling for players. Lastly, five student athletes at Princeton University accused their coach of racist coaching protocols; denying them playing time (Demas, 2011).

In 1969, Black football players from the University of Wyoming fueled the "largest collective protest by African American athletes in collegiate history" (Demas 2011, p. 21). Named the "Black 14" by media outlets, fourteen Black University of Wyoming football players were dismissed from the team for following the lead of San Jose State Black athletes and planning to also wear black armbands at a game against BYU. The Wyoming coach, Lloyd Eaton, was made aware of their plans and dismissed the players before they could explain their desire to take this stance (Demas, 2011). The dismissal of the players the night before the BYU

game forced a meeting between the players, university president, university administrators, and the governor of Wyoming that lasted until 4:30am. The controversy attracted large media attention, faculty meetings with over 700 attendees, threats of faculty resignation, student athletes, some White, of other sports quitting their teams the national guard's presence at football games, a graduate student formed committee followed with campus marches, the adornment of the black armbands by San Jose State and University of New Mexico football against Wyoming, demonstrations at various games against BYU by other schools in their conference, civil rights speaker events, and picketing of Eaton's home by White students (Demas, 2011).

Between 1968 and 1972, other demonstrations of Black student athlete protest against racial discrimination included 14 football student athletes from Indiana University boycotted practice because of a coaching atmosphere that was "mentally depressing and morally discouraging to Blacks" (Demas, 2011, p.111). University of Kansas Black football players refused to play until a Black cheerleader was recruited, and the same players filed a complaint against their coaches for waving confederate flag singing "Dixie" at a team banquet (Demas, 2011).

In 2002, Maurice Clarett, a football player at The Ohio State University, publicly criticized the university for collecting 13 million dollars from a championship game but doing nothing to alleviate the issue of poverty surrounding the campus (Reese, 2017). In protest against the war in Iraq, Manhattanville College women's basketball player Toni Smith, gave her back to the American flag in 2003 (Frederick et al., 2017). Former UCLA basketball player Ed O'Bannon filed a class action lawsuit in 2009 against the NCAA for lack of compensation over use of his name image and likeness. In that same year, the National Labor Relations Board granted football players at Northwestern University employee status under federal law (which

was later denied as the players sought to unionize and collectively bargain in 2015). The aforementioned Nigel Hayes of University of Wisconsin Madison was very outspoken in 2016 by challenging the NCAA for its exploitation of student athletes by not paying them (Cooper et al., 2019).

More recently, student athletes have engaged in activist efforts regarding the killings or Black men by police officers. In 2014, division I basketball student athletes from Georgetown University and Notre Dame University wore t-shirts during the pregame that read "I Can't Breathe" in protest of the killing of Eric Garner in New York while a Division III Knox College basketball player participated in pregame demonstration in memory of Mike Brown of Ferguson Missouri (Arnett, 2015). University of Nebraska football players Daishon Neal, Mohamed Barry, and Michael Rose-Ivey took a knee during the national anthem for the same reason in 2016 (Frederick et al., 2017). In the same year, University of Wisconsin-Madison men's basketball student athletes Nigel Hayes and Jordan Hill, stood behind their teammates during the national anthem in protest of their university's response to a racist incident where students wore a costume of former President Barack Obama with a noose tied around his neck.

Student Athletes and Social Justice Today

In January 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) published information on the outbreak of a novel virus, Covid-19, reportedly originating in China (WHO, 2020). By March, Covid-19 had spread rapidly across the globe, leading to a massive call by the Center for Disease Control (CDC) for people to socially distance (CDC, 2022). Colleges and universities across America halted operations for two weeks then quickly shut down and forced students to leave campus and complete classes online the rest of the semester. For student athletes, this meant a sudden stop to athletic training and competitions and an abrupt transition to life off campus or

back home. In addition, the murders of Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and George Floyd amidst a worldwide health crisis reignited the Black Lives Matter movement and rapidly developed student athletes' responses as activists for social justice.

Student athletes on the football team at the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) centered student athlete activism by crafting a powerful statement expressing the lack of care they experienced from UCLA regarding their (student athletes') health and safety. The football student athletes stated, "the responsibility to uphold and assert our rights as student athletes and human beings falls within our own hands" (Mellor, 2020). The players demanded enhanced health and safety protocols in order to secure their return to athletic activities. Additionally, the players demanded their voices be heard and actions protected without consequence in the form of loss or reduction of financial scholarship or retaliation from coaches and faculty.

In a pilot study, I found that student athletes and their administrators engaged in unique strategies as tempered radicals for social justice (Gyamfi, 2021). They tempered their strategies to support their student athlete activists by reacting in small unnoticeable ways as not to bring attention or cause disruption to their work in the institution (Meyerson, 2004). Administrators made passive decisions to leave political news networks on in the office that led to conversations between them and the athletes about social issues. Student athletes in the study were emboldened by these conversations that they requested that their coaches allowed the team to watch a documentary concerning the social climate in place of practice and even took steps to get their entire team registered to vote in time for the 2020 presidential elections (Gyamfi, 2021). This study also found that student athletes were participating in social justice activism through social media posts, marches, protests, and class assignments and their administrators encouraged their

actions by rescheduling athletic related commitments and providing supportive resources that amplified their message.

Student Athlete Recruitment Strategies

Division I schools governed under the NCAA spend millions of dollars in financial and human capital on the recruitment of student athletes to play for their programs (Magnusen et al., 2014). College coaches are important to student athletes' future in collegiate athletics and thus play an active role in the recruitment process (Magnusen et al., 2014). Recruitment of collegiate student athletes is a competitive, multi-year process in which coaches rely on the building relationships with the student athlete, their friend, family, and even high school coaches as they may serve as influencers to the student athlete college choice (Magnusen et al., 2014). In return, the recruit/recruit's family look to the coach and the team to serve as a surrogate family.

While student athlete recruitment practices vary from institution to institution, researchers suggest that one common practice at PWIs has been to use faculty of color to assist in the recruitment of student athletes of color (Carter-Francique et al., 2017). This strategy suggests that the campus is "diverse, inclusive and safe for Black students" (Carter-Francique et al., 2017, p. 97). As a former DI student athlete at a PWI, Dr. Akilah Carter-Francique shares that on official and non-official recruitment visits, she was often introduced to Black faculty within or without her academic program of interest in addition to Black staff that oversaw student life programs such as multi-cultural affairs or Greek life (Carter-Francique et al., 2017).

Other common recruitment practices include focusing on influential factors that may appeal to a student athlete. Research has shown that for NCAA basketball recruits, the most influential factors in their college choice has been the on-court success of the team, arena size, conference prestige and NBA draft potential (Evans & Pitts, 2017). Coaches and other athletics

recruiters often highlight such characteristics in effort to lure prospective student athletes to commit to their program. In connection with this practice, in 2013, the Bleacher Report released an article sharing the best recruitment pitch for each SEC school, highlighting influential characteristics and other recruitment strategies. The report included schools like The University of Florida and University of Alabama, which boasts characteristics such as winning games and championships respectively in their recruitment pitches (Martin, 2013). Winning can be important to highly skilled student athletes (Martin, 2013) and winning in one sport can also be used as a recruitment tool for another sport (Evans & Pitts, 2017) (University of Kentucky football using their basketball team to recruit).

Athletic facilities have also been used as an influential recruitment tool by college coaches (Manfred, 2013; Martin, 2013). Louisiana State University emphasizes their over 90,000 seat football facility, Tiger Stadium as an optimal playing experience for their recruitment pitch (Martin, 2013). For HBCUs however, emphasis on experience comes from the experience created from the overall pageantry of a football game rather than the allure of the physical stadium (Stanley, 2021). In the 1970s when schools in the South began to desegregate their athletic programs, it became harder for HBCUs to recruit student athletes to their teams (White, 2019). HBCU programs are seen to utilize their own unique strategies to recruit student athletes. For example, football coach Thomas Howard at Division I HBCU North Carolina A&T University sells recruits on the gameday experience brought forth from social events and explains it as something “you have to see to really understand” (Stanley, 2021, para. 3). Social experiences that occur at games such as battle of the bands and parades are just some of what contribute to the total gameday experience (Cianfrone et al., 2010). Other characteristics HBCU athletic programs use as a recruitment approach include emphasis on academics and the

incomparable support students receive from the HBCU campus community to be successful in academics (Stanley, 2021).

Finances at HBCUs

The Morrill Act of 1890 paved way for the longstanding underfunding of land grant HBCUs. The act held that HBCUs would receive an appropriation from the federal government in addition to a one-to-one match from its state government (Smith, 2021). However, some states never provided the funds which meant that these institutions would lose out on receiving the federal portion of the funding (National Education Association, n.d.). HBCUs were also left out of state and federal funding that PWIs received from legislation such as the GI Bill in 1944 even though they also had increased enrollment of veteran students (Smith, 2021).

Prior to the 2016-2018 admission's cycle, enrollment at HBCUs had been steadily declining leading to overall decline in funding (Elliot & Kellison, 2019). HBCUs were the primary educational institution for 90% of Black students (Elliot & Kellison, 2019), until the Brown v. Board of Education verdict desegregating public schools in 1954 occurred. The Brown v. Board of Education verdict resulted in the decrease of Black student enrollment at HBCUs as the opportunity to attend PWIs became available. This resulted in less funding for HBCUs because of HBCU's strong reliance on tuition dollars as primary income (Stuart, 2017). Following Brown v. Board of Education came Education Act of 1965 which required PWIs to increase enrollment of ethnic minority students and thus also weakened HBCU enrollment (Elliot & Kellison, 2019). However, in 1986, with the help of HBCU graduate and senate staffer William Arthur Blakey, Title III Part B of the Higher Education Act of 1965 was created which authorized federal strengthening (grant aid) for HBCUs (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.).

As of September 2021, Congress will consider legislation that will invest over a trillion dollars in infrastructure that will aid families in enrolling at HBCUs as well as community colleges and Minority Serving Institutions (Smith, 2021). This same plan will also provide additional financial support for HBCUs, Tribal Colleges, and Minority Serving Institutions to strengthen their academic and operational needs. However, even if passed, it will still be challenging for HBCUs to make up for years of systemic underfunding.

HBCU Athletics Finances

Most HBCUs depend on federal dollars for a majority of their annual revenue, making them susceptible to financial ruin in the event of radical policy shifts, economic downturns, or state divestments in education (Tynes, 2019). The pursuit of Black freedom was a major driving force for the creation of Black institutions, but such freedom is difficult without financial equity between HBCUs and PWIs (Tynes, 2019). This financial inequity trickles into the athletics departments of each kind of institution, where HBCUs athletics are at a financial disadvantage than PWIs (Jones & Bell, 2016). Limited resources, leading to decades of institutional inequality, are responsible for recruiting gaps between HBCUs and PWIs (Jones & Bell, 2016; Tynes, 2019; White, 2019). Such financial lack not only impacts student athlete recruitment, but recruitment of top-tier coaching staff as well (Cooper & Hawkins, 2012; Robbins et al., 2015).

Many HBCU athletic departments raise much of their funding from non-competition games such as football classics against rival teams and guarantee games against top- tier Division I programs (Elliot & Kellison, 2019). The longstanding football classic between HBCUs Tuskegee University and Morehouse College generated revenue to support each schools' athletic operations for the entire academic year (Seymour, 2006), while a guarantee game between

HBCU Florida A&M University and PWI Ohio State football teams brought in roughly $900,000 to Florida A&M (Hruby, 2017).

Some HBCUs have opted to make significant changes to their athletic programs to maintain the financial well-being of their institutions overall. In 2017, Savannah State University took a step down from Division I to division II status in effort to maintain financial responsibility to the institution (Suggs, 2017). In 2016, HBCU Stillman College had to cut all but four of their athletic teams in addition to move from NCAA governance to NAIA (National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics which offers collegiate athletic experiences for a lesser cost than NCAA). Lastly, HBCU Paine College eliminated their football team in 2015 (Elliot & Kellison, 2019).

Name, Image, and Likeness

In 2012, it was found that HBCUs have about half the funding that PWIs spend on their athletics programs (Elliot & Kellison, 2019; Jones & Bell, 2016). Non-HBCU NCAA Division I programs were able to spend $16.7 million while HBCUs spent an average of $8.6 million (Jones & Bell, 2016). Researchers suggest options for HBCUs, such as creating an HBCU-exclusive league, that would bring funding into the historically Black institutions, level the financial inequity between these institution types, and support those student athletes in profiting from their name, image, and likeness (Hruby, 2017). The term name, image, and likeness (NIL) refers to a legal concept known as “right of publicity” (NCAA, 2020). According to the NCAA website, right of publicity is when a person needs to be granted permission to use their NIL. An example of this is when copyright belongs to the photographer, which posted a picture of a student athlete playing in a newspaper, and not to the actual student athlete in the photo.

For years, the NCAA has been firm on student athletes being amateurs, making them unable to profit from their status as students and athletes. This means that student athletes are not able to be paid in money or product for anything that represents their status as an amateur athlete, their name, image, and likeness. However, with the state of California passing a bill in September 2019 that would allow for student athletes to benefit from NIL, the NCAA was prompted to change their rules and in June 2021, allow for student athletes to participate in NIL deals. Nine days after the NIL rule went into effect, the Alston case ruled that the NCAA's current cap on student athlete's compensation for academic related costs are in violation of the Sherman Anti-trust Act, an act that outlaws contracts that to try to monopolize and/or restrain trade (Kurdziel, n.d.). As a result, NCAA member school are no longer allowed to cap academic-related expenses not included in the cost of attendance for student athletes and must allow schools to reimburse education related expenses. Each of these rulings have the potential to change the financial landscape for HBCU athletics. It could potentially level the funding field between HBCUs and PWIs. The NIL rule change could be one route in creating financial equity; where Black players using their individual talent could reframe the power relationships in college sports (White, 2019).

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

The purpose of this study was to explore how athletic department professionals at HBCUs made meaning of highly ranked student athletes choosing to attend HBCUs post the spring 2020 Black Lives Matter movement. The study was a qualitative design that used narrative inquiry and endarkened feminist epistemology to elicit the stories of Southern Division I HBCU athletic department professionals who identified as being Black. Endarkened feminist epistemology was used to center the voices and experiences of Black people and honor spirit as a legitimate form of knowledge (Dillard, 2006) while narrative inquiry was used to value the story telling linguistic capital born out of the experience of being part of a historically minoritized group (Yosso, 2005). Narrative inquiry's emphasis on stories honored ways of knowing that were familiar for me as the researcher and my participants and the spirit of these stories was fortified with the use of endarkened feminist epistemology. This section discussed the details designed for this research study.

Framework

Endarkened Feminist Epistemology

Endarkened Feminist Epistemology (EFE) serves to unmask traditionally held political and cultural constructions as well as transform oppressive narratives of sociocultural phenomena and relationships (Dillard, 2000). Dillard (2000) values the use of intentional language in EFE because it helps individuals understand their reality, and as a result, allows for the transformation of that reality when such language can work towards "transforming particular ways of knowing and producing knowledge" (p. 3). With that, Dillard choses to use the word endarkened as opposed to enlightened to describe this epistemological framework.

Endarkened is used to specifically describe how "reality is known when based in the historical roots of Black feminist thought" (Dillard, 2000, p. 3). It counters the well-known concept of enlightenment/enlightened, that is traditionally used in White feminist thought to describe new and important feminist insights. Therefore, EFE brings together the historical lens of Patricia Hill Collins' Black Feminist Thought, encompassed with the historical and contemporary contexts of oppression and resistance of the African American woman, and the culturally constructed concepts of race, gender, and other identities, to talk about how reality is known (Avila et al., 2020; Dillard, 2006).

Tenets of Endarkened Feminist Epistemology. Feminist theory understands knowledge only within the context of the social conditions in which it has emerged while traditional research theories and paradigms have solemnly depended on social, cultural, and spiritual contexts from which knowledge is developed (Jones, 2014). Endarkened Feminist Epistemology (EFE) uses six tenets or assumptions to collide these ideas and center them on the Black racial experience as viewed by the Black woman (Dillard, 2006). I will explain each of the six tenets and then apply each one to this research study.

The first tenet of EFE states that "inquiry arises from personally and culturally defined beliefs that render the scholar responsible for one's community's well-being, both inside and outside of the academy" (Dillard, 2006, p. 18). Second, research is "both an intellectual and spiritual pursuit, a pursuit of purpose" (Dillard, 2006, p. 20). Third, Dillard (2006) writes, "only within the context of the community does the individual appear and, through dialogue, continue to become (p. 22). Fourth, in "Black communities, what happens in people's daily lives is critical for making sense of actions, expressions, experiences, and community life" (Dillard, 2006, p. 23). Fifth, "knowing and research are both historical (extending backward in time) and outward

to the world: to approach them otherwise is to diminish their cultural and empirical meaningfulness" (Dillard, 2006, p. 24). Finally, the sixth tenet states, "power relations manifest as racism, sexism, homophobia, and so on, structure gender, race, and other identity relations within research" (Dillard, 2006, p. 26). These tenets guided the study as it explored how HBCU athletic department professionals make meaning this paradigm shift.

The first tenet of EFE explained that my inquiry into this work was allowed to be both personal and cultural (Dillard, 2006). It provided me the space to say that as a sport-scholar, I was allowed to have a personal investment in my research that could inform my participation and responsibility to the community. How I defined myself mattered to this work and as I took on the work, I was also indebted to the community I worked with. The second tenet explained that research could be both academic and spirit-affirming. It could be "me-search." As I considered my identities and experiences, I recognized that I connected and disconnected throughout the population I am observing. I delved more deeply into this "endarkened" enlightenment in the positionality statement however tenet two gave me as the researcher, permission to create and receive knowledge throughout the study. From this, the third tenet of EFE emerged and reminded me that I am nothing without the community and the dialogue that takes place within community. I could not exist without the context of the community, and it was imperative that I saw myself in the research. Although I was never a student athlete nor have I attended or worked at an HBCU, I could still trace myself in the community I was researching, using our shared experiences and dialogue to affirm one another's existence within the study's context.

The fourth tenet spoke directly to Black community and affirmed that their experiences as individuals were valuable and necessary to understanding the collective experience as a Race (Dillard, 2006). This tenet helped us to make sense of the world around us; similar to when

similar narratives are coded into themes during research. The fifth tenet showed that I could not separate knowing and research from history. I had to acknowledge knowing and research's omnipresent coexistence and that what was brought to the research from personal experiences was equitably as valuable to what was discovered in the research. Lastly, the sixth tenet explained that in research, power shows up as systems of oppression which then built the social constructions of identity. Racism, which was the core issue of oppression in this study, was manifested because of power relations. It was from this, that society could have the resources to build an identity such as race. Without power relations, society and most like this study would have been in a much different place as events leading up to moment may ceased to have existed.

Taking all these tenets together, EFE showed me that my research was with the HBCU athletic departments and that I belonged in their community as well as they in mine (Dillard, 2006). This study was about me just as much as it was about the work being done at HBCU institutions and I needed to use that to fully understand the stories shared by HBCUs athletics professionals. It allowed me to bring myself, and my ways of knowing to the work along with my participants' ways of knowing so that through dialogue, we could exchange and possibly create knowledge. Endarkened feminist epistemology gave me the tools to analyze sport in a deeper context than just the game. It showed me how I could examine sport critically, academically, socially, culturally, politicly, and personally. It also showed me that my own experiences were crucial to include in the totality of this study just as much as the stories from my participants.

Using Epistemology Rather Than Theory

Epistemology responds to the question, "how we know," while theory, is a set of narratives used to explain a phenomenon (Tennis, 2008). The number of Black student athletes

making the intentional choice to attend an HBCU because of social factors has not risen to the status to be considered a phenomenon, making the use of theory less applicable for the intent of this study. Epistemology, however, provides a "philosophical background for deciding what kinds of knowledge are legitimate and adequate" (Gray, 2004, p. 16). For the purposes of this study, although there were a small number of highly ranked student athletes choosing HBCUs over PWIs, the use of epistemology gave this study the backing it needs to make its case.

The purpose of this study was to explore how athletics department professionals at HBCUs made meaning of highly ranked student athletes choosing to attend HBCUs post the spring 2020 Black Lives Matter movement. Epistemology helped me discover how HBCU athletic departments were understanding the paradigm shift of college choice and athletic participation. Epistemology also helped me observe how I as the researcher was situated within the context of the study. Without having attended/worked at a HBCU or participated in collegiate sport, how would I know how to analyze the findings of the study? Lastly, I chose to use epistemology because the events observed in this study were still new and happening in real time. Epistemology allowed me to capture what participants knew to be true as it existed in their experiences. It gave the foundation for the participants reality to exist independent of validation from a theory that may not have related to the unique context of past and present informing one another the way it did in this study. Endarkened feminist epistemology, however, not only allowed this to be done, but did so in ways of knowing that were familiar to Black culture specifically.

Using Endarkened Feminist Epistemology

I believe that if I was going to talk about an experience explicitly centered on Black people, it would make sense to use a framework that centered Black people and ways of knowing

traditional and relatable to Black people and curated by a Black person. How could I come to know a Black experience through a lens that is not Black? EFE acknowledged this for me as it honors spirit, wisdom, and Black women ways of knowing and being in research (Dillard, 2006). I appreciated that it did not allow me to separate what I know, my spirit, from the work and acknowledged a sense of community, belonging, healing (past or present trauma), and new ways of seeing oneself/the transformation of the researcher (Militz-Frielink, 2017).

Endarkened feminist epistemology allows one to center their own spirit, a non-religious spirituality, in their work; a method to which traditional scholarship asks to be disconnected. The denial of this practice is "an act of violence against us and those like us whose cultural norms dictate the centrality of spirituality in our live (Dillard, 2000). By being true to and acknowledging spirit, a non-religious spirit, in my research, endarkened feminist epistemology supports traditional African and by association, Black ways of knowing. EFE said that you had all the evidence you needed and that your spirit and your experience were enough. It would emphasize the self-inquiry, intellect, spirit, and experiences undergirded in its tenets as the tools needed to start the journey of analyzing and transforming systems of oppression.

My desire to use EFE was also rooted in the first tenet, "inquiry arises from personally and culturally defined beliefs that render the scholar responsible for one's community's well-being, both inside and outside of the academy" (Dillard, 2006, p. 18). Epistemologies are "birthed through social history and the culture of the dominate race, forcibly perpetuating the narrative of such dominant groups and leaving out those of other racial groups," e.g., Black people (Dillard, 2006, p. 8). I imagined that HBCUs, in their inception, operated in this essence as it used its social context and experiences with racism to educate Black students. Access to higher education for the Black race was personal and cultural when HBCUs were being

established and EFE elicited that in this study by exploring how athletics professionals made meaning of how a few highly ranked student athletes were choosing to access higher education in the time post the spring 2020 Black Lives Matter movement.

Endarkened Feminist Epistemology and Sport

Sociologist Dr. Harry Edwards wrote "America's response to what the Black athlete is saying and doing will undoubtedly not only determine the future course and direction of the American athletics but will also affect all racial and social relations between Blacks and Whites in this country" (Edwards, 1969, p. 8). Thinking more deeply about sport with EFE looked like exploring how the paradigm shift of what highly recruited student athletes were saying and doing in their considerations to attend HBCUs. It also explored the way HBCUs made meaning of what these few student athletes were doing.

Sport is often perceived as an apolitical space where athletes are encouraged to focus on their performance and consent to the expectations of coaches, stakeholders, and fans (Cooper et al., 2019). At the same time, is also an institution where social issues and the oppression of minoritized groups have been "reproduced, exacerbated and/or ignored" (Cooper et al., 2019, p. 151). An EFE perspective connected sport being used to address social issues and allowed me to challenge this tension within sport and explore the power of sport more deeply. The tenets of EFE set the tone for understanding a cultural stance within the historical and contemporary contexts of oppression and resistance of the Black community (Militz-Frielink, 2017). Dillard (2000) believes that EFE could be used as a healing tool to counteract racism in all its forms which can be considered as an act of social justice. If sport has the power to change the world, as Nelson Mandela once stated, then it is necessary to start thinking about just how that works.

Lastly, EFE intrinsically embedded social justice within its framework. It took a social justice lens by recognizing the social power dynamics and social inequalities that could result from various forms of oppression, and positions spirit with healing to think about education (Militz-Frielink, 2017). EFE provided this study the opportunity to deconstruct a Black student athlete's college choice and social justice activism and analyze it in a way that incorporated many intersecting identities, circumstances, events, and cultural histories contexts.

Research Design

Participant Recruitment and Selection

The population interviewed for this study were six Southern Division I HBCU athletics department professionals that identified as being Black and worked in HBCU athletics at least since Fall 2019. HBCU athletics professionals were used to describe those working as staff members, administrators, or coaches with a department. The South was determined as any state on and below the Mason Dixon line and athletics professionals was limited to fulltime or parttime only. Because there were not many highly ranked student athletes known to have chosen an HBCU over a top tier PWI, it was only necessary that each participant had knowledge of this kind of event.

Participants were recruited by email solicitation and snowball sampling. First, I reached out to my professional contacts that either worked in HBCU athletic departments or were connected to someone at an HBCU athletic department. I asked those people to connect me via email to potential participants and I sent the recruitment email. This yielded five of the minimum number of six participants. When the minimum number of participants was not met after two weeks, I moved to a different recruitment method. I created a list of Division I HBCUs in the South from the SWAC and MEAC conferences since these two conferences consisted of HBCUs

that competed in Division I athletics. After gathering this list, I selected a school at random, reviewed the athletic department's staff directory, and selected/ emailed athletics professionals who, based on their bios, had been at an HBCU at least since the Fall 2019.One participant was recruited using this method.

Data Procedure

Data was collected via semi-structured interviews conducted over video conferencing platform Zoom. Participants were asked approximately 12 questions with discretion to probe for deeper understanding or more information with non-scripted questions. I also used discretion to withhold a pre-scripted question when I felt it has been already addressed. After each interview, I completed reflexive memos to capture my thoughts. I used a transcription service to transcribe each interview and made that document available to each participant to review if they indicated so during their interview. This review process was optional for each participant.

Once transcribed, I utilized the Josselson (2011) method of narrative inquiry which involved understanding the individual narrative and the entire narrative through coding and themes. This process included a) an overall reading of each interview to gather themes, paying attention to how certain parts create meaning for the entire interview, b) multiple readings of each transcript to track narrative and how those narratives relate to each other, c) developing a whole story from the emerging themes, and d) putting those themes in conversation with the theoretical framework (in this case, the epistemology as framework) (Josselson, 2011, p. 228). This final step honored part of the chosen framework, endarkened feminist epistemology, in the idea of putting the data in dialogue with the framework. To put this into practice, the data for this study collected was not only coded into themes, but the findings were also discussed with community members outside of my participant community. This included two Black scholar(s)

familiar with the work of endarkened feminist epistemology that were able to engage in dialogue about the findings; a practice found in the tenets of this epistemology. Being in dialogue with community not only deepened my understanding of the narratives but brought life to Dillard's (2006) assumption in endarkened feminist epistemology which states, "only within the context of the community does the individual appear and, through dialogue, continue to become" (p. 22).

Data Analysis

Narrative inquiry was used to analyze data from this study. Narrative is used by researchers to understand context behind stories, that is "what does and doesn't get said, about what, why, how, and to whom" (Chase, 2011, 421–423). It explores social, cultural, and institutional stories within one's lived experience (Jones et al., 2014). Using this approach addressed the purpose of the study, exploring how athletic department professionals at HBCUs made meaning of highly ranked student athletes choosing to attend HBCUs post the spring 2020 Black Lives Matter movement, by using stories to highlight human experiences.

Narrative inquiry shares a history with psychology and student development research because of its focus on stories, identities, and meaning making (Jones et al., 2014). Chase (2011) describes narrative inquiry as a distinct kind of discourse which makes meaning through "shaping or ordering of experience, a way of understanding one's own or other's actions, of organizing events and objects into a meaningful whole, of connecting and seeing the consequences of actions and events over time" (p. 421). The use of narrative inquiry in this study was using the stories of HBCU athletics professionals to re-story how they were making meaning of highly ranked student athletes choosing PWIs in the context of the 2020 Black Lives Matter movement.

The emphasis narrative inquiry takes with temporality, sociality, and place were what made it a good methodological approach for this study. Temporality grounds experiences in the past and present and allow them to be carried into the future. Analyzing the history of activism at HBCUs and how it influenced actions in the present makes use of temporality; narrative inquiry captures events in past, present and future (Jones et al., 2014). Sociality recognizes how the researcher and participants can relate to one another and how the researcher brings an important social context to the relationship. Chase (2011) explains that through narrative, researchers use their own stories about life experiences as significant and necessary; a practice that is present within endarkened feminist epistemology. Lastly, place, in this study HBCU campuses, centers the importance of the "specific, concrete, physical, and topological boundaries of place where the inquiry and events take place" (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 70).

I followed the Josselson (2011) method for analyzing the data. Every participant was interviewed on a different day. This was unintentional but it worked well because it gave me enough time to process each interview. After each participant was interviewed, I wrote down my thoughts and reactions as a reflective journaling practice. I did this to capture how I was feeling about each conversation and any thoughts I had about what they shared and how it related to EFE, myself, or the study in general. Afterwards, I used an online transcription service (Rev) to create a word-for-word transcription and printed out a paper copy for myself. All the participants wanted a copy of the transcript, so I emailed it to them as soon as I received it from Rev. With each paper copy, I read through the interview, highlighted, and made notes of anything of significance said by myself or the participant. I labelled those significances with a category/code. This was my coding processes. I did this after each interview but before a subsequent interview to make sure I captured each conversation individually.

Following this, every time I conducted a new interview, I would go over the previous interviews and make note of similarities between each. I would then create categories of each code in a Microsoft Word document and paste parts of the conversations from each transcript that had the same code. This helped me seamlessly re-story the data. Once I had all six participant interviews transcribed and annotated, I read through them all again along with my reflective journals and my framework in mind making note of how endarkened feminist epistemology was present. I then consolidated my most similar and reoccurring codes into five themes and pieced the parts of the conversation from the transcripts that fell under those themes together so that they flowed as one voice telling the story of the theme which I wrote about in detail in chapter four. I sent these themes to three scholars who have used endarkened feminist epistemology in scholarship and met with two of them over Zoom to have a conversation about the themes. After that EFE scholar conversation I went through my themes once more and filled in additional information from the transcripts that I left out originally. Speaking out loud with EFE scholars helped me to recall some of that missing information. I wrote about that EFE conversation alongside my reflections in chapter five.

Re-Storying the Data

Within narrative inquiry exist different genres that can more explicitly support the researcher in sharing the data. For the purposes of this study, I used an arts-based narrative inquiry approach, also known as genre-blurring. Genre-blurring is the integration of two genres, art and research, that dissolve the art science dichotomy in qualitative research and "combine scientist research with artistic design elements that are more evocative, enabling readers to vicariously experience the lives of people through their stories" (Kim, 2016, p. 136).

The arts-based approach I used is creative nonfiction, a literary-based narrative inquiry featured within the arts-based approach. “Creative nonfiction uses an imaginative approach to reporting that requires the skills of a storyteller and the research ability of a fact-finding reporter in order to write about facts in ways that bring the reader to an empathic understanding” (Cheney, 2001; Gutkind, 2008; Kim, 2016, p.130). Using a creative approach in narrative work allows the work to appeal to a wider audience (Kim, 2016). This is important to me because I want my work to be accessible to practitioners and others who may not have to rely on academic literature as part of their daily job functioning.

The way I used creative nonfiction in this study was by using the themes that emerged from the data to craft a scripted recruitment pitch. The audience for the pitch was a fictional highly recruited student athlete being convinced to attend a fictional Division I HBCU in the post George Floyd era and the point of view of the pitch came from the voices of my participants combined into one voice. Writing the findings in this way worked seamlessly because each participant interviewed spoke on similar topics making the data appear to “speak to each other”. The participant interviews created the themes themselves, almost as if all my participants were together having a conversation. The data showed that across many DI HBCUs, the sentiments were very much the same as to why a Black student athlete would want to attend an HBCU.

This method of expressing the data was used because it best aligned with the study’s purpose and exploration for how athletic department professionals at HBCUs made meaning of highly ranked student athletes choosing to attend HBCUs post the spring 2020 Black Lives Matter movement. I created this pitch in a style like the pitches made by athletic programs where a particular element is highlighted in effort to entice recruits. This was something unique to the sport program, its atmosphere, culture, etc. At Jackson State University, football coach Deion

Sanders "straight-shot" pitch is what he believed motivated the nation's number one football recruit, Travis Hunter, to commit to his football program in 2021 (HBCU Sports, 2021). Sanders' approach to Hunter included emphasis on the rarity of having a Black coach in a Division I program. Other examples of pitch highlights include championship wins for the University of Alabama, NFL recruitments for the University of Georgia, and the stadium experience at Louisiana State University (Martin, 2013).

EFE informed my use of narrative inquiry through an arts-based approach because it allowed me to remain true to the tenets in endarkened feminist epistemology, specifically the second tenet that states, "research is both an intellectual and spiritual pursuit, a pursuit of purpose" (Dillard, 2006, p. 20). In EFE, to choose one over the other would go against how spiritual tradition and the production of knowledge work in tandem in endarkened feminist epistemology. Dillard (2006) writes, "endarkened feminist epistemology draws on a spiritual tradition, where the concern is not solely with the production of knowledge (an intellectual pursuit) but also with uncovering and constructing truths as the fabric of everyday life (a spiritual pursuit)" (p. 20). Similar to the concept of genre blurring where the both/and is both valued and emphasized, EFE values that research can be both intellectual and spiritual. This resembles the way that a qualitative research product can be presented as a literary art form (Kim, 2016). Presenting the data in the arts-based style of narrative inquiry honored the value that EFE places intellectual and spiritual pursuits.

Positionality

My Relationship to Sport

I come to this work from the perspective of a "native northerner." Most of my life has been spent living and working across the Northeast in states such as New York, Connecticut, and

Pennsylvania. I spent a year in Virginia and Florida however those experiences are jaded with academics and tourist attractions that I simply cannot count as being immersed in southern culture. Much of my time in Virginia and Florida was spent working in events and theme parks, places created to give an intentional experience that is outside of reality. It was not until moving to Georgia and being in a Ph.D. program that I fully began to understand elements of the South that make it uniquely different landscape than my northern experiences and the lens in which I view this work.

Social studies and history lessons did not prepare me for the atmosphere of Georgia. My purview of racism and its Black vs. White binary was more evident than I have ever known it before moving to Georgia. Subtle reminders of the South's dark past and relationship with history became very evident to me each day. I could never unsee the destruction left behind by segregation and anti-Blackness or stop wondering about whether the "safe spaces" were truly free from the hate that once lived there, or if it was just less obvious. One of those uncertain spaces was sport and all the hoopla that came with attending a large, primarily White, southern school where football was the marquee sport. Even as a self-proclaimed sport-enthusiast, watching games and indulging in the sensationalism of the college football atmosphere increasingly made me more of a critic than fan. During my first year, I noticed less of the game on the field and developed a critical eye for all the plays happening around it. The inquisitiveness sat heavily on my spirit. It felt as though I was watching a crime that no one else could see but me and led me to write out my thoughts in a poem I titled "Game Day":

> I sensed a spirit of trauma when I moved down South.
> I felt it in the polite obedience in phrases like "yes sir" and "no ma'am."
> I saw it in the plantation style architecture throughout the town.
> I heard it in the sounds of whips cracking on the backs of slaves on a hot Georgia afternoon every time a tackle was made on the backs of the mostly Black football team and the mostly White school.

There is a spirit of trauma here.

There were screams coming from a sea of red and black that I thought was blood pouring from my enslaved Black ancestors.
But then I realized that screams I hear and the sea I see of red and black were cheering for the team.

So, was I wrong? Was there no spirit of trauma here?
Or was the spirit of trauma drowned out by school spirit?
Can anyone see that the slaves are still on the field?

Is this reconciliation? Is atonement for the whip to trade it for a helmet?
Keep yourself safe as I whip you into shape
As you back drips in sweat in the hot Georgia sun
As your back breaks in labor until their whistle says you're done
As you labor all in vain in the name of glory glory
Cracklin whips or taking hits in the name of fame and glory
In the name, for a name, that's not your name, but cashes checks in your name
Like a slave in the field, you're on a field

Dripping sweat, breaking backs, crackling whips, and taking hits
Is this redemption? It's possible.
But there is a spirit of trauma here

I sense among the Black community
I feel it like a tackle on a hot Georgia afternoon
I see it when a player takes a knee in protest
I hear it in every voice chanting "Black Lives Matter"

Epistemology informed every part of this study, starting with the creation of this poem and how it helped me to conceptualize and craft this study. As I reflected on this poem and this study, I am reminded that in the spirit of EFE, intellect and spirit are encouraged to co-exist. I am also reminded that science and art can also co-exist which is evident in this poem and in my choice to use creative non-fiction to share the data from this study. The way I connect this study and this poem is through the idea that there is a tension happening between social issues and sport that no one really talks about. It appears to be that society is distracted by sport and unable to recognize what is happening with and around sport. This study can help consumers of sport, in this case collegiate athletics and higher education pay attention to how social issues are intersecting with

sport through exploring how HBCU athletics professionals are making meaning of what highly ranked student athletes are doing.

My Relationship to HBCUs

I needed to see myself in this research so therefore, my positionality needed to be included in my argument for EFE in this study so that readers understand how EFE and as a result I, myself, fit into this work. If I did not include where I stood in relation to this study, the tenets of EFE fall apart and it would have been difficult to connect me to the research on HBCU athletics. My positionality connected me to the research and was supported by the EFE tenet that says inquiry arises from personally and culturally defined beliefs.

In high school, what I knew of HBCUs was that they hosted mostly Black students. I did not fully comprehend the uniqueness of the culture sharing such a space with a specific group of people or what that meant. I was unaware of the history as to why HBCUs came to be besides the fact that segregation once existed. I had one friend that was very serious and committed to attending an HBCU and tried to convince me and others to at least consider it, but my ignorance and lack of exposure did not allow me to even get that far. As I reflected on my high school and college choice, I clearly remember saying that I did not want to go to an HBCU because I wanted to go somewhere with more diversity. In hindsight, it is evident that I knew very little of what the word diversity meant. I thought that because I grew up surrounded by Black people of many variations throughout the diaspora and attended schools where the teachers and students were majority of Black and LatinX heritage, that I needed to use my college experience to be around a more diverse crowd; by diverse I was really saying I wanted to be around White people.

In retrospect, I think I wanted to fill a void of a White experience unbeknownst to me that my entire existence and world was already centered on Whiteness. I remember hoping for a

White classmate each summer in grammar school as I awaited the start of a new school year. I remember strongly desiring to make White friends in high school and college but being frustrated that it was not happening. I thought I was missing out on something because I did not see White people around me when the presence of Whiteness still existed heavily in my socialization. For example, I remember taking a standardized exam in grammar school and being confused at a question asking about blinds. Whatever response I gave was just a guess because it would years before I learned the term for that window embellishment. There were no apartments in my neighborhood, or worldview at that, that came with blinds.

In essence, I refused to attend an HBCU for undergrad. My master's degree program was a unique application experience and so I never had time to truly be intentional about where I wanted to go. When the time came for me to choose for my doctoral studies, I had grown so much as a scholar, Black woman, and in all my identities that I set out with thorough intentionality as to what kind of school I wanted to attend. Among all my filters and preferences, I made sure that an HBCU made the list. By simply applying, I felt that I was rectifying my injustice to HBCUs made in high school many years earlier. However, I was wrong and once again felt like I had failed the collective institution of HBCUs.

Language and how we say things are very important. The HBCU on my doctoral studies list was not my number one choice. It was there because I thought it would be wonderful to attend that school IF I did not get into my number one choice which was a PWI. After I was rejected from my top choice, I even went as far as to say to myself that I'd rather attend this HBCU than attend this other school in a state I was disinterested in living in. The way I said it was condescending. It was as though the HBCU was the lesser choice but that I'd rather choose

this lesser option than the obviously better option because the better option was not in an ideal location. There I was, being blindly ignorant again, just like high school.

I was accepted to both the HBCU and the school in the less favorable state and I did not choose the HBCU. To be here now and doing this work from this perspective feels like a punch in the gut. It felt shameful and insensitive. Even though I said I would rather attend the HBCU, was accepted, and STILL DID NOT ATTEND was an act of betrayal that I had trouble expressing in words. For me, although I am a Black person, I did not think it was fair to now want to turn around and benefit (in terms of using HBCUs as my dissertation topic) from a place I did not want to be, a place I rejected. I felt that I need forgiveness and permission from the entity that is HBCUs to proudly do this work. That was why a framework like endarked feminist epistemology felt so right as a lens to look at this work because it allowed me to bring this part of myself into the entirety of the study. It gave me an alternate way of positioning myself as a researcher in this work, a way that is true to me as someone who does not think in the traditional ways of the academy.

There is a colloquial phrase Ghanaians use that says, “we move.” This means in whatever challenge we find ourselves in, “we keep going” or “continue on.” Therefore, I continued on in this work because as much as I wanted to own that guilt, I had to own that it was not my fault that I was never taught the true value of attending an HBCU. It was not my fault that decades of being underfunded and under-resourced is the reason why there was no funding available to offer me as a doctoral student at the HBCU I was accepted into. That was the reason why I declined their offer; I could not afford to take out more loans. I had to show myself grace because I was too young in high school to understand that the world around me was both feeding me lie that HBCUs were inferior to or lesser than PWIs and starving me of the knowledge of the quality

education offered and HBCUs. It was not my fault and I had to remember that as I engaged in this work.

Writing this dissertation was a unique challenge. I wrote as America and most of the world were emerging from 18 months of varying isolation. Isolation that looked like social distancing, masks, lockdowns, quarantine, death, vaccines, zoom, weight gain, weight loss, many tears and so much more. As people made their way out of their homes to make the most of the outside world in summer 2021, I continued to be in isolation to write. This was a personal choice I know, but like the many dissertation writers before me, isolation to write is part of the journey. Essentially, I was on an extended lockdown; a continuation from the lockdown that the Covid-19 pandemic forced on the world. I wrote about activism and social injustice from a lonely place set in a time where activism and social justice are very alive. For me the challenge of dissertating became so unique because of the setting I was staged in, and I included this context to show how the EFE assumption of "what happens in everyday life to individuals within the community is critical to making sense of particular actions, expressions, experiences, and community life" (Dillard, 2006, p. 23) was existing for me as I engaged in this study.

So, as I wrote, I came to the work with a desire to uncover some type of joy. I wanted to find beauty in the ashes and strength for my weakness. Therefore, I wrote from the position of searching for a diamond in every rough place. To possibly uncover for myself, the hidden gems I missed out on at HBCUs as well how HBCU athletic departments used those gems in our current social context. I did this work to redeem myself from the ignorance that was imposed on me in high school. I wrote about the resilience of every Black student activist doing school in the turbulence of the Jim Crow South; enduring unique challenges that, I dare say, far surpass my own. I wrote for every Black student athlete challenged with a college choice and a moral

obligation to choose resistance. And I wrote for every HBCU that ever existed; that opened its doors to give me the chance to thrive. It's a chance I never took but I am grateful for the opportunity for Black education, liberation, and liberatory education.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to explore how athletic department professionals at HBCUs were making meaning of highly ranked student athletes choosing to attend HBCUs after the spring 2020 Black Lives Matter movement. The central questions of this study were: What do HBCU athletics professionals perceive is influencing highly ranked Black student athletes to consider attending HBCUs over PWIs and in what ways, if any, have HBCUs athletics departments been influenced by highly ranked Black student athletes attending HBCUs? To answer these research questions, six Division I HBCU athletics professionals were interviewed. Some of the professionals held multiple roles and titles in their department and served student athletes in a variety of capacities. Because there are only 107 HBCUs and roughly twenty have DI status, I did not describe my participants or their institutions in detail to maintain anonymity. In addition, some of the participants' titles were unique to their institution so to protect their identity, I used generic descriptors of their position title. Those titles include a director of athletics, assistant director of academic services, director for media relations, sports information director for various teams, senior women's administrator, and Title IX coordinator.

Overall, the findings suggested that HBCU athletics professionals perceived that highly ranked Black student athletes chose HBCUs for many of the same reasons Black students in general still chose HBCUs in the days post desegregation of public schools. HBCUs, then and now, provided shelter from the storm of White supremacy and served as a site for learning with Black racial consciousness in mind (Roebuck & Murty, 1993). HBCUs provide Black students the opportunity to have Blackness, for the most part, be the hegemonic system in their educational endeavors (Patton, 2016) and students are able to thrive because of the support and

nurturing environments (Jett, 2013; Mobley & Hall, 2020; Palmer & Gasman, 2008).The findings also suggest that HBCU athletics departments have been affirmed in their strategic use of their institution ethos and reliance on existing resources to do the work. That is, HBCUs have a "use what you have" attitude and have been affirmed in that strategy as they have gained more recent popularity and attention. HBCU athletics professionals welcome the additional resources from organizations, celebrities, and professional athletes and count it towards using what they have to support their operations. These findings reflect Dillard's (2006) tenet in EFE, "In Black communities, what happens in people's daily lives is critical for making sense of actions, expressions, experiences, and community life" (p. 23). What is happening in the daily life of high ranked Black student athletes was critical for making sense of their actions and as a result, critical for how HBCU professionals then made sense of their own experiences and community life.

Presentation of Findings

The findings are presented as narratives that showcase HBCUs as the ideal choice for a Black student athlete told from the point of view of the athletics professionals. This method was chosen because the participants all shared facts that resemble what the literature has described as reasons why Black students select HBCUs. This led me to believe that the way HBCU athletics professionals are making sense of recent racial justice motivated college choice is not much different than why the average Black student chooses to attend an HBCU. Participant narratives were categorized into the following themes: (1) #BlackExcellence (2) #FortheCulture, (3) #WeAreFamily, (4) #BlackJoy, and (5) #MamaIMadeIt. I use hashtags to categorize the names of each theme as an ode to Black culture and the virtual spaces, like Black Twitter, created by Black people on social media to organize and share their thoughts related to the Black culture.

Black Twitter is an informal virtual community curated by mostly users that identify as Black focused on issues of interest to the Black community (Brock, 2012). The findings are essentially similar to HBCU characteristics shared by recruiters and alum. In chapter five, I discuss why it was necessary to retell a story literature has already told.

I used the themes collected from the participant narratives to create five themed recruitment pitches directed to a fictional Black student athlete to attend a fictional DI HBCU in the South. The recruitment pitch shares reasons why any Black student athlete should attend this particular HBCU. In reality, because athletics professionals from several different HBCUs were interviewed, the pitch really represents the collective voice of all the participants and presents reasons any Black student athlete, regardless of sport, should attend any HBCU in general. The setting of this pitch is a meeting between a fictional Black student athlete, their family, and members of a fictional athletic department, Black Lives Matter University (BLMU). It is post Spring 2020 and the resurgence of the marches and protests from Black Lives Matter movement that erupted from the murder of George Floyd has subsided. However, the impact of racial injustice is still active among Black student athletes and their professional counterparts. Highly ranked, highly recruited Black student athletes from a variety of sports as well as former professional athletes and their children are making headlines with their decisions to join team rosters at Historically Black Colleges and Universities throughout the South. The athletics professionals at BLMU want to take advantage of this moment with an intentional and truthful pitch to a recruit this Black student athlete to their institution. The voice narrating each pitch is the collective stories of the BLMU professionals detailing some facts about the HBCU campus atmosphere that make it the ideal college choice for this highly ranked Black student athlete.

The first theme, #BlackExcellence, represents the history and lineage of Black excellence/Black people that have come out of HBCUs. Whether it be Black alumni, contemporary figures, or major events, the theme of Black excellence represents any person or thing affiliated with historically Black colleges and universities that are making or have made significant contributions to society and culture. The next theme, #ForTheCulture represents the cultural nuances specific to HBCU campus and atmosphere. It is the collection of practices, aesthetics, mannerisms, and overall ethos of the HBCU community. The third theme is #WeAreFamily. This hashtag gives reverence to the 1970s song, "We are Family" performed by a group of Black sisters called Sister Sledge. This theme embodies the sense of familial community and bond that is felt at an HBCU. It can be likened to the sense of belonging one feels on a team, organization, or even one's own family. Theme four, #BlackJoy, encompasses how HBCUs serve as a shelter from a storm and how that translates into somewhat of a Black utopia for HBCU students. This theme also highlights the sentiments of bliss and peace experienced in a space that is catered to Black cultural distinctions. Lastly, the fifth theme, #MamaIMadeIt represents opportunity and achievement. It features HBCUs as an institution where one can succeed in anyway imagined. It positions HBCUs as always being an equitable space for excellence, despite the imbalance of resources between HBCUs and PWIs.

Each pitch represented the collective voices of all the study's participants. It was their narratives fused together based on their similar ideas and concepts with some of my voice to help with the grammar and flow of the content. All five pitches represented participant narratives except for the sections with citations. Literature from academic and media sources was used sparingly to add richer descriptions to the events shared by participants.

Pitch 1: #BlackExcellence

This is a Historically Black College/University

When you are considering where to go to college, part of the school's pitch to you is their academic programs and graduation rate. They'll tell you where students have gone on to have successful careers and the type of campus organizations they have. When you are a student athlete considering where to go and play for college, they will tell you about those items just mentioned and all about their athletics program, facilities, records, etc. We here at BLMU will be sure to tell you about those things in this recruitment meeting, but we want to start with one very important fact first. We want you to know that this is a historically Black institution. When we are recruiting a student athlete, we have to be explicit about letting them know that BLMU is an HBCU. It would be dishonest of us to leave that out. We do this intentionally because years ago we had a student athlete, a Black student athlete, on the softball team and she didn't know she was at an HBCU until her first day of classes. She actually called her mom and said, "there are Black people everywhere."

A friend asked her how she remained unaware for that long; as a recruit, you are brought on campus to visit. Her response was,

> think about it, I play softball. It's not a sport you traditionally see a lot of Black people playing. So, if I've been playing this sport from my youth into high school and I have seen nothing but non-Black girls on softball teams, that's my worldview of softball teams. When I came on campus to visit, the BLMU team was mostly White, again it was nothing I wasn't used to seeing. I got to meet some girls from the BLMU tennis team, and they were also White. I met some people from the football team, they were Black.

But majority of football teams are Black. So how was I going to know that this was a historically Black school if no one told me?

Now granted, this student athlete could have done her due diligence and researched the school, but she made a very valid point; someone should have said something. We are proud to be a historically Black institution. We are proud to be the only HBCU with a Division I equestrian, triathlon, and swimming and diving program but for some of those teams, there are more non-Black than Black student athletes just like the softball team. That is why today, we are more open to asking our coaches, especially the ones that aren't Black, if they tell their recruit that this is an HBCU. And when we get an opportunity to meet a recruit, the first fact we want them to hear from us is that BLMU is an HBCU so that they are very aware of where they are coming.

HBCU Lineage

Now that we have that out of the way, we want to tell you about what it means to be at an HBCU. We want to give you some history of the Black excellence produced from our campus and other HBCU institutions. “White supremacy required the creation of parallel institutions of higher education, but it was Black ingenuity that transformed them into enduring shrines of excellence and achievement” (Alexander, 2020, para.12). We pride ourselves on Black excellence and we want you to understand the legacy of an HBCU from your position as student athlete so you can make an informed decision for your college choice.

HBCUs, BLMU included, have a long history of athletes and non-athletes that attended our institutions and then went on to because leading figures in society. Thurgood Marshall, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Andrew Young, Spike Lee, Kamala Harris are a few non-athletes. Lance Gross, the actor, was actually a student athlete at an HBCU. He turned down an offer to become

a professional athlete so he could pursue acting. HBCUs have produced a ton of professional athletes, There's Steve McNair, who played football at Alcorn State, His brother is the head football coach there now. Civil Rights Activist, Medgar Evers also went to Alcorn and played football and track there. If we keep looking back, other great student athletes from HBCUs include Walter Payton, Jerry Rice, Doug Williams, and Art Shell to name a few.

If you can remember, think about Grambling State back in the days, when talented Black athletes only choice in terms of competing at a high level and really showcasing their athletic ability was at an HBCU. And if you really think about it, it wasn't about Division I or Division II, it was just about opportunities to really showcase the talent. There was a time when we were unable to do that across any area. Now look at the choices; student athletes actually have a choice. Think about early on when the choice wasn't ours, we had to go where we could participate. HBCUs had a cluster of talent, and Black people would gather in those stadiums to see those great performances. HBCUs have a rich lineage of student athletes that went on to play professionally and that could be you too if that's something you want for yourself. It's possible here.

If these examples are too far back for you to understand, you might be aware of some recent Black student athletes that committed to HBCUs. Bria and Cimone, twin volleyball players are at Howard University. Most recently, Travis Hunter, the number one ranked recruit committed to Jackson State to play for head Coach Deion Sanders. Now Deion Sanders is a prime, no pun intended, example of the excellence within HBCUs. Sanders did not attend an HBCU, but he made an intentional decision to go work for one. He is one of the greatest cornerbacks in NFL history and could have landed a coaching job at some other really great universities. I don't know his finances, but he probably did not need to take a coaching job.

Sanders' going to Jackson State added not only to the school's excellence but added another level of credibility to all HBCUs. It allowed for the number one high school football recruit this season, Travis Hunter, to commit to an HBCU. And for Hunter's one national story that made the news, there are a ton of local stories of student athletes just as talented that are also decided to attend an HBCU. When a larger-than-life figure like Deion Sanders decided to go to an HBCU, it added to the value of HBCU.

It's not new to have a former NFL player coaching at an HBCU, but a personality like Sanders had a positive effect on Jackson State and all of us at HBCUs. Sanders coached Jackson State to winning a championship game in his second year as head coach. It was a big deal, but winning championship games is part of HBCU culture. BLMU has won six championship games in our conference, two of them being back-to-back years. So, as we are discussing the history and excellence at HBCUs, playing in front of large crowds, being part of a competitive conference, and having a winning program is very much part of that.

Spirt of Activism

Part of our history and part of our name is the truth that Black lives matter. As a historically Black institution, we want our students to be themselves and embrace their Black identity. We want to emphasize that we welcome our students and student athletes to be themselves and that includes identities that are important to them. We have student athletes that identify as activists, and we fully encourage and support it. We have to because activism has been a bloodline for lot of HBCUs since their early beginnings. HBCU campuses served as training grounds for many of the 1950s and 1960s civil rights movement leaders and as we mentioned earlier, many of them attended HBCUs. "It was these students and alumni who sat- in at lunch counters and engaged in nonviolent direct action, faced water hoses, jail time and death"

(Alexander, 2020). The late John Lewis, an HBCU grad, phrased it as “good trouble” For them, HBCU campuses provided space to be able to be among other Black people, to be able to learn from one another, learn things like racial consciousness and how to use what they have to fight against White supremacy happening outside of campus in the days of Jim Crow and racial segregation.

Our student athletes truly understand that activism is a building block of this school and lives in the ethos of our campus community. If they didn’t do their research about BLMU or HBCUs before they got here, they will hear about our history because most HBCUs involve you in more than just the day-to-day book learning. You get to learn about our heroes, people who others only talk about during Black History Month. You learn about popular folks like Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., but you also get to learn about students who marched right behind him. The students were the backbone of those early civil rights movements. In 1968, about 200 protesters, mostly students from our campus, protested against racial segregation at a local bowling alley. Law enforcement opened fire on the protestors on the edge of campus, killing three students. One was a student athlete. That was actually the first incident in American history where collegians were gunned down by law enforcement on a college campus.

Activism has always been prevalent at HBCUs because we as Black people knew we were being denied so many opportunities. Black students were among the headliners that led some of the marches during the height of the early Civil Rights Movements. That spirit of activism still continues today with students fighting for other things like LGBTQ+ rights and equitable funding from legislators. Most HBCUs have been underfunded for years by state legislators including BLMU. Black students have been at the forefront fighting for equality and justice from then and still do now.

When Covid-19 first hit and our student athletes were forced to pause all their athletic activity, I believe that's when they *really* started paying attention to the news and what was going on in their community. We likened it to a resurgence of the convictions Black student athletes had for social justice in the 60s and 70s. Because of Covid-19, student athletes had no practices, games, or campus activities to distract them, so they had the focus to see and comprehend what happened to George Floyd. George Floyd was not the first Black person to be murdered by law enforcement. But having the time to focus and seeing how barbaric it was unlocked something; the history of the mistreatment of Black people that has always existed. It unlocked the history of the early civil rights movements of the 50s, 60s, and 70s that was happening on the same campus they went to class on. They started connecting the dots and when they got back on campus, they were reignited with a passion for racial justice, and we support that. It's been two years since the murder of George Floyd and our athletes haven't forgotten their zeal for the cause. We still have volleyball players taking a knee and softball and basketball players holding up a fist because they are using their platform to bring awareness.

Today's student athletes are tech savvy. You know how to use all your platforms. You know that with one click, potentially millions of people can see what happened or see what you are doing about it. With one click, you can go viral. Take Howard University for example, activism is huge at Howard. #occupyBlackburn just happened on their campus this academic school year. Here at BLMU, we have a see something, say something attitude so we've had our student athletes go on the internet and talk about things that they want better, and we've had to address those things. Those are examples of protesting against the institution, but that goes to show you how much students at an HBCU feel free to speak their minds. We now have town halls and a SAAC, our student-athletes advisory committee for student athletes to talk about stuff

that goes on in real time. Many of our academic staff work with our student athletes through SAAC to come up with some things that they'd want to talk about.

Continuing Excellence

So, to wrap things up for you about the history of Black excellence, we mentioned significant HBCU alumni, affiliates, and events to get you thinking about who you could become if came to BLMU. Our responsibility to you is to use the position we are in to get the best out of you and prepare you for the real world. Morehouse College helped shape Dr. Martin Luther King Jr's moral development and racial consciousness which he used to become one of the greatest leaders for the Black community. Kamala Harris expressed that Howard University influenced and reinforced her "sense of being and meaning and reasonings for being" (Givhan, 2021, para. 15) and now she is the first female Vice President of the United States. So, helping you as a student athlete become the best version of yourself is our commitment to you.

That's the beauty of coming to an HBCU, we care about you as a whole person. Yes, you are a student athlete, but we want you the person. You being a good athlete, that takes care of itself. You've probably been doing that since you were a young child. If you are the number one player or top ten in the country, we don't have to teach you how to play your sport, you already know how to do that. But you are going to come here and be able to be embraced as a person, a Black person. And you're going to be able to learn about that everywhere on campus. Where else in this world are you going to be immersed in learning through a Black frame of view? If you come here, to an HBCU, you are surrounded by people that look like you and you have a chance to feel like a majority rather than a minority.

HBCU alum understand that when you attend an HBCU, you have to be built different than other people. It's not a fault, but an asset and it helps get you prepared for the world outside

of campus. Many of our alum have said that they felt more ready at 22 years old graduating from college than their peers that went to PWIs. We think it's because HBCUs teach you how to be self-sufficient. Our students learn that nothing is given out freely, but that they have to go out and make it happen. We see that in our athletic department alone, but we're sure it's very similar across campus. Our record and the day-to-day things we have been able to accomplish on very minimal resources is comparable to some of our non-HBCU peer institutions. So, in that way, going to an HBCU helps Black students better navigate the world. Our forefathers and historical figures set the tone for Black excellence for us to follow. Now, we have some contemporary figures that are using those past examples with current events to continue the legacy of excellence with a more level playing field.

Pitch 2: #ForTheCulture

Black Culture

Black culture is one of a kind. There is a uniqueness to our clothes, hair, speech, music, food, and so many other characteristics. One major reason we believe a few highly ranked student athletes, like yourself, are considering HBCUs is because of the culture. Black culture is infused into the culture of the school and students want that feeling. We think the dynamics are changing and student athletes are starting to realize, "hey, I can make it anywhere, it doesn't have to be a PWI. I can be successful at an HBCU." They are thinking that way and deciding to come to an HBCU because they don't have to sacrifice their desires to be around their culture with their desires for athletic competition and success.

There is something about walking on campus on a sunny day at BLMU. You walk through the yard, and you see people enjoying themselves, playing music, and getting along. The yard is not just your basic quad; the wide-open space on a campus. the yard is different. An

HBCU yard is typically a large green space on campus where you'll find the sorority and fraternity plots. It's like the epicenter of the campus life where we celebrate unapologetic Blackness (One Yard, 2020). It's a gathering place for folks between class, meet up with friends, or enjoy a campus party. People gather together on the yard and it's just a vibe. It's also a sacred space so you have to respect the yard. One of the first things you'll learn here as a freshman is do not walk on the grass of the yard!

The culture of an HBCU campus is vibrant. You walk through the yard, and you hear music playing; your music, Black music playing. The university just hosted a festival and invited some local Black rappers to perform. That right there is cultural familiarity that you don't get at a PWI as a Black person. As a Black student athlete, you have to think, it's not just about the bells and whistles of a big fancy stadium, you have to ask yourself, "how will I fit in at the school itself? How will I acclimate to the campus culture? I'm a great athlete but how will I fit in day to day"? Those are the questions you have to ask yourself. Imagine yourself walking around our campus and people wearing shirts with our school's name on it. It probably reminds you of being at home, watching your favorite Black sitcoms like Different World, Living Single, The Cosby's, or Martin. You probably remember seeing those actors wearing the same thing. It's in that moment you realize you are actually standing in the middle of those television scenes, and it makes you feel some kind of good inside. You feel like you are with your people; like you are at home.

Game Day Atmosphere

If those images of standing in the yard made you feel good, wait until you hear about how our game day atmosphere! Now we may not have 90,000 to 100,000 seat stadiums at our school, but 25,000 people in the stadium with 50,000 to 60,000 people around town for a tailgate is still

a lot of people. The atmosphere on game day is just electric. People are out just wanting to celebrate, and they do that in ways authentic to Black culture. The student athletes warm up to Black music blasting from the speakers in the arena or on the field. We play the Black national anthem, *Lift Every Voice and Sing,* at the start of every game. At football games, the bands play renditions to songs by past and present Black artists. It's cultural acknowledgements like simply making it normal to play Black music that make Black student athletes interested in attending an HBCU.

Homecoming is a game day experience on steroids. Like many schools, homecoming happens in the fall semester and culminates around a football game on the Saturday. Some people joke that homecoming is like a big party where people happen to be playing football. The entire week leading up to homecoming weekend is packed with events and celebrations. Alumni come back on campus from miles away to reconnect with their college buddies and the university; it feels like a family reunion. Everyone is dressed in their best outfits and the school colors, going to barbeques, fish fry's, tailgates and parties. You can be hanging out at a campus event and as soon as the D.J. plays "Swag Surfin" by the Fast Life Yungstaz, you don't have to know anyone around you. You just know that in that instant, you'll all be locked together, singing, dipping, and swaying from left to right because that's just what you do when that song comes on (Alexander, 2020).

Homecoming is definitely a highlight for current students, faculty, staff, the community and especially the alumni. There's almost always a parade and pep rally. Our parade starts in one of the predominately Black neighborhoods in the community (Allen, 2021). Doing this keeps the university, students, and alumni connected to Black community, the culture that inhabits it, and allows for community members to feel part of the campus and celebration. Homecoming is

definitely an event that builds community across generations and geographies. Almost any event we have has that effect. Community members are so anxious to be there and support the students. You'll even see them hanging in the trenches just watching teams practice on the field. Our Black communities are really proud of our institutions.

BLMU has its own special homecoming traditions and so do many other HBCUs. This could be when individuals or organizations present a big check on the field, lighting of the sign, attending an annual step show or choir concert, or strolling with sorority/fraternity members that crossed before and after you. Those are some homecoming memories that keep alum coming back each year. Or maybe it's the band that keeps them coming back. HBCU bands bring some of the liveliest entertainment next to going to a concert. When two bands or band sections go against each other, pregame battle of the bands, it becomes a heated competition within a competition. The announcer once had to ask the band directors to stop so they could start the game (Milburn, 2022).

The band is definitely a handy recruitment tool for us. We've had a number of student athlete alum tell us that the band is what sold them on coming to this institution. The band is like a cultural ambassador; it's curated for a Black audience emphasizing Black music, Black culture, and Black excellence (Allen, 2021). Their halftime routines take place on the field and use military style marches infused with style and choreography from musical genres like R&B, rap, gospel, and jazz (Allen, 2021). We don't immediately recognize but HBCU band performances, starting from the very first, the FAMU Marching 100, functioned to affirm Black life (Allen & McCreary, 2021). So even though we are talking about culture and gameday atmosphere, it all still goes back to what we spoke about earlier with Black excellence.

At HBCUS, we have something call the fifth quarter which happens after the game. It's a mix of planned and spontaneous competition where the rival team bands, or sections, of the band go back and forth trading riffs or songs (Allen, 2021). It feels like an encore of the halftime show but the setup is a little less formal. People crowd around the bands as they do their thing, and you can see how each side analyzes and appreciates the artistry and technicality of each round (Allen, 2021). Fifth quarter battles used to last long after the game finished because being the first band to leave the stadium is like surrendering to defeat (Milburn, 2022). And you'll know when a band is at the end of their routine because they have a tradition. Every HBCU band has their own signature song that they do at the end. You'll know it's the end of the performance when they do this song; everyone knows this song.

Something really funny happened back in the day regarding ending a fifth quarter. It happened in the 90s between the bands of Jackson State University and Southern University. Each band played their entire book of songs; I'm talking about over 80 songs. But neither one was going to walk out the stadium first and admit defeat. So, you know what they did? They started playing scales! That's when facilities got sick of them, cut off the lights and turned on the sprinklers (Milburn, 2022). The funniest and most ridiculous part about the whole thing was that Southern's band ended up missing their dinner at a local restaurant because of that fifth quarter. They paid $5000 for this meal, and they lost it because the restaurant was closed by the time they got there. In all, people really love the game day atmosphere, the fifth quarter is definitely part of that.

Campus Organizations

We really want our student athletes to get involved with campus organizations while they are here. We've been around folks from PWIs who talk about these silos of athletes, and they

wonder how to integrate them into campus life. A few student athletes may be willing, but they may feel disconnected from campus life by the demands of their sport and team commitments or that the campus is not open or inviting to them. It's almost like shut up and play, just stay over there and play basketball, we'll see you on the weekends. Fortunately for us at BLMU, we encourage and support our athletes getting involved in campus organizations. And our classroom sizes are smaller so maybe that helps with the comradery between all the students; the student athletes don't feel so far removed. We want our student athletes to have a life outside of athletics. We give them the freedom to do that here and it's good to see.

We have student athletes involved in student government and Greek life; Greek life is very popular if we're talking about top extracurricular activities among our student athlete population. It doesn't surprise me though. Our athletic director is a Kappa, the Facilities Manager is a Sigma and Coach A is an AKA. A lot of the coaches support Greek Life because they are also part of it. Coach B is a Que and he always tells his team, "I can't be a hypocrite if I did it." They really just ask their student athletes to keep them informed about what they are doing so that they can support them and make sure the team is functioning well. We once had an athlete who did not tell their coach they were joining because the coach was White, and they did not think the coach would understand with it being a historically Black organization. But when this athlete started asking to miss practices and games, it was challenging for the coach to work with this student athlete because they were being so vague about why they needed all this time off. It all worked out in the end, but it can work out better if you just talk to your coach.

Teammates and the Greek life organizations are also very understanding. We had a baseball player that was an Omega, a couple softball players that became Zetas, basketball players that became Sigma, and volleyball players that joined Delta. If they had a commitment to

their sport, their organizations were understanding. There was a time some football players had spring practice and the track team had a meet. The fraternity they were joining didn't say "no you have to come to our meeting." It was "no you got track practice, no you have a game, go to that and we will support you in whatever way we can." They understand that some of these student athletes are on scholarships for their sport. And as a student athlete, you also need to understand you are on a scholarship for your sport. You've got to learn how to balance your commitments, or the waters can get muddied.

So, we do see, as much as we can, a good percentage of our student athletes engaging in Greek life and also in other organizations around campus because Greek life may not be for everyone. We think what is essential to take away in this conversation is there are opportunities around campus for student athletes to be involved and as an athletics department, we want you to get involved. We want you to feel comfortable here and not have to worry about being interested in other things beyond your sport. We want you to know that people here will always have your back, that you're going to have great teammates, great coaches, and a great experience.

Pitch 3: #WeAreFamily

Coming to BLMU is like coming home to your family. You hear that a lot about HBCUs; that there is a feeling of family and community. One of our Athletic Directors met their spouse at the Bayou Classic. The Bayou Classic is a huge rival football game between two Louisiana HBCUs, Grambling State University and Southern University. That Athletics Director went to Southern University and their spouse went to Grambling State, so when we talk about family, they met their literal family through the HBCU community.

We also have a lot of generations of families that come to our institution too. Grandparents, parents, aunts, uncles, and siblings have made it a mission to intentionally come

and even play at our university. It's nice when families come visit with their recruit and talk about the relationships they created when they were a student here many years ago. You can tell they never lost touch with those friends, and that they are very much part of each other's families. It's not like once they graduated, they barely saw each other again. It's more like, "I was just talking to my college roommate/teammate yesterday" or "I'll see you in a few weeks for this person's birthday" or "mom was asking about you."

At our HBCU, you will feel that family atmosphere. It's more welcoming. You generally have people that are going to care about you, going to gravitate to you, and are going to help you the best way they can. We're not saying that a PWI won't do that, but we think HBCUs definitely have a different approach to doing that with Black student athletes. The way Deion Sanders recruited Travis Hunter is a great example of that. Sanders went into that young man's home and told his mama he wanted to help her son get to the next level in his football career and in becoming a man. He knew, probably from lived experience, the importance of family dynamics to the Black community. It's a different appeal to have a coach that looks like you, come into your home and speak to your mom. A mom, or any parent/guardian, wants their child to be taken care of. They have intuition and can tell when something don't taste right in the Kool-Aid. It's like they say, "mama knows best." HBCUs feel like family because the people here understand what family is. A recruit's family can sense that and feel safe enough to entrust their student athlete to us.

We may not have dorm mothers anymore reminding you about residence hall curfew, but you do have a coach scheduling your time, especially your weekends. You won't just be running around doing whatever you want whenever you want. It's sort of like the obligatory speech a grandmother gives when a child leaves for college "when you go off to college, act like you got

some sense. Act like somebody raised you!" Your coach is going to do what they can to make sure you act like you got some sense! You are going to see your coach a lot and they are going to see you in a lot of different ways. They will see you at your most vulnerable moments when you're tired and you want to quit. They'll see you at your best, making a personal record, and many times at your worst, when you are really run down with physical and mental exhaustion. Then, just like your mama might do, your coach might call your auntie (me) to talk about you and get some advice; just like our families do. So, we don't mean it lightly when we say we are like family.

We're not a large staff so we have to wear a lot of hats here. We have a lot of interaction with our student athletes. Everyone who's on our senior leadership team, regardless of their title, has touch points with our student athletes. We have so much interaction with you, we have no choice but to treat you like family most of the time. We understand that parents are really giving us their kids and letting us take them to other states, to the airport, and on a plane! Parents are missing time with their student athletes on weekends, holidays, family parties and that kind of stuff. So, our student athletes become like our kids too.

Sometimes, our student athletes have the time to go home for a break, but their parent will call us and say "can my child just stay there [campus] please? Your city/town is safer than where we live." Sometimes the student athlete will come to us themselves and say, "I can't go home" or "I don't want to go to New York." "I don't want to go to Philadelphia." "I feel like I'm putting myself at jeopardy." Those are holidays like Thanksgiving and Christmas, and they are not spending it with their parents and other relatives. It might feel isolating not being home with your mother during those seasons because she is more concerned with your safety. You end up, as a student athlete, spending that time with your teammates and their families. Or as a team

because we're on the road for a competition. Those are special moments, so for us to share that time with student athletes, it does make us feel like family. That's huge. It transcends beyond sport.

We're even familial between each other as staff and administrators. We love hard to the point we even fight like family. It's not a "meet me outside" type of fight, but we disagree about things because of our humanness and the passion and love we have for our work and the student athletes we serve. After George Floyd was murdered and organizations were putting out statements, naturally, as a historically Black institution, we put out something because its paramount to portray who we are and what we stand for. Some of the teams decided to write individual statements to release and that has to be approved by a senior administrator. One of our coaches crafted a statement that we had to push back on. We felt strongly that the statement didn't take a stance, it was toeing the line and we did not want to do that. One senior administrator said,

> If you're not going to say what you need to say, it cannot be put out as a statement. Black people can be the most forgiving people in the world. We turn the cheek on a lot of stuff that we shouldn't. I am a Black person, and I am the audience. What you wrote is not right for the audience.

That's when the coach replied, "it's for the team" and that administrator responded,

> If it's for the team put it up in the locker room. If you ain't trying to say what happened to Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and everybody, all the names... if you ain't trying to say Black lives matter, we're not putting this out.

We definitely fight like family but it's because we feel so strongly about doing right for these student athletes. We want to prepare them for life, so everything is a teachable moment.

That situation with the coach was reminder that we are still a nation battling with racism and how we respond to it really matters. Many of us have children. I have a Black male son, 19 years old. Just the other day he grabbed his keys and said, “hey Mom, I’m going out.” I had to go through that speech of “all right now, make sure you do this, make sure you don’t do that.” I know as a mother I can’t just tell him to stay in the house, but I live in fear of “how do I communicate enough to him so that he’ll feel empowered but still be safe”? I wonder the same about our Black male student athletes because like I’ve said, we are family. It might seem a little gender biased, but we are having these tough conversations outside of just how well you play your sport and its exhausting. We are not numb to it, but how do you prepare student athletes, people that are like your own children, about the ugly side of our nation?

Pitch 4: #BlackJoy

We don’t mean to dampen the mood with those stories, but those are some of our realities. But like the church mothers used to say, “count it all joy.” There’s a joy you experience walking through campus and seeing a sea of Black people laughing and walking to class. It makes you feel good. Despite all the hateful things going on in the world around them, our student athletes find shelter being surrounded by people that look like them and that makes them feel good. We had a game against Howard University recently and when the student athletes took a knee, it didn’t cause a stir. The student athletes felt confident and safe to do that in a space where two HBCUs were playing each other. But imagine how they would feel doing that at a Kansas or a North Carolina? Imagine a Black student athlete doing that there. Would they even feel that they had the same chance to do that? We don’t know for sure, and we can’t say what the outcome would be, but imagine the fear or apprehension of thinking “is this the place to do this”?

Black student athletes have a type of freedom here and being free brings some joy. As we mentioned, feeling safe enough to protest by taking a knee or raising a fist gives them the liberty to not have to worry about being called a racial slur or having to look over their shoulder. We love that they have a safe space to advocate for racial justice and we do our best to keep them in a positive mindset and not let anyone take away their joy or their peace. Our goal is to keep them upbeat and isolate the negativity. Those are the moments when we are glad our budgets are tight because, money can't buy happiness. The peace of mind they find here cannot be bought. We may not have as much as some Power 5 institutions, but our administrators and coaches make sure our student athletes are taken care of. Alabama may offer a 12-ounce steak as a pregame meal, and we may offer baked chicken. They may offer 10 different options for dessert, and we only offer four options. We may not eat as "well" as those Power 5 schools, but we still eat. We still make sure our student athletes are taken care of, and they are grateful.

The student athletes aren't the only ones who are happy here, we as staff and administrators are too. We have an administrator that has been at this institution for almost fifty years. All of his degrees are from here. He retired and then unretired to come back and continue working here. This department gave him his first job after graduate school, and he never left. He definitely had opportunities to leave. Our sister institution offered him a job and opportunities at other HBCUs and PWIs became available, but he decided that his affinity and love was for his alma mater, and he stayed. For him to stay here this long means this can't just be a nice place to work. There has to be some immeasurable joy and satisfaction coming from it that can keep a person that long. You have to have a real love and affinity for the work here. Most of our sporting events happen at night or over the weekend, so you end up missing a lot of family events. But as we've mentioned, we have a sense of family and community here. We have a

legacy of Black excellence here and the length of that administrator's career here proves that. There's a lot of love and joy here and I hope you get the sense of that.

Pitch 5: #MamaIMadeIt

You Can Make It Here

We'll wrap up this meeting by saying this. You can make it here. You can make it at an HBCU. Going to an HBCU is not a death knell. A couple of years ago, we were definitely mom-and-pop-ing it for sure. We had to be resourceful and many of us wore multiple hats. We still do. But we use what we have, and with the recent attention from top athletes we have a little more to use. With that, we leverage the playing field for our current and potential student athletes. We know that when a highly ranked student athlete say they are going to an HBCU, some people are surprised. We aren't surprised because we know they can still get on a good path. If they want to go play professionally, they can do that and if they want to be an engineer, they can do that here as well. We've put student athletes in the pros, and we've put student athletes in Hollywood. We have a saying, "if you are good, people will find you."

We have four pro football Hall of Famers, four! There's only one other school in this state that can say they have a Hall of Famer, and they only have one. We have NFL scouts on our campus every year. We currently have the most players on an NFL roster out of all the HBCUs. We've sent over 100 players to the NFL and two of the highest paid defensive players graduated from our HBCU. In the 1970s, two of our players were chosen in the supplementary draft for Major League Baseball. They went one and two in the draft. So, if professional athlete is what a student athlete wants to be, they can get there from here. And if they want to have an exciting student athlete experience and play in bowl games and on television, they can do that here too. We have bowl games, we have the MEAC/SWAC Challenge, our games are on ESPN+ just like

everyone else. They might have peers that brag about being recruited for Kentucky and Kentucky said they're going to be on television every week. Our response to that is, if you're sitting on the bench, it doesn't matter if they are going to be on television every week, your mama is looking at you on the bench!

The same goes if a student athlete wants to have a rewarding academic experience; they can do that here too. I've heard stories of so many high school students being misinformed about the education at an HBCU. They were told things like "high performing Black students don't go to HBCUs." But that is not true. If you look at statistics, most Black doctors and lawyers are trained at HBCUs. The number two Democrat in the House is an HBCU graduate. Our ROTC program produced over twenty generals. The only other school to have produced more generals is West Point and that's a military school. One of our health science programs can boast that for seven years straight, every graduate of their program got a job. We have one the highest graduation rates among student athletes in our conference. We attract people from around the world because of the curriculums that we offer around agriculture and horticulture and subjects of that nature. When companies are looking for racially diverse candidates to hire in STEM fields, HBCUs are one of the first places they come to recruit because we have those programs and plenty of Black students in them. So, whatever a student athlete's ultimate aspiration, whether it be a competitive aspiration or an academic aspiration, they can achieve it at an HBCU. And, they can leave saying they were cared about, engaged on campus, and felt connected.

You Can Help Others Make It Too

When Makur Maker went to Howard, he was reported to be the first top ranked basketball recruit to go to an HBCU. He wanted other highly talented Black student athletes to at least consider HBCUs. When a top recruit says, "this is my top five" it means something for an

HBCU to be on that top five with Power 5 institutions. I think some student athletes look at it as an opportunity to be different. Sometimes you want to be the trendsetter. I think a lot of student athletes look for an opportunity to do that; be the first to do something like set a record. The nice thing about it is having a first like Makur Maker, Cimone and Bria Woodard, or even Travis Hunter has been beneficial to all HBCUs as well. BLMU, in particular, hasn't had a high-profile student athlete commit here yet, but we are feeling the waves of their actions in positive ways. It's like they say, "a rising tide lifts all boats."

BLMU, and HBCUs as a collective, have reaped great benefits of having highly ranked student athletes, and even professionals like Deion Sanders, come into the fold. For starters, it has definitely given our coaches the confidence to go after a 4-star, 5-star recruit. Before they'd probably feel like it was a waste of time trying because a top recruit may never look the way of an HBCU. But now with the attention these folks have brought the HBCU space, we know we have chance. We know that a top ranked student athlete will now at least consider us or even have us in their top five list. They will look at a Tennessee State or Hampton next to a Duke or UNC and know that an HBCU can provide a just as equitable athletic experience.

Top ranked student athletes or professional athletes turned coaches that go to HBCUs have also helped us obtain resources and financial benefits. One thing that we've seen more recently is that more organizations want to help HBCUs. For example, our men's and women's golf program is sponsored by Steph Curry; he's invested in this program for six years. Recently, there was an inaugural HBCU all-star game that was televised on CBS. Twenty-four-of the top seniors throughout the HBCU community had a chance to play on national television and that contest did not disappoint! Of course, that televised came then also came with its own benefits like more exposure, revenue from tickets sales and streaming services. It also provided a chance

for more resources like potential sponsors for our institutions and NIL deals for our student athletes. It's all been working like a trickle down and back around effect. The highly ranked student athletes attending HBCUs help bring those resources to us and those resources help will help continue that movement of getting highly talented student athletes to come to HBCUs.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, & RECOMMENDATIONS

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore how athletic department professionals at HBCUs were making meaning of highly ranked student athletes choosing to attend HBCUs post the spring 2020 Black Lives Matter movement. It used endarkened feminist epistemology as the framework from which to analyze the study. From this analysis, I found that Black athletics professionals view Black student athletes racially motivated college choice in ways similar to why Black students in general chose to attend HBCUs post desegregation of public schools. Increased racial tensions in society have encouraged Black student athletes to look to HBCUs as refuge because of HBCUs' commitment to expressions of Blackness in their campus ethos.

The desire to be immersed in ways that are uniquely Black or familiar to Black people was the most common point brought up by the participants. In my findings, I retold a similar story HBCUs have been telling for years about why their schools great and why Black students are attracted to them. These were stories I had heard in my own socialization, and so hearing them repeated by folks who worked and even attended HBCU institutions confirmed ideas I already knew. I believe this confirmation was the centering of spirit that endarkened feminist epistemology asks researchers to engage in.

What was explored in this study was elicited not only from spirit led confirmations or the narratives of my participants, but also from reports from media outlets. This work pushes the boundaries not only of what we understand about Black student athletes and collegiate athletics, but it pushes what is being explored in literature and what could be published in academic journals. My reliance on media sources to cite information shows that what is happening in

collegiate athletics and among Black college student athletes has yet to be explored in academic literature. Other academics have not captured this key moment in history and are not yet writing about this topic in this way. As I write to share my participants' narratives about this not quite yet phenomenon, it is important to put a timestamp on their stories so that all may know that folks at HBCUs have said this before and they are saying it again.

Expanding the Literature

The findings support and expand the literature. It pushes what we know about HBCUs, and the reasons Black students choose to attend them. The findings support what literature says are reasons Black students attend HBCUs which is to find space to be authentic to Blackness and be protected from tensions of racism experienced in predominately White spaces (Hill, 2019, Williams and Palmer, 2019). The findings then further expand the literature through analysis of a subgroup of Black students, highly ranked Black student athletes. Uncovering that HBCUs provide this level of safety and comfort to Black student athletes speaks volumes because although their talent and ability can afford their attendance at schools that have more money and more tangible resources, some highly ranked Black student athletes still chose an HBCU. This revelation is supported even further because it was recognized through the perspective of HBCU athletics professionals who have known this information all along. These athletics professionals saw that student athletes choosing to attend HBCUs in the 21st century really was like coming back home because there was a time when they did not have a choice about where they attend college and play. One participant reminded me to think about when Black student athletes did not have the choice and had to play at HBCUs. That was a result of the turbulent times that they lived in. What we are seeing a few Black student athletes doing in the times post the murder of George Floyd is also a result of turbulent times. Even with knowing what they know about anti-

Black racism, the murders of Black people by law enforcement, etc., HBCU athletic professionals gave the same responses about culture, family, atmosphere, and feeling safe as the top reasons highly ranked Black student athletes choose to attend HBCUs. These reasons are not new to HBCUs because people at HBCUs understand oppression and White supremacy and have provided safe and culturally relevant spaces to help Black students and Black communities combat it for years.

For HBCUs, athletics departments included, what is happening with racial injustice in society from the inception of the Black Lives Matter movement through the murder of George Floyd and others is reminiscent to the cruelties that happened to Black people all throughout history and throughout the creation of HBCU institutions. The dates are different, but the times have not changed and HBCUs are doing what they have always done to welcome and protect the Black community. There isn't any new happening at HBCUs that are drawing attention to highly ranked Black student athletes. It's the same thing they have been doing, the same thing they have been advertising to anyone that will listen, it's just that now, people are finally paying attention.

The difference with telling the same story now is that society is finally paying attention to the story. The effects of White supremacy in everyday life have guided Black college student athletes to HBCUs because HBCUs are spaces where Blackness in skin color and ethos is embraced, affirmed, and cultivated. With the Covid-19 lockdown forcing Black student athletes to have time to be immersed in movement for Black lives, highly ranked Black student athletes (and professional athletes like Deion Sanders) truly saw HBCUs. I believe these high profiled groups saw HBCUs as a space where they could experience and express Black cultural epithets with confidence and pride without fear or shame. Some highly ranked Black student athletes were able to pay attention to injustices happening in society or pay attention to how their

presence at an HBCU could shift the minds of others when it came to HBCU athletics. These types of paying attention were racially motivated and helped highly ranked Black student athletes make more informed decisions on their college choice. Their actions then caused media outlets to pay attention to what they were doing and led society overall to also pay attention.

The act of "finally paying attention" was the greatest revelation to come from this study. Spring 2020 was not just George Floyd, White supremacy did not just start happening, and Black lives did not just start mattering to Black college going student athletes. Ahmaud Arbery existed, Breonna Taylor existed, and Jacob Blake still exists. HBCUs exist and talented student athletes exist; the ones coming straight out of high school and the ones transferring from junior colleges. These skilled Black student athletes always existed, and they have also been attending HBCUs long before Makur Maker and Coach Deion Sanders (Hill, 209; Cavil, 2015; Demas, 2011). What appears to be the case is no one cared enough to pay attention until the Covid-19 lockdown forced them to have the time to stop and then while having the time, Black injustice occurred and someone with a big enough platform responded in a unique way. That response was to retreat to a place that social constructs labelled as unworthy, HBCUs. These are same social constructs that have harmed Black bodies for years.

When Travis Hunter chose Jackson State University over Florida State University, Florida senator Chip LaMarca stated that there must have been some type of compensation offered that would make the number one football recruit say no to a top program like Florida State University and yes to a small HBCU in Mississippi. LaMarca did not believe that an HBCU could possibly be a better choice for a high caliber recruit like Hunter (Gaither, 2021). In reality, there was no other reason for Hunter's choice beyond Hunter himself believing that Jackson State, a small HBCU in Mississippi was a better choice than the PWI Power-5

powerhouse that is Florida State University. The irony and what has made the stories of high-profile Black student athletes attending HBCUs so popular in this point in time is that White supremacy never expected the Black community to uncover the lies about HBCUs and fight back in such a genius way. It was not expected that Black people would use the methods of White supremacy (embedding practices into systems) against White supremacy. In this case, the master's tools are being used to the dismantle the master's house.

Everything written in the findings is not new news. For centuries, Black students have been misinformed and lied to (myself included) about what it meant to attend HBCUs. HBCUs have been advertised as less than educational spaces with subpar athletic potential in comparison to their PWI counterparts. The part of the story that White supremacy has held captive is that HBCUs are educational spaces that have excelled in athletics and academics in spite of being sabotaged by White governments and White systems that withheld funding and resources for years. And HBCUs continue to excel in this present time, even though the same lies have been retold year after year and resources are still scanty. However, despite the sabotage, monetary disparities, and harm on the Black bodies they have always been here to serve, HBCUs are starting to receive beauty for their ashes through the acts of a few highly ranked Black student athletes. It is the desire of these few Black student athletes, HBCU athletic professionals, and mine that HBCUs continue to see talented Black student athletes and financial support come to their institutions; Hill, (2019) emphasizes this in her article *Black athletes should leave white colleges.* With a Civil Rights movement mimicking the movement of the 1950s and 60s, HBCUs have been and continue to be a safe space and racial conscious training ground for Black students (Favors, 2019). Black student athletes are able to engage in academic and institutional cultures that affirm their Black ways of being and are rooted in relationships (Favors, 2019).

As the moment becomes a movement, it is necessary that the stories of why HBCUs are an excellent choice for top talent continue to be told. Yes, they are the same stories HBCUs and their advocates have been telling for years, but maybe it will fall on a smaller number of deaf ears in this movement. Folks such as Jasmine Gurley, co-founder of HBCU Jump, an advocacy group for recruiting talented student athletes to HBCUs, have used their platforms to emphasize the point that HBCU's have always been doing the work to uplift Black communities since their founding (Faris, 2021). HBCU athletics professionals are making meaning of highly ranked Black student athletes attending HBCUs the same way they have always made meaning of their existence, and they are going to capitalize on this momentum to help push that "same ole story." They will also strive to do better with what they have for their student athletes and their campuses. Hopefully, they will have a more even playing ground to do their good work and as society moves forward, people will listen and keep listening.

Reflections on Endarkened Feminist Epistemology

I reflected on myself and the narratives concerning HBCUs that I have come to know in my lifetime, and they were constantly confirmed in the participant interviews. Those moments were intuitive insights ignited by my understanding and use of endarkened feminist epistemology. I experienced the endarkenment that Dillard (2006) writes of where endarkened counters the concept of enlightenment that is traditionally used in White feminist thought to describe new and important feminist insights. The first tenet, "inquiry arises from personally and culturally defined beliefs that render the scholar responsible for one's community's well-being, both inside and outside of the academy" (Dillard, 2006, p. 18) came to life for me.

In hearing and sharing my participant's stories, I did feel a responsibility to ensure that their voices were centered accurately, and the messages were written to be received as plainly as

possible. As I wrote the findings, I tried to keep the language as close to the language that the participants used, and I was also constantly reminded that their stories should not just end with my dissertation but need to be illuminated in other spaces. The insight I received in totality, the fact that people are finally paying attention to messages my participants and other HBCU affiliates have been repeating for years, tells me that I too have to use the present momentum and the captured attention of society to spread the word about how valuable HBCUs are to Black people. They are valuable to the surrounding Black communities, to the folks that work there, to the students and student athletes, their families, to the thousands of alumni, and to the world.

In each of the participant interviews, I noticed particular body language, tones, facial expressions, and phrases accompanied with the information they shared with me. These mannerisms reflected coded language that I understood to be ways that Black people communicate beyond speech. Their explanations were paired with metaphors or examples that the participants just knew I would know on the simple basis of being a Black person. This was spirit in action. This is not to say that all Black people are expected to know these hidden messages, but it is very common to assume that one will. Participants would say things like “you know how we do” or “now you know” with a certain diction and tone and I indeed would know what they were referring to. They would also make certain bodily gestures like turn their head sideways, widen their eyes, and curl their lips to indicate a message they were saying without saying and that message was received. I appreciated sharing in these moments with my participants because it both let me know that my lack of HBCU experience did not exclude me still understanding a Black experience and made the spirit of Black ways of knowing and being that EFE describes come to life in the research. It was the intellectual and spiritual pursuit of research personified.

Participants also used descriptive phrases, imagery, and examples that felt very exclusive to Black culture. In one interview, a participant said, “imagine an old Baptist church and you get that same feeling.” Although I’ve never attended a Baptist church, I understood that point of reference and even why it was used to explain the unspoken expectations HBCUs have of their Black students. In another example, a different participant described how Black people have a basic understanding of racist experiences simple because they are Black. In describing a situation with a colleague, a participant said, “this person is biracial, Black and White, so I know they ain’t crazy.” This was said to describe the fact that this person understood the issue at hand concerning racism because their partial Black heritage gave them a point of reference from which to come to the conversation. While I understand that may not necessarily be true for all biracial or multiracial people, but between myself as the researcher and my participant, there was this unspoken but common understanding that we both knew to be true in this situation.

I likened these moments to the EFE tenet “in Black communities, what happens in people’s daily lives is critical for making sense of actions, expressions, experiences, and community life” (Dillard, 2006, p. 23). What my participants and I know and experienced in our daily lives as Black people, helped us make sense daily interactions like the one between colleagues, and larger life experiences like church attendance. Because I used EFE as my framework, I was able to recognize these experiences and have a scholarly way to “prove” my lived experiences as part of my academic research.

Conversation With Scholars of EFE

Part of my protocol was to speak about the findings with scholars familiar with the work of endarkened feminist epistemology. After writing the initial draft of the findings, I met with two scholars who have used EFE in practice and scholarship before. The purpose of this step was

to honor and put into practice the tenet of EFE that says, “only within the context of the community does the individual appear and, through dialogue, continue to become” (Dillard, 2006, p. 22). I used this scholar meeting as a reflexive tool to see myself in this work and how I can hold myself accountable to epistemology and EFE specifically.

In this communal space, I shared the experiences and sentiments I felt during each interview as well as the moments of clarity or revelation I received as I analyzed the data. With each interview, I felt more and more welcomed and part of the HBCU community, even though I never attended one. I shared how my participants spoke to me as if I was one of their own and how I realized that it was because I was part of the Black community. Having a shared identity in Blackness gave us a connection, and even though I had no HBCU experience, my participants knew that we still shared similar experiences for which I had a point of reference to relate and understand their perspectives. Being embraced in this way made me feel affirmed in the work I was doing with this study and helped me realize that I do not have to feel like an intruder or an outsider in the HBCU community. It allowed me to forgive myself for rejecting HBCUs in the past and helped me understand that there was no need for atonement. I could give up the hope that the past could be different and feel free and confident that I could do better in the future.

Part of the work of epistemology is to recognize one’s knowing and how they came to know. Meeting with the two EFE scholars helped me attend to ideas in the study that I had not considered or not did not come up in the data. I recognized my lack of acknowledging spirit when it showed up during each participant interview. I was able to bridge that to how I have been socialized in my educational experiences to disconnect from a spirit centered way of knowing and only be logical in academic work. While I assert that endarkened feminist epistemology in the way I speak about being Black and just understanding certain Black

language or Black settings, I do acknowledge that I could have done a better job of tuning into that more during the interviews. I think if I was more cognizant of that, I could have helped my participants tap into that more and together we could have explored topics in our conversations more deeply and more intently. There was one instance with one particular participant, his experiences and wealth of knowledge resembled sitting at the feet of an elder as he shared memories of his nearly fifty-year career at one HBCU. I wish that I had acknowledged that in real time so that my participant could have leaned into that more as they shared their narratives.

The ways in which I did recognize an endarkened epistemology was by attuning to the ways in which an ethic of care centered in Blackness showed up in this study and events surrounding this study. The first way was in an analysis my EFE scholars and I did of Travis Hunter and his commitment to Jackson State University. I acknowledge that Travis Hunter, Deion Sanders, and Jackson State are reference quite frequently throughout this document, that is because of the significance their actions have made to the entire landscape of this study's purpose. In this scholar meeting, we discussed details surrounding the hats that Hunter wore as he led the audience in his college choice decision. We recognized that the only hat that appeared to actually fit Hunter's head with his loc'd hair was the Jackson State hat. This small gesture spoke volumes because it reminded us about how HBCUs are literally curated with Black people in mind. Black hair grows and is styled in textures and volume that add to the circumference of one's head. The Jackson State hat was the only HBCU hat present, and it was clearly the largest hat and it fit better over Hunter's hair better than the PWI hats. This detail showed us that Blackness is not an afterthought on HBCU campuses like it can appear to be at PWIs. Black students do not have to adjust themselves to fit into the structures, the structures were built for them.

Another analysis that came from this EFE scholar meeting was the idea of things already being understood. Similar to the idea of just knowing or spirit, there was a sentiment that things were just understood and therefore never explicitly spoken about. This came up around the topic of food. I was surprised that none of my participants mentioned the cultural significance of food for Black people or how food is different between Black people and other races. Again, maybe there was an idea that we as Black participant and Black researcher just understand how food works in Black communities or maybe that is a part of HBCU athletics culture that exists differently than the rest of campus. Is food not a cultural experience for HBCU athletics programs? I had to question whether or not certain things were just thought to be understood and that's why they were never mentioned, or was it because the HBCU athletics department, similar to other non HBCU athletic departments, are in some ways are disconnected from their campus. In bringing this up, I was led to recall my own experiences working in PWI athletics and how disconnected that department felt from the rest of the campus culture. Student athletes and the athletics department at my PWI operated in silo and rarely ever collaborated with campus partners.

Implications For Practice

Intentional Recruitment Methods

From the data and repeated mention of the same most publicized HBCUs, I came to understand that there is a need to garner just as much support for all HBCUs and that is something that can start with intentional recruitment. Participants shared how top ranked recruits attending more publicized HBCUs brought attention and resources from celebrities and major corporations to these popular HBCUs. Some of that attention also came to their own institution which would be considered not at popular or publicized. Participants then asked me to imagine

the benefits if that recruit came to their school. This information from the data leads me to believe that intentional recruiting of highly ranked Black student athletes to these less publicized HBCUs can bring more support to those schools in the form of diverse student populations, increased enrollment, media and public attention, brand and sponsorship deals, government, and community support.

HBCU athletics professionals shared that they felt more confident recruiting highly ranked Black student athletes after a few highly ranked Black student athletes recently committed to playing for HBCUs. The publicity garnered from these few student athletes, and even professionals like Deion Sanders, for HBCUs collectively has brought monetary and in-kind resources to many HBCUs. Because of this, HBCUs should use the momentum as a confidence booster to go after the best players. Having a few top tier Black student athletes committing to HBCUs shows that HBCUs have ability to host great players. HBCU athletics programs have seen great success having lesser resources than other non HBCU institutions. HBCUs have won championship games, developed talented student athletes to compete for the institution, and produced a number of athletes selected for professional teams. With the publicity these few top ranked Black student athlete have produced. HBCU athletics professionals are now seeing what having the best players can do for their institutions even when a talented athlete attends a different HBCU but an HBCU, nonetheless. So why not recruit a top tier Black student athlete to their own program too?

As HBCU athletics program look to recruiting highly ranked Black student athletes, it is necessary for them to not only lean into the strengths and characteristics that make them a valuable college options, but for all HBCU institutions to feel that that have an equitable chance at recruiting a highly ranked student athlete. One thing that came up throughout my interviews

was the fact that the same few HBCUs were being highlighted and sought after. Howard University, which is nicknamed by affiliates as the Mecca, and Jackson State were the schools mentioned the most and thought of as the most desirable for many Black students/ student athletes. It was a desire of mine and my participants that the love and attention be shared among other HBCUs that were not the HBCU ivy leagues Howard, Morehouse, Spelman or a few of the other more popular HBCU institutions. As much as there is a desire by HBCU professionals in this study to continue to see highly ranked student athletes attend HBCUs, it is also as much desired that those student athletes consider the lesser publicized HBCUs (a number of which are also Division I) such as Prairie View A & M University, South Carolina State University, Maryland Eastern Shore University, North Carolina Central University, Mississippi Valley State or Texas Southern to name a few.

The call to spread the recruitment and student athlete commitment love across all HBCUs is a call not just to coaches or student athletes. This call to action is also being requested of the organizations that recruit talent from HBCUs for employment to racially diversify their staff and of big and small brands like athletic sportswear, television and other media production companies, or fast-food chains that sponsor athletic teams and programs. With HBCUs being the leading producers of Black graduates in STEM fields, they have become an easy talent pool for major organizations like Deloitte or Microsoft to recruit from (Alcorn, 2021). These organizations should also be willing to work with the variety of HBCU institutions and not just the schools with big names. Having such organizations spread the love across the different HBCUs can more equitably uplift and distribute resources that can support the quality of HBCU athletic programs and the school overall. It can also bring more attention from new populations

to the less publicized HBCUs that could support programs like enrollment, retention, athletic department operations, and town and gown relations.

Lastly, spreading the love could aid with resources that will financially support Black student athletes at these less publicized HBCUs directly. It could mean more opportunity for student athletes at these HBCUs to obtain NIL deals or for their athletic departments to receive finances that can increase their budgets so that they can increase things like scholarships or book stipends. With the recent decision the Alston case, athletic departments are able to provide more funding for academic related expenses to their student athletes (Harvard Law Review, 2021). However, not all schools, especially HBCUs with smaller budgets are able to afford this. If they had more attention and support coming into their programs from outside entities, it could mean that they would have funding to be able to help student athletes benefit from the ruling in the Alston case. Overall, spreading the love through intentional recruitment of highly ranked Black student athletes and attention to other HBCU institutions could result in an even more levelling of the playing field between HBCU institutions and between PWIs and HBCUs.

The Black Utopia, A Harmful Story for HBCUs

The conversations I had with my participants painted a picture of a utopia type universe created by HBCUs for Black students. Part of me supports that idea whole heartedly. Black students, student athletes included, face a myriad of aggressions and micro aggressions moving in spaces and systems that operate in Whiteness. Being Black and doing almost anything, as seemingly mundane and unsuspicious as it can be, has proven to be dangerous and life threating for Black people in this society. Is it a bad idea for Black people to have a space where they feel safe, even if it doesn't reflect the real world? Would it not be okay for Black student athletes on HBCU campuses to be shielded momentarily in hopes of keeping their spirit intact to face the

rest of it once they leave campus? If HBCUs campuses are the only or one of the few spaces of peace and joy a Black person can have, while also being educated and affirmed in their Blackness and Black ways of knowing, then I cannot help but want to support that.

I want to support the idea that as a response to the trauma brought on by anti-Blackness, HBCUs have intentionally chosen not to think about the hardships of racism on their campuses because their campuses are the only safe spaces they have as Black people. It is a literal and metaphorical shelter in the time of storm and HBCUs chose to treat this space as an imagined utopia because they know what they have to face as a Black person outside of campus. Some of my participants felt that it was their responsibility to their student athletes to keep them positive, upbeat, and isolated from anything negative. To me, that statement sounds like regardless of what is happening in society, on this HBCU campus, you can live in a world where anti-Blackness does not exist, and you can feel safe. Part of me is okay with allowing that mindset to exist because the world has been cruel to Black people; let us have joy. I love the idea of a Black Utopia because Black people deserve safe spaces, but at the same time, I live with a dual tension of the idea of a Black utopia. I grapple with the idea of a Black utopia being a harmful story to live in at HBCUs because of the idea that it can also mean that HBCUs are choosing to ignore the diversity in Blackness.

During the study, I questioned if HBCUs creating a utopia for themselves where they pretended that issues of anti-Blackness in society did not exist or, if it was easy for them to not think about those issues because they are in community with other folk that look like them. Those questions were amplified when one of my participants spoke about Black student athletes having a sense of joy and peace at HBCUs because they did not have to worry about racism because everyone looked like them (everyone around them was Black). The participant also said

that they did not see color among their student athletes, but only personality. While not worrying about racism can be true in a sense, holding this idea that HBCUs are joyful spaces because Black student athletes do not have to worry about racism makes racism seem like the only social injustice issue a Black person can experience and denies that other issues of diversity, equity and inclusion can exist at HBCUs. I have tension with each of those ideas.

Anti-Blackness can exist on HBCUs just based on the historical settings in which HBCU campuses began. Conservative and religious ideals presented as tradition and policies at HBCUs have been left over from racist systems established by White stakeholders who helped found HBCUs (Mobley & Hall, 2020). Not only were HBCUs established to provide educational opportunities to Black people who were formerly enslaved, but they also existed to "instill values of White morality" into the Black community (Nguyen et al., 2018). Respectability politics in the form of dress code or policing types of Blackness under the guise of making them safe and palatable within White communities are some of the systemic ideologies that have been passed through HBCU over time. If students are being indoctrinated into the university through traditions, policies, and practices, and such establishments were founded to bring Black students in proximity to Whiteness, then by that end, racism has to exist with the HBCU campus.

Next, regarding the statement of diversity, equity, and inclusion existence on HBCU campuses, issues of colorism, classism, sexism, homophobia, fatphobia, ability, etc. do exist at HBCUs. To scale down diversity equity and inclusion to just race and not ethnicity, or any other intersection of the forms of oppression that Black people can also face, is dangerous, does not make sense, and is frankly a very basic analysis. For example, colorism is a form a discrimination based on skin tone, grants privilege to lighter-skinned Black people and may deny those same privileges to darker skinned Black people (Allen et al., 2000; Hunter, 2007, 2008;

Russell et al., 1992). Colorism has ties back to slavery and parts of HBCU history hold memories of skin tone discrimination within sororities, homecoming queen, and homecoming court participants (Gasman & Abiola, 2016).

Another example includes how many facets of Black culture were curated from queer and trans culture (Bey, 2017), yet members of the LGBTQ community have reported feeling left out classroom and campus experiences while at HBCUs (Mobley & Hall, 2020). “The complex nature of sexuality, gender identity, and gender expression often present as an affront to Black ‘respectability politics’ and disrupt widely accepted notions of conservatism and decency within Black communities” (Mobley & Hall, 2020, p. 503). Because of the desire to uphold a respectable identity, one which was rooted and founded in Whiteness, HBCU students who hold identities that do not align with this curated identity are erased from the image of HBCU campuses. This erasure is part of the overall erasure of diversity, equity, and inclusions and is why I fear the story of the Black utopia on HBCU campuses.

While I appreciated his honesty of my participant not seeing color and understood the context from which he shared this statement, I cannot help but wonder about the danger in choosing not to see any specific part of an individual. I struggle with the idea that I may be going against the hopes and dream of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s words to not judge on the color of skin but the content of character. I wonder if and feel that it is not okay for Black people to not see the variations within Blackness because Blackness is not a monolith and there is much diversity within Black culture that we have to acknowledge. Black people in the diaspora have unique cultural differences amongst one another depending on where in the diaspora one is from. There are also differences between Black people from the continent of Africa and Black people

from the diaspora. Failure to see or acknowledge these differences could mean failure to provide the necessary resources and support for those individuals.

As it relates to student athletes, a Black student athlete recruited from a country in Africa will have different needs as they get acclimated to the university that a Black student athlete that may be from the same state that the university is located in. That Black international student athlete may have trouble adjusting to cultural differences between America and their home country (Newell, 2015). Using one approach may not be able to cover the needs of all student athletes of a team, even if they all identify as being of the Black race. In refusing to see color, HBCU athletics administrators can condition themselves to not see oppressive acts that can and do exists among people in the same race. No matter what type of institution, it is imperative to center the needs of students because injustice can exist in a myriad of different ways. It is even more imperative to do that at HBCUs because of the injustice that exists against Black students outside of campus. They should be made to feel safe from it from within.

Lastly, if the response to societal traumas of anti-Blackness is to create a utopia on HBCU campuses where Black student athletes can feel safe, are we really protecting them and if so, at what cost? Will they miss on important life lessons and what will happen when they graduate, enter the workforce, play professionally, or find themselves at a PWI? What will happen if Black student athletes existed on HBCU campuses without acknowledging race, racism, or color and then find themselves in spaces that are the polar opposite of HBCUs? If HBCU athletics job is to help their students become successful academically, professionally, etc., are they adequately and holistically doing that when they create these spaces that do not resemble the real world? I grapple with the idea that a Black utopia is space that does not exist anywhere else but within an HBCU campus and it could be dangerous for Black student athletes

when HBCU campuses intentionally create spaces that ignore how issues of the real world are real on their campus.

Reciprocity For All Connected To This Study

In doing endarkened feminist work, one constantly has to think about what this research and findings means long term and how will it help others, especially the communities I did the research with. It is not enough or right for this work to only benefit me in the sense that I defend the dissertation and I become a PhD holder, but I have to always center reciprocity for key players within the context of the study. I had to recognize how to build a conversation around key players so that the messages highlighted in this study are sustainable and continue to support HBCU communities and so the credit goes back to the people who shared the knowledge with me. My participants were so willing and comfortable to share information with me without asking for anything in return. Part of that came from them feeling safe in speaking with another Black person about Black experiences. However, in honoring EFE and a desire to uplift the Black community, reciprocity is still necessary, even if it is indirectly supporting my participants. In thinking how I can give back to Black communities, Black college going student athletes, and HBCUs/ HBCU athletics programs, I have come up with a few things that I want to do and have already done to make sure I am being accountable to EFE and my participants.

The first is sharing this work through conferences. The abstract for this study was accepted for a research showcase at the NACDA and Affiliates conference happening in June 2022. The NACDA and Affiliates Convention is a large collegiate sport conference that brings together all levels of athletics administrators from across all divisions and types of institutions within the NCAA in addition to over one hundred sponsors and company exhibitors. Showcasing this work to such a variety of people is a quick and simple way to get the highlight the message

of HBCU athletics professionals across multiple platforms. I think it also means something when the work is attached to a name like the University of Georgia which has a leading sports program. It can make people stop and listen. I would love to share that space with my participants in as much capacity as they would like to be involved so that they and others know that this work, and I am, because they are.

My next plan for reciprocity is to go back into the communities that gave me wrongful messaging about what it meant to attend an HBCU and give them an accurate narrative. The church has been a very influential space for my educational socialization, and it is a valued entity within Black communities. I want to go talk to church leaders, starting with my own and lovingly challenge where they received negative messaging about attending HBCUs. I then want to encourage the children and college going youth to consider HBCUs and share the reasons that were expressed in the findings. I want to use my research to counter the negative narratives they have heard or will hear about HBCUs. After my church, I plan to share this same messaging with churches that are in community with us and then further out to churches I am not connected to.

Through my PhD education, I have been increasingly more curious about exploring what collegiate sport looks like in Ghana, West Africa. I've made connections with sport faculty and administrators both in America and Ghana with interest around developing the culture around college and athletics in Ghana. In those conversations, we realized that in its current state, Ghanaians interested in playing and developing their athleticism would most likely do that outside of the continent of Africa. I see this as an opportunity to plug and assist Ghanaian student athletes to consider attending HBCUs to further their development as a student athlete. My professional and academic experiences in college student affairs give me great skillset to help

them navigate the college going process and the connections I have made with my participants working at various HBCU institutions gives me a direct line to aid in that recruitment process.

I have also learned how important scholarship and publication is in academia. It is how folks who do research disseminate the knowledge they have created. In thinking about reciprocity and elevating the message of this study, the idea of publication felt like the obvious next step. However, I had to also consider that I was once a practitioner in a collegiate athletics department and so how I choose to publish this work really matters. For a study centered on practitioners, I need to place this writing on platforms that they have access to and pay attention to. This work may be of no use to them if it only lives in an academic journal if academic journals are not part of the places where they retrieve knowledge and best practices to do their work. I know it was not the case for me when I was a practitioner.

Because of that, I want the information and recommendations of this work to live under the names of my participants and in published spaces like campus or department newsletters, conference newsletters, ESPN articles, and in campus/department policies and procedures. The policy piece is really important because embedding systems in policy can cause those systems to be more sustainable. I want to work with my participants and to create scripts for HBCU affiliates and supporters to have so they know how to respond to folks sharing misinformation that discourages people from attending or working at an HBCU. I imagine it to look like a quick facts sheet with highlights that tell the truth about HBCU excellence in education, and racial and cultural affirmation.

I also need to consider that the language used in this study and its publication needs to be understandable and digestible for the audience. Throughout this document I made sure to attend to using language that was not filled with academic jargon and concepts that were not

generalizable to a broad audience. I plan to do the same when I scale down this study to a length that is practical for the everyday athletics professional to get through. Lastly, I want it to remain true to ways of knowing and being familiar to Black communities, and so I will continue to include colloquial language and examples that are found in Black culture. I want everything about this work to be Black.

Lastly, because of my emphasis on recruitment pitches and using that as the platform for which I shared my participants narratives, I see it only fitting that I give these pitches to HBCU recruitment participants like coaches, advisors, and the like. Sharing the findings would not be telling them anything they did not know before, but more of an affirmation to them that they are doing good work and should feel encouraged to go after the best athlete. I want to take this a step further and be intentional about sharing this with HBCU athletics professionals at institutions that are not considered the elite or the ivies of the HBCU world. I want those institutions especially to know and understand that they are valuable spaces for Black student athletes. I want the message to go out that Black student athletes should go to HBCUs and that they should remember that there are many options of HBCUs for them to choose from. I want them to consider HBCUs in major cities and rural towns. When we think about levelling the playing field for HBCUs against PWIs, we have to remember the fields of all HBCUs.

Impact on Policy

Although I do not believe there is a need to do away with HBCUs, I do believe that the debates about HBCU vs PWI can be alleviated if there were systemic changes created to provide equitable college experiences for Black students at PWI. I believe that with such systemic change, colleges and universities can see more positive experiences for Black students in addition to all racial groups that have been traditionally marginalized. I believe this because the

past, with the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, has shown that the movement for Black liberation pioneered the movement groups such as disability rights, women's rights, LGBTQ rights, and Latino rights (Isaac, 2008). One of my participants guided me to the idea of policy as an effective tool for social change as we discussed the impact of athlete racial justice motivated choices such as college choice and other forms of activism. This participant said:

> I think everybody should encourage them [Black student athletes] to work within their system, because the only way you affect change is through policies and procedures. I'm all for a good march if it means something to raise awareness, but really to make change is through policies and procedures and so that's where we encourage them.

The idea of creating sustainability from the marches and protests led me to think more deeply about what existing policies could be considered as a starting place. The circumstances we find ourselves in today, groups of Black student athletes opting to attend HBCUs because of their intentional commitment to Black holistic and academic development, will never be resolved with minimal efforts such as optional courses or hiring ethnically diverse staff. The institution, the system, has to make more sustainable efforts in order for these practices to make the intended impact. Public policies like affirmative action needs to tread further into education and be embedded into curriculum design, not just admissions and employment practices. It is not enough for some states to use affirmative action and others to not, and it is certainly not enough to use it to admit Black and other marginalized students with no follow up as to how the acknowledgement of their race in their admission will be acknowledged throughout matriculation.

The political attack on critical race theory should influence educators all the more to desire written policies that enforce a higher education curriculum reflective of the HBCU second

curriculum, the communitas (Favors, 2019), and commitment to racial consciousness (Roebuck & Murty, 1993). HBCUs have been able to provide transformative experiences and educational opportunities despite being inequitably resourced (Bracey, 2017; Liontas, 2016) so imagine what can be done at institutions with access to more funding if they mimicked a similar style systemically. Testimonies of the quality of education, quality that attends to Blackness in respective academic fields, paired with statistics of higher rates of Black graduates from HBCUs (Wyllie, 2018) should be enough to render consideration for this policy driven curriculum revamp. It should be mandatory through agencies like the Department of Education who set the standard. However, along the same line, the political attack on critical race theory is also an obstacle and a deterrent from suggesting that the government do more to infuse race into the curriculum. Policy is a powerful method to influence change and it is a method that should be put into action as students continue to be agents of the change they wish to see on campus and in society.

Recommendations For Research

Expanding This Study

This study was centered on Division I HBCU athletic program because they were the most equitable parallel to a student athlete attending a Power 5 institution. This study should be expanded to explore what this topic would look like at the division II and III HBCU level. It should also examine the potential for highly ranked Black student athletes choosing HBCUs becoming a phenomenon and whether or not this is a movement that influences all sports or just revenue producing sports like football and men's basketball. Furthering the research in this way helps parse out how one event influences collegiate sport in different ways depending on the population being studied. In addition, it is imperative to explore this movement through the lens

of the highly ranked Black student athletes themselves. Speaking with the HBCU athletic professional was an act of convenience because there was a larger pool of people to elicit for interviews; that is, there are not many highly ranked Black student athletes that have been publicized as making these racial justice motivated college choices. A study that put the voices of these student athletes will not only add more richness to this up-and-coming research area, but also include the point of views of the main stakeholders of this very topic.

This study was written through the lens of activism. While there are many activist acts infused throughout this time period, it is important to note that resistance is also very prevalent. Activism and resistance often get conflated, but they have nuanced differences; all activism is seen as resistance, but not all resistance operates as activism (Stewart and Williams, 2019) As this research area expands, exploring it through a frame of resistance rather than activism would better encapsulate the actions of these highly ranked Black student athletes. While Black student athletes did engage in forms of activism through protests, marches, and other public displays of social justice advocacy, the racial justice motivated college choice of highly ranked Black student athletes was more of an individual, everyday act, that served to undermine and disrupt power (Stewart, 2019). This realization, however, could not have come to fruition without doing the study the way it was done so there is still much validity and value from the activism lens.

"More Money More Problems"

In an April 2022 article interview, Dr. Billy Hawkins, a professor in the Department of Health and Human Performance at the University of Houston, expressed that conference administrators, college presidents, and athletic directors have a responsibility to "tap into the energy around social justice in broader society to help advance HBCUs when it comes to television revenue and sponsorship conversations" (Arnett, 2022, para. 23). The broader context

of the conversation was about bridging the financial gap at HBCUs and HBCU athletics departments. What are the potential issues that can arise from the increase of revenue if HBCUs take this advice and use social justice momentum to garner revenue from media deals and sponsors? What happens if a student athlete receives an NIL deal from a competitor company of one of their schools' partnerships? These are areas of research that need to be developed as HBCUs move forward in this new spotlight so that increased revenue and revenue opportunities will be positive experiences for student athletes and HBCU athletic programs. It can also create learning experiences for student athletes to be well informed about contracts, developing a personal brand, financial wisdom, and business relationships.

Another area for research is exploring what concerns has been brought up for athletic departments since highly ranked Black athletes were publicized for committing to HBCUs. In one participant interview, it was shared that with the increased attention and increased financial opportunities that highly ranked student athletes brought to HBCUs, unforeseen issues also occurred in the form of favoritism and rule changes. Athletics professionals saw leniency with conference rules around voting and which student athletes who could be eligible in the votes conference awards after Makur Maker went to Howard University. Prior to Maker's attendance at Howard, award votes were based on performance from the previous season. However, that changed after Maker because the conference allowed for votes for players even if they played little to no games in the previous season. Research in this area can help athletics professionals revisit existing policy and procedures and understand why they are written the way they are and make considerations for updates that will improve the quality of their athletic programs.

Case Study on Deion Sanders Impact Alone

Lastly, of the participants interviewed in this study, Deion Sanders was the only professional athlete explicitly named as working at an HBCU. I know that there are others, Eddie George especially because he went to Tennessee State around the same time as Sanders, but it appears that Sanders' act is making bigger waves than other professional athletes. Researchers should consider exploring what about Deion Sanders, if anything, has changed the game for HBCU athletics. Another route for research on Sanders is to examine his strategies for recruitment and overall improvement of the quality of the Jackson State University football program outside of the field. Research on Deion Sanders' influence and impact on HBCU athletics can help HBCU athletics professionals examine their own institutions practices and what they can do to positively support their own programs. Questions to consider for a case study on Deion Sanders would be:

- What happen at Jackson State and other HBCUs as a result of Sanders' employment at Jackson State?
- Did enrollment, retention, alumni donations, or general donations have significant changes at Jackson State or its athletics department after Sanders' employment?
- How do significant changes at Jackson State compare to changes that may have happened when Eddie George went to Tennessee State since both he and Sanders started at their individual institutions at the same time?
- What significant changes happened at other HBCU institutions when a professional athlete started coaching there?
- Is there a significance in the number of Black student athletes going to HBCUs after Deion Sanders went to Jackson State University?

Conclusion

Black HBCU athletics professional make sense of highly ranked Black student athletes choosing HBCUs over PWIs in ways very similar to why some Black students have opted to attend HBCUs since the inception of these institutions. After segregation ended, racism and social injustice guided Black students to seek refuge on campuses that were originally created for them and affirmed their Black being. Although the dates have changed, the times have not and the violence against Black bodies has yet again led Black students by way of Black student athletes with a large platform to find safety and reassurance at historically Black institutions. Through a Black cultural lens, racial justice motivated highly ranked Black student athletes have been endarkened to see all the benefits at HBCUs and have inadvertently operated in equity to attend them and bring the resources their talent brings to these schools. HBCUs have always been doing the work that affirms and values Black people through education, but now folks are finally paying attention.

REFERENCES

Agyemang, K., Singer, J. N., & DeLorme, J. (2010). An exploratory study of Black male college athletes' perceptions on race and athlete activism. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport, 45*(4), 419–435.

Alcorn, C. (2021). Major companies are recruiting more HBCU grads than ever before, administrators say. CNN Business. https://www.wral.com/major-companies-are-recruiting-more-hbcu-grads-than-ever-before-administrators-say/19823433/

Alexander, C. (2020). Welcome to homecoming. *New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/07/style/welcome-to-homecoming.html

Allen, D. (2021a). The legacy and culture of HBCU marching bands. https://www.bestcolleges.com/resources/hbcu/legacy-culture-of-marching-bands/

Allen, D. (2021b). The HBCU homecoming experience. https://www.bestcolleges.com/resources/hbcu/homecoming-experience/

Allen, D., & McCreary, T. (2021). Performing Black life: The FAMU marching 100 and the Black aesthetic politics of disruption, presence and affirmation. *Cultural Geographies, 28*(1), 41–55.

Allen, W., Telles, E., & Hunter, M. (2000). Skin color, income, and education: A comparison of African Americans and Mexican Americans. *National Journal of Sociology, 12*, 129–180.

Andrew, D., Martinez, J. M., & Flavell, S. (2016). Examining college choice among NCAA student-athletes: An exploration of gender differences. *Journal of Contemporary Athletics, 10*(3), 201–214.

Anti-Defamation League. (2017). A brief history of the disability rights movement. https://www.adl.org/education/resources/backgrounders/disability-rights-movement

Arnett, A. (2015). Athletes and activism. *Diverse: Issues in Higher Education, 31*(25), 18–19.

Arnett, A. (2022 April 28). Sport scholars debate the 'price' of athletic success at HBCUs. *Diverse: Issues in Higher Education. https://www.diverseeducation.com/sports/article/15291112/sport-scholars-debate-the-price-of-athletic-success-at-hbcus*

Avila, K., Colompos-Tohtsonie, M.T., & Walter, S.L. (2020). Exploring the heartbeat of the Black family: Observations through the lens of Endarkened Epistemology. *Black History Bulletin*. *83* (2).

Bey, M. (2017). The trans*-ness of Blackness, the Blackness of trans*-ness. *Transgender Studies Quarterly, 4,* 275–295.

Blinder, A., & Witz, B. (2020). College athletes, phones in hand, force shift in protest movement. *New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/12/sports/ncaafootball/george-floyd protests-college-sports.html?auth=login-google

Bolster, J.W. (1998). Black jacks: African American seamen in the age of sail. Harvard University Press.

Boyd, R. L. (2019). Southern Black metropolis: Position, place, and population below the Mason-Dixon line. *Journal of African American Studies, 23*(3), 256–272.

Bracey, E. N. (2017). The significance of historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) in the 21st century: Will such institutions of higher learning survive? *American Journal of Economics and Sociology, 76*(3), 670–696.

Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopedia (2021). Colin Kaepernick. *Encyclopedia Britannica*. https://www.britannica.com/biography/Colin-Kaepernick

Brock, A. (2012). From the Blackhand side: Twitter as a cultural conversation. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media. 56*(4), 529–549.

Brown, D. M. (2020). *Jim Crow in the U.S. South*. Salem Press Encyclopedia.

Bryant, H. (2019). *The heritage: Black athletes, a divided America, and the politics of patriotism*. Beacon Press.

Buettner-Schmidt, K., & Lobo, M. L. (2012). Social justice: A concept analysis. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, *68*(4), 948–958.

Byington, P. (2020). Miles college teams up with Shaquille O'Neal to launch HBCU initiative. *Bham Now*. https://bhamnow.com/2019/10/21/miles-college-teams-up-with-shaquille-oneal-to-launch-hbcu-initiative/

Carter-Francique, A., Gill, E. & Hart, A. (2017). Converging interests: Black scholar advocacy and the Black college athlete. In B.J. Hawkins, A.R. Carter-Francique, J.N. Cooper (Eds.). *Critical race theory: Black athletic sporting experiences in the United States.* (pp. 85-119) Palgrave Macmillan.

Cates, B. (2020). The HBCU vs PWI student athlete dilemma: Giving up opportunity over culture. *VOX ATL*. https://voxatl.org/the-hbcu-vs-pwi-student-athlete-dilemma-giving-up-opportunity-over-culture/

Cavil, J. K. (2015). Early athletic experiences at HBCUS: The creation of conferences. In B. Hawkins, J.N. Cooper, A.R. Carter-Francique & J. K. Cavil (Eds.). *The athletic experience at historically Black colleges and universities: Past, present and persistence* (pp. 19-58) Rowman & Littlefield.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2022). *Health equity considerations and racial and ethnic minority groups*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/health-equity/race-ethnicity.html

Chard, C. R., & Potwarka, L. R. (2017). Exploring the relative importance of factors that influence student-athletes' school-choice decisions: A case study of one Canadian university. *Journal of Intercollegiate Sport, 10*, 22–43

Charles, S. (2020, February 24). Unwilling to just wait: Alabama State sit-in brought change, cost protesting students dearly. *Montgomery Advertiser*. https://www.montgomeryadvertiser.com/story/news/2020/02/21/alabama-state-sit-in-brought-change-but-cost-students-dearly/4793116002/

Chase, S.E. (2011). Narrative inquiry: Still a field in the making. In N.K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research (4),* 421-434. Los Angeles, CA: Sage.

Cheney, T. (2001). *Writing creative nonfiction: Fiction techniques for crafting great nonfiction*. Ten Speed Press.

Cianfrone, B. A., Pitts, B. G., Zhang, J. J., Byrd, C., & Drane, D. D. (2010). *A market segmentation analysis of historically Black college and university "classic" attendee*s [presentation]. 2010 North American Society for Sport Management.

Collins, F. G., & Norris, M. L. (2015). Historical origins of education for Black individuals in the United States. In B.J. Hawkins, J.N. Cooper, A.R. Carter-Francique & J. K. Cavil (Eds.). *The athletic experience at historically Black colleges and universities: Past, present and persistence* (pp. 1-18) Rowman & Littlefield.

Coogler, R.K. (Director). (2018). *Black panther* [Film]. Marvel Studios.

Cooper, J., & Hawkins, B. (2012). A place of opportunity: Black male student athletes' experiences at a historically Black university. *Journal of Intercollegiate Sport, 5*, 170–188.

Cooper, J. N., Macaulay, C., & Rodriguez, S. H. (2019). Race and resistance: A typology of African American sport activism. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport, 54*(2), 151–181.

Clandinin, D. J., & Rosiek, J. (2007). Mapping a landscape of narrative inquiry: Borderland spaces and tensions. In D. J. Clandinin (Ed), *Handbook of narrative inquiry: Mapping a methodology*. Sage.

Deb, S., & Draper, K. (2021). Atlanta Dream are sold after players revolt against Kelly Loeffler. *New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/26/sports/basketball/atlanta-dream-kelly-loeffler-renee-montgomery-sale.html

Demas, L. (2011). Integrating the gridiron: Black civil rights and American college football. Rutgers University Press.

Dermer, S. (2020). How Withrow football standout Daniel Ingram ended up at HBCU Arkansas Pine-Bluff. *Cincinnati Enquirer*. https://www.cincinnati.com/story/sports/2020/08/10/how-withrows-daniel-ingram-ended-up-hbcu arkansas-pine-bluff/3337121001/

Dillard, C. B., (2000). The substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen: Examining and endarkened feminist epistemology in educational research and leadership. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, *13*(5), 661 – 681.

Dillard, C. B. (2006). *On spiritual strivings: Transforming an African American woman's academic life.* State University of New York Press.

Edwards, H. (1969). *The revolt of the Black athlete*. The Free Press.

Edwards, H. (2016). The promise and limits of leveraging Black athlete power potential to compel campus change. *Journal of Higher Education Athletics & Innovation*, *1*(1), 4–13.

Elliot, K., & Kellison, T. (2019). Budgeting for success: comparing finances between historically Black colleges and universities and predominantly White institutions. *Journal of Intercollegiate Sport*, *12*(1), 25–42.

Evans, B., & Pitts, J. D. (2017). The determinants of NCAA basketball recruiting outcomes. *Applied Economics Letters, 24*(5), 351–354.

Faris, N. (2021). HBCUs seek to connect their storied pasts to a revitalized future. *The Score*. https://www.thescore.com/ncaab/news/2120460

Favors, J. M. (2019). *Shelter in a time of storm: How Black colleges fostered generations of leadership and activism*. UNC Press Books.

Fischer, E. (2014, August 4). *What is a Conference in Sports*? Dear sports fan. http://dearsportsfan.com/2014/08/04/conference-sports/

Frederick, E., Sanderson, J., & Schlereth, N. (2017). Kick these kids off the team and take away scholarships. *Journal of Issues in Intercollegiate Athletics, 10*, 17–34.

Gaither, S. (2021, December 17). Deion Sanders, Travis Hunter Jr., and fear of an HBCU revolution. *HBCU Gameday*. https://hbcugameday.com/2021/12/17/deion-sanders-travis-hunter-jr-and-fear-of-an-hbcu-revolution/

Gasman, M. (2013). The changing face of historically Black colleges and universities. Penn Center for Minority Serving Institutions: Pennsylvania.

Gasman, M., & Abiola, U. (2016). Colorism within the historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs). *Theory into Practice*, *55*(1), 39–45.

Gibson, C., & Williams, F. (2020). Understanding the impetus for modern student activism for justice at an HBCU: A look at personal motivations. *Urban Review, 52*(2), 263–276.

Givhan, R. (2021, January 11). Kamala Harris grew up in a mostly White world. Then she went to a Black university in a Black city. *The Washington Post.* https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/2021/01/11/kamala-harris-howard-university-black-city/

Gray, D. E. (2004). *Doing research in the real world.* Sage Publications.

Gutkind, L. (2008). Private and public: The range and scope of creative nonfiction. In L. Gutkind (Ed.), *Keep it real: Everything you need to know about researching and writing creative nonfiction* (pp. 11–25). W. W. Norton.

Gyamfi, K. Y. (2021). *Keeping it minimal: Narratives of tempered radicals for student athlete activism*. Unpublished manuscript.

Hammerschlag, A. (2020, July 22). Black lives matter protests spawn push for athletes to attend historically black colleges. *The New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/22/sports/ncaabasketball/black-lives-matter-hbcus-college-athletes.html

Harper, S. R. (2018). *Black male student-athletes and racial inequities in NCAA Division I college sports: 2018 edition*. Los Angeles: University of Southern California, Race and Equity Center.

Harper, S. R., Patton, L. D., & Wooden, O. S. (2009). Access and equity for African American students in higher education: A critical race historical analysis of policy efforts. *Journal of Higher Education, 80*(4), 389–414.

Harvard Law Review. (2021). Antitrust law: NCAA v. Alston. Harvard Law Review, 135, 471. https://harvardlawreview.org/2021/11/ncaa-v-alston/

HBCU Sports, (2021, December 16). Deion Sanders explains his pitch that led to Travis Hunter commitment. *HBCU Sports*. https://hbcusports.com/2021/12/16/deion-sanders-explains-his-pitch-that-led-to-travis-hunter-commitment/

Hill, J. (2019). Black athletes should leave White colleges. *The Atlantic*. https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2019/10/black-athletes-should-leave-white-colleges/596629/

Hill, J. (2021). Athletes will never be quiet again. *The Atlantic*. https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2021/05/george-floyd-murder-athletes-sports-public-life/619043/

Hill-Collins, P. (2000). What's going on? Black feminist thought and the politics of postmodernism. In E. A. St. Pierre, W. S. Pillow (Eds.), *Working the ruins: Feminist post structural theory and methods in education*. Routledge.

Holmes, O., IV. (2020). Police brutality and four other ways racism kills Black people. *Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion*, *39*(7), 803–809.

Horka, T. (2020, September 22). 'My people': Deion Sanders says why he took the Jackson State job on good morning America. Clarion Ledger. https://www.clarionledger.com/story/sports/college/jackson-state/2020/09/22/deion-sanders-says-why-he-took-jackson-state-job-good-morning-america/5863325002/

Hruby, P. (2017). The plot to disrupt the NCAA with a pay-for-play HBCU basketball league. VICE Sports. https://sports.vice.com/en_us/article/59ze- jz/the-plot-to-disrupt-the-ncaa-with-a-pay-for-play-hbcu-basketball-league

Hunter, M. (2007). The persistent problem of colorism: Skin tone, status, and inequality. *Sociology Compass, 1*, 237–254.

Hunter, M. (2008). The cost of color: What we pay for being black and brown. In R. E. Hall (Ed.), *Racism in the 21st Century* (pp. 63–76). Springer.

Isaac, L. (2008). Movement of movements: Culture moves in the long civil rights struggle. *Social Forces, 87*(1), 33-63.

Jett, C. C. (2013). HBCUs propel Black male mathematics majors. *Journal of African American Studies, 17*, 198–205.

Jones, S., Torres, V., Arminio, J. (2014). *Negotiating the complexities of qualitative research in higher education.* New York, NY: Routledge.

Jones, W. A., & Bell, L. F. (2016). Status report on HBCU athletics: Participation, finances, and student experiences. *Journal for the Study of Sports and Athletes in Education, 10*(1).

Jones-Castro, A., & Johns, D. J. (2016). 5 reasons the Civil Rights Act of 1964 is just as relevant today. *Better Conversation*. https://educationpost.org/5-reasons-the-civil-rights-act-of-1964-is-just-as-relevant-today/

Jones, W. A., & Bell, L. F. (2016). Status report on HBCU athletics: Participation, finances, and student experiences. *Journal for the Study of Sports and Athletes in Education, 10*(1), 48–74.

Josselson, R. (2011). Narrative research: Constructing, deconstructing, and reconstructing story. In F.J. Wertz, K. Charmaz, L.M. McMullen, R. Josselson, R. Anderson, & E. McSpadden (Eds.). Five ways of doing qualitative analysis: Phenomenological psychology, grounded theory, discourse analysis, narrative research, and intuitive inquiry (pp.224-242). New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Kim, J.H. (2016). Understanding narrative inquiry: The crafting and analysis of stories as research. Sage.

Kimbrough, W. I. (2016, September 11). Enrollment surge at historically Black colleges amid racial tensions. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from https:// www.washingtonpost.com/news/answer-sheet/wp/2016/09/11/ enrollments-surge-at-historically-black-colleges-amid-rise-in-racial- tensions/

Kurdziel, K. (n.d.). The Alston decision: What does it mean for student-athlete and universities. *James Moore & Co.* https://www.jmco.com/alston-decision-what-does-it-mean-for-student-athletes-universities/

Liontas, A. (2016). Inherit the word. *New York Times Book Review*. https://www.nytimes.com/2016/06/05/books/review/inherit-the-word.html

Love, B.L., (2019). *We want to do more than survive: Abolitionist teaching and the pursuit of educational freedom*. Beacon Press.

Lovett, B. (2015). *America's historically Black colleges and universities: A narrative history, 1837-2009*. Mercer University Press.

Lucks, D. (2017). African American soldiers and the Vietnam war: No more Vietnams. *A Journal of History, Politics and Culture, 10*(2), 196–220.

Magnusen, M. J., Yukyoum, K., Perrewe, P. L., & Ferris, G. R. (2014). A critical review and synthesis of student-athlete college choice factors: Recruiting effectiveness in NCAA sports. *International Journal of Sport Science & Coaching, 9*(6), 1265–1286.

Manfred, T. (2013, July 31). Oregon's new $68-million football facility is like nothing we've ever seen in college sports. *Business Insider*. http://finance.yahoo.com/news/oregon- 68-million-football-facility-144135871.html

Martin, J. (2013, January 22). Every SEC coach's best recruiting pitch. *Bleacher Report.* https://bleacherreport.com/articles/1492536-every-sec-coachs-best-recruiting-pitch

Matthews, D. (2020, June 2). How today's protests compare to 1968, explained by a historian. *Vox*. https://www.vox.com/identities/2020/6/2/21277253/george-floyd-protest-1960s-civil-rights

McKenzie, L. (2020, June 8). Words matter for college presidents, but so will actions. *Insider HigherEd*. https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2020/06/08/searching-meaningful-response-college-leaders-killing-george-floyd

Mellor, C. (2020, June 21). Read the UCLA Football Players Full Letter. Retrieved from https://www.bruinsnation.com/2020/6/21/21298261/ucla-football-read-full-letter-coronavirus-protection-demanding-chip-kelly-dorian-thompson-robinson

Meyerson, D. E. (2004). The tempered radicals: How employees push their companies – little by little– to be more socially responsible. *Stanford Social Innovation Review, 2*(2), 14–23.

Milburn, A. (2022). The development of marching band traditions at historically Black colleges and Universities: The human jukebox versus the sonic boom of the South. *Journal of Historical Research in Music Education, 43*(2), 205–227.

Militz-Frielink, S. (2017). Endarkened feminist epistemology: A case study in higher education. [Doctoral dissertation, University of Illinois at Chicago]. https://indigo.uic.edu/articles/thesis/Endarkened_Feminist_Epistemology_A_Case_Study_in_Higher_Education/10851230

Mobley, S. D., & Hall, L. (2020). (Re)Defining queer and trans* student retention and "success" at historically Black colleges and universities. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory and Practice*, *21*(4), 497–519.

Mollo, E. (2021). HBCUs become more appealing for high-profile athletes. *ABCNews*. https://abcnews.go.com/Sports/hbcus-appealing-high-profile-athletes/story?id=76210979

Museus, S. D., Ledesma, M. C., & Parker, T. L. (2015). Racism and racial equity in higher education. *ASHE Higher Education Report, 42*(1), 1–112.

National Education Association. (n.d.). *A looming crisis for HBCUs? An analysis of funding sources for land grant universities.* NEA research land grant university brief no.2.https://www.nea.org/sites/default/files/2022-03/A%20Looming%20Crisis%20for%20HBCUs%20-%20An%20Analysis%20of%20Funding%20Sources%20for%20Land%20Grant%20Universities.pdf

NCAA. (2020). *Overview.* https://www.ncaa.org/sports/2021/2/16/overview.aspx

New, J. (2017, February 3). Athletes and activism. *Inside Higher Ed*. https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2017/02/03/ncaa-meeting-college-sports-leaders-recommend-supporting-athlete-protests

Newell, E.M. (2015). International student–athlete adjustment issues: advising recommendations for effective transitions. *NACADA Journal 35*, 36-47.

Nguyen, T., Samayoa, A. C., Gasman, M., & Mobley, S. D., Jr. (2018). Challenging respectability: Student health directors providing services to lesbian and gay students at historically Black colleges and universities. *Teachers College Record, 120*(2), 1–44.

One Yard. (2020). How the yard became a cultural epicenter for Black excellence. https://oneyard.co/articles/how-the-yard-became-a-cultural-epicenter-for-black-excellence/

Palmer, R., & Gasman, M. (2008). "It takes a village to raise a child": The role of social capital in promoting academic success for African American men at a Black college. *Journal of College Student Development, 49*(1), 52–70.

Patton, L. D. (2016). Disrupting postsecondary prose: Toward a critical race theory of higher education. *Urban Education, 51*, 315–342.

Pauline, J. (2010). Factors influencing college selection by NCAA Division I, II, and III lacrosse players. *Journal of Research, 5*(2), 62–69.

Payne, C. (1995). *I've got the light of freedom: The organizing tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle*. University of California Press.

Race Forward (n.d.). About race forward. https://www.raceforward.org/about

Rashad. K. (2020, September 13). Sister, sister: Twin volleyball standouts decommit from Texas A&M to play at Howard. *HBCUSports*. https://hbcusports.com/2020/09/13/twin-volleyball-standouts-decommit-from-texas-am-to-play-at-howard/

Reese, R. (2017). The lack of political activism among today's Black student-athlete. *Journal of Higher Education Athletics & Innovation, 1*(2), 123–131.

Rhinehart, C. (2021). Shaq's son, Shaqir O'Neal, is headed to Texas HBCU to play basketball and change the narrative. *Black Enterprise, Sports*. https://www.blackenterprise.com/shaqs-son-shaqir-oneal-is-heading-to-texas-hbcu-to-play-basketball-and-change-the-narrative/

Robbins, G., Gilbert, J., & Clifton, A. (2015). Coaching stressors in a division II historically Black university. *Journal of Intercollegiate Sport, 8*, 183–205.

Roebuck, J. B., & Murty, K. (1993). *Historically Black colleges and universities: Their place in American higher education*. Praeger.

Rogers, I. H. (2012). The Black campus movement and the institutionalization of Black studies, 1965–1970. *Journal of African American Studies*, *16*(1), 21–40.

Russell, K., Wilson, M., & Hall, R. (1992). *The color complex: The politics of skin color among African Americans*. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Publishers.

Schad, T. (2020). Makur Maker chooses HBCU school over UK, UCLA. *USA Today*. https://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/ncaab/2020/07/03/makur-maker-basketball-recruit-chooses-howard-over-uk-ucla/5371203002/

Seymour, A. (2006). Pigskin payday: For many HBCU athletic departments, the annual football classics keep their sport programs afloat. *Diverse Issues in Higher Education, 23.*

Sharpe, C. (2016). *In the wake: On Blackness and being*. Duke University Press.

Smart, D. L., & Wolfe, R. A. (2000). Examining sustainable competitive advantage in intercollegiate athletics: A resource-based view. *Journal of Sport Management, 14,* 133–153.

Smith, D. (2021). Achieving financial equity and justice for HBCUs. *The Century Foundation*. https://tcf.org/content/report/achieving-financial-equity-justice-hbcus/?agreed=1

Smith, C. (2017). Why are historically Black colleges and universities enjoying a renaissance. National Geographic. https:// www.nationalgeographic.com/magazine/2018/04/black-colleges- universities-race-class-gender-sexuality/

Smith, J. C. & Wynn, L. T. (2009). *Freedom facts and firsts: 400 years of the African American civil rights experience*. Visible Ink.

Stanley. S. (2021). What HBCU football coaches want you to know about recruiting. HBCU Gameday.https://hbcugameday.com/2021/08/12/what-hbcu-football-coaches-want-you-to-know-about-recruiting/

Stein, M. (2020). Led by N.B.A., boycotts disrupt pro sports in wake of Blake shooting. *New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/26/sports/basketball/nba-boycott-bucks-magic-blake-shooting.html

Stewart, T. J. (2019). "Where we are, resistance lives": Black women, social media, and everyday resistance in higher education. *Jcscore*, *5*(2), 1–31.

Stewart, T. J., & Williams, B. M. (2019). "Nuanced activism: A matrix of resistance.". In A. Dache. S. Quaye, K. McGuire (Eds.). *Rise up! Activism as education.* (pp. 201–23). University Press.

Stuart, R. (2017). Financial anxiety. *Diverse Issues in Higher Education, 34*, 10–11.

Suddler, C. (2021). George Floyd changed the world of athlete activism. *The Washington Post*. https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2021/05/25/george-floyd-changed-world-athlete-activism/

Suggs, D. (2017). Savannah State University moving back to NCAA Division II because of financial concerns. *The Undefeated*. https://theundefeated.com/features/savannah-state-moving-back-to-ncaa-division-ii

Sweitzer, K. V. (2009). Institutional ambition and conference aspirations. *New Directions for Higher Education*, *148*(148), 55–63.

Synder, T. (2015). *The power to die: Slavery and suicide in British North America*. University of Chicago Press.

Tennis, J.T. (2008). Epistemology, Theory, and Methodology in Knowledge Organization. *Toward a Classification, Metatheory, and Research Framework. 35* (2), 102-112 https://faculty.washington.edu/jtennis/Publications_files/Tennis2008KOEpist.pdf

Thames, A. (2021a). At Jackson State the 'Prime Effect' reverberates. *New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/2021/12/03/sports/ncaafootball/deion-sanders-jackson-state-football.html

Thames, A. (2021b). Deion Sanders lands top recruit Travis Hunter at Jackson State. *New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/2021/12/15/sports/ncaafootball/travis-hunter-deion-sanders-jackson-state.html

Tynes, T. (2019). The golden age of Black college football lost to integration. *The Ringer*. https://www.theringer.com/2019/9/19/20873575/black-college-football-golden-age

U.S. Department of Education (n.d.). Title III Part B, strengthening historically Black colleges and universities program. https://www2.ed.gov/programs/iduestitle3b/index.html

Walker, T. (2021). Eddie George, other former all-pros, making impact at HBCUs. *Associated Press*. https://apnews.com/article/college-football-sports-entertainment-nba-nfl-fef9edbbedb518b811cb426c089eea20

Wallace Sharp, A. (2012). *The freedom rides*. Greenhaven Publishing LLC.

White. D. E. (2019). *Blood, sweat, and tears: Jake Gaither, Florida A&M, and the history of Black college football.* University of North Carolina Press.

Wilkins, T. (2021, August 20). HBCUs experience near record surge in enrollment. *NBC Washington*. https://www.nbcwashington.com/news/local/prince-georges-county/hbcus-experience-near-record-surge-in-enrollment/2779385/

Williams, J. L., & Palmer, R. T. (2019) *A response to racism: How HBCU enrollment grew in the face of hatred*. Rutgers Center for Minority Serving Institutions.

Williams, R. T. (2021). The capitol riot, racism, and the future of American democracy. *National Security Law Brief, 11*(2), 38–67.

World Health Organization. (2020, April 27). *WHO Timeline- Covid-19.* https://www.who.int/news-room/detail/27-04-2020-who-timeline---covid-19?gclid=Cj0KCQjwpZT5BRCdARIsAGEX0zn_85EtRwjFa4Ynru-fc6sLW6J-musl_3vDiDMjbZxRV86UHF0R4sEaAsouEALw_wcB

Wyllie, J. (2018). How are Black colleges doing? Better than you think, study finds. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. https://www.chronicle.com/article/how-are-black-colleges-doing-better-than-you-think-study-finds/

Yosso, T. J. (2005). Whose culture has capital? A critical race theory discussion of community cultural wealth. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, *8*(1), 69–91

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Hello! Are you ok with me recording?

Thank you for talking to me today and volunteering to be my participant for this interview. This topic for this interview is to explore how athletic department professionals at HBCUs make meaning of highly ranked student athletes choosing to attend HBCUs post the spring 2020 Black Lives Matter movement*. I will be asking you some questions in the next 1 hour about your athletic department at your institution. If you feel uncomfortable and would like to pass on any questions, please let me know. Do you have any questions before we get started?*

Research and Interview questions

Rapport Building Questions

- Tell me about yourself (where you grew up, most salient identities, family, etc.)
- Describe your role as a staff/administrator including how it interacts with student athletes. (position, how long, department, etc.)
- Did you attend an HBCU for any of your education?
- What made you want to come work at an HBCU?

Interview Questions

RQ1: What do HBCU athletics professionals perceive is influencing highly ranked Black student athletes to consider attending HBCUs over PWIs?

- What are some attributes unique to HBCUs (and your HBCU) that you believe attract highly ranked student athletes?
- How do you imagine history (past or present) intersects with highly ranked student athletes electing to attend an HBCU?
- What are some reasons you believe highly ranked student athletes attend an HBCU over a PWI?
    - (if applicable) Why do some select your HBCU in particular?
- How do you think HBCU culture influences (if at all) highly ranked student athlete's college choice?
- How does activism intersect with highly ranked student athlete choice to attend HBCUs over PWIs?

RQ2: In what ways, if any, have HBCUs athletics departments been influenced by highly ranked Black student athletes attending HBCUs?

- How has resurgence of the BLM post spring 2020 influenced the way you approach a potential student athlete for your institution?
- How do you think the student athletes that recently committed to HBCUs (e.g., Travis Hunter/Makur Maker) influence the way your department thinks about their overall work with student athletes?
- How have you reimagined your role in athletics since a few highly ranked student athletes chose to attend HBCUs over top tier PWIs?
- Where, if at all, does activism live in your athletic department?
- How is racial justice activism influencing how your department interacts with student athletes?

    - What can racial justice motivated student athletes expect when they arrive at your campus?
- What responsibility do you believe the athletic department professionals have to their student athletes when it comes to racial justice activism?

Closing Script

This concludes all my questions for you? Do you have any questions for me?

I will be having this interview transcribed, would you like to see the transcription for the purposes of adding or withdrawing any of the information you shared today?

APPENDIX B

RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Greetings,

I hope this email finds you well.

My name is Konadu Gyamfi, and I am a PhD Candidate at the University of Georgia conducting research on HBCU athletics meaning making of Black student athlete's racial justice motivated college choice under the guidance of Dr. Merrily Dunn. The purpose of this study is to is to explore how athletic department staff and administrators at HBCUs make meaning of highly ranked student athletes choosing to attend HBCUs post the spring 2020 Black Lives Matter movement

I am emailing because you were identified as fitting the participant criteria for this study because of your position as a staff/administrator at a Division I Southern HBCU athletics department. I would like to ask if you would be willing to participate in this study.

As a participant, you will engage in one 1-hour long semi structured interview where you will be asked questions regarding the history and culture of your HBCU institution, your experiences working within HBCU athletics, and your thoughts regarding racial justice motivated college choice. The interview will be video recorded and transcribed. You will have an opportunity to review the transcription should you wish.

Should you believe someone else in your department or network be more fitting for this study, feel free to forward this email to them or provide their email address to me and I can reach out.

Thank you for considering this opportunity. Should you have any questions or concerns regarding participating in this study, please feel free to respond to this email.

Best,

Konadu Gyamfi
Konadu.gyamfi@uga.edu