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Pastime 1885-2000**

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Labels of African American Ballers: A Historical and Contemporary Investigation of African American Male Youth's Depletion from America's Favorite Pastime, 1885–2000

Eddie Comeaux and C. Keith Harrison

"I wish I was a baller, I wish I was a little taller. I wish I was like 6'9 so I could get with Leoishi, yo she's really fine." (Skee-Lo 1996)

To Be Equal, Be Better

The position of Negroes in professional baseball is much better today than it was a generation ago when—by gentleman's agreement—they were totally excluded. Today some of the game's superstars are Negroes. Nevertheless, the Negro ballplayers, to be treated equally, must be better. The distribution of both player and nonplayer positions in the baseball hierarchy is different for the two races. Discrimination appears to operate for

managerial jobs on the field and in the front office as well as for player positions below the star level. Thus, as organizations become integrated, Negroes appear to be more readily accepted in follower rather than leadership positions, where integration appears to take much longer. How much longer is not known. (Rosenblatt 53)

Introduction

Over the past decade, little scholarly attention has been given to African Americans in organized

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baseball (Gerlach; Harrison, "Life"; Korr; Nathan). Through various research perspectives, attempts have been made to understand the virtual invisibility of African American baseball players in youth leagues, high schools, and at intercollegiate and professional levels. Studies have highlighted how "racial stacking" has maintained the low numbers of African Americans on team sports like baseball and football (Edwards, *Sociology*; Martin; Nightengale; Smith and Harrison; Smith and Henderson; Wiggins). Patterns of racial stacking were evident through the mid-1980s, when African Americans were relegated to playing positions based on their race/ethnicity instead of their playing abilities (Smith and Henderson). Plaschke suggests that there are greater numbers of African Americans who play basketball and football because these sports have an abundance of role models, youth leagues, and cultural appeal. This increased interest in basketball and football contributes to fewer African Americans who play organized baseball. Rhoden suggests that a lack of youth baseball programs and scarcity of full scholarships in college baseball are reasons for the decline of African American participation in organized baseball. Early contends that ever since the establishment of the Negro Leagues, black interest in the game has not been intense. Further, he states that "African Americans experienced the game through flawed Americanism, imposed on them by whites, and this is why they are somewhat alienated and distant from the game today" (41).

Despite these authors' viewpoints, our understanding of the underrepresentation of African Americans in organized baseball remains limited. There is a tendency to overtheorize the core and crux of this issue and ignore widespread perceptions and beliefs among African American male youth. It is essential to understand the complex elements that shape and influence the socialization process of African American youth (Edwards, "Crisis"; Harrison; Sailes; Sellers, Kuperminc, and Waddell). Specifically, racial demographic differences among football, basketball, and baseball require investigation into the environmental conditions that impact the selec-

tion of sport by participants (Sellers). A lack of empirical studies that examine the decline of African Americans in organized baseball and the use of anecdotal evidence provide only a minimal, exploratory understanding of this issue. Therefore, drawing from various sociohistorical references to African Americans in organized baseball at the intercollegiate and professional levels, this article details the empirical patterns and trends of African American participation from 1885 to its steady decline in the late 1990s. In addition, this article seeks to extend labeling theory (Becker, Raalte, and Linder; Goffman), which has been used occasionally in sport scholarship to frame and analyze symbolic interaction (see Coakley, *Sport*). In this article, traditional labeling theory is buttressed with empirical findings of urban black male youth that document their participation choices and perceptions of value in sport selection. Empirical results are based on an original inventory developed specifically for this study, which will be explained later. Finally, this article analyzes a study conducted on male high school student-athletes regarding their perceptions of and beliefs about team sports to further understand the decline of African Americans in organized baseball.

Background: Time Patterns and Trends

Sociohistorical references and statistical data convey valuable information about the contemporary faces of African Americans in organized baseball. Although such data may be limiting in their ability to explain the minimal number of African Americans in organized baseball, they do provide current insights into the broad patterns and trends of African Americans at the professional level.

As early as 1885, there were several attempts to organize professional African American baseball leagues, but the lack of financial backing became a major obstacle toward their establishment (Ashe).

Moreover, an exclusionary policy in professional baseball officially banned African Americans from participating in the first national baseball organization, which was formed by whites (*The Journey of the African American Athlete*). The exclusion of blacks from baseball was largely an attempt by southern whites to gain legal power through segregation and negate an African American presence in the sport (Early 5). As a result of this discrimination, African American interest in organized baseball did not grow until after the Civil War. By 1920, the Negro National League (NNL) created by Rube Foster became one of the biggest African American businesses in America, and baseball was the number one spectator sport among African Americans as the New Negro Renaissance began (Nathan 2). Interestingly, the NNL posed an economic threat to Major League Baseball (MLB). This is documented by the inverse relationship between attendance per team per capita at MLB cities with NNL competition and the level of NNL competition. The NNL brought increased stability and organization to African American baseball. A growing number of professional African American baseball players would travel throughout different cities and inspire generations of future players at all organized levels. This trend became known as “barnstorming” (*The Journey*).

Along with shifts in attitudes and behaviors of both whites and African Americans came important changes in the trends of baseball. By 1930, pressures from notable African American civil rights organizations and others like Wendell Smith, an editor of the *Pittsburgh Courier Journal*, helped to convince the baseball establishment that African American athletes possessed the skills to play in the Major Leagues (Wiggins, *Glory Bound* 80).

In 1947, Jackie Robinson became the first African American to break the perennial color barrier in Major League Baseball (Rampersad; Tygiel, *Baseball's Great Experiment*; Tygiel, *Past Time*). Robinson's entrance to the Major Leagues eventually led to the demise of the NNL. This was largely due to MLB's “talent raiding” of the NNL without much compensation to the NNL

owners. At least 54 Major League-caliber players were left behind during integration, and over 200 African American players were left with “reduced careers” at best (*Black Diamonds, Blues City*).

At the Major League level, the trend toward greater African American participation in baseball grew between 1947 and 1953. Six of the seven National League Rookies of the Year were former Negro Leaguers: Jackie Robinson, Don Newcombe, Sam Jethroe, Willie Mays, Joe Black, and Jim Gilliam. During this seven-year stretch, the National League added African American players at a rate of three every two years, while the American League added one African American player every two years (Wiggins, *Glory Bound* 91; Figures 1–4).

In 1959, the first year that baseball became integrated, 69 African Americans played in the 16 major league teams and represented 17 percent of all players (Nightengale 23). According to a study by Curtis and Loy (cited in Lapchick, *Five Minutes* 287), the percentage of African Americans in baseball grew from 18 percent in 1968 to an all-time high of 27 percent in 1975. The steady increase in players' salaries by the advent of free agency may have contributed to the increased draw of African American players to the game. In addition, traditional baseball relationships during the Jim Crow period would shift as more players like Curt Flood began to assert themselves and pioneer for players' rights and free agency.



Figure 1.



Figure 2.



Figure 3.

Despite changes within the structure of Major League Baseball, which produced more African American coaches and players during the 1970s, the percentage of African American participants dropped in 1983 to 19 percent (Lapchick, *Broken Promises* 223). By 1999, the percentage of African Americans in Major League Baseball had declined to 13 percent (Lapchick and Matthews). Although African American players continued to rank among the game's highest paid superstars, America's pastime remained unappealing to them at the grassroots level (Ashe).

Accompanying many changes at the Major League level were substantial changes to the professional Minor League. According to a study on the Minor League system, African Americans



Figure 4. The representation of African American youth in little leagues was higher in the 1970s. We hypothesize that tangible empirical images and higher percentages of African Americans in Major League Baseball, along with resourceful black institutional forces (i.e., parks, camps, events, and cultural identity), cultivated earlier sporting identities in America's pastime. Author's collection.

made up 30 to 40 percent of the players in 1970, while 1975 showed a sizable drop to 15 percent (Lapchick, *Broken Promises* 225). Currently, the number of African Americans in the Minor League system is lower than ever due to an increase in foreign talent being recruited to play in the United States (Morgan). This "global age" of sports may have influenced the decline in African American participation at the Minor League level. Because baseball players can be imported from countries like the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico to play for minimum wage or for less money than what an average player from the United States would earn, the selection pool becomes increasingly competitive, unlike boxing, football, or track and field.

In 1996, African Americans made up only 6.9 percent of all Division I baseball players at the

level of intercollegiate baseball, which functions primarily as a minor league system. After eliminating the misleading element of predominately African American schools in Division I, the participation figures dropped to 2.6 percent (Williams 18). When comparing these numbers with the percentage of African Americans who participate in Division I college football (37 percent) and basketball (56 percent), as well as the percentage of African Americans in the NFL (65 percent) and NBA (77 percent), the participation trends found in baseball are particularly alarming (Lapchick and Matthews). The latter figures represent a disproportionately high number of African American participation in team sports other than organized baseball.

The picture conveyed by this overview is one of constant change in terms of African American participation in organized baseball. African Americans experienced their most significant growth and stability in 1920 with the formation of the Negro National League. The interest in the game changed and ultimately influenced a growing number of African Americans to play organized baseball. However, the demise of the NNL was impacted by the integration of NNL talent into Major League Baseball. The statistics and sociohistorical references indicate that the integration of African American players into baseball in 1947 precipitated a rise in their participation rates at the Major League level. A gradual decline followed after 1970, when structural mechanisms were not in place to maintain athletic identities specific to baseball (discussed in greater detail later).

These statistical data and sociohistorical references show patterns that provide new insight on the issue of African American participation in organized baseball. Essentially the references provide a broad overview examining the decline of African American participation at the Minor and Major League levels. Thus, it is important to recognize and examine factors that contribute to the decrease in African Americans playing organized baseball at various levels. We now turn our attention to a theoretical framework and conceptual model of labeling that shed light on our

central questions and concerns on environmental conditions that impact the selection of sport.

Labeling Theory, Urban Space Realities, and Sport Identities

In popular culture, the “baller” is an image that resonates with sports like football and basketball. It is a term that can be used as a noun, adjective, or verb, signifying aspects of achievement or success. Both the sports and the “baller” label have deep visual and personal investments in identity (sport choices) by many African American and white male youth. For example, visual investments are made through the global consumption of sporting attire, and personal investments are made in sports selected for participation. The “baller” label has, for the most part, been excluded from the space of organized baseball and is only one of the few positive identities that develop in urban spaces that deal with *visual and existential stresses* such as unemployment, violence, poverty, and hopelessness (Kelley 44). Although this label receives commitment from the “hoop dreamers” and the next football stars, the dream through baseball appears to have decreased. Sport becomes the opiate in football and basketball, but not baseball (Edwards, “Crisis” 11–12).

Longtime Major League Baseball player Brian Hunter articulates, “Brothers don’t play baseball because they feel they can’t get as many girls, unlike football and basketball” (personal interview). Beyond Hunter’s remarks, there are other theories and formal scholarship that help explain the depletion of the African American baseball player. Becker and Goffman are two major contributors to the sociological and psychological literature who relate labeling theory with social reactions and identity. For our purposes, the major threads of their theory are the basic concepts of individual identity, group relations, the impact of environment, and the movement and interactive meanings of information. Both

scholars refer to the individual as an actor or performer shaped by his or her environment. The implication of an “audience” is implicitly constructed to provide others with “impressions” that are consonant with the desired goals of the actor (Goffman 4).

The concepts of social actors and performances bear relevance to our central research question and investigation. First, athletics have become a visible and attainable identity for many African American males in terms of being football and basketball players, track athletes, and boxers, primarily. Second, peer group relations for youth across ethnic and gender lines are a strong indicator of commonality and bonding (Comer and Poussaint 8). Third, the environment of the “inner-city” and urban landscape both enables and inhibits the development of African American potential through expression in the arts and sports. These cultural expressions by urban youth have been prevalent in sport and entertainment (Gilroy 269). Fourth, the movement of logos, cultural images, and representations related to the “baller” encourages the creation and promotion of information that bears micro and macro significance. Goffman suggests that social identity is closely allied with the concept of “front,” described at length as

That part of the individual’s performance which regularly functions in a general and fixed fashion to define the situation for those who observe the performance. The front acts as a vehicle of standardization, allowing for others to understand the individual on the basis of projected character traits that have normative meanings. As a “collective representation,” the front establishes proper “setting,” “appearance,” and “manner” for the social role assumed by the actor, uniting interactive behavior with the personal front. The actor, in order to present a compelling front, is forced to both fill the duties of the social role and communicate the activities and characteristics of the role to other people in a consistent manner. (22, 27)

The actual term “frontin” is a common sound by the “in” hip-hop discourse, emphasizing the

importance of maintaining an external image of “cool” (Majors and Billison 12). Similarly, the term “outsider” coincides with the idea of “frontin” in that these performed identities may have labels attached to them that cause social actors to view themselves as being different from “mainstream” society. For example, Becker researched the lives of Chicago dance musicians through participant observation to illustrate the social life of a “deviant” subculture. Although law-abiding, the dance musicians’ unconventional lifestyles led them to feel like outsiders. This compares to black male athletes in the same ways that their social privileges may be founded on exceptional psychomotor abilities, and their characters demonized by an affiliation to an urban upbringing that has its own social pathologies.

Becker concludes that the culture of the dance musician is rich in its own language and gestures that mirror that of African American male athletes, “ballers,” performers, and artists. Exuberant expressions that are either vocalized or produced through the body are more culturally accepted and prevalent in football and basketball, as opposed to baseball. This phenomenon illustrates one of our research hypotheses in which we postulate that vocal or bodily self-expression in the sporting arena is highly influenced by media interaction and feedback.

Becker’s labeling theory is commonly applied in the realm of mental health, which parallels our concerns for athletic mindsets, identity politics, and sport choice perception. In general, our measures of urban perception at the micro level coincide with the macro-level influence of mass media and representation. In other words, there is a relationship between the consumer/athletic participant and the product being promoted by the institution of television (sports). This, we argue, will have some impact on the variables influencing the depletion of African American baseball players and the glorification of football and basketball players.

Conceptually, we hope to extend both Goffman’s and Becker’s theories by incorporating greater empirical support for social actors in the

athletic environment. Our research design and conceptual framework extends their scholarship to the area of sport, which is seldom linked with labeling theory.

Conceptual Model

Studies have highlighted how the decline of African Americans in baseball can be attributed to integration, racial discrimination, and stereotyping—in addition to the popular interest in other team sports—as stated earlier (Stone 2). By assuming that these factors hold constant without further investigation, there is a possibility of limiting our knowledge base and understanding in this area. Thus, our approach is to determine other factors relative to the depletion of African Americans in baseball by focusing on the beliefs, social identities, and perceptions of African American athletic participants themselves. Beliefs about baseball as a sport, summer sports programs and camps, parental or main authority contributions and encouragement, and role model influences and past heroes' influence (among others) are analyzed. We assert that issues of integration, racism, economics, and the interest in other team sports factor into the decrease of African American baseball players; however, we also maintain that other influencing variables exist.

Instrument (Urban Identity Sport Scale)

There are no available empirical studies that survey African American high school student-athletes' perceptions and beliefs about certain team sports, especially with regard to baseball. Therefore, it became necessary to develop an original questionnaire with a team of experts and scholars that interrogates student-athletes' perceptions about team sports. The development and design of this study piloted informal interviews with student-athletes, college, high school, and

youth league coaches, professional players and scouts, and trained sport scholars.

The questionnaire is designed to reveal subjects' perceptions and beliefs about the game of baseball. The questionnaire contains forty-five items and employs a 5-point Likert scale that is coded as follows: 5 = strongly agree, 4 = agree, 3 = undecided, 2 = disagree, 1 = strongly disagree. Some of the questions included in the instrument are: "Baseball is of interest to me," "Baseball is a boring sport to play," "Sport figures or role models have an influence in the selection of my sport," and "The availability of summer sports programs/camps are a major factor in my selection of a sport."

The conceptual mode of the Urban Identity Sport Scale is conceived by collapsing the forty-five items in the instrument, which produces several dependent variables. Subjects either choose baseball as their main participatory sport or basketball and football as their primary sports. The dependent variables that result from this grouping are: media influences, professional athletes' influence, popularity of sport(s), and availability of resources that include summer camps and youth leagues.

Methods and Subjects

Urban-area high schools are ideal sites in which to conduct this study because of the disproportionately higher number of African Americans who are channeled particularly toward team sports (Edwards, "Crisis" 10). Based on the sample population, these subjects would not differ from the characteristics being measured and would ensure immediate relevance to the study.

African American male student-athletes who were involved in at least two sports were recruited for the study and participated on a voluntary basis. The subjects were selected from school media guides that listed current student-athletes in each sport. Selection took place from ten Southern California urban-area high schools (grades 9–12) where the Urban Identity Sport

Scale questionnaire was administered to 300 male student-athletes and equally distributed among baseball, basketball, and football participants. It should be noted that dual sport athletes were selected based on their participation in baseball, basketball, and/or football *only*. Each student-athlete completed the UISS in approximately twenty minutes. All subjects were debriefed and thanked for their participation in the study. All questionnaires were self-administered by the first author in groups of approximately twenty per session.

Subjects participating in the study are identified in the following categories: African American males whose main sport is baseball = 100, football = 100, and basketball = 100. Using an independent *t* test, the authors determined differences in perceptions and/or beliefs about baseball between baseball and nonbaseball participants.

Findings and Results

When the “agree” and “strongly agree” categories are combined, the data reveal that approximately ninety-six percent of all subjects (both baseball and nonbaseball participants) felt that their main sport was an important part of their lives. Forty-six percent of all subjects selected sports based on the number of their friends (peers) who participated in them. Sixty-six percent of participants in this study felt that their parent(s) had an influence on their participation in a specific sport. Eighty-nine percent of the participants report spending a great deal of time watching sport highlights, and approximately forty-five percent felt that the availability of sport camps and summer leagues were major factors in their selection of sport (see Table 1). In addition, according to subjects whose *main* sport was baseball, almost forty-two percent stated that the main authority figure in their lives played and preferred baseball. Sixty-five percent of participants whose main sport was basketball, and ninety-six percent of participants whose main sport was football stated that the main authority

Table 1
Beliefs Held About the Influences on the Selection of Team Sports Among African American Participants (*N* = 300)

Dependent variable	Agree (%)	Undecided (%)	Disagree (%)
Peer Influence	46	5	49
Parental Influence	66	9	25
Media Influence	89	2	9
Sport Camp Availability	45	19	36

figure (representative or image) in their lives played and preferred basketball and football, respectively. This is strong evidence to support that representation, imagery, and possibly style are strong predictors of sport identification for participants.

Nonbaseball Participants' Beliefs About Baseball

Significant differences were evident in all five of the dependent variables: baseball interest, media influence in baseball, professional baseball players' influence, popularity of baseball, and availability of resources for nonbaseball participants (see alphas in Table 3). Specifically, nonbaseball participants agreed more strongly that their baseball interests in general ($M = 2.11$, $SD = 1.3$, $p < .05$) and professional baseball players' influence ($M = 1.99$, $SD = .84$, $p < .05$) were not important (see Table 2). These data lend more conceptual and ideological support to the “baller” identity by explaining that images and/or contexts of baseball athleticism do not resonate as strongly with African American males as much as football and basketball do (Figure 5).

Baseball Participants Beliefs' About Basketball and Football

Significant differences were evident in four of the five dependent variables when basketball and

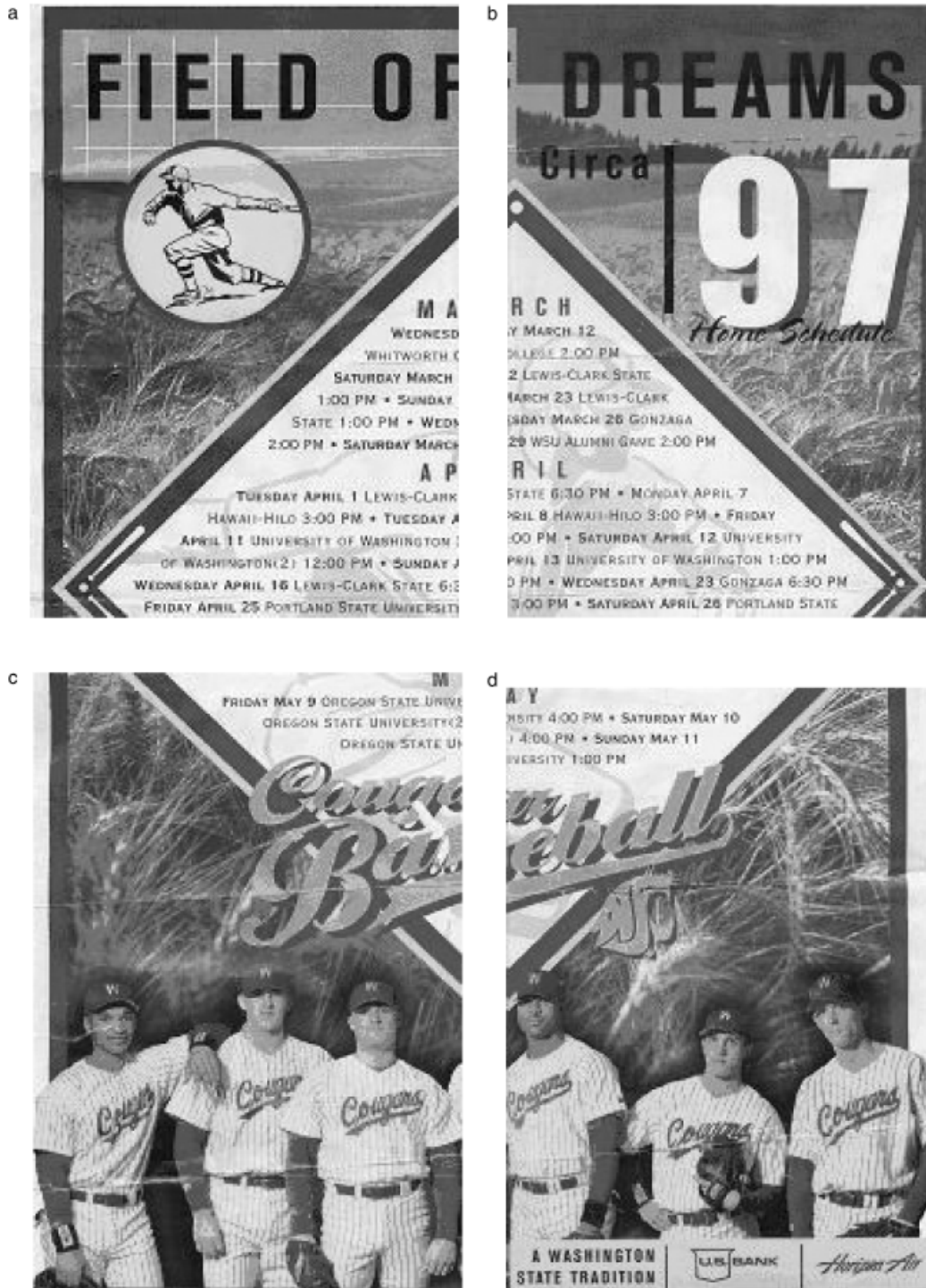


Figure 5. Division I varsity baseball poster of marquee players. It is peculiar that in Division I football and basketball, fifty percent of the participants on athletic scholarship are African American, but less than five percent of Division I baseball players are African American, all in the same American higher education system. Are these primarily institutional or individual ideologies in terms of sports participation? Author's collection.

football were combined: interest, media influence, professional players' influence, and popularity on campus. Specifically, baseball participants agreed strongly with their interest in basketball and football ($M = 4.41$, $SD = .75$, $p < .05$), the popularity of football and basketball on their high school campuses ($M = 4.55$, $SD = .86$, $p < .05$), and the influence of professional players ($M = 4.11$, $SD = .84$, $p < .05$) in both basketball and football (see Table 2). These findings suggest that there are multiple variables that impact African American male interests in football, basketball, and baseball. Some of the most visual illustrations that support the findings are the urban landscape, marketing texts, and cultural attire worn by numerous urban black males.

Discussion and Summary

Results of this study indicate that nonbaseball participants (those who choose basketball or football as their *main* sport) have little interest in the game of baseball. These participants also strongly believe that professional baseball players do not have much influence on their interest to play organized baseball, nor do they believe that

Table 2
Nonbaseball Participants' Beliefs Held About Baseball and Baseball Participants' Beliefs about Nonbaseball (Basketball and Football)

Dependent Variable	Mean Baseball ($n = 200$)	Mean Basketball & Football ($n = 100$)
Interest	2.11	4.41
Media Influence	2.21	4.06
Pro Athlete Influence	1.99	4.11
Popularity	2.37	4.55
Availability of Resources	2.58	2.96*

* $p = .05$ (This was the only finding not significant as indicated in this table.)

Note: Nonbaseball participants consist of those who chose basketball or football as their *main* sport. Baseball participants consist of those who chose baseball as their *main* sport.

Table 3
Reliability and Alpha Results

Dependent Variable	Baseball	Basketball/ Football
Interest	.93	.84
Media Influence	.83	.90
Pro Athlete Influence	.62	.64
Popularity	.74	.72
Availability of Resources	.77	.82

baseball is a popular sport in their communities. Moreover, the lack of summer sport camps and availability of youth leagues for baseball compared with other team sports impact the sport selection by African American males ("There's No Business"). In other words, because more resources in the form of summer leagues, camps, or all-star teams are available for basketball and football participants, these sports tend to exert greater influence over African American youth's selection practices. Although this study provides substantial evidence to suggest that multiple factors impact African Americans' selection of a team sport, it also supports the literature pertaining to the decrease in African American participation in organized baseball (Plaschke; Rhoden).

Another noteworthy finding of this study is that participants whose *main* sport was baseball also exhibited strong interests in basketball and football. Professional basketball and football players seem to have a substantial impact on the appeal of each sport to baseball participants because subjects strongly believe that these are popular sports in their communities. Moreover, the data reveal that participants whose main sport is baseball tend to have greater interest in basketball and football than nonbaseball participants' interest in the game of baseball. In other words, African American youth who participate in team sports tend to gravitate toward basketball and football over baseball, regardless of whether they are directly involved with baseball themselves. The representation of African American males in the NFL (sixty-five percent), NBA (seventy-seven percent), and MLB (twelve percent) appear

to correlate on some level with this finding (Lapchick and Matthews).

As hypothesized, the depletion of African American participants from the game of organized baseball is influenced by several factors, namely: lack of interest in the game; lack of media influence; professional baseball players' lack of impact on African American youth; lack of appeal on urban high school campuses; and a dearth of baseball resources in their communities. These factors emphasize the importance of youths' socialization process and the elements that appeal directly or indirectly to their interests (Coakley 128).

These aforementioned findings are also connected to Brewer, Raalte, and Linder, who analyzed the degree to which individuals identify with the athletic role. Interestingly, although several articles have been published that indicate a greater career longevity for playing baseball in comparison to other team sports, the majority of African American male youth prefer to participate in team sports like basketball and football. We infer that the African American males in this study still strongly identify with the "baller" label, an identity that tends to exist outside of baseball. The "baller" label suggests that they also perceive football and basketball as avenues with greater opportunity and merit for what we might deem "cultural mobility." Revisiting Goffman's and Becker's notions of labeling theory, once baseball can (re)construct a cultural label that young African American males identify and associate with, there may be a surge in the participation rates of the African American baseball player.

Limitations, Conclusions, and Future Research

Although this study has improved upon several methodological shortcomings in previous research, it is not without its own limitations. First, this analysis provides empirical patterns and trends of African Americans in organized base-

ball; it does *not* provide substantial information on African American youth leagues and programs. This study relies mainly on sociohistorical references—high school, intercollegiate, and professional league data—but because there is empirical evidence to suggest a decline in African American participation at the intercollegiate and professional levels of baseball, it is reasonable to infer that there are not many African American youth currently entering the pipeline and participating in youth leagues. Second, our study lacks a mixed methodological approach that could illuminate greater social and political contexts from qualitative and descriptive data. Narrative and open-ended responses interrogating the deeper meaning(s) of association and identification with certain sports may construct a more comprehensive picture to the research community. Nevertheless, the method used in the present study provides a useful framework for conducting further research on African Americans in organized baseball, particularly as a pipeline to Division I baseball, educational and occupational venues, and levels of participation in the entertainment industry.

Additionally, the present study focuses on African American youths' perceptions and/or beliefs about team sports, yet there may be other components that contribute to the decline of African American participation in baseball, such as the pervasiveness of professional scouts on high school and college campuses (Ralston 9). Although the participants of this study answer several questions relating to this issue, future research on professional baseball scouts should be addressed because they too play a major role in determining the numbers of African American players. To date, there are few African American scouts for Major League Baseball. In fact, a study conducted in 1998 on the prevalence of African American scouts for MLB revealed that only 16 of the 90 scouts in California were African American (Baseball Scout). This study was replicated recently and confirmed the exact same results (Baseball Scout).

Additional research questions that require investigation include whether non-African Amer-

ican scouts attend baseball games in the inner cities. Are young African American baseball players afforded the same opportunities for professional baseball careers as non-African Americans are? Along a broader scope, what about professional opportunities for young African Americans in other sport and societal venues?

Future research on the use of vocal or bodily self-expression in the game of baseball would enhance the body of knowledge in sport sociology. Historically, blacks have shown a propensity to celebrate more so than their white counterparts (Andrews; Hitchcock). This includes dancing in the end zone in football, performing stylish dunks in basketball, and a range of other entertaining gestures. In baseball, however, the lack of tolerance for individual gestures that can be used to score “cool points” (Majors and Billison) is considered necessary to preserve the team psyche. For example, a team may retaliate if they feel that an opponent has “disrespected” them by celebrating. The substantive work of Andrews further articulates this issue by contrasting African American codes of behavior against the white normative construction of sportsmanlike conduct in organized football.

Further, future studies on the marketing scheme of baseball that reveal differences in commercializing African American baseball players compared to basketball and football players should be addressed. The disproportionate number of African American basketball and football players represented in the media compared to baseball players is a fascinating research issue considering that many of the highest paid players in professional baseball are African American. Further research also needs to question the various ways in which African American athletes are marketed across the sporting spectrum. Do the marketing images differ between sports like bowling, golf, and tennis? We might infer that the more mainstream (white) the sport stays, the less representation, participation, and access African Americans will have (Edwards, “Crisis” 9). This theorized phenomenon has educational implications that will be explained at length in the remainder of this article.

Finally, future studies that investigate the roles and relationships between African American coaches and players in both high school and college baseball are imperative. In addition, the state of Historically Black Colleges and Universities’ (HBCU) baseball programs, where many field teams have greater numbers of non-African Americans, needs to be addressed and systematically investigated.

Clearly, there are several untapped and crucial issues to further understand the depletion of African Americans from the game of organized baseball. This study suggests that more concerted efforts are needed to address the participation of African Americans in organized baseball. For instance, this study investigates only one aspect of social class. There are approximately eighteen million middle-class African Americans out of thirty-five million in the United States (*People Like Us*). The question of class status as it pertains to African American participation in baseball demands investigation into whether baseball is more popular in middle-class African American communities versus urban African American communities. Empirical data that combine qualitative and quantitative design would be very helpful in answering this research question. Although this study reveals considerable “light” and empirical underpinnings on the depletion of African American youth from America’s favorite pastime, the attempt should be to produce studies that illuminate how African American youth are channeled into certain sports, and equally why baseball is predominantly white at certain levels of participation (Lipsitz 233). From such research will come valuable information for understanding the virtual invisibility of African Americans from all organized levels of baseball. The application of research into policy and program implementation represents tangible solutions to these types of social issues.

If athletic and social schemas exist in the internal structure and space of sport, researchers must examine the external barriers that preclude African American males from being labeled “intellectuals” or “scholars” as frequently as they are branded with athletic or entertainment

labels. Presently, our findings suggest that media influence is the most salient of all of the variables.

Focusing on our major finding at the surface, a study of current intercollegiate football and basketball players who played baseball in high school would be most informative in terms of discerning the reasons they left baseball. In addition, studies that focus on professional athletes who are oftentimes active in multiple sports during college—such as Brian Jordan of the Atlanta Braves, who was a standout basketball player in college; Michael Vick of the Atlanta Falcons, who was drafted as a baseball player; and Deion Sanders, who was a star of several football and baseball teams simultaneously—might help illuminate the social impact of being labeled a football, basketball, or baseball player. Although a longitudinal design would be more reliable for evidence of this sport and role-exit from one sport to another, reflection and recall of why African American athletes select the sports they do adds even more color to the picture. This type of research will increase the awareness of what each “ball” means for every “baller”; what factors led some athletes to exit sport while others chose to develop within it from the early Negro Leagues, the Jackie Robinson Era, and the plentiful 1970s. Teams like the Pittsburgh Pirates, which use popular music like “We are family” from the group *Sister Sledge*, fuse baseball, African American culture, and the American pastime. This type of fusion is healthy for the social and cultural development of African American male youth. In the meantime, ball, baller, and “ballin” should be labeled, cultivated, and nurtured to imply “success” in any sport or societal task that African American male youth set their minds to.

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