

Journal of Sport & Social Issues

<http://jss.sagepub.com>

The Real Color of Money: Controlling Black Bodies in the NBA

David J. Leonard

Journal of Sport and Social Issues 2006; 30; 158

DOI: 10.1177/0193723506286725

The online version of this article can be found at:
<http://jss.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/30/2/158>

Published by:



<http://www.sagepublications.com>

On behalf of:

[Northeastern University's Center for the Study of Sport in Society](#)

Additional services and information for *Journal of Sport & Social Issues* can be found at:

Email Alerts: <http://jss.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts>

Subscriptions: <http://jss.sagepub.com/subscriptions>

Reprints: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav>

Permissions: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav>

Citations <http://jss.sagepub.com/cgi/content/refs/30/2/158>

The Real Color of Money

Controlling Black Bodies in the NBA

David J. Leonard

Washington State University, Pullman

Amid a backlash against the influence of hip-hop within professional basketball, exacerbated by the 2004 brawl at the Palace of Auburn Hills, NBA executives, media pundits, and fans have denounced the influx of Black high school players. This article argues that the establishment of a policy preventing high school players from the NBA is neither a pure business decision nor a hypocritical move by a league that has long profited off the contributions of young Black males and the popularity of hip-hop. Instead, it links this discourse to the larger societal moves to police and put Black male bodies under surveillance. It specifically examines the ways in which calls for an age restriction within the NBA and those efforts to send young men and women of color into America's expanding prison system reflect the same White supremacist logic that necessitates the control, regulation, and punishment of Black and brown bodies.

Keywords: *disciplinarity; hip-hop; NBA; race; White supremacy*

In recent months, following the “Palace brawl”—an extraordinary fight between Ron Artest (Indiana Pacers) and Ben Wallace (Detroit Pistons) that turned into a fight between players and fans—social, political, and cultural commentators have found themselves in constant conversation about this fight and its larger cultural meaning and significance. They have taken to the air to lament the influence of hip-hop (the “ghetto mentality”), warning of impending doom within the league if it didn’t check its marriage to the hip-hop world (Celizic, 2004; “Limbaugh on NBA Fight,” 2004; McNamara, 2005; Powell, 2004; Taylor, 2004; Wilbon, 2004; Wilstein, 2004). Similar debates took place within classrooms, on the Internet, in front of the watercooler, at the cappuccino machine, and in the local barbershop. Regardless of the location or the nature of the conversation, the reaction to this spectacle is nothing new, reflecting both the power of basketball and its importance as a cultural site of conversations regarding race, class, American values, and national identity.

At the core of the racialized culture war that came into public sight during (and in the aftermath of) the brawl was a battle about the influences of hip-hop on basketball, with headlines reading “Hip-Hop Hoops Feeding Negative Stereotypes” (Powell, 2004), “Hip-Hop Culture Contributes to NBA’s Bad Rap” (Wilbon, 2004), and “NBA’s Problems Are Cultural, Not Racial” (Celizic, 2004). Lamenting the cost of hip-hop’s intrusion into the league, where fans “like pro game, not the players” (Whitlock, 2004) because of its “image problem” (Elmore, 2004) and its “punks and thugs” (Kindred, 2004), commentators called for action: reform to bring the league

back to its glorious (White, and White-controlled) past. "As the NBA tries to recapture some respectability in the aftermath of the fight seen 'round the world, it nervously dances around a misguided culture that's slowly suffocating the league," wrote Shaun Powell (2004, p. A95). "Stern was the man who boldly rescued the NBA from an image of being too black in the late 1970s. Now he must contend with the image of the NBA being too black, in a different sense, in the new millennium" (p. A95). Powell not only calls for action—for an effort to rid the league of "the middle finger mentality" that far too many young Black players in the league embrace—but emphasizes how the image problem differs from those of years past, given the dominance of young, hip-hop-influenced "angry black males" who don't understand what it means "to be professional and dignified black players" (Powell, 2004, p. A95). Mike Celizic (2004) takes this rhetorical position a step further, not only linking the problems to a cultural shift within the league and calling to "rebuild the game" through an authentic recapturing of love for the game but instituting programs and policies to teach (discipline) or punish the offenders. "It means taking the teenagers now coming into the league in hand . . . giving them a support system, hammering home the importance of fundamental values in their lives," he noted. "That begins with team play, the element that was so lacking in Athens. Respect your teammates and your fellow competitors and your fans and the people who write about you and make you famous, and you'll get it back" (Celizic, 2004).

Intimating a link between the influx of younger players, hip-hop, and the lack of discipline within the league, Celizic embodies the backlash against players younger than 20 that followed the Palace brawl. As part of larger and long-standing reactionary cultural and ideological projects that blame Black culture, in this case, hip-hop, for the pollution, corruption, and denigration of American life, the accusations against hip-hop and against the younger "baller" as the seeds that gave rise to the brawl are nothing new (Boyd, 2004; Hughes, 2004; Tucker, 2003). "America is a country that still fears on a daily basis the black male body" (Harrison, 2001, p. x). Herman Gray (2005), in *Cultural Moves: African Americans and the Politics of Representations*, notes the links between moral panics, race, and popular culture:

The discourses of regulation and the moral panics that they helped to mobilize worked for a time in the 1980s to consolidate a neoconservative hegemonic bloc. This bloc routinely used media images of black men and women, the poor and immigrants to represent social crises. Gendered and racialized images of poverty and disenfranchisement became the basis for a barrage of public policies and legislation intended to shore up this hegemonic position and to calm and manage the moral panics construction around race in general and blackness in particular.

So often media narratives presume and then fix in representation the purported natural affinity between black criminality and threats to the nation. By fixing the blame, legitimating the propriety of related moral panics, these representations (and the assumptions on which they are based) help form the discursive logic through which policy proscriptions for restoring order—more jails—are fashioned. (pp. 24-25)

Just as crime signifies Blackness and vice versa, Blackness has come to embody a pollutant within the NBA that necessitates surveillance and regulation. Numerous scholars have noted the simultaneity of commodification—a form of embracement—and demonization of both Black male bodies and cultural practices (Boyd, 1997, 2003; Collins, 2004; Watkins, 1998). “The love of black culture with the simultaneous suspicion and punishment of black bodies is not unusual” (Perry, 2005, p. 28), resulting in big contracts and demonization, fanfare and condemnation.

Building on the work of Mark Anthony Neal (2005), Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2003), David Andrews (2001), CL Cole and David Andrews (1996), C. Richard King and Charles Fruehling Springwood (2001), Ann Stoler (1997), and a wave of recent scholarship concerned with hip-hop and Black popular culture that aptly link commodification, policing, authenticity, state violence, and moral panics to Black popular culture, this article explores the efforts to institute an age limit within the NBA. Reflecting on this policy move within a larger cultural, racial, ideological, and discursive context (Collins, 2004; Gray, 2005; Neal, 2005), this article specifically examines the racial text and context—the growth of America’s “Jim Crowed” prison system and broader war on youth of color—of the recent debate concerning the institution of an age limit within the NBA. In documenting the age debate amid a sporting crisis induced by the brawl and broader discourses concerned with Black youth, this article argues that the proposed age limit represents not just a response to the brawl but a method of surveillance and an instrument of control aimed at the uninhibited “invasion” of hip-hop, a threatening and potentially unprofitable inscription of Black masculinity. Ann Stoler (1997) argues in *Race and the Education of Desire*, “Racism is not an effect but a tactic in the internal fission of society into binary opposition, a means of creating biologized internal enemies, against whom society must defend itself” (p. 59). It “does not merely arise in moments of crisis, in sporadic cleansings. It is internal to the biopolitical state, woven into the web of the social body, threaded through its fabric” (p. 59). Whether with public debates concerning the on- and off-court behavior of Black ballers or those regarding welfare or drug abuse, communities of color signify the pollution to which the state or the commissioner “must constantly purify itself” (p. 59).

Amid widespread celebrations of the arrivals of Freddy Adu, Michelle Wie, Sidney Crosby, and Koby Clemons, the straight-out-of high-school baller has now found a “do not disturb” sign hanging from the NBA’s window. This article moves beyond a focus on double standards: the NBA’s selective embracing of hip-hop; the praise afforded to other young athletes, particularly Whites engaged in individual sports; and the willingness that America shows in sending “its” youth of color onto the battlefield. It transcends a focus on the long-standing racist practice of both demonizing and commodifying Black bodies, instead arguing that the proposed rule and the nature of the debate reflects the hegemonic practice of policing young Black males who defy dominant expectations with baggy shorts, trash talking, “bling-bling,” and hypermasculinity. In society in general, and especially in spaces dominated by Black

youth, we expect control, reverence, and respect; as a society, we repel, almost fear, Black youth, who are habitually demonized as the source of America's problems. In connecting the age debate to the increased levels of violence inflicted on youth of color, my effort here attempts not only to center race and racism within this discourse but to emphasize its connection to increasing levels of state violence and widespread efforts evident in American schools, the criminal justice system, and the sporting playgrounds to police, profile, punish, discipline, or otherwise render those deviant bodies as invisible: to turn the victims of racism and White supremacist violence into the assailants or source of problems in need of control and correction(s).

Discipline and Punish

The fact that Ron Artest attacked those "poor" (White) fans in Detroit and others responded with aggression was not surprising given the presence of hip-hop within the league. At least, that is what media pundits concluded again and again. Having diagnosed the problem and seen the consequences of this "marriage," commentators lamented the needed steps to redeem and ultimately retake the game of basketball (Burwell, 2004; Kerr, 2005). In the months following the brawl, it became increasingly clear that David Stern was listening, with a year-long suspension of Artest, several shorter suspensions, a proposed age limit of 20 for the league, and other "needed" rule changes (a dress code and an increased fine structure for technical fouls).

In fact, less than 2 months after the brawl, the NBA sent a clear message about the place of hip-hop and those bodies embracing, reflecting, or signifying a ghetto-centric imagination. Shortly after being traded to the Sacramento Kings, the NBA, in providing a prelude to a dress code to follow, admonished Cuttino Mobely for conducting interviews while wearing a skullcap. Despite his headgear donning the insignia of the NBA, and that he was "a good guy," league officials took this moment to remind players about professionalism, values, and the league's new official, yet unofficial, policy concerning hip-hop. In both moments, the simultaneous commodification and demonization of hip-hop and its Black male signifiers within the NBA became visible, illustrating the complex and contradictory place of aesthetics, cultural values, and bodies that are constructed as both fashionable (desirable and cool) and suspect (dangerous). Within the NBA, the success of Tim Duncan and Ray Allen on and off the court, as well as their decision to spend 4 years in college, gives legitimacy to the condemnation of those others and to claims that race has nothing to do with the opposition to hip-hop, straight-out-of-high-school players, or today's baller. In fact, this "new racism" works through the simultaneity of the good and bad Other, enjoining legitimacy to claims of colorblindness (Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Burdekin, Hossfeld, & Smith, 2005; Gray, 2005).

David Andrews (1996), in "The Fact(s) of Michael Jordan's Blackness," reflects on this practice as part of the New Right's deployment of colorblind racial discourses:

The new cultural racism conjoined the moral panics surrounding the issues of urban crime, violence, drug abuse, and welfare dependency, under the guise of irresponsible, indolent, deviant, and promiscuous “soft body” of the essentialized nonwhite, urbanite, whose very existence threatened (and in doing so reinforced) that core values of the Reaganite American Nation. (p. 115)

Move ahead 20 years and similar panics and discourses of condemnation still guide the NBA, with the hip-hop baller and those who bypass the disciplinarity of college sports once again threatening the values of the league and America through “irresponsible indolent, and promiscuous” displays, necessitating both discipline and punishment through increasingly loud calls to restrict entry into the NBA to those older than 20.

Within a context of increasingly vocal denunciations of Black youth culture, efforts to funnel money away from social services to institutions of social control, and notions of criminality that are linked to racial signs, Black youth have suffered significantly. The shifting emphasis on building and populating prisons has resulted in a massive increase in prison populations, especially Black and Latino males. Between 1970 (200,000) and 2000 (2 million), America’s prison population has increased by 500% as opposed to a mere 45% increase in its overall population. As of the late 1990s, there were more than 50 million criminal records on file in the United States, with at least 4 million to 5 million “new” adults acquiring such a record annually. As of 2000, the total number of men and women behind bars, on parole, and on probation had reached 6.3 million, more than 3% of the adult population. In the 1990s alone, nearly 2 million people were imprisoned (A. Davis, 2003; Miller, 1997; Parenti, 2000).

At present, people of color account for more than 70% of America’s prison population, with Latinos representing nearly 20% and Blacks accounting for more than 50% of America’s prison population. As of 2004, there were more than 1 million Black people confined to prison. That represents 1 out of 35; if you split that in half, it constitutes 1 out of 17 men; now remove the very old and very young, and this number drops to 1 in 10. Now if you include those on parole or probation, the number is 1 in 4; for those just in their 20s, it is 1 in 3. In America, the land of the free, Black males have more than a 30% chance of doing time at some point in their lives. Compared to Latinos, who hover around 16% (1 in 6), and Whites at about 4% (1 in 24), it becomes clear that the effects of the prison industrial complex are specific to the Black community. Although formal Jim Crow ended with the efforts of activism and organizers through the 1960s, the existence of the prison industrial complex represents a 21st century manifestation of Jim Crow that entails disenfranchisement, family dislocation, virtual enslavement, and forced confinement (Mauer & the Sentencing Project, 2001; Miller, 1997).

The web that defines the prison industrial complex connects the political and economic interests of America’s elite: Laws; zealous prosecutors; the legislative, judicial, and executive branches at the local, state, and federal levels; the media; transnational corporations; schools; the church; the police; virtually every American institution;

and the ideologies and rhetoric of racism, fear, and crime and punishment all work together to maintain the world's largest prison system.

The prison industrial complex has thus created a vicious cycle of punishment which only further impoverishes those whose impoverishment is supposedly "solved" by imprisonment. Therefore, as the emphasis of government policy shifts from social welfare to crime control [and because "criminality and deviance are racialized"], racism sinks more deeply into the economic and ideological structures of U.S. society. . . . The emergence of a U.S. prison industrial complex within a context of cascading conservatism marks a new historical moment, whose dangers are unprecedented. (A. Davis, 1998)

Moreover, "its uncontrollable growth ought to rattle a national consciousness now complacent at the thought of a permanent prison class" (M. Davis, 1995, p. 260). These institutions and ideologies not only hold a dialectical relationship with one another in the growth and maintenance of the prison industrial complex but possess various interests in sustaining a system of mass incarceration, despite the fact that a majority of people suffer under these conditions. From Ronald Reagan's Willie Horton ad to the media's depiction of the welfare problem through Black female bodies, from *Cops* to discourses of hip-hop, it is crucial to understand the interconnectiveness between crime, fear, race, and the media (Andrews, 2001; A. Davis, 2003).

In 1994, President Bill Clinton signed the Gun-Free Schools Act, which mandated a 1-year expulsion for having weapons in school. Although this legislation resulted in suspensions and expulsion of children across the nation for crimes as severe as bringing a toy gun, plastic knife, or nail file to schools, the Gun-Free Schools Act has contributed to widespread policing of youth of color (http://endzero.tolerance.com/zero_tolerance_overview.htm). In 1998, when Black students accounted for 17.1% of U.S. student populations, they represented 32.1% of students suspended for disciplinary infractions (Johnson, Boyden, & Pittz, 2001, p. 15). Throughout the nation, youth of color were increasingly subjected to suspensions and expulsions, side by side with their schools seemingly becoming prisons. With metal detectors, security guards, and fences being used disproportionately at schools with more than 50% students of color, the late 1990s saw America's schools increasingly resembling its prisons in terms of efforts to discipline and punish as well as in the number of youth of color in attendance (Johnson et al., 2001, p. 17).

To understand the racialization of crime (disobedience) and the acceptance of a culture of law and order (disciplinarity, accountability) is to understand both Willie Horton and Ron Artest, zero-tolerance policies in schools, an age limit within the NBA, and fears about crime and influences of hip-hop in the NBA, in that each seeks to control, discipline, and ultimately disarm Black bodies. The increasing level of intolerance for the NBA's youth movement and the calls for restrictions is not particular to sports but rather part of a larger movement reflective in growing prison populations, shrinking social welfare budgets, and overzealous police, prosecutors, and judges ready to throw children into jail just as teachers, principals, and school administrators increasingly expel students (of color) for even the smallest infraction.

The Great Age Debate

Amid a widespread backlash against the NBA and calls for reform, David Stern has capitalized on these environments (just as Clinton seized on fears about crimes and George W. capitalized on fears of terrorism) to push forward with his long-sought-after age limit. Seeking to exploit the panics induced by the brawl and the efforts to link the “demise of the league” to its youthfulness, Stern pushed hard to add an age clause to the 2005 collective bargaining agreement (CBA). During an online interview, Stern made his opinion on the matter clear, denying that the proposal had anything to do with preparedness of players, financial incentives, or a desire to assist the college game:

I have never said that the 18 year-olds can't play in the league. I just said that I don't think it's a good idea for us to have them in the league. And I never said that they shouldn't come into the league because they should go to college. Because I am not sure that college is necessarily for everyone. What I have said is that I don't think we should be setting an example for kids to be planning the rest of their lives around basketball, because it's not a very good thing to do. (“David Stern Media Conference,” 2004)

Seeking to save youth of color through discouraging basketball and encouraging school, Stern's emphasis on role models and protecting children reflects the long-standing efforts of White saviors. Despite the inscription of the “White man's burden,” the proposed age limit cannot be understood outside of widespread demonization of hip-hop and young Black males and societal efforts to reform, discipline, and punish those “othered” deviant bodies who persistently threaten the (NBA) status quo.

Stern's effort to institute an age limit seeks a reversal of a 1971 Supreme Court ruling. In *Haywood v. National Basketball Association*, the Court ruled against the NBA's requirement that entrants into the NBA draft wait until the graduation of their college class. Following the 1976 Olympics, Haywood signed a contract with the Seattle Super Sonics, causing the NBA to threaten to disallow the contract and implement sanctions against the Sonics. Haywood concluded that such actions violated the Sherman Act, filing an antitrust action that eventually would be heard in front of the Supreme Court in 1971. Haywood and his attorneys argued before the Court that the conduct of the NBA was tantamount to “group boycott” and thus was in violation of the Sherman Antitrust Act. The Supreme Court agreed, ruling that the NBA's draft policy was a “restraint on trade” and therefore was illegal under the Sherman Act (Brown, 2000).

Following the ruling, the NBA briefly required players to formally request early entry status, basing its decision on the financial hardship of each individual player. Although the NBA eliminated the hardship criteria, the league had few early entrants. From 1976 through the 1994 draft, only 18.1% of the first-round picks were early or foreign entrants, compared to almost 80% being college

juniors and seniors. Most of that 18% came after 1989 and from foreign entries. The absence of a salary cap (instituted in 1989) and strict salary structures that led draft picks to negotiate directly with teams lowered incentives to enter the draft early.

The 1995 CBA addressed concerns from veterans and the league itself regarding rookies' earning more than veterans. Under the 1995 CBA, first-round picks were given guaranteed 3-year contracts, with salaries being determined by a predetermined scale linked to place draft yet still allowing teams to exceed salary amounts by up to 20%. The terms of agreement also added provisions to address the status of second-round draft choices, who would to be paid league minimum without any guaranteed deals. This agreement ostensibly encouraged top-rate high school and college freshmen and sophomores to enter the draft early to expedite achieving veteran status, 3 years of restriction resulting in free agency and market-driven salaries. However, it discouraged those good but not top-flight players from entering the league, pushing them to college with hopes of making it into the first round after a couple years in school (McCann, 2004; Rosenbaum, 2003).

This reality worsened with the 1999 CBA. In fact, the number of early entrants increased significantly following the signing of the 1999 CBA, from 47% of draft picks encompassing early or foreign entrants between 1995 and 1998 to 71.5% during the 1999 to 2004 seasons. The 1999 CBA lowered the pay scale for rookies, added a 4th-year team option, and implemented set percentage salary increases for each player. The agreement provided incentives to teams to draft younger players, which under the agreement had to pay less for the next potential superstar. "The changes in the 1999 collective bargaining agreement gave teams even more incentive to draft early entrants," writes Peter Groothuis, James Hill, and Timothy Perry (2005) in "Early Entry in the NBA Draft."

By lowering the rookie scale for contract salaries, and adding a fourth year option for teams at a predetermined percentage pay increase, the league and union added even more opportunities at the bargaining table for teams to recoup general on the job training cost. (p. 8)

Had the NBA or David Stern wanted to truly diminish the influx of young players into the league, they would have needed merely to reform a CBA that encourages not only early entrance for players who seek to secure market value as soon as possible but teams that have minimal cost, investment, and risk for players selected in the draft (McCann, 2004; Rosenbaum, 2003).

A Raceless Issue?

Asked about the racial implications of the proposed age limit that the NBA had planned to add to the 2005 CBA, Jermaine O'Neal told the *Indianapolis Star*:

As a black guy, you kind of think (race is) the reason why it's coming up. You don't hear about it in baseball or hockey. To say you have to be 20, 21 to get in the league, it's unconstitutional. If I can go to the U.S. Army and fight the war at 18, why can't you play basketball for 48 minutes and then go home? (Zirin, 2005)

He went on to say, "In the last two or three years, the Rookie of the Year has been a high school player. There were seven high school players in the All-Star game, so why we even talking (about) an age limit?" (Zirin, 2005)

Before he finished his last sentence, the vultures began to circle, attacking O'Neal with little thought or regard for his statements. "Jermaine O'Neal has no idea what racism is," wrote one columnist, and another cited the absurdity of O'Neal's comments as reason enough to institute a rule change:

Look at the behavior of Jermaine O'Neal. He has helped prove the fact that the NBA needs less high schoolers in the league. All you need to do is bring up his behavior in Detroit, and everyone will know what I'm talking about. (Leonard, 2005)

To these columnists and others, whether talking about race, fighting at the Palace, or merely donning braids, "tats," and "phat" diamond earrings, the downfall of the league rests on the back of those players who have entered the league without a stint in college.

Specifically, both defenders of the proposed age limit and those colorblind opponents saw race as a nonissue. A number of commentators dismissed O'Neal invoking race in that the rule would affect all players. For example, Nick Prevenas (2005) scoffed at the mere imposition of racism:

The proposed NBA age limit has its share of problems, but it's not a racist initiative. The age limit is an equal opportunity discriminator. The 20-and-under barrier wouldn't only affect American high school kids—it would have a massive impact on overseas prospects.

Bill Gibron (2005), like so many others (see Whitlock, 2005), denounced O'Neal for introducing race into the conversation:

Worse yet, the "r" word—race—has crawled into the conversation, making its potent presence known. While a Caucasian cabal out to keep the young black man out of the NBA may not exactly be the message of Indiana Pacer's Jermaine O'Neal's now famous comments, it surely is what he's suggesting. The sad thing is, had he not decided to go down the path of least logical resistance (as bringing ethnicity into an issue will often do), his anti-age limit sentiment might have sounded astute.

A majority of the commentaries not only dismissed race as a valid point of discussion but also used O'Neal's discussion of race as evidence for why all players need to go to college. "Jermaine O'Neal has no idea what racism is. . . . He's every bit of twenty something" (Moore, 2005). Jayson Whitlock (2005) concurred, denouncing

O'Neal through a series of demonizing comments about him and his generation of players: "O'Neal is the stereotypical NBA Million Dollar Baby. His youth, lack of formal education and bank account all stand in the way of his grasping the big picture." Often noting how the NBA was one of few places where racism no longer mattered, the outright dismissal of O'Neal's comments as those of an ignorant Black male willing to play the race card reflects the power of colorblindness within post-civil rights America.

Along these same lines, commentators sought to delegitimize O'Neal's comments by saying that the rule was motivated not by race but by money and enhancing the quality of the NBA product. Although certainly part of the rule, money doesn't invalidate racism as an explanatory factor—wasn't slavery driven by both financial greed and White supremacy? In fact, the systemic process of further exploiting the bodies of Black athletes fulfills a long history of racism in America. A third argument stems from the idea that an age limit finds support among people of color, whether they are players (Shane Battier, Reggie Miller), commentators (Michael Wilbon), or fans. This again does not undermine the legitimacy of O'Neal's comments but rather demonstrates the complexity of race and the power of racist ideologies. Last, the argument that the rule cannot be racist because it ultimately seeks to help Black youth is both absurd (imperialism, colonization, and institutions of enslavement have always invoked paternalism and helping as the basis of endeavors) and baseless.

Don't Believe the Hype: Looking Beyond the Stars

A prominent argument that many commentators, public figures, NBA representatives, and even players voiced in support for an age restriction was that those who have entered the league at a young age struggle on and off the court. Commentaries and editorials consistently avoided facts and the history of financial and basketball success for those who have skipped college, instead claiming that an overwhelming number of cases have ended tragically. "For every Kobe Bryant, Kevin Garnett, and LeBron James, there are countless others, poor misguided kids who put their eggs in the NBA basket and have few options when it doesn't work out," wrote Pete Barth (2005). "Thanks to the success of King James, naive high school students around the country suddenly think they're NBA ready. In a large, large majority of cases there are not even close" (Barth, 2005).

Such hyperbolic (and racialized) language has been commonplace within the debate, as has been the stories of three players, James Lang, Taj McDavid, and Korleone Young, all who are deployed as rationale for an age restriction. Each of the three entered the league hoping to turn his talents into NBA riches. In the estimation of the age restrictionists, each failed to meet his dream because he was not mentally or physically prepared for the grind of the NBA. Described as "long-legged freaks"

and “too young” (Camunas, 2005), the discourse consistently demanded that the NBA’s future stars be forced to garner a college “experience away from the court” (Adande, 2005); to learn from Roy Williams, “Coach K,” and others (Barth, 2005; Gibrón, 2005; Kerr, 2005); to “grow, to remove the pimples from their face, to become men on the court and *gentlemen* [italics added]” off the court (Camunas, 2005). Whereas Young and Lang quickly found themselves out of the league, McDavid was not even drafted, leaving them all without options (McCann, 2004). Sports commentators and even Stern have consistently invoked their tragic stories to justify the institutionalization of a system that would have forced these men to college, allowing them to mature as players and as men. In other words, a few years with Bob Knight, Mike Kryzwecki, and any number of the White NCAA coaches is believed to be the answer to the influx of the hip-hop generation. Steve Kerr (2005), in defense of raising the age limit, penned the following statement: “Perhaps Kobe Bryant would have dealt with adversity in a more positive manner had he spent a season or two playing for Mike Kryzwecki at Duke.” In other words, an age limit will not only make the NCAA better with an influx of talent (and dollars) but will also enhance the popularity of the game, all while players exchange their labor for a nonexistent college education.

As already mentioned, these arguments lack substance in terms of the history of early entrants into the league. Michael McCann (2004), in “Illegal Defense: The Irrational Economics of Banning High School Players From the NBA Draft,” an article that appeared in *Sports Law Review*, illustrated the lack of supportive evidence for the argument of Stern, Barkley, and others:

From 1995 to 2003, over 80 percent of drafted high school players became, or will become multi-millionaires by the age of 21, or how they have maximized their earning potential by gaining the ability to become unrestricted free agents—when as many as 30 teams bid for their services—by the tender age of 22, when, coincidentally, some of their counterparts will graduate from college and become bound by the nearly non-negotiable rookie salary scale for three to five years.

Most players who skip college may earn as much as \$100 million more over the course of their careers than if they had done the “smart thing” and earned a college diploma. . . . High school players who enter the NBA Draft are a small, self-selected group, comprised almost entirely of exceptionally talented players. Simply put, for every Korleone Young, there are two or three Kobe Bryants. (p. 295)

Out of 37 players who entered the draft straight out of high school, 30 were selected; as of this writing, 26 were still in the league. More revealing, several of those who entered the draft early, went undrafted, or became late second-round picks, including Taj McDavid, did so because of low SAT scores (McCann, 2004). If the NBA, NCAA, and others truly wanted to push high school players away from the NBA toward college, they might push for an elimination of Proposition 48 (Lapchick, 2002).

Put Down That Ball: Saving America's (Black) Youth

The rationale for implementing an age limit has been rather simplistic in that its proponents seek to save not only those players who have attempted to jump straight from high school into the league and failed, but future generations as well. Michael Wilbon, along with others, stated on *Pardon the Interruption* that the policy was a good idea because it would give a different message to hundreds of young Black men who are operating under the disastrous idea that they, too, are headed for the NBA and therefore aren't concentrating on school (Wilbon & Kornheiser, 2005). Asked why he was so adamant about a 20-year-old age limit, given the success of LeBron James and Carmelo Anthony on and off the court long before their 20th birthdays, Stern offered the following assessment of the rule as having nothing to do with the NBA:

I have never said that the 18 year-olds can't play in the league. . . . You stopped at Carmelo and LeBron, but one could talk about the long list of Jermaine O'Neal, Kevin Garnett, Kobe Bryant, and Tracy McGrady—a veritable All-Star team. ("David Stern Media Conference," 2004)

In other words, such a policy would supposedly send a message to America's (Black) youth that school matters, that success can come from something other than, as the Notorious B.I.G. observed, "slingin' rock" or balling with "a wicked jump shot." The efforts to save Black youth from their poor decision making, exacerbated by cultures of poverty, limited options, and greedy agents, necessitates benevolent intervention from the NBA. In the estimation of those who support an age restriction, it is not so much about helping those who entered the league, the draft, or even those future NBA stars but the many who roll the dice on a professional career because of Kobe and T-Mac only to find failure in securing a basketball career; it is about ushering a generation of Black youth toward school (despite underfunding of public schools, the dismantling of affirmative action) who might otherwise terrorize residents through criminal activity and other financial demands on the state. Such racist assessments, albeit deployed through codes and colorblind discourses, guide the proponents of an age limit within the NBA, displacing reality for the good of the kids. The patronizing and colonial nature of this racialized discourse is quite evident here as the predominantly White leadership within the league, the media, and the fans claim that they know what is best for the immature and undisciplined Black ballers (Gray, 1995; Shapiro, 2005).

Moreover, the argument that the NBA is facilitating a whole generation of young Black males who invest all life's energies and focus into basketball and who will ultimately fall short in securing their NBA dream has little to do with the age limit proposal. Everyone from Charles Barkley to the average blogger has cited the dangers of a generation of Black youth with no education or skills beyond basketball as the basis of supporting the rule change. Beyond promulgating stereotypes and

deploying the problematic rhetoric of Daniel Patrick Moynihan and others who have cited personal (and cultural) factors as the basis for understanding rates of welfare, incarceration, or poverty, such efforts to link an age limit in the NBA to helping America's youth of color lack evidence when talking about those players who have entered the draft early.

Policing Hip-Hop

The desire to establish an age limit cannot be understood outside the backlash against the hip-hop baller in the wake of Kobe Bryant's nontrial, the Palace brawl, and a host of other events, each of which supposedly marked the demise of the league if it didn't wrestle back control from the tattooed, braided, bling-bling displaying, posse rollin', street ballin', straight-outta-high-school ghetto baller. Following the Pistons-Pacers-fans-security guard brawl at Auburn Hills, Bryant Burwell wrote in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* the following assessment of the league, demonstrating the racialized disconnect between the league and the fans: that the NBA

thought they were getting Will Smith and LL Cool J. But now they've discovered the dark side of hip-hop has also infiltrated their game, with its 'bling-bling' ostentation, its unrepentant I-gotta-get-paid ruthlessness, its unregulated culture of posses, and the constant underlying threat of violence. (Burwell, 2004)

In numerous interviews regarding the proposed age restriction, David Stern did not even deny the importance of the proposed rule change in winning back fans, arguing that the league's motivation emanated from business concerns, their effort to placate fan concerns, and the increasing discomfort of many NBA executives with scouting teenagers—denying the racial and cultural implications of the debate, instead focusing on business, fans, and age. He told Armen Keteyian (2005) during an interview for HBO's *Costas Now* that he sensed a level of condemnation from the NBA's fans, "that we are too young, that we were in effect robbing the cradle, and that we're grabbing kids at a young age." Although Michael McCann and Billy Hunter agreed with Stern regarding the dialectical workings of the age limit and league fears about a fan backlash, both men told Keteyian that the proposal reflected an effort to scapegoat straight-out-of-high-school ballers for the league's image problems. "I really think it is a way to indirectly address the image issue. I think he and owners feel that they have to give the fans something," noted National Basketball Association Union President Billy Hunter.

The idea is what can you give the fans to convince them that you are in control of the game and that it hasn't gotten out-of-hand. And that [the Brawl] is just part of it. . . . Some individuals have problems that so many players have tattoos or corn-rows or they're saying that there a bunch of spoiled millionaires, etc. The problem may not be with the 18-year olds, but if we can make that the result, so be it. (Keteyian, 2005)

The NBA age limit not only functions as a gatekeeper, as a means to minimize the infiltration of the “dark side of hip-hop” (literally) while appeasing critics of the league and placating NBA fans, but also represents an effort to put Black male bodies and styles under surveillance and control. Although partially about the owners’ not wanting to pay first-round dollars to players who might take years to develop and most certainly about the desire of college programs to profit from the unpaid labor of America’s top ballers, the push to send America’s best players to college reflects a desire for them to arrive into the league as “seasoned” and “domesticated.” This policy embodies a long history of the “White man’s burden” in which White men have presumed to know what is best for people of color. According to its supporters, an age restriction will not only save those players who are not ready from the league by forcing them to college to receive an “education” or greater athletic development, but will serve as a deterrent for thousands of young Black males by creating role models who go to college rather than to the league.

Hypocrisy, or the Consistency of White Supremacist Discourse?

Jermaine O’Neal’s denunciation of the proposed age limit focused on the hypocrisy of such a restriction given the societal acceptance of 18-year-olds fighting in Afghanistan and Iraq in the name of freedom. “If I can go to the U.S. Army and fight the war at 18, why can’t you play basketball for 48 minutes?” (Zirin, 2005). Recognizing that many of those who are fighting to “preserve freedom at home” and spread democracy are youth of color and are from low socioeconomic communities, O’Neal found Stern’s plan a troubling inconsistency. *No Child Left Behind* (2002), in fact, requires public schools to assist the U.S. military in its recruitment effort for all students older than age 14, further revealing that age matters only in certain places. “The armed forces believe that children as young 14 should consider a career traveling to far away places, guarding oil pipe lines, and killing people,” writes Dave Zirin (2005), a progressive sports commentator. “But the NBA commissioner David Stern contends that 18 and 19 year olds may be able to vote, work shifts at Abu Ghraib and watch Sin City, but they have no place in his league” (Zirin, 2005).

The call and successful implementation of an age restriction within the NBA cannot be understood outside the context of the (increasing) hegemonic practice of criminally trying youth of color as adults. Like the NBA age limit in terms of the ideological orientation and obvious effects, the efforts to try teenagers as adults has disproportionately affected communities of color. Beginning in the 1980s, calls for law and order and truth in sentencing resulted in an increased effort to not only incarcerate youth but to try them as adults. By the mid- to late 1990s, 43 states had enacted laws facilitating the transfer of children into the adult criminal justice system, ostensibly eroding the juvenile justice system. The impact of these laws is

the gradual erosion of the 100-year-old juvenile justice system. Founded on the belief that children were entitled to a range of special protections because of their vulnerability and immaturity, the juvenile court was intended to separate youth from the deleterious effects of the adult justice system. Yet the 1990s saw a paradigm shift in which age represented just a number to prosecutors, the police, and the larger criminal justice system. Currently, all 50 states have laws on the books allowing juveniles to be tried as adults (Males & Macallair, 2000).

Rather than prompting outrage and demands that the system protect youth, laws allowing juveniles to be tried as adults have received unprecedented support. For example, in California, 62% of voters offered support for Proposition 21, the Juvenile Crime Initiative, in 2000 ("Proposition 21 Approved," 2000). Proposition 21 provided prosecutors, rather than juvenile court judges, the power to move cases into the adult court; it additionally required adult trials for all juveniles older than 14 facing murder or specified sex offenses. Proposition 21 enabled the state to send juveniles to prison for parole violations under its call to thwart juvenile offenders who could not be rehabilitated, and such efforts to "crack down on juvenile crime" has resulted in widespread efforts to treat youth of color as adults within the criminal justice system. Pete Wilson, then governor and principle sponsor of the initiative, noted that "Proposition 21 will help win the war on youth crime, concentrating the Juvenile System's resources at rehabilitating nonviolent offenders but at the same time sending the clear message that there will be serious consequences for violent criminal acts" ("Proposition 21 Approved," 2000).

In reality, Proposition 21, like much of the "reform" in the criminal justice system, has not been part of a universal "war on youth crime" but one against youth of color. In fact, Proposition 21 exacerbated the already present inequity within the treatment of youth of color within the criminal justice system. One study of the juvenile justice system in California from 1996 to 1999 found that minority youth, particularly African American and Latino youth, consistently received more severe sentences than White youth; these same youth were more likely to be committed to state institutions than White youth for the same offenses. Compared to their populations and levels of arrest for every offense category, minority youth offenders are much more likely than White youth offenders to be sentenced to incarceration in California Youth Authority facilities. Although studies reveal proportionality in terms of youth committing violent offenses in California, Latino youth are 2.3 times as likely, African American youth 6.7 times as likely, and Asian or other youth 1.3 times as likely than their White peers to be arrested for a violent offense ("Proposition 21 Approved," 2000).

Across the nation, similar trends are evident. Black youth are six times more likely to be locked up than their White peers, even when charged with a similar crime and when neither has a prior record, concluded one civil rights report from the Youth Law Center and the National Council on Crime and Delinquency, a criminal justice think tank. Citing racial bias in every step of the juvenile justice process, the study concluded that efforts to charge youth as adults have a disproportionate effect on youth

of color. Youth of color are more likely than White youth who commit comparable crimes to be arrested, prosecuted, tried as adults, convicted, sentenced, and sent to adult prison. Of youth with no prior record arrested for violent crimes, including murder, rape, and robbery, 137 out of every 100,000 Blacks were incarcerated, compared with 15 out of every 100,000 Whites (Mauer & the Sentencing Project, 2001).

Neither the increasingly prevalent practice of incarcerating youth nor the support garnered for legislation to try youth as adults can be understood outside of contemporary racial politics, in which the efforts to criminalize social problems and institute policy through playing off fears of Black bodies have resulted in the acceptance of and support for locking up an entire generation of Black and brown youth. The efforts to try youth within the adult criminal justice system have been tantamount to a war against youth of color, replicating long-standing efforts to police youth of color under surveillance, control their movement, and otherwise discipline and punish.

At first glance, the support for and successful implementation of an age limit within the NBA and the simultaneous effort to treat certain youth (of color) within the criminal justice system as adults appear to be a source of societal contradiction. Is the desire to protect and deny early entry into the NBA draft for those younger than the age of 20, within a society that increasingly sees little relevance of age within its criminal justice system, an example of hypocrisy? A surfaced examination might lead to such a conclusion; the NBA's age restriction and efforts to increasingly try youth (of color) as adults within the criminal justice system are bound by simultaneous efforts to discipline deviant bodies, to control those who transgress societal boundaries, and to ultimately punish young bodies of color. King and Springwood (2005) rightly connect these practices in their discussion of the spectacles of college sports: "Disciplinary mechanisms such as these limits on celebration and nineteenth-century prohibitions of Native American dance are informed by a fear that these racial others have impulses that demand a civilizing force in order to rein them in" (p. 201). Foucault (1995) and King and Springwood would all understand the proposed age restriction within the NBA as part of larger body of "disciplinary power" and league sanctions that allow "the hegemonic forces within a society to manipulate the bodies of its citizens and to exact from them greater degrees of social control, so that imperial discipline might supersede punishment" (King and Springwood, 2005, p. 201). Whether attempting to understand the criminal justice system or the NBA, we must understand laws and rules as efforts to impose discipline prior to punishment.

Moreover, with efforts both to try youth (of color) as adults and push youth (of color) to college instead of the NBA, the White paternal body (the NBA commissioner and the state) seeks to enact policies that discipline and punish, not only thwarting deviant behavior but also working toward protecting (accommodating or placating the needs and fears of) White interests. Additionally, each racialized project works through dominant discourses that construct cultural deficiencies (dysfunctional values, culture of poverty, single parents) as the basis of deviant behavior,

whether in a lack of emphasis on education that leads Black youth to select the immediate gratification of NBA riches versus a college experience or a culture of poverty that fosters criminality and poor decision making (in McCann, 2004, p. 147). Writing about the ways American racial discourse imagines the relationship between sport and the Black family, CL Cole furthers our understanding of both the proposed age debate and the criminalization of youth of color:

In the absence of the modern family unit, sport is positioned as “the most powerful, and by far the most economical system for keeping human beings human.” Sport is narrated as indispensable to community production and well-being as the figure of the coach is made to represent the sanctioned nurturing father-child relationship depicted as unavailable in the African American community. The “breakdown of the black family” and its pathologization through the figures of the matriarch and the absent inseminating black male are historical mechanism for displacing the social, economic, and political forces that shape the lives of the urban poor. (Cole, 2001, p. 69)

The fact that a majority of NBA players, particularly those early entries, supposedly emanate from single-mother homes and from America’s poorest communities is a point emphasized by much of the public commentary but serves as explanation for the problem of early entries and the necessity of early entry. Whether because of financial needs, poor parenting, or a culture of immediate gratification, efforts to join the league are pathologized and linked to a culture of poverty, mandating intervention from the noble White parent, who knows what is ultimately good for young Black males.

Conclusion

In this racism, the Other’s identity warrants its very annihilation because it is seen as impure, evil, and inferior. Moreover, whiteness represents itself as a universal marker for being civilized and in doing so posits the other within the language of pathology fear, madness, and degeneration. (Giroux, 1994, p. 75)

In a recent interview in *Sports Illustrated*, Phil Jackson denounced the NBA for its increased emphasis on young talent, offering rhetoric about Blackness requiring White control:

It doesn’t matter whether they can play or not. We’ve ended up becoming a service for growth. Now it’s, “We’ll hire a chef, we’ll hire laundry, we’ll hire Mom, we’ll hire somebody to come and live with them so that they can perform at this level.” (Leonard, 2005)

David Stern’s successful institutionalization of an age limit for those younger than 19 does not just slow the youth movement within the NBA but also represents an answer to Phil Jackson and others’ calls for intervention, a movement to appease fans and its constructed image problem on the backs, bodies, and cornrows of young,

straight-out-of-high-school ballers. Whereas the sports world celebrates the youth movement in golf, soccer, and tennis with media pundits describing Freddy Adu and Michelle Wie as, among others, prodigies and geniuses (Kroft, 2005), the opposite seems to be the case in the world of basketball and America's criminal justice system.

Today's NBA and its surrounding media discourse often construct an authentic Blackness (through youth) as menacing and threatening, as a pollutant that requires surveillance and control, whether with increased rules or more prisons. More specifically, although dominant popular culture continues to imagine young Black inner-city youth as authentic embodiments of Blackness, the proposed rule change and corresponding backlash against the infusion of hip-hop within the league reflects desires to police "authentic Blackness." The efforts to push those young Black men who have jumped straight to the league reflects not only desires to regulate bodies in the league (and send symbolic message to fans) but a desire to push future players into conditions and spaces that will ultimately produce a commodifiable yet controllable installment of today's hip-hop baller.

Imani Perry (2005), in one of several new texts concerning hip-hop, argues that the backlash against hip-hop is nothing new nor unique but rather reflects the White supremacist practice (and logic) that renders Black bodies and cultural styles as menacing and dangerous:

The isolation of black bodies as the culprits for widespread multiracial social ills is not unique to rap. It has occurred in critiques of the welfare state, in the demonization of early release programs from prison, in the image of drug trafficking, and in the symbols of sexist aggression. (p. 27)

In recent years, the NBA and its surrounding coverage have merged the "athlete, the gangster rapper, and the criminal into a single black male persona that the sports industry, the music industry, and the advertising industry have made into the predominant image of black masculinity" (Hoberman, 1997, p. xviii). Likewise, the ways of mediating and controlling these dangerous bodies find similar logic within both the world of sports and the criminal justice system. The age restriction is the NBA's version of various juvenile crime initiatives, working to constrain and control those who have secured a piece of the American Dream through basketball; more importantly, it works from the same racist logic that identifies Black bodies as threats to White hegemony and pleasure, conceiving of rules, state power, and surveillance as proper and needed methods to save both the game and community. To protect the streets thus necessitates more police and prisons whereas protecting the NBA mandates increased rules and regulations of bodies, whether by minimizing trash talking; establishing regulations regarding shoe and sock color, headwear, and length of shorts; airbrushing away player tattoos; or in the end, restricting who can and cannot enter the league.

The racial implications are as undeniable here as is the policy's intent to control Black male bodies and aesthetics. Scoffing at those who denounced Jermaine

O'Neal for his comments about race and the proposed age limit, Scoop Jackson (2005) wrote,

Let's define stupid. Stupid is Barry Bonds still working out with Greg Anderson. Stupid is Mike Tyson still fighting for a title shot. Stupid is the Lakers not getting at least one All-Star in return for Shaq. An NBA superstar finding something racially motivated when the principals involved are specifically of one race? That's not stupid. That's conscious.

Can you imagine a media commentator or citizen of the 1960s denouncing a civil rights worker or even a Black laborer for questioning the racial implications of Jim Crow? Just as then, the motivations of profit and appeasing White customers play through the age debate, yet at its core is an agenda of controlling Black male bodies while maintaining profits from that same Black male body. "The black other occupies a complex site, a place where fears, desires, and repressed dreams are lodged," argues Norman Denzin (2001, p. 7). More than fears and repressed dreams, the Black body exists in the courtroom and on the court as "a site of spectacle, its blackness" existing as "a potential measure of evil, and menace," necessitating containment and control (Denzin, 2001, p. 7). Although the problems facing the NBA, just as the problems of drug abuse or welfare abuse, have little to do with high-school ballers entering the league, their ultimate denial of entry into the professional ranks follows long-standing White supremacist logic that "focuses, organizes, and translates blackness into commodifiable representations and desires that [can] be packaged and marketed across the landscape of American popular culture" or otherwise confines it outside the dominant racial order (Gray, 1995, pp. 68, 165). In other words, Black bodies will continue to be called into the NBA in the name of global capitalism just as those same bodies will be subjected to the rules and logic that emanate from White supremacy. Likewise, their brothers and sisters, in the name of global capitalism, will be subjected to the surveillance and walls that define criminal justice, also finding their legitimacy and ideological basis in the rules and logic that emanate from White supremacy.

References

- Adande, J. A. (2005, April 14). It remains an age-old question for the NBA. *Los Angeles Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.latimes.com>
- Andrews, D. L. (1996). The fact(s) of Michael Jordan's Blackness: An excavation in four parts. *Sociology of Sports Journal*, 13(2), 125-158.
- Andrews, D. L. (2001). The fact(s) of Michael Jordan's blackness: Excavating a floating racial signifier. In D. L. Andrews (Ed.), *Michael Jordan, Inc: Corporate sport, media culture, and late modern America*. (pp. 107-152). Albany, NY: State University of New York.
- Barth, P. (2005, June 12). NBA age limit a good idea. *Sheboygan Press*. Retrieved from http://www.wisinfo.com/sheboyganpress/print/print_21401883.shtml
- Bonilla-Silva, E. (2003). *Racism without racists: Color-blind racism and the persistence of racial inequality in America*. New York: Rowan and Littlefield.

- Boyd, T. (1997). *Am I Black enough for you: Popular culture from the 'hood and beyond*. Bloomington: University of Indiana Press.
- Boyd, T. (2003). *Young, Black, rich, and famous: The rise of the NBA, the hip hop invasion and the transformation of American culture*. New York: Doubleday.
- Boyd, T. (2004, November 26). Did race play a role in basketball? *Los Angeles Times*. Retrieved from www.latimes.com/news/opinion/commentary/la-oe-boyd26nov,0,192357.story?coll=la-news-comment-opinions
- Brown, D. (2000). Sports law history: The Spencer Haywood case. Retrieved from <http://www.sportslawnews.com/archive/history/SpencerHaywoodcase.htm>
- Burdekin, R. C. K., Hossfeld, R. T., & Smith, J. K. (2005). Are NBA fans becoming indifferent to race? Evidence from the 1990s. *Journal of Sports Economics*, 6(2), 144-159.
- Burwell, B. (2004, November 22). The NBA is hip-hopping its way out of the mainstream. *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. Available from <http://www.stltoday.com>
- Camunas, M. (2005, June 23). Not enough: NBA age limit too low. *Oracle*. Retrieved from <http://www.usforacle.com/vnews/display.v/ART/2005/06/23/42bab2b24cdc0>
- Celizic, M. (2004, November 23). NBA's problems are cultural, not racial: League must help players improve image to middle America. Retrieved from <http://msnbc.msn.com/id/6561246/>
- Cole, C. L. (2001). Nike's America/America's Michael Jordan. In D. L. Andrews (Ed.), *Michael Jordan Inc.: Corporate sport, media culture, and late modern America* (pp. 65-71). Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Cole, C. L., & Andrews, D. L. (1996). "Look—It's NBA show time!": Visions of race in popular imaginary. In N. Denzin (Ed.), *Cultural studies: A research volume* (Vol. 1, pp. 141-181). New York: Routledge.
- Collins, P. H. (2004). *Black sexual politics: African Americans, gender, and the new racism*. New York: Routledge.
- David Stern media conference*. (2004, April 12). Retrieved from <http://www.insidehoops.com/stern-interview-041104.shtml>
- Davis, A. (1998, Fall). Masked racism: Reflections on the prison industrial complex. *ColorLines*. Retrieved from http://www.arc.org/C_Lines/CLArchive/story1_2_01.html
- Davis, A. (2003). *Are prisons obsolete?* New York: Open Media Series.
- Davis, M. (1995). Hell factories in the field: A prison-industrial complex. *Nation*, 260(7). Retrieved from <http://www.rut.com/mdavis/hellfactories.html>
- Denzin, N. (2001). Representing Michael. In D. L. Andrews (Ed.), *Michael Jordan Inc.: Corporate sport, media culture, and late modern America* (pp. 3-14). Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Elmore, C. (2004, November 29). Men behaving badly: An image problem. *Palm Beach Post*. Retrieved from <http://www.palmbeachpost.com>
- Foucault, M. (1995). *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison*. New York: Vintage.
- Gibron, B. (2005, May 10). Age before ability: Why college, not a contract, should be the next stop for the student athlete. *PopMatters*. Retrieved from <http://www.popmatters.com/sports/features/050510-nba-1.shtml>
- Giroux, H. (1994). *Disturbing pleasures: Learning popular culture*. New York: Routledge.
- Gray, H. (1995). *Watching race: Television and the struggle for Blackness*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Gray, H. (2005). *Cultural moves: African Americans and the politics of representation*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Groothuis, P., Hill, J., & Perry, T. (2005). Early entry in the NBA draft: The influence of unraveling, human capital, and option value. Working paper, Department of Economics, Appalachian State University, Boone, NC. Available from <http://econ.appstate.edu/RePEc/pdf/wp0405.pdf>
- Gun-Free Schools Act, P.L. 103-382, Title X, Part F § 14601, 20 U.S.C. 18921 (1994).
- Harrison, C. K. (2001). From Paul Robeson to Althea Gibson to Michael Jordan. In D. L. Andrews (Ed.), *Michael Jordan Inc.: Corporate sport, media culture, and late modern America* (pp. vii-xii). Albany: State University of New York.

- Haywood v. National Basketball Association, 401 U.S. 1204 (1971).
- Hoberman, J. (1997). *Darwin's athletes: How sport has damaged Black America and preserved the myth of race*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Hughes, G. (2004). Managing Black guys: Representation, corporate culture, and the NBA. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 21, 163-184.
- Jackson, S. (2005, April 14). Why can't O'Neal ask questions? *ESPN.com*. Available from <http://sports.espn.go.com>
- Johnson, T., Boyden, J. E., & Pittz, W. (2001). *Racial profiling and punishment in U.S. public schools: How zero tolerance policies and high stakes testing subvert academic excellence racial equity*. Oakland, CA: Applied Research Center, Erase Initiative. Retrieved from <http://www.arc.org/erase/downloads/profiling.pdf>
- Kerr, S. (2005, April 14). Quality control. *Yahoo! Sports*. Retrieved from <http://sports.yahoo.com/nba/news?slug=sk-agemlimit041305&prov=yhoo&type=lgns>
- Keteyian, A. (2005, June 10). NBA age debate. *Costas now* [Television broadcast]. Los Angeles: HBO.
- Kindred, D. (2004, April 14). Punks and thugs are to blame here. *Sporting News*. Available from <http://foxsports.msn.com>
- King C. R., & Springwood, C. F. (2001). *Beyond the cheers: Race as spectacle in college sport*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- King C. R., & Springwood, C. F. (2005). Body and soul: Physicality, disciplinarity, and the overdetermination of Blackness. In D. Hunt (Ed.), *Channeling Blackness: Studies in television and race in America* (pp. 185-206). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Kroft, S. (2005, July 1). Prodigies: Bright lights in sports. Retrieved from <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2005/07/01/60minutes/printable705753.shtml>
- Lapchick, R. (2002). *Smashing barriers*. New York: Madison.
- Leonard, D. J. (2005, February 5). Why does a 14-year old matter? *PopMatters*. Retrieved from <http://www.popmatters.com/sports/features/040205-freddyadu.shtml>
- Limbaugh on NBA fight: "This is the hip-hop culture on parade." (2004, November 23). *Media Matters*. Retrieved from <http://mediamatters.org/items/200411230007>
- Males, M., & Macallair, D. (2000). *The color of justice: An analysis of juvenile adult court transfers in California*. San Francisco: Building Blocks for Youth. Retrieved from <http://www.buildingblocksforyouth.org/colorofjustice/coj.html>
- Mauer, M., & the Sentencing Project. (2001). *Race to incarcerate*. New York: New Press.
- McCann, M. (2004). *Illegal defense: The irrational economics of banning high school players from the NBA draft*. Retrieved May 15, 2005, from <http://www.nbadraft.net/illegaldefense/index.html>
- McNamara, J. (2005, April 12). Green only color that matters. *Daily Cardinal*. Retrieved from <http://www.dailycardinal.com/media/paper439/news/2005/04/13/Sports/Green.Only.Color.That.Matters-922170.shtml>
- Moore, G. (2005, April 14). NBA needs age limit to protect the quality of play. Retrieved from http://www.blackathletesportsnetwork.net/artman/publish/article_0608.shtml
- Miller, J. (1997). *Search and destroy: African-American males in the criminal justice system*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Neal, M. A. (2005). *New Black man*. New York: Routledge.
- No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, Pub. L. No. 107-110 (2002).
- Parenti, C. (2000). *Lockdown America: Police and prisons in the age of crisis*. New York: Verso.
- Perry, I. (2005). *Prophets of the hood: Politics and poetics in hip-hop*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Powell, S. (2004, November 25). Hip-hop hoops feeding negative stereotypes. *Newsday*, A95.
- Prevenas, N. (2005, April 14). O'Neal plays the race card. *SportsFanMagazine.com*. Retrieved from <http://www.sportsfanmagazine.com/sfm/articles.html?id=1451>
- Proposition 21 approved by voters. (2000, March 9). International Child and Youth Care Network. Retrieved from <http://www.cyc-net.org/today2000/today000309.html>

- Rosenbaum, D. (2003). *It doesn't pay to be young in the NBA*. Unpublished manuscript. Retrieved from <http://www.uncg.edu/bae/people/rosenbaum/youngnba1.pdf>
- Shapiro, M. (24, June 2005). Stern and Hunter find gray area on age limit. *CSTV.com*. Retrieved from <http://www.cstv.com/sports/m-baskbl/stories/062405aaa.html>
- Stoler, A. (1997). *Race and education of desire*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Taylor, P. (2004, November 22). Slippery slope: Pacers-Pistons fight latest shot in growing divide between players, fans. *Sports Illustrated*. Retrieved from http://sportsillustrated.cnn.com/2004/writers/phil_taylor/11/22/artest.fans/
- Tucker, L. (2003). Blackballed: Basketball and representations of the Black male athlete. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 47(3), 306-328.
- Watkins, S. C. (1998). *Representing: Hip hop culture and the production of Black cinema*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Whitlock, J. (2004, November 21). Fans like pro game, not the players. *The Kansas City Star*. Retrieved from http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_kmtkc/is_200411/ai_n8593949
- Whitlock, J. (2005, April 14). Stern's decision based on the biz. *ESPN.com*. Retrieved from <http://sports.espn.go.com/espn/page2/story?page=whitlock/050414>
- Wilbon, M. (2004, November 25). Hip-hop culture contributes to NBA's bad rap. *The Washington Post*, p. D01. Retrieved from http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A11188-2004Nov24.html?nav=rss_sports/columns/wilbonmichael
- Wilbon, M., & Kornheiser, T. (2005, April 15). *Pardon the interruption* [Television broadcast]. Washington, DC: ESPN.
- Wilstein, S. (2004, November 22). NBA brawl an ugly sign of violent times: More debacles likely to occur in future given society's nature. Retrieved from <http://msnbc.msn.com/id/6540172/>
- Zirin, D. (2005, April 18). Straight outta high school: Jermaine O'Neal, race, and the NBA age limit. *CounterPunch*. Retrieved from <http://www.politicalaffairs.net/article/view/964/1/88>

David J. Leonard is an assistant professor in the Department of Comparative Ethnic Studies at Washington State University. He has written on sports, video games, film, and social movements, appearing in both popular and academic mediums. His work has appeared in *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, *Cultural Studies: Critical Methodologies*, *Game and Culture*, *Simile*, and several anthologies. He is a regular contributor to *PopMatters* and *ColorLines*. His work explores the political economy of sporting cultures and globalized discourses of sport, examining the dialectical interplay of movements of sporting cultures, White supremacy, and state violence through contextual, textual, and subtextual analysis.