

GOING, GOING...BUT NOT YET GONE
COUNTER-STORYTELLING THE SOCIALIZATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN
COLLEGE BASEBALL PLAYERS

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Doctor of Philosophy

by

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The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School,
have examined the dissertation entitled

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presented by Kendall Lewis,
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DEDICATION

God, you have blessed me with a mission of service to others. I pray that you strengthen me to continue this work.

To my wife Suzanne: You are the best teammate. Your unconditional love and unending support have sustained our journey. Thank you for loving us and propelling us forward. I love you.

To Pop: Each talk with you is a walk with wisdom. It was a talk with you that provided the impetus for this work. The messages in your intentional words of wisdom are received. Thank you for your guidance, support, and love.

To Baseball: You are a great game. I fell for you decades ago. This work serves to communicate my passion for diamond sports and to grow the games in the educable space of sports for others.

To my children Xavier, Xarria, Kayden, and Synaya: Education is a lifelong journey. This work is for you. Our family is my reason for existing. I serve as an educator and coach to improve outcomes for your generation. I shared my passion for baseball and education with you all and I am so proud of the people you all have become. You four are my inspiration for each lesson I teach and each game I coach. I love you eternally.

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ABSTRACT

Higher education is key to accessing pathways toward upward mobility. Combining strong academic preparation and athletic skill provides opportunities for secondary students to access higher education as student-athletes. For African American males, the academic and athletic combination has produced a college sports landscape where they account for nearly half of the higher education student athletes in two of three major sports. These student athletes are utilizing academics and athletics to access higher education and opportunities for upward mobility through participation in football and basketball. Baseball is the third major sport in America and African American males represent less than 5 percent of college participants. Major League Baseball recognizes the lack of African American representation in baseball and has expressed a desire to reverse this worsening phenomenon. The dominant discourse states that economics and lack of interest are key factors in the low rate of African American participation in baseball. The economic and lack of interest perspectives do not include the opinions of African American college baseball players. This study utilizes Critical Race Theory and Narrative Inquiry (Critical Race Narrative Inquiry) to centralize the voices and experiences of African American males along their journey to access higher education through participation in baseball. These voices provide an informed counter-narrative to the disinterest perspective, define the impact of racism on their journey, and detail strategies for African American males to successfully access higher education through participation in baseball.

CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Background and Rationale of Proposed Study

The work I engage in as a secondary educator is influenced by my passions for education and sports. I am an African American man who has experienced the inspiration of mentors and the unwelcomeness of racism as major impacts on my journey from youth through higher education and beyond. The combination of these passions and experiences have provided the greatest influence on my chosen dissertation study. My decision to conduct a study that examines the African American college baseball player experience from youth through secondary school was formalized at a baseball game.

My father, Pop, and I attended a baseball game featuring college-bound participants on both teams. The home team took the field to start the game, and Pop excitedly commented on how many “Black players” there were on the field...six on one team, including the pitcher! As baseball fans, we were both well aware of the declining representation of African Americans in baseball at the Major League level (Comeaux & Harrison, 2004; Cooper et al., 2012; Gaither, 2013; Johnson, 2017; Kang, 2016; Lapchick, 2017; Lindbergh & Baumann, 2017; Rosenthal, 2017; Ryan, 2016; Spearman et al., 2017; Standen, 2014; Thomas, 2014; Witz, 2019; Woods, 2019; Yates, 2018). Pop commented that he was immediately reminded of watching my twin brother and I play more than 35 years prior. I then began to reflect on my experiences as a college student and baseball player. It was in that moment that I realized how my experiences and curiosities would provide the motivation for me to pursue my research idea (Mayer, 2008).

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I had already begun thinking about other topics for my doctoral program comprehensive exams and research in preparation for a meeting with my advisor, Dr. Ty-Ron Douglas. The mentorship of my then-advisor clarified my thinking and encouraged my passion for education and sports as an educative space. Dr. Douglas nurtured and challenged my passion to understand the experiences and journeys of African American college baseball players to provide insight for how other African American student-athletes can access higher education through baseball participation.

Narrative research provides an opportunity for African American college baseball players to explain their experiences accessing higher education through baseball participation. Clandinin and Connelly (2006) define narrative research as a literary form of qualitative research that reveals a detailed story. Narratives exist in the form of oral histories, collections of personal artifacts, stories, letters, autobiographical and biographical writings among a variety of many other narrative data sources (Clandinin & Connelly, 2006). Field notes, interviews, journals, letters, autobiographies, and orally told stories and counter-stories are all narrative inquiry methods (Manglitz et al., 2006).

Miller et al. (2020) describe a counter-story or counter-narrative as grounded in Critical Race Theory (CRT) and various approaches to discourse study, including narrative inquiry. The use of counter-narrative has emerged in education research as a tool to stimulate educational equity in diverse schools and communities (Miller et al., 2020). This study used counter-narrative to examine the role of race and racism in the experiences of African American college baseball players from their perspective. The study helps to inform changes to educational leadership practices and policies that influence the enrollment of these student athletes. For example, leadership in higher

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education institutions must hold teams accountable to creative recruiting in urban, suburban, and rural areas to intentionally build programs that reflect the whole American community while compensating for the structural racism that persists today (Carey, 2023). The recruiting practices utilized by the revenue-generating sports of football and men's basketball routinely identify academically and athletically qualified African American male student-athletes to play on those teams. Football and basketball recruiters and scouts go to urban areas to evaluate student-athletes which is a practice that does not occur in baseball (Spearman et al., 2017). This study reveals that African American males are preparing for participation in post-secondary baseball and require the opportunity of recruitment to matriculate onto college baseball teams. One recommendation based on the findings of this study is that higher education leadership should hire and promote more personnel, including African American baseball coaches, who are willing to recruit student-athletes from urban areas.

The following experience is a quick view from my personal narrative that helped sow the seeds of motivation for this research project long before I began graduate school. My first interaction with my College World Series coaches is cemented in my memory as a formative baseball experience. I wasn't a student at the urban Midwestern predominately white institution (PWI), but I did live nearby. I would work-out regularly and alone on the open baseball field to develop my skill in hopes of studying chemistry and playing at the university. I rarely saw more than a couple of people in the area of the ballpark as I used my bucket of balls, bat, batting tee, and glove to work on base running, hitting, and throwing. Hitting balls off a tee in an empty ballpark required me to go pick them up when I was done. I did my throwing practice in the bullpen so I wouldn't have

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to chase balls again. I chose the university field, because I lived within walking distance and my current junior college team did not offer much individual instruction and development during the summer. I had to work on my own to improve my skills in this off season.

During one of my final workouts as the summer was ending, I was approached by a short balding man who identified himself as one of the baseball coaches at the university. He politely interacted with me and asked me to continue working. He said, "Don't mind me, just keep doing your thing and I'll keep watching." I was beginning my throwing workout in the bullpen area of the ballpark as the coach stood behind the fence and watched the entire workout without saying another word. When I finished, he helped me pick up the scattered baseballs as we had a conversation. He complimented my athleticism, arm strength, and speed. He said they had been watching my workouts all summer and knew I was an infielder at one of the local junior colleges. I explained that I would be a student there and play on that field soon. He told me that would be up to the head coach because he was just the assistant. He laughingly said, "Tell you what...you can play here when a guy like you can throw hard enough to break through the net you are using as a backstop in the bullpen!" I wasn't amused. My immediate thought was, "why would I need to throw hard enough to break the net when I know that no one else does? And you just said I had a good arm. And what do you mean by a guy like me?" I was taken aback by this conversation and even though I verbalized nothing, my facial expression must have spoken volumes. The assistant coach quickly back-pedaled and said, "Look, I like you and want to see you play here; it's just not up to me is all." I was quickly re-encouraged by the assistant coach's desire to see me play there, then just as

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quickly deflated as the head coach walked into our conversation. He barked, “You can run and play the six (shortstop), but I don’t see you ever getting on my infield!” I was slightly thwarted by his rudeness and lack of manners and responded by introducing myself and my intentions to study chemistry and play baseball at the university. The leader of the baseball program responded with surprise, “Chemistry? So, you’re a smarty, brainsy kind of kid, huh? What’s a Black guy like you doing studying chemistry?” Once again with the “guy like me” reference. This conversation abruptly ended as both coaches turned to walk away while the assistant coach stated he would see me around.

Confusion filled my thoughts after this unplanned meeting with the university’s baseball coaches. I had looked forward to meeting the coaches and now I was left unimpressed and feeling unwelcomed. Some of the comments in the conversation could be considered quick inquiries to get to know a little about a potential student-athlete who has already expressed an interest in attending the university. To me, the repeated racial microaggression in the references to “a guy like” me was hurtful and confusing regardless of intent. The racist message they communicated was that even though I was a good player and good student, a Black guy like me couldn’t use baseball to access an opportunity at a chemistry degree there, because I couldn’t play there (Sue et al., 2007; Yosso et al., 2009).

Still, I did not know what to do about the way these experiences made me feel, so I continued to grind in the classroom and on the playing field. For the next school year, I performed well academically and athletically at the Junior College before accepting an academic scholarship to my nearby university. I also leaped at the opportunity to join the baseball team and continue my career as a student-athlete because I enjoyed playing the

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game. The assistant coach was very welcoming as my position coach and helped me improve as a player while advocating for me to get more time on the infield. The unwelcomed racial microaggressions continued from the head coach throughout the year. The two coaches once had a brief debate over which pitch to select for me to attempt a stolen base. The assistant coach suggested that I run early in counts. The head coach responded by saying through angrily clenched teeth, "If you bring in the only Black guy in the ballpark to run, then everybody is going to know that he is stealing a base so you can't run on the first pitch!" I expressed my frustration by saying, "Excuse me!" Coach acted as if he was now aware of the inappropriateness of using race in his argument when he looked away from me and the conversation while saying, "I'm sorry, but you know what I mean."

That team was very successful as strong positive relationships among players were developed along the way to the 1993 College World Series. There were instances of tutelage as both coaches shared baseball knowledge and instruction to help me develop competency as a player. However, the grave impact of race-based negative comments made it impossible for me to get comfortable in that environment. I decided to transfer to another school on the flight home after we were eliminated from the College World Series. I intentionally sought a school that recruited and welcomed me from junior college. I was able to utilize college baseball participation to access higher education and complete a chemistry degree.

This excerpt from my life experience represents a narrative of my personal reality. I believe my college baseball experience is not unique. Experiences like mine can shed light on the sharp decline that occurs for African American youth baseball players when

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they reach the secondary level and beyond (Kelly, 2019; Kleen, 2019). The experiences of African American males accessing higher education through participation in baseball must be told with their voices. The use of counter-narrative will empower these student-athletes to share their stories and provide examples of successful pathways for others on a similar journey (Lieblich et al., 1998; Yosso et al, 2009). The counter-narratives in this study will add the perspective of African American college baseball players to the discussion of the decline of these players.

Problem Statement

The dearth of African Americans participating in baseball overall is well researched and documented (Armour & Levitt, 2016; Comeaux & Harrison, 2004; Lapchick, 2017; Ryan, 2016; Standen, 2014; Thomas, 2014; Woods, 2019; Yates, 2018). These studies have focused on baseball participation at youth and professional levels with occasional mention of college baseball. For African Americans, the participation rate in college baseball is lower than the rates for youth and professional baseball players (Lapchick, 2020). Additionally, the participation rate for African American college baseball players is significantly lower than the rates of participation in college football and basketball (Lapchick, 2020). In the 2019-2020 college sports year, African American participation in college football was at 44.6% and college basketball at 53.2%, which was significantly higher than college baseball at 4.0% (Lapchick, 2020). Butts et al. (2008) call the low college baseball participation rate for African American players and fans more than coincidental and question the culpability of the social system of athletics. For example, youth football and basketball have greater financial accessibility

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than baseball (Butts et al., 2008). The authors also found that football and basketball appeared to be more culturally acceptable than baseball (Butts et al., 2008).

Culturally, African Americans have emphasized education and athletics as avenues to upward social mobility (Cole & Omari, 2003). With only two percent of amateur athletes becoming professionals and achieving mobility, the myth of athletics as a pathway has not hindered the participation of African Americans in football and basketball (NCAA, 2018). However, the percentage of African Americans in college baseball has remained below seven percent for the last 30 years (Lapchick, 2020). In 2020, African American college baseball players totaled just four percent of all players at the Division I level (Lapchick, 2020).

African Americans represented 12.5 % of the United States population as of 2020 (Vespa et al., 2020). Again, accessing college through sports as an opportunity for upward mobility is a priority in the African American community (Cole & Omari, 2003) despite the fact that only two percent of National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) athletes become well paid professionals (NCAA.org, 2020). However, accessing higher education through sports is a viable pathway to opportunities for upward mobility (Beamon, 2010). African Americans desirous of participating in baseball at youth levels are faced with obstacles of access and affordability that limit opportunities to play the game and develop skills that translate to the college level (Comeaux & Harrison, 2004). Still, more than 1,500 African Americans are accessing U.S. higher education through college baseball (Lapchick, 2019). But how are these young men doing this? Understanding how these student athletes are accessing and participating in college baseball is the focus of this study. The reality that there are African American college

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baseball players suggests that it is possible for these baseball players to successfully navigate the pathways and obstacles to access higher education through participation in collegiate baseball. Understanding their stories and educational pathways to get into college as baseball players is necessary to increase African American participation in the sport. The voices of African American college baseball players are absent from the discussion of their poor representation in college baseball and Major League Baseball. This study narrows the gap in the limited research on African American college baseball players.

Research Questions

To better understand how African American college baseball players navigate the pathways of K – 12 education and baseball to access higher education through baseball participation requires their voice. The lived experiences, as told in the words of these student athletes, is an essential part of the conversation. The following research questions help to increase understanding of African American college baseball players' experiences from K – 16:

1. How do African American males who participate in college baseball navigate their journeys from boyhood to the collegiate baseball field?
2. How do African American college baseball players perceive race and racism in their baseball journey?

The purpose of this study is to examine the journeys of African American college baseball players and their perceptions of race and racism as they access higher education. According to Singer (2005), critical race theory (CRT) is an appropriate framework for conducting race-based emancipatory research in sport management, because CRT values

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the experiences of people of color. Foundational to CRT is its recognition of the pervasiveness of racism and the corresponding impact on the lives of African Americans. As such, this study will be guided by a CRT framework (Crenshaw et al., 1995) using counter-narrative (Lieblich et al., 1998; Miller et al., 2020; Yosso et al, 2009) to examine the educational pathways of African American college baseball players.

Theoretical Framework

Critical Race Theory. Critical race theory (CRT) is appropriate for this study because it helps define the role of race and racism in the educational experiences of African American college baseball players. CRT acknowledges the presence and persistence of racism and discrimination in American culture. According to Glover (2007), critical race theorists recognize that race and racism characterize the lived experiences of people of color in America and ought to be the starting point for race-related inquiry. CRT is a lens that allows a discourse about race and racism for the analysis of African American experiences. Race-based epistemological approaches are important analytical lenses because they offer the opportunity to challenge the dominant ideology and provide a voice for the experiences of African Americans (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). These voices are representative of individuals that have been historically silenced in education research and now have a counter-story to the dominant narrative of economic inaccessibility and cultural disinterest (Harper, 2008).

McDowell and Jeris (2004) indicate that the number of tenets defining CRT can vary depending on how the theory is utilized in research (Daftary, 2018; Hiraldo, 2010). A CRT framework in higher education and social work research can comprise up to eight basic tenets including the permanence of racism, experiential knowledge, counter-

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storytelling, intersectionality, interest convergence, whiteness as property, the critique of liberalism, and a commitment to social justice (Daftary, 2018). CRT and the tenets associated with education research are thoroughly discussed in chapter two. However, this study utilizes three CRT tenets that are most relevant to understanding the educational pathways of African American college baseball players.

The first relevant CRT tenet is the permanence of racism in American culture (Bell, 1992) including education and sports. Singer (2016) used CRT to examine African American male college athletes' narratives on education and racism to gain insight into their secondary schooling background, what education means to them, and how racism impacts their holistic development. The study revealed that each of Singer's participants came from urban high schools in close proximity to the university, viewed education as more than classroom learning and obtaining a degree, and perceived racism as alive and well in college sports. The second relevant CRT tenet recognizes the importance of the experiential knowledge of people of color while the third relevant CRT tenet or counter-stories provides African American college baseball players a voice in the conversation about their absence from the sport (Crenshaw et al., 1995). Including the narratives and perspectives of African American college baseball players can offer a counter-story to the dominant discourse that characterizes these student athletes as uninterested in baseball as a vehicle to access higher education. This study used the CRT tenets of permanence of racism, experiential knowledge, and counter-storytelling to examine how race and racism in education and sports impact the experiences of African American males and may offer new analysis into the under-representation of African American males in baseball at all levels.

Research Design and Methodology

Narrative Inquiry. This study seeks to understand the experiences and educational pathways of African American college baseball players using a qualitative research approach. Creswell (2013) defined qualitative research as a constantly unfolding model occurring in nature that allows a researcher to accurately describe phenomena based on actual experiences. Investigating the educational experiences of African American college baseball players from the participant or players' perspective is an example of a qualitative research study.

Narrative inquiry is a way of understanding and inquiring into experience through collaboration between researcher and participants (Clandinin & Huber, 2009). Morrow (2007) contends that qualitative methods like narrative inquiry provide a more comprehensive understanding of human behavior. The data generated in narrative inquiry reflect personal, historical, and lived experiences (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Narrative inquiry allows the researcher to hear how individuals construct meaning from their belief systems as the process moves between the internal and external world of the storyteller (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006).

Counter-Storytelling. Solorzano and Yosso (2001) define the counter-story as a critical race methodology of telling the stories of people whose experiences are not often told. The stories of African American college baseball players have rarely been told in their own words. Counter-storytelling the experiences of African American college baseball players can help strengthen the cultural survival of baseball in African American communities. Personal stories or narratives, composite stories or narratives, and other people's stories or narratives are the three general forms of counter-storytelling practiced

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by critical race scholars to empower marginalized populations (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002).

Solorzano and Yosso (2002) tell us that narratives detailing personal counter-stories are often biographical reflections of the author. Composite narratives draw on various data sets to recount experiences of people of color. These counter-stories can be biographical or autobiographical because authors create composite characters and place them in situations to discuss various forms of subordination. A counter-narrative that tells another person's story usually offers biographical analysis of the experiences of a person of color in relation to American institutions and in a sociohistorical context (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). Studying the experiences and educational pathways of African American college baseball players meets the criteria for a narrative of other people's stories.

Critical Race Theory and Narrative Inquiry. African American college baseball players telling their stories allowed me access to understand the impact of marginalization, provide a way to challenge dominate ideas, and build unity through shared experiences (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Taylor et al., 2009). Access to the narratives of African American college baseball players were established through the combination of critical race theory and narrative inquiry to form critical race narrative inquiry. The philosophical position of narrative inquiry suggests that narratives are rich sources of social ideologies and power that help the researcher construct portraits of life experiences (Riessman, 2013), and CRT allows space for the marginalized to communicate their racialized experiences and name their own reality from a race perspective (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Yosso, 2006). Utilizing critical race narrative inquiry allowed me to

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examine the stories of African American college baseball players through a lens that mirrors their life experiences (narrative inquiry), while providing access to their realities from their culturally specific perspectives (CRT) (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Riessman, 2013; Yosso, 2006). Therefore, the purpose of this study is to detail the accounts of African American college baseball players navigating their experiences and their perceptions of racism within those experiences. This purpose was accomplished through narratives shared from the named racial realities of African American college baseball players.

Significance of the study

The study helps to inform the efforts to increase African American access to higher education through baseball participation with the perspective of African American college baseball players. Research by Spearman et al. (2017) indicated that college baseball coaches refused to go into African American neighborhoods to recruit and sought players that looked like them. This study can inform college athletic departments and institutional leadership of the potential impact of hiring more African American coaches and staff members on the recruiting of African American baseball student-athletes. The extant literature on the experiences of African American college athletes is void of the voice of Black college baseball players. Collectively, the participants in the study and other African American college baseball players are empowered through adding their voice to the conversation about their lack of representation at all levels of collegiate baseball. These important narratives help fill a gap in the research that defines a viable pathway to higher education access through baseball participation for African American male youth.

Definition of Key Terms

African American is an evolving term as the percentage of Black Americans without any connection to descendants of slavery in America continues to rise as the corresponding percentage of Black Americans who are descendants of slavery continues to decline (Adams, 2020; Berlin, 2010; Broadus, 2019). For this dissertation, African American refers to an individual who was born in the United States and has origin to the Black racial groups in Africa. I use African American or Black throughout the writing to refer to the same group.

Barnstorming entered baseball in the 1860s when the amateur Brooklyn Excelsior club played exhibition games around the state of New York (Adomites & Wisnia, 1995). In early baseball history, racist practices of white baseball team owners prevented African American players from making a living in baseball. Individual African American players were not allowed to play on white teams and the teams of the Negro Leagues were forced to barnstorm because they did not own ballparks in which to play a consistent schedule and make a living (Wiggins, 2010). Barnstorming allowed players to earn money while bringing baseball to towns and venues that were not on the professional circuit (Tye, 2016). African American baseball teams began barnstorming to make a living in baseball in the 1880s and continued until the 1960s (Tye, 2016). In my dissertation, I use barnstorming to define this aspect of baseball survival for African Americans.

Racism in America is institutionalized, structural, and systemic. This form of subordination is depicted as policies and practices that exclude non-dominant groups (Ostertag & Armaline, 2011). I use the terms racism and racist to characterize these acts.

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According to Cineas (2020) and Hauser (2020), the definition of racism is also evolving in the Merriam-Webster dictionary to include the concept of systemic racism. The new definition combines prejudice based on skin color with the social and institutional power to subjugate in defining the breadth of racism as a system of advantage based on skin color (Cineas, 2020; Hauser, 2020).

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have introduced my dissertation by outlining the lack of African American participation in baseball, a theoretical framework for studying this phenomenon, and several key terms for productive investigation and discussion of the distinct challenges that African American college baseball players face in the pursuit of higher education. It is my intention to use this study to highlight the significant context that frames the educational journeys and experiences of African American baseball players. In chapter two, I discuss the experiences of African Americans throughout the history of baseball in America including racism, education from K – 16, a current demography of African American college baseball players, and critical race theory as sources of relevant literature to this research project. In chapter three, I discuss the methodology and research design including limitations, data collection, and data analysis. The findings of this research study are presented in chapter four, followed by a discussion of the implications from this research in chapter five.

CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW

Racial equality through access to education was the promise of the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision of 1954 and the passage of the Civil Rights Acts of the 1960s (Cooper & Cooper, 2015). In the years that followed, impoverished African Americans emphasized the importance of education (Cole & Omari, 2003) and athletics (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2005) as pathways out of economically immobile neighborhoods of the United States and toward equality (Chetty, 2015). This upward mobility required and still requires access to resources and support that are already present in areas of higher economic status to fulfill the desire to get out of poverty through education and athletics (Leonhardt, 2013).

The legislation of the 1950s and 1960s, combined with a focus on education and athletics for upward mobility, produced an increase in African Americans attending college (Karen, 1991), while the professional athletic ranks for the three major sports of football, basketball, and baseball all saw increases in African American participation during the 1970s and 1980s (Armour & Levitt, 2016; Papanek, 1979; Schneider & Eitzen, 1986). Lapchick (2017) explains that idealizing athletic success as access to education has produced a National Football League (NFL), National Basketball Association (NBA), and National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) where African Americans are the majority of participants in football and men's basketball. African American representation has not been as extensive in Major League Baseball (MLB) or NCAA baseball. Armour and Levitt (2016) report an MLB participation peak for African Americans of 18.7 % in 1981 as a result of subtracting Afro-Latino data from previously

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reported participation rates. That number has since declined steadily to less than 10 % for 2020 (Lapchick, 2020).

The lack of African American participation in baseball is an issue of great concern to the MLB as numerous studies have sought to understand this worsening phenomenon (Butts et al., 2008; Comeaux & Harrison, 2004; Ogden & Hilt, 2003; Spearman et al., 2017). Research in this area has focused on why African American male athletes are not playing baseball at various levels, including the Major Leagues (Chang, 2017; Comeaux & Harrison, 2004; Kang, 2016; Lapchick, 2017; Lindbergh & Baumann, 2017; Ryan, 2016). The results of this research indicate accessibility and socioeconomic factors specific to baseball as the major causes of the reduced participation at all levels of baseball in the last 30 years (Rosenthal, 2017). The participation of African Americans in football and basketball has remained high despite research debunking the myth of upward mobility through sports (Cole & Omari, 2003).

Notably absent from the limited research on African American participation in college baseball is the role of racism. Glover (2007) asserts that critical race theorists recognize that race and racism characterize the lived experiences of people of color in America and ought to be the starting point for race-related inquiry. Research by Edwards (1984) emphasized how social systems like racism and other macro-level factors like economics or culture have adversely impacted the educational experiences of African American athletes in school sports for decades and spawned subsequent research on the educational challenges of these athletes at predominately white institutions (Beamon & Bell, 2006; Singer, 2015; Cooper, 2016).

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In this literature review, I cover four areas of literature that help lay a foundation for my study. First, I discuss the history of baseball and some of the first African American baseball players. This literature details the presence, impact, and challenges of racism for these early African American baseball players while highlighting the lack of narrative voice for these players' experiences. Second, I discuss racism in baseball. This literature details racism as an intentional and persistent impediment to African American participation in baseball. Third, I discuss K – 16 experiences in baseball for African American players. This literature details the practices and policies that discourage and prevent African American participation in baseball. Fourth and last, I discuss the relevance of Critical Race Theory (Bell, 1992). This literature details the permanence of racism, experiential knowledge, and counter-storytelling as relevant aspects of CRT (Bell, 1992, Yosso & Solorzano, 2005). Next, I describe the origins of baseball before detailing how racism has been a part of the game since its inception.

Baseball: A New Game Begins

Thorn (2018) explains that baseball in America originated in the 1840s from a combination of the British games cricket and rounders. Alexander Cartwright is credited as the father of modern baseball. In 1845, Cartwright facilitated the creation of a list of rules that included a diamond-shaped field, foul lines, three strikes for a batter to be out, and that runners must be tagged or thrown out. The first official American baseball game played under modern rules was between Cartwright's Knickerbockers and the New York Baseball Club on June 19th, 1846 in Hoboken, New Jersey (Burns, 1994). The New York Baseball Club won the initial contest 23 – 1 and the modern game subsequently began to grow in New York. In the short time period of just 10 years the New York

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Mercury newspaper prematurely coined the modern game as America's national pastime even though the popular activity was primarily a New York game played by immigrants (Thorn, 2018). One year later, 25 amateur teams from the northeast United States formed the National Association of Base Ball Players. Baseball grew significantly beyond regional northeast popularity after the Civil War (Thorn, 2018).

The contagious enthusiasm for baseball also infected collegiate life just seven years after intercollegiate athletics began with the first crew regatta or boat contest between Harvard and Yale in 1852 (Thelin & Edwards, 2001). Wilco (2019) describes the first intercollegiate baseball game between Amherst College and Williams College in Pittsfield, Massachusetts as wildly different from the modern game. The two schools met on July 1, 1859 and played according to Massachusetts rules instead of the Knickerbocker rules, which are considered the basis for the modern game. The field was a square with no foul territory. The bases were four feet long wooden stakes that were 60 feet apart from each other. There were no balls in pitching and the batter was called a striker. Dangerously, Massachusetts rules allowed the defense to get a runner out by throwing the ball at him and hitting him. Runs scored were referred to as tallies. The schools agreed to end the game when a team reached 65 tallies. Amherst defeated Williams 73 – 32 because it was able to score 8 runs more than the agreed upon tally total before the final out was recorded in the 26th inning. The game lasted three and one-half hours which is similar to today's slow pace of play (Wilco, 2019).

The November 3, 1859 college baseball game between St. John's College Fordham Rose Hill Baseball Club and St. Francis Xavier College is regarded as the first true college venture into the sport because the game was played with the Knickerbocker

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rules (Wilco, 2019). The game featured a field with foul territory, nine players in the lineup for each team, three outs per half inning, and no throwing at a runner to get him out. St. John's College Fordham Rose Hill Baseball Club became Fordham University. The Rams of Fordham won that 1859 contest 33-11 and are currently the winningest program in college baseball history (Wilco, 2019).

The First African American College Baseball Players

Because baseball was the first sport that originated in the United States, the America's national pastime moniker has persisted (Burns, 1994). After the Civil War in the South, African Americans also participated in the burgeoning new sport for recreation (Thorn, 2018). The Oberlin Penfields from Ohio featured the first African American baseball player at first base in 1865 in a disorganized game that did not resemble modern baseball (Thorn, 2018). The starting nine for the 1867 Oberlin Penfields featured 16 year-old African American, Simpson Younger, playing left field (Thorn, 2018).

Thorn (2018) explains that Simpson Younger was born a slave in Missouri in 1850. He moved to Oberlin in 1855 after his father, who was white slave owner Charles Younger, had freed Simpson, his sister Catherine, and his mother Elizabeth. Unfortunately, Simpson and Catherine were separated from their mother until age 21. The children were educated in Oberlin until they were ready for college. Before enrolling in college and becoming one the first African American college baseball players, Simpson enlisted in the 27th United States Colored Troops at age 13 to become one of the youngest members of the Union Army. An American hero, Simpson's name is displayed on Plaque B-43 at the African American Civil War Memorial in Washington, DC (Thorn, 2018).

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According to Thorn (2018), Younger attended Oberlin College from 1866 through 1870 and pitched for the Resolutes, which was the new collegiate nickname of the previously amateur Penfields. The Resolutes were not sanctioned by the college and their games were essentially exhibitions. Simpson Younger graduated from Oberlin College and continued to pitch for several all-Black baseball teams throughout the 1870s, because racism and Jim Crow laws prevented African American baseball players from playing on teams with white players. Jim Crow laws existed for nearly 100 years from the end of the Civil War until the Civil Rights legislation of 1968 (Edwards & Thompson, 2010). These laws marginalized African Americans by denying them the right to vote, employment, education and other opportunities (Edwards & Thompson, 2010). Eventually, Simpson Younger returned to Missouri where he lived until his death three days before his 93rd birthday in May 1943. Younger was followed at Oberlin College by Moses “Fleetwood” Walker and his brother Weldy Walker. In 1881, the Walker brothers played on the first collegiate baseball team at Oberlin College after a self-imposed ban on off-campus competition was lifted, which established the Walkers as the first African American college baseball players. Fleetwood played well as a homerun hitting catcher and was recruited to the University of Michigan in 1882 where he was later joined again by his brother, Weldy. During the summer months between Oberlin and Michigan, Fleetwood played semi-professional baseball for the White Sewing Machine Company of Cleveland. This experience brought Fleetwood Walker face-to-face with blatant racism in baseball. His first semi-professional game outside of Ohio was in Louisville, Kentucky in the summer of 1881 (Thorn, 2018).

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Thorn (2018) explains that players for the Louisville Eclipse Club objected to the visiting White Sewing Machine Company playing Walker because he was African American. The manager of the Cleveland team decided not to play Walker so the game could start. When the replacement for Walker was injured and could no longer play, Walker was asked by his manager to go into the game so play could continue. Initially, he declined because of the racist treatment he had already suffered. He eventually decided to go in so the game could resume, but it did not. Two Eclipse players left the field of play as other Eclipse players openly objected to Walker playing. White relented to these objections and Walker did not go into the game. The Eclipse then resumed play. The Louisville newspaper reported that the Cleveland team acted foolishly by playing the game without Walker. The paper concluded that Cleveland should have declined to play unless Walker was admitted to the game and Louisville should have been sued for gate money and damages because it was already understood that Walker was the catcher, and no rules provided for the rejection of players on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude (Thorn, 2018). Racism in baseball is as old as the game itself.

In 1883, Fleetwood Walker made history as the first African American big-league player when he helped the Toledo Blue Stockings win the Northwestern League championship in spite of facing continued blatant racism (Thorn, 2018). On August 10, 1883 blatant racism was on full display as the Toledo Blue Stockings faced the Chicago White Stockings and their future Major League Baseball Hall of Fame player Cap Anson who initially refused to play the game because Moses Fleetwood Walker was African American (Golenbock, 1997; Thorn, 2018). This time Walker's manager supported him with a change in practice. The manager had previously planned to give Walker the day

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off but decided to start him in right field and dare Cap Anson and the White Stockings to forfeit the gate receipts if they refused to play (Pietrusza et al., 2000; Rosenberg, 2006). Cap Anson played but complained that he would never bring his team to Toledo again. However, in 1884 Chicago again played an exhibition game at Toledo. Fleet sat out this game for what was reported as a sore hand. There was speculation that Walker sat out the game to placate Chicago and Cap Anson because of a letter written by Chicago Treasurer-Secretary John A. Brown three months prior to the game. In the letter, Brown wrote Toledo manager Charlie Morton to request assurance that Walker would not play in the July 25th contest (Rosenberg, 2006).

The 1884 season did offer some excitement as the Blue Stockings had moved to the American Association where Weldy Walker joined his brother as an African American big-league baseball player for part of the season. Their reunion on the field was short lived as Weldy lasted only four games. Fleetwood suffered a broken shoulder and was released during the 1884 season. On July 14, 1887 the Chicago White Stockings played an exhibition game against the Newark Little Giants. African American George Stovey was listed in the Newark News as the scheduled Newark starting pitcher. Cap Anson objected, and Stovey did not pitch. Moreover, International League owners had voted six to four at a meeting in Buffalo, New York on the morning of the game to exclude African American players from future contracts (Rosenberg, 2006). Despite playing integrated baseball through 1889, the college educated Fleetwood Walker's 1884 season saw the last African American player in the major leagues until Jackie Robinson 63 years later (Thorn, 2018).

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In sum, I use the beginning of this literature review to detail the inception of baseball and the experiences of the first African American college baseball players. I outlined the role of racism in the early history of baseball for college educated African American baseball players at the professional level. Next, I will discuss baseball in educational settings and define the relevance of CRT in studying the current impact of racism on the experiences of these post-secondary student-athletes.

Baseball and Higher Education in America

According to Thelin and Edwards (2001), the access promised in *Brown* (1954) and the Civil Rights Acts of the 1960s, along with shifting cultural values, produced changes in higher education sports policies. College access through athletic grants-in-aid were expanded beyond the revenue generating sports of football and men's basketball. Title IX of the Equal Opportunity in Education Act of 1972 limited football scholarships to 105 for the 1973 season. This legislation provided resources for women's sports as additional sports like track, soccer, lacrosse, hockey, wrestling, swimming, and baseball were providing students access to higher education through athletic scholarships. These changes in policy and practice systemically increased the racial and gender diversity of college athletics in the 1970s. Subsequent football scholarship reductions by NCAA schools in 1978 to 95 scholarships and in 1992 to the present day 85 scholarships continued the expanded opportunities for access to higher education to student-athletes in other sports (Rippetoe, 2013; Thelin & Edwards, 2001).

The professional ranks of the three major American sports of football, men's basketball, and baseball all saw increases in African American male participation in the 1970s as well. All three of these sports rely on colleges to produce players for each

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respective league. While the NFL at 68% and NBA at 74% have maintained high levels of participation from African American males, Major League Baseball (MLB) has seen a significant decline from a peak of 18.7% in 1981 to less than eight percent in 2020 (Lapchick, 2020). MLB has instituted a variety of programs like Reviving Baseball in Inner Cities and the Dream Series to increase African American participation and develop professional talent (Yates, 2018). These limited programs have produced some players with the high-level skill and preparation necessary for college and professional baseball. All of these programs target youth and high school aged players. Many of these high school players are selected in the MLB draft which does not increase college baseball participation for African Americans (Yates, 2018).

Unlike the NFL and NBA, MLB can draft players directly from high school into the minor leagues of baseball's professional ranks. The financial structure of college baseball forces high school draftees to choose between a professional signing bonus or student loan debt because baseball scholarships are a minimum of just 25% of tuition while rarely approaching 100% of tuition as in football and basketball (Chatelin, 2019). Historically, high school athletes only comprise about 25% of the players drafted into MLB while two out of every three MLB draft picks are selected from college baseball (Cooper, 2018). The desire of MLB executives to increase African American representation will require increasing college baseball participation from this subgroup. African American participation in NCAA Division I baseball averaged five percent from 1997-2007 and a paltry three percent from 2008-2018 (Lapchick, 2019). Understanding the pathways to higher education for African American baseball players provides insight to ways of increasing the participation of these athletes at the college level.

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According to the NCAA (2018), its Division I baseball teams are only allotted 11.7 scholarships for all players on a 35-man roster. Only 27 of the 35 roster spots are eligible for scholarship assistance. Each player on scholarship must receive at least 25% of tuition. The NCAA allows Division I football programs a maximum of 85 full scholarships. Basketball programs can offer up to 13 scholarships for men and 15 for women (NCAA.org, 2018). Baseball was allowed unlimited scholarships until 1974 when the NCAA, attempting to reduce costs and achieve parity, established a maximum of 19 (Klein, 1990). In 1976, the NCAA reduced the maximum number of baseball scholarships to 13 (Klein, 1990), then finally to the present number of 11.7 in 1991 to further cut costs (Keating, 2012). The limited number of scholarships and the extraordinarily high cost of attendance for most colleges present a major obstacle for players who do have the talent and ability to play college baseball but may not have the finances to do so (Chatelain, 2016). Many African American male student-athletes choose college football or basketball because those sports offer full scholarships (Klein, 1990; Keating, 2012). The lack of scholarships, economics, MLB signing bonuses for draftees, and lack of preparedness from inner city baseball programs were all reasons listed by college coaches to explain the poor representation of Black males in college baseball in the early 1990s (Klein, 1990; Cook, 2013). The exact same reasons are offered for the low representation of African American college baseball players today (Cook, 2013).

The transition to travel and club baseball caused an explosion in the financial cost of participation for youth players. K – 12 baseball is where players develop the skill to participate at the major college level (Friedman, 2013). However, African American

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players also suffer from poor recruiting efforts in urban areas as scouts do not patronize these players (Klein, 1990; Spearman et al., 2017). Klein (1990) explains that several college baseball coaches denied racism as a factor in the poor recruiting and poor representation of African American college baseball players. However, the same recruiting practices that are based in racism today were used more than 30 years ago (Klein, 1990; Spearman et al., 2017). Scouts and recruiters refusing to go into urban areas to see African American players and only recruiting the super talented “program” Black player is racist and contributes to the low rate of participation for African Americans in college baseball (Klein, 1990; Spearman et al., 2017). While there is limited scholarship on racism in college baseball, the racist history of baseball in America is well documented (Spearman et al., 2017). In the next section, I focus on professional baseball to establish a clear picture of racism in baseball.

Racism in Baseball

African Americans were included in the growing populace of baseball fans and players as the game exploded in popularity in the 1860s (Ruck, 2011). Recreationally, the post-Civil War era of baseball featured a landscape that included African American players and teams. A group of African Americans formed their own team and attempted to be part of the first amateur baseball league (Ruck, 2011). The Philadelphia Pythians were denied admission to the amateur league as rules preventing African American teams from joining the league were written after this failed attempt (Ruck, 2011).

The racist experiences with early baseball did not deter African Americans from the growing sport. Baseball was the most popular sport in America, which included the African American community from the late 1800s through the early 1900s (Ruck, 2011).

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Baseball as a leisure activity provided an escape from the difficulties of a life filled with discrimination in the early 20th century (Ruck, 2011). Baseball was firmly cemented as part of American culture around the beginning of the 20th century. African Americans participated in the game as players and fans but were segregated because racism still won out over the courage required to integrate (Burns, 1994). The few teams that were integrated with African American players were regularly threatened with violence if these players participated in the scheduled contest under the practice of the Gentlemen's Agreement (Burns, 1994; Peterson, 1970). This unwritten and racist rule of practice from 1888 stipulated that team owners would not sign any African American players (Anderson, 2010; Burns, 1994). Blatant on field racism from influential players like the aforementioned-Cap Anson and from the racists crowds in the South combined with the Gentlemen's Agreement to prohibit African American participation all highlighted the need for an alternative for early African American baseball players.

The work of King Solomon (Sol) White presented an African American baseball player's perspective on the early history of Black baseball in America (Hurd, 2011). The need for an alternative was fulfilled through the formation of Black baseball teams and leagues in the late 19th century and early 20th century (Hurd, 2011; Thorn, 2012). According to Hurd (2011) and Thorn (2012), Sol White was a highly skilled and successful infielder and historian of early baseball. Born in 1868 in Ohio, Sol began his baseball career with barnstorming in 1883 before his talent and productivity landed him a roster spot with the integrated Wheeling Green Stockings of the Ohio State League in 1886. In 1887 most white players opposed integration by refusing to play with African Americans. After five successful years of integrated organized baseball, Sol would make

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his most prominent mark in African American baseball. Regarded as a founding father of Black baseball, Sol was dubbed the Renaissance Man. Sol and Philadelphia writer Walter Schlichter founded the Philadelphia Giants in 1902. Statistically, the Giants were one of the most successful baseball teams in history as it won 507 of 608 games from 1902 through 1906. The powerful squad from Philadelphia played in the first two World Series style championships for African American baseball in 1903 and 1904. Sol completed an excellent career as a player on integrated teams and informal early Negro league teams. Early African American baseball players like Sol White helped create great pride and a strong positive identity with baseball in the African American community despite their continued exclusion from Major League Baseball organizations (Ogden & Hilt, 2003).

Holway (2001) considers the Renaissance Man's efforts to accurately record the baseball history of African American players as more significant than his play on the field. Sol White's career as a baseball historian tells the story of the first African American baseball players in their words. His 1907 book, *The History of Colored Baseball*, accurately documented the past while advocating for the future of African American baseball players. Sol White is regarded as the most influential figure in the first decades of African American baseball (Holway, 2001). He was elected to the National Baseball Hall of Fame in 2006 for his contributions as a player, coach, and historian (Hurd, 2011).

Racism prevented African Americans from playing in the Major Leagues, so they formed their own leagues and teams. From 1880 through 1955 the Negro Leagues featured opportunities for African American professional players on teams with African

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American owners (Mathewson, 1998; Peterson, 1970). Most African American professional players played in less lucrative exhibition games while barnstorming from town to town (NLBPA, 2012; Burns, 1994). This practice created scenarios with recreational events featuring some of the best baseball players in the history of the sport. Formal professional opportunities for African American baseball players were available from 1920 through 1931 with the Negro National League (NNL) (Burns, 1994). Rube Foster created the NNL with teams in Northern and Midwest cities (Burns, 1994; Wiggins, 2010). Additional opportunities for African Americans to play professional baseball arose in 1923 when Edward Bolden formed the Eastern Colored League (ECL). One year later, the first Negro League World Series was played between the champions of the NNL and ECL in 1924 (Bolton, 2007). The Negro League World Series ended competition in 1927 due to poor funding (Bolton, 2007).

Wiggins (2010) explains that financial instability plagued both Negro leagues in the Great Depression era economy. In 1928, the ECL folded then reopened a year later as the American Negro League (ANL) with the NNL folding just two years later (Peterson, 1970; Burns, 1994). Baseball was so engrained in African American culture that other leagues featuring African American players continued to open. The East-West League (EWL) and the Negro Southern Leagues (NSL) were formed with great excitement and enthusiasm in 1932 (Wiggins, 2010). Unfortunately, the new leagues were dissolved during the 1932 season due to continued financial insolvency. The EWL and NSL teams did not own ballparks and could not afford the high costs of renting Major League stadiums (Wiggins, 2010). The new Negro National League (NNL) was the only professional baseball opportunity for African American players from 1933 through 1937

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(Peterson, 1970). The new Negro American League (NAL) was formed later in 1937 (Peterson, 1970). The champions from the new NNL and new NAL met in the Negro World Series throughout the 1940s. In 1949, the NNL and NAL merged and played as one league in the early post-integration era until 1960 (Bolton, 2007).

The Negro Leagues successfully provided professional opportunities for African American baseball players. Again, the Negro Leagues were not able to survive financially because the league and its owners did not own any baseball stadiums which resulted in prohibitive fees to rent stadiums from MLB teams (Burns, 1994; Peterson, 1970; Ruck, 2011). The discriminatory practices and racist encounters that defined the experiences of African American players and coaches also defined the end of the Negro Leagues after integration resulted in a talent vacuum of players to MLB (Burns, 1994; Peterson, 1970; Wiggins, 2010). The quality of the Negro leagues slowly deteriorated, and 1951 is considered the last major Negro League season even though the Indianapolis Clowns continued to barnstorm into the 1980s (Wiggins, 2010). According to Ogden (2004), the end of the Negro Leagues represented the beginning of a rift between the African American community and baseball because the racist and unwelcome environments of MLB now made African American players and baseball less accessible to the African American community.

The percentage of African Americans on the rosters of major league baseball teams is at a 30 year low, while the percentage of White players in the major leagues has remained relatively stable (Lapchick, 2020). More than a half century has elapsed since the first African American joined the ranks of a major league baseball team. At that time baseball occupied an important niche in the culture of African Americans (Peterson,

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1970). But over the decades baseball has lost its cultural value among African Americans.

The number of African Americans who play and watch the game is on a decades-long decline, and that decline is gaining momentum. African Americans comprised 10% of the players on the 40-man rosters of Major League Baseball teams in 2002, compared with 18% in 1991. White individuals comprised approximately 60% of players on the 2002 rosters and Hispanic individuals 28%, an all-time high (Lapchick, 2017). The percentage of African Americans at the major league level could drop further based on the number of Black individuals playing in the college and youth ranks. The percentage of Division I college baseball players who are African American spiked at almost seven percent in 2002, after holding steady at three to four percent during the previous decade (Lapchick, 2017).

The persistence of racism continues to adversely impact the experiences of African Americans in professional baseball in the modern game. An example of the continued blatant racism occurred during the 2017 MLB season. On a cool May night in Boston, Andrew Johnson (2017) covered the game as the hometown Red Sox were defeated by the Baltimore Orioles who surged into first place with the win. Instead of the post-game press conference focusing on the move to first place, racism dominated the presser. The Orioles superstar center fielder, Adam Jones, reported that a fan had thrown peanuts at him while shouting racial slurs during the game. Jones said, "I was called the N-word a handful of times tonight." In the days immediately following this incident, many other African American players revealed blatant racism as part of their MLB experience. Outfielder Curtis Granderson suggested that the harassment goes beyond

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hatred of the other team. He feels the attacks are personal and unnecessary. Outfielder Matt Kemp is disappointed with the lack of effort from the league to combat the blatant racism. Kemp explains that security guards and many other people are present for this abhorrent behavior and no one redirects anything (Johnson, 2017).

The experiences described in the article by Johnson (2017) reflect the data presented by Butts et al. (2008) that suggest the environment of college baseball in the Southeastern United States is unwelcoming to African American players and fans which contributes to low rates of participation. The history of racism in MLB has persisted since the league began. There have been improvements in race relations, but the Adam Jones experience in Boston speaks to how much work still remains. In the 2018 off-season, the Red Sox attempted to move forward from the organizations' extensive history of racism. Team owner John Henry petitioned the city of Boston to rename the street outside Boston's Fenway Park. The legacy act of naming the street Yawkey Way in honor of former team owner Tom Yawkey inextricably linked the organization with the former owner's racist history of refusing to integrate the Red Sox until 12 years after Jackie Robinson made his MLB debut with the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1947 (Collins-Fadell, 2018). Henry was commended for the powerful symbolism of this act. Collins-Fadell (2018) also examined the collegiate associations with the Yawkey family in New England. The Yawkey legacy is prominent at Boston College where the school has benefitted tremendously from the millions of dollars donated by the Yawkey family. Boston College officially stated that the Red Sox efforts to rename Yawkey Way do not involve recipients of the Yawkey Foundation grants. Boston College replied that a judge ruled that a college could not change the name of a building for financial reasons

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(Collins-Fadell, 2018). It appears that Boston College is choosing the money tainted by racism.

Experiences of African American Baseball Players

K – 12. Student-athletes must develop a high level of skill academically and athletically to access higher education through baseball participation (Yates, 2018). The acquisition of these high-level skills begins with access to adequate academic and athletic skill development as youth. A catalyst for the civil rights movement, the May 17, 1954 United States Supreme Court decision in the case of *Oliver Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* outlawed racial segregation in public schools and legally provided equal access to adequate educational opportunities for African American youth. The *Brown v. Board of Education* decision of the 1950s and the Civil Rights Acts of the 1960s not only produced an increase in African Americans attending college (Cooper & Cooper, 2015; Karen, 1991), but the legislative changes also spurred increased K - 12 enrollment rates for five to 19 year-old African Americans in the early 1970s (Snyder, 1993).

While African American youth were enrolling in school at a higher rate, the landscape of youth sports was rapidly evolving to a more expensive and highly competitive race for college admissions (Kelly, 2019). The social changes that increased school enrollment also benefitted urban sports programs at the secondary level as African American athletes were able to compete for college admission in the 1970s and 80s while becoming fixtures on college campuses with 61.8% participation in football and 42.7% participation in men's basketball by 1991 (Lapchick, 2019). Football and basketball for K – 12 youth are less expensive due to equipment cost differences when compared to

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baseball (Thomas, 2014). The lower costs for football and basketball also make those sports more accessible to K – 12 youth than baseball (Thomas, 2014). Ease of access and affordability created an explosion in basketball participation as the Amateur Athletic Union sponsored youth tournaments jumped from 100 in 1995 to more than 250 by 2005 (Friedman, 2013). The popularity of football and basketball grew to levels that relegated baseball to 3rd in popularity among sports for American youth (Thomas, 2014).

According to Ryan (2016), the expense for high level baseball participation increased significantly in the 2000s as the amateur baseball landscape transitioned to the expensive travel baseball model for youth and the showcase circuit for secondary athletes. This new direction in youth baseball signaled the end of recreational players succeeding in the sport as lower-class participants were priced out. These expensive baseball pathways created a precipitous decline in youth baseball as participation for American players aged seven to 17 dropped from 8.8 million in 2000 by 40% to 5.3 million in 2013 (Ryan, 2016). Baseball has since rebounded with a 21% increase in overall participation at all levels from 2014 through 2018 (Kleen, 2019). Unfortunately, increases in casual, recreational baseball participation resulted in limited exposure to the sport with players experiencing only 12 actual games during the year (Kleen, 2019). These opportunities provided fun and interest, but not the development, experience, training, or exposure necessary to continue participating at more competitive levels of youth and high school baseball. Conversely, competitive youth and high school baseball players can participate in 80 to 100 games or more each year along with year-long training and development (Kimiecik, 2016; Kleen, 2019). The casual increases in youth

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participation and MLB sponsored adolescent development has not produced increases in the number of African American students attending college as baseball players.

According to Kimiecik (2016), in the span of about three generations, the baseball experience has gone from kids organizing their own games (1960s & 1970s) to Little League (1980s & 1990s) to travel baseball (2000s & 2010s). Recreational baseball is generally not considered a viable pathway to develop the skills necessary for youth players desirous of using baseball to access higher education (Mendel, 2014). Youth baseball in the 21st century uses highly competitive travel baseball teams and leagues to develop highly skilled players. Travel baseball requires a high financial cost to participate, extensive training at an even higher financial cost, and scouting/recruiting services for future baseball opportunities including high school and college (Mendel, 2014). The travel baseball experience can be prohibitively expensive for many families, yet there are still some African American youth baseball players that access opportunities to develop a high level of baseball skill and matriculate to college as a baseball student-athlete (Lapchick, 2019; Thomas; 2014). Inner city youth are priced out of that training and development as the collective price to train, play, and travel is far too high for lower-class family budgets (Thomas, 2014).

College costs can be prohibitive for players who are able to complete high school with the proper preparation (academic and athletic) and desire to help fund a college education through participation in baseball. Witz (2019) explains that high costs for equipment and exposure in youth baseball along with the loss of opportunities to participate in urban areas as some of the key reasons why African Americans have turned

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away from baseball. The lack of cultural relevance for baseball in the African American community was also offered as a possible explanation (Witz, 2019).

While there is an over-representation of African American athletes in intercollegiate and professional football and basketball (Harper et al., 2013), there are still systemic barriers to youth sports participation for many minoritized groups (Kanters et al., 2012). The relatively high financial commitment required for youth sport participation has been posited as a factor in the low participation rates for minoritized groups (Dunn et al., 2016). Research by Somerset and Hoare (2018) highlighted several barriers to sports participation. Person-centered barriers can include race (Pandya, 2021), race-based stereotypes, and bad experiences in other sports contexts (Somerset & Hoare, 2018). Overcoming barriers to sports participation is essential to accessing higher education through participation in sports where minorities are under-represented. Roselli and Singer (2017) found familial involvement through introduction, competition, and support as influentially key to African American golfer's participation in and continued pursuit of golf at the elite levels (Roselli and Singer, 2017). The family support system that was fostered around golf provided an environment where golf was viewed as an acceptable, positive, and worthwhile physical activity and competitive sport (Roselli and Singer, 2017).

Higher Education. The same social changes that focused the African American community on education and athletics to produce upward mobility and resulted in large increases of African American students in higher education and sports (football and basketball) have not increased college baseball participation. A study by Butts et al. (2008) revealed that African Americans were at the time about 13% of the national

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population and only 4.2% of baseball players in the Southeastern conference where schools are home to states with an average African American population of 20.8%. The percentage of African Americans in college baseball has remained below seven percent for the last 30 years (Lapchick, 2020). Academically, the percentage of African Americans enrolled in degree-granting institutions increased from 10% in 1976 to 14% in 2008 (Aud et al, 2010). African American participation in the major sports in the NCAA has remained above 50% in football, above 40% in basketball, but below seven percent in baseball since 1990 (Lapchick, 2019). The study examines the journeys of African American college baseball players and their perceptions of race and racism as they access higher education.

The four percent participation of African Americans in NCAA baseball represents over 1500 student-athletes who have navigated their way into college baseball to help acquire a college education (Lapchick, 2020). The NCAA policy of 11.7 (NCAA.org, 2018) scholarships for Division I baseball programs has just as much impact on the participation of African American baseball players as the institutional practices that include or exclude them. The NCAA practices that can limit opportunities for African Americans occur in recruiting (Gamble, 2019). Most coaches recruit players who look like them as a matter of practice (Gamble, 2019). Over 98% of coaches are white and so are their teams (Lapchick, 2019). The practice of hiring more African American coaches could also improve the interest and participation of urban baseball players. Improving the NCAA policy for college baseball scholarship limitations and changing recruiting practices by coaches will improve the low African American participation rate.

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Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) have a prominent place in the history of educating African American baseball players since the 1890s (Witz, 2019).

The pre-Negro Leagues and the Negro Leagues were a destination for these talented and educated men who were not allowed to play MLB. According to Arnett (2015) an estimated 40% of Negro League players had college educations from HBCUs. MLB teams of the time did not have as many college-educated players because most came directly from high school. The erosion of African Americans in baseball has also infected HBCUs where once the majority, African American players now constitute a minority of the baseball rosters at many HBCUs (Gaither, 2013, Arnett, 2019).

Current Demography for African American College Baseball Players

The paltry participation rate of African Americans in Division I college baseball has persisted for nearly 30 years (Lapchick, 2019). Currently, African Americans at the highest level of amateur competition comprise 53.6% of college football players and 44.8% of men's college basketball players while only participating at a rate of less than four percent in college baseball (Lapchick, 2020). The low rates of participation are present at all levels of competitive baseball which prompted a response from MLB (Ryan, 2016). In June 2015, newly elected MLB Commissioner Rob Manfred created the Play Ball initiative to grow the game of baseball (Newman, 2015). Play Ball was the top priority of Commissioner Manfred and has produced a 52.6% increase in youth recreational baseball participation, but not in college level competition (Kelly, 2019, Lapchick, 2018; Lapchick, 2019). MLB initiatives like Urban Youth Academies and the Dream Series are developing significant talent that is trickling into college without really increasing collegiate baseball participation rates, because unlike football and basketball,

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the bulk of the newly developed baseball talent is drafted from high school and signed by major league franchises (Yates, 2018).

According to Yates (2018), significantly low rates of participation are observed in pitching and catching. Research has indicated that the practice of stacking may be responsible (Yates, 2018). Stacking in sports occurs when athletes are directed to some positions requiring less responsibility and thinking on the field (Schneider & Eitzen, 1986, Yates, 2018), while denying them access to other central positions (Polite, 2009). Historically, African Americans have been stacked into reactionary outfield positions that baseball managers, owners, coaches, and scouts perceive as non-central positions that don't require intelligence (Smith & Leonard, 1997). Pitching and catching positions have been associated with greater cerebral requirements in the thinking man's game (Yates, 2018). Smith and Leonard (1997) describe stacking as a basic form of discrimination that contributes to the decline of African American baseball players. The MLB Dream Series endeavors to develop African American pitchers and catchers (Yates, 2018). In result, few of these players have committed to college as many have been selected by MLB thus, contributing to the low rate of participation for African Americans in college baseball (Yates, 2018).

The practice of coaches reflexively recruiting players who look like them also plays a role in the low participation rates of African Americans in college baseball. Even if youth sports participants can successfully navigate through significant baseball costs and difficult travel, players still have to hope for a college recruiting opportunity. Bogage (2019) interviewed a Division I head baseball coach who stipulated that lack of diversity in coaching perpetuates coaches recruiting players with whom they are familiar

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or look like. Only 1.1% of Division I college baseball head coaches are African American (Lapchick, 2019), increasing the chances that college baseball rosters will continue to reflect a lack of diversity and perpetuate the status quo of low rates of participation for African Americans.

As noted earlier, colleges are not making the effort to recruit in urban areas or African American baseball players (Klein, 1990; Bogage, 2019). Klein (1990) described college baseball as becoming primarily a white game when lack of available scholarships was a key factor in poor recruiting of African American baseball players. The only African American players that get seriously recruited at the Division I level are the program players who are likely to get drafted high (Klein, 1990). College coaches practice reluctance to recruit urban areas which is racist and contributes to the reduced participation of African Americans in college baseball (Klein, 1990; Bogage, 2019). According to Lapchick (2019), the percentage of African Americans participating in college baseball has declined to less than four percent of total players. The percentage of African Americans playing in MLB is currently up to 7.7% (Kelly, 2019). In the 2019 MLB draft there were nearly 70% of the selected players chosen from college baseball (Cooper, 2018). Increasing the percentage of African American players in college can increase the number of these players attaining a college degree and getting selected in the MLB draft. The previous research on African American participation in baseball has primarily investigated the lack of participation in MLB and the youth level with little attention to the collegiate level. The voices and perspectives of the few African American players who make it onto collegiate rosters are absent from the discussion of what has happened to the participation of these athletes in baseball at all levels. Utilizing

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critical race narrative inquiry as an analytical framework to study African American college baseball players educational pathways helped me access the voices of these student-athletes as I sought to better understand their experiences and the factors that informed their choice to persist in baseball as a means of accessing higher education.

Theoretical Framework

The civil rights advances of the 1960s were followed by significant hostility toward legal policy such as affirmative action in the 1970s (Taylor et al., 2009). The response to the hostility of the 1970s was Critical Legal Studies (CLS) scholars questioning the role of the American legal system in propagating racially based social and economic oppression in the 1980s (Taylor et al., 2009; Yosso, 2005). CLS scholars included Derrick Bell, Kimberle Crenshaw, Richard Delgado, Lani Guinier, Charles Lawrence, Mari Matsuda, and Patricia Williams, among others (Lynn & Adams, 2002; Taylor et al., 2009). The CLS approach critiques the depiction of American society as a meritocracy, but fails to produce racial reform (Crenshaw et al., 1995). CLS does not consider the lived experiences and histories of people of color and fails to include the concept of racism in scholarship (Ladson-Billings 1998; Yosso, 2006).

Critical Race Theory (CRT) has origins tied to the CLS approach to expose the ways law has helped maintain racism through white supremacy (Glover, 2007). Unlike CLS, CRT emphasizes the narratives and histories of people of color through storytelling and places this emphasis within a larger societal context (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1998). Racism being central and endemic to American society is foundational to CRT (Hiraldo, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1998). CRT is a response to a racist American legal system and provides a pathway to challenge dominant systems of

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racial oppression (Museus, 2013). Derrick Bell is considered the father of CRT, because his early 1970s writings on initiatives designed to improve the lives of African Americans were considered foundational to the CRT movement in the 1980s (Crenshaw, 2010). Bell's work highlighted the hierarchies of racial power and privilege in American law (Crenshaw 2010). Bell argued that racism and white supremacy are permanent features of American society and serve as structural elements of racism as a system of power. Fundamentally, CRT is a theoretical framework that challenges racism and its impact on people of color (Patton et al., 2011).

In education, CRT is significant because it further explicates the role of race and racism in the structures of educational systems that maintain dominant and subordinate racial positions in higher education institutions (Patton et al., 2007). Some scholars have grounded the use of CRT in educational and social work research in eight fundamental tenets: 1) the permanence of racism, 2) experiential knowledge, 3) counter-storytelling, 4) interest convergence, 5) intersectionality, 6) whiteness as property, 7) a critique of liberalism, and 8) a commitment to social justice (Daftary, 2018; Hiraldo, 2010; McCoy, 2014).

The Permanence of Racism. Racism is systemically permanent to life in America (Bell, 1992; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Daftary, 2018). CRT recognizes racism as normalized in the life experiences for people of color in America (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). As a result, racism is a customary and expected experience for people of color in the United States as opposed to the isolated incidents that make the news (Abrams & Moio, 2009; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 2013; McCoy, 2014). With an understanding of the permanence of

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racism in American society, CRT is a tool that allows inspection of race and racism through the experiences of marginalized people.

Experiential Knowledge. According to McCoy (2014), CRT recognizes that the lived experiences of people of color are critical to analyzing and understanding racial subordination in education. Experiential knowledge is essential to understanding daily lived experiences with racism and learning the impact of race in society. In educational research, storytelling is fundamental to CRT and in using a critical race methodology. Telling counter-stories in CRT add lived context to the objectivity of positivist perspectives. As stated, my own narrative details the significance of my college baseball team advancing to the College World Series while the only African American player routinely experienced acts of racism throughout the season before ultimately leaving the team and university. Counter-stories like my narrative are essential to CRT in contesting traditional methods of scholarship that do not centralize or value the lived experiences of people of color (McCoy, 2014).

Counter-storytelling. Counter-storytelling is a framework that legitimizes the lived experiences of marginalized groups through stories that are counter to the prevailing narrative (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). Counter-storytelling provides voice to historically marginalized people (McCoy, 2014). In educational research, counter-stories provide faculty, staff, and students of color a voice to tell their narratives about marginalized experiences. The combination of shared experiences into one voice can enable an entire group of oppressed people to benefit from it (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). CRT challenges the social construction of race by grounding research

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in the experiences of people of color through the use of storytelling and narrative knowledge (McCoy, 2014).

Intersectionality. The concept of intersectionality was introduced to educational research as the intersection of race and other identities in oppression (Crenshaw, 1989). Intersectionality recognizes that various social identities like race, class, gender, sexual orientation, etc. are interconnected (Crenshaw, 1989; Ford & Airhihenbuwa, 2010). CRT recognizes that racial identity and racism intersect with other subordinated identities and forms of oppression to influence lived experiences of people of color (Jones et al., 2013; Kumasi, 2011; Lynn & Adams, 2002; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). Crenshaw (1989) explored how the lives of women of color were influenced as they experienced oppression based on the intersection of their race, gender, and class. Dorian McCoy (2014) used intersectionality to examine participants identifying as students of color and as first-generation college students at an extreme predominantly White institution (EPWI). McCoy (2014) defined an EPWI as a Sea of Whiteness in which people of color are grossly under-represented in student and faculty populations. EPWIs also have a history of racism and exclusion in policies and practices within an overwhelmingly White community that offers limited services, such as a Black barber shop, for people of color (McCoy, 2014).

Interest Convergence. Interest convergence states that racial equality is only considered when it corresponds with the best interests of the dominant white group (Bell, 1980). Efforts to work toward racial justice are not sought by the white dominant group out of altruism. People working for racial justice must demonstrate how any changes benefit the white dominant group in order to gain support to progress toward racial

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equality (Ladson-Billings, 2013). In recent CRT research, Harper (2008) used interest convergence to theorize increased educational outcomes for African American male student-athletes when their interests converge with the interests of community college faculty. Harper (2008) asserted that the successful transfer of African American male student-athletes from a two-year community college to a four-year school is a shared goal for the student-athletes and the school. The interest convergence benefits both the student-athlete and the school (Harper, 2008).

Whiteness as Property. The concept of Whiteness as property was introduced by Cheryl Harris (1995) in her story of her grandmother passing for White after leaving the Deep South for the Midwest. Harris (1995) described how her grandmother was able to access privileges and benefits associated with Whiteness because of her fair complexion. Those benefits have been protected legally beginning with the 1823 *Johnson and Graham v. McIntosh* decision that established whiteness as a prerequisite to property ownership (Harris, 1995). In education, CRT scholars have identified how the curriculum in higher education is considered White property because it has historically focused on White, Western perspectives (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Patton et al., 2011). The majority of faculty and administrators are white, creating an understanding that the property of Whiteness has more status and power than non-whites (Bondi, 2012).

Critique of Liberalism. Liberalism is based on the idea that formal equal opportunity law and policy is functional and ensures people of all races are treated equally in the eyes of the law in a color-blind legal system (Abrams & Moio, 2009). Color-blindness fails to consider the permanence of racism and is a mechanism that allows people to ignore racist policies that perpetuate social inequity (DeCuir & Dixson,

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2004). CRT challenges the notion that color-blindness is synonymous with the absence of racism (Ford & Airhihenbuwa, 2010). CRT scholars are critical of and challenge the liberal concepts of objectivity, meritocracy, color-blindness, race neutrality, equal opportunity, and incremental change while treating race as central to the law and policy of the United States (DeCuir & Dixon, 2004; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Ford & Airhihenbuwa, 2010; Lynn & Adams, 2002; Museus, 2013; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001).

Commitment to Social Justice. Social justice as both a process and goal (Bell, 2013). In education, CRT scholars are committed to social justice for the establishment of a socially just U.S. society and educational system (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015). The social justice efforts of CRT scholars work toward the elimination of racism and the empowerment of groups that are oppressed and marginalized (Jones et al., 2013). Specifically, CRT is grounded in a commitment to resist the racialized and gendered inequality and injustice defining access to social, political, economic, and cultural resources (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015).

Critical Race Theory and the Educational Pathways of African American College Baseball Players

CRT research on African American male college athletes' educational experiences has placed more of an emphasis on structural factors like the culture of college athletics (Cooper, 2016) and social factors like systemic racism (Singer, 2015). John Singer (2015) challenged researchers to use CRT as a theoretical framework to characterize what is wrong with American society and the educational and sport systems African American college baseball players are affiliated with, instead of focusing on what is wrong with the African American college baseball players and their participation with

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social systems and organizations. This study used CRT to interrogate the pathways of African American college baseball players and the paltry rates of participation for this sub-group by accessing the players' perspectives on their educational and sporting journeys. Utilizing CRT allows stakeholders to acknowledge the structural issues within society and organizations while also allowing for critical examination of the role these athletes play in their educational experiences (Singer, 2015). Singer (2015) also discussed research that offered African American male athlete success stories as a counter-narrative to the deficit-focused dominant discourse. More counter-narratives of African American male athletes are needed to give insight through their voices about what education means to them and the impact of racism on their experiences (Singer, 2016).

In this study, I contextualize the educational experiences of African American college baseball players from their perspective. I was guided by a critical race narrative inquiry framework to examine the educational pathways of African American college baseball players. In the following sections I explain the relevance and intended application of CRT to define the role of race and racism in the K - 12 experiences of these student-athletes. Critical race narrative inquiry focuses the study of their lived experiences on the voices of the African American college baseball players.

As noted, CRT emphasizes how race and racism are ingrained in American society and produces social inequalities that can be manifested in individuals' actions (Crenshaw et al, 1995; Marable, 2002). CRT is a field of scholarship interested in studying the relationship transformations between race, power, and racism through discourse and counter-storytelling to tackle issues that question the foundations of the

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liberal order, including equality theory, legal reasoning, and neutral principles of constitutional law (Crenshaw et al, 1995). CRT is unique because of its social justice aims and activism. CRT scholars do not assert that their work is neutral or unbiased, but rather to eliminate racist structures and inequities (Daftary, 2018). CRT is relevant to understanding the educational pathways of African American college baseball players because it allows the researcher to challenge the racial narrative of African American disinterest in baseball as an avenue to access higher education.

Brooks et al. (2017) proposed an adaptation to CRT that is better suited to studies in the educable space of sports. CRT in sports is a theoretical and analytical framework that contextualizes American sports in racism while challenging the ways race and racism impact sports structures and experiences. CRT in sports acknowledges the contradictory nature of sports in America. Sports privileges, stratifies, and marginalizes while maintaining emancipatory and empowering potential. CRT in sports can center and validate the experiences of people of color while refuting the dominant ideology and White privilege. The review by Brooks et al. (2017) concluded that more research on the different experiences of youth of color is needed to better understand how youth sports participation has changed and may further evolve.

CRT can be the vehicle that facilitates a discourse in educational research that is commonplace in the lives of minorities. Action and application are essential to CRT as it seeks to understand social situations, then to transform these situations for the better (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000). Sports management researchers have used the CRT framework to help understand issues related to the impact of race and racism on people of color in educational settings and sports organizations (Singer, 2019). This study explored

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the CRT concepts of the permanence of racism and experiential knowledge using the counter-storytelling CRT methodology to explicate the educational experiences of African American college baseball players (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000).

Permanence of Racism. Racism is not just intentional acts of discrimination by individuals, CRT recognizes that racism is part of the policies and practices of institutions in America and seeks to dismantle them (Abrams & Moio, 2009). Solorzano and Yosso (2002) explained that this permanent racism is about institutional power that non-whites have never possessed. For example, Corasaniti (2021) described how the 2021 Georgia Voting law that limits voting access institutionally marginalizes African Americans by making voting harder. The law, passed by Georgia Republicans, requires more rigid voter identification requirements for absentee balloting, limits drop boxes, and expands the State Legislature's power over local elections (Corasaniti, 2021). Georgia is the first state in a national movement among Republican-controlled state legislatures to contract voting access so extensively. CRT recognizes that racism is not a random isolated act, as more than 17 states enacted new restrictive voting laws in 2021 (Ladson-Billings, 2013; Wilder, 2022). Successfully using the legal system to restrict voting access for African Americans furthers the notion that racism is a normal component of daily life in the United States of America (Taylor, 2009). This study used CRT to evaluate the role of permanent racism in US society in the experiences of African American college baseball players.

Experiential Knowledge. CRT emphasizes and recognizes the experiential knowledge of people of color as legitimate and critical to understanding the role of race in their experience (Bell, 1992; Gillborn, 2015; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). CRT

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theorists view experiential knowledge as a strength and draw on the lived experiences of people of color through methods like counter-storytelling and narratives (Bell, 1992; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). The use of counter-storytelling exposes racial rhetoric, deficit-informed research, and policies and practices that distort the experiences of people of color (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002).

Historically, the experiential knowledge that people of color possess has been routinely excluded from higher education research (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). CRT theorists recognize the lived experiences of people of color as legitimate, invaluable, and critical to understanding, analyzing, and teaching about racial subordination in education (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). Counter-stories from people of color are often shared through storytelling which is fundamental to using a critical race methodology in educational research (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Jones et al., 2013). Understanding the knowledge gleaned from the combination of shared experiences into a voice of lived experiences can benefit other African American youth desiring to access college through baseball participation (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).

Counter-storytelling. According to Solorzano and Yosso (2002), critical race theory in education is a framework to identify, analyze, and transform structural and cultural aspects of education that maintain subordinate and dominant racial positions. Counter-storytelling in education is a critical race methodology to include and understand the experiences of racial minorities in American education. Critical race methodologies recognize that majoritarian narratives mute the voices of people of color (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). Rich counter-stories in CRT effectively add context to the objectivity of positivist perspectives (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Each of these stories details lived

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experiences that counter the majoritarian story (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002; Delgado & Stefancic, 2000). Interrogations of the majoritarian narrative of why African Americans don't participate in college baseball must include the voices and experiences of African American college baseball players. This research sought to identify and analyze the experiences of African American college baseball players to counter the majoritarian deficit narrative of participation for these student-athletes.

Chapter Summary

Despite recent gains in African American participation in youth baseball, the landscape of sport at this level does not offer encouragement for continued participation at higher, more competitive levels which prepare and showcase players for opportunities beyond high school. Increased equipment costs, the explosion in fees for competitive leagues, the preference for cost prohibitive travel teams, and the showcase circuit are all reasons for the dearth of African Americans in competitive youth baseball (Lindbergh & Baumann, 2017). Low participation in youth baseball limits the numbers of players in high school who can then attend college as a baseball student-athlete. Yet, some African Americans are choosing to participate in baseball as part of accessing higher education. Research on perceptions of baseball players at HBCUs by Cooper et al. (2012) concluded that one of the primary reasons that African Americans choose to participate in baseball is because of the influence of a family member. This socialization process also had a significant impact on the athlete's desire to persist in baseball (Cooper et al., 2012). An anti-deficit perspective of why African Americans are choosing to use baseball to attend college could provide insight to help increase the number of these athletes in college and

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in professional baseball. There is scant research on why/how these athletes are choosing to participate in baseball.

In this chapter, I have evaluated the literature that is relevant to my study. The examination revealed an extensive and problematic history of racism in the experiences of African American baseball players. My dissertation provides agency through voice to a marginalized population in higher education. My use of critical race theory provides insight to the role of racism in college baseball which is a limited area of research. In the next chapter, I provide a discussion of the research design and the appropriateness of narrative inquiry for this study.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

This study examined how African American males who choose to participate in college baseball perceive racism in baseball and navigate their journeys from boyhood to the collegiate baseball field. To conduct this study, I used a narrative inquiry qualitative methodological approach to collect personal narratives of 6 participants as they voice their experiences with racism, baseball, and education from youth through secondary school and into college. To critically examine participant narratives, I employed counter-storytelling from Critical Race Theory to focus the study on the role of racism in the educational and sporting experiences of the participants. This approach allows participant voices to define their narratives and name their own realities while providing a counter-narrative to the dominant discourse (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). This chapter discusses the combining of critical race theory with narrative inquiry to produce critical race narrative inquiry. I also discuss positionality, data collection and analysis, and limitations in this section.

Narrative Inquiry

Connelly and Clandinin (2006) define narrative inquiry as requiring a collaboration between researcher and participants, over a period of time, and in various places to better understand lived experiences. Historically, narratives have been used by researchers to help understand the lived experiences of the participants in a study (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). The narrative approach in research has origins in the fields of anthropology and sociology (Buttina, 2015). Studying identity through narratives began in the 1980s in personality psychology as narrative identity research (Buttina,

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2015). The credibility of narrative knowing and the ways of knowing were examined using narrative in the early 1980s (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). Later in the decade, narrative theory began to develop according to how narratives were used in research (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Narrative inquiry emerged as a research methodology as researchers began to use participant stories as more than just data (Caine et al., 2013). In the 21st century, narratives have been used in a variety of social sciences (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Narrative inquiry uses the narrative as the method and phenomena of the study (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). Additionally, narrative inquiry represents participant stories in a storytelling writing style (Smith, 2010).

Narrative inquiry is qualitative research because of its emphasis on developing understanding of experiences and stories from participants (Robert & Shenhav, 2014). Marginalized individuals can use narrative to communicate the realities of their experiences in their words and thus allow researchers to better understand these individuals (Robert & Shenhav, 2014). Narrative inquiry is appropriate for the current study, because the methodology promotes agency in the participants. According to Smith (2010), the use of narrative inquiry in sports studies is still a relatively new approach to these investigations to better understand the experiences of their participants. For the purposes of the current study, narrative inquiry is defined as a dynamic process founded on a set of epistemological and ontological assumptions. Narrative inquiry uses a storytelling writing style to represent data (Smith, 2010). Specifically, narrative inquiry allows researchers to develop meaningful relationships with participants as their stories are constructed (Beuthin, 2014; Connelly & Clandinin, 2006).

Counter-storytelling

The use of counter-storytelling and narratives for inquiry provide a voice to the realities and lived experiences of racialized people (Matsuda, 1989). Counter-storytelling is a method of reporting the experiences of individuals whose stories have not been told. The CRT methodology provides a tool for analyzing and challenging the stories of those in power whose stories define the dominant discourse (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000). The lack of representation of African American baseball players from K – 12 and in higher education requires research strategies that includes their voices to explain their experiences with the educational system and sports. This study empowers and analyzes the voices of African American college baseball players to offer counter-narratives of desire to participate in college baseball as access to higher education that resist majoritarian deficit narratives.

The use of narrative and storytelling provides a culturally sensitive and empowering approach to African American college baseball players (Tillman, 2002). Narrative approach combined with CRT is a critical paradigm offering the researcher the opportunity to provide counter-narrative to the theory of African American disinterest in baseball and to accurately describe the experiences of marginalized groups with the educational system. Howard (2008) used CRT to examine how African American males perceive their schooling experiences in PreK – 12 schools. The challenge to education researchers must go beyond responsibly and reliably investigating various phenomena in education and identifying meaningful interventions (Howard, 2008). The challenge must include listening to the stories, experiences, challenges, setbacks, successes, and triumphs of marginalized groups (Howard, 2008). The under-representation of African Americans

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accessing higher education through participation in college baseball is a worsening phenomenon. The challenge is to learn about their experiences and triumphs by listening to their stories to gain insight on how to reverse the current state of paltry participation rates.

A recent example of the informative and potentially transformational impact of this work is displayed in a study by Singer (2016) that uses CRT and a case study approach to narrative inquiry to give voice to the educational experiences of three African American college football athletes. The study revealed that these athletes viewed education as more than academic work and that perceived racism is present in college sports (Singer, 2016). This study went beyond traditional critical analyses by centering the voices of African American male athletes and their educational experiences of making sense of schooling in an environment that they perceived as unjust. This work offers a useful way to researchers who seek to understand choices that African American males make in their schooling process.

Critical Race Narrative Inquiry: Combining Critical Race Theory and Narrative Inquiry

In this study, I used critical race narrative inquiry as my methodology. The philosophical position of narrative inquiry allows for African American college baseball players to give an insider's account of their experiences to help reveal a portrait of life experiences for the researcher (Riessman, 2013). CRT provides space for these players to name their own reality and communicate their racialized experiences, while offering a tool to analyze experiences and challenge dominant narratives (Ladson-Billings 1998; Yosso, 2006; Yosso & Solorzano, 2005). Combining counter-storytelling from CRT and

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narrative inquiry situates race at the center of the story and empowers the storyteller to construct knowledge rather than the researcher. According to Baszile (2015) knowledge is never neutral and results from a story produced by a situated knower.

For my study, I bring to light the baseball experiences African American college baseball players have along their boyhood journeys and the ways in which they navigate those encounters. A narrative inquiry approach allows me to understand the narratives of the African American college baseball players while CRT allows for the positioning of their narratives as racialized experiences. Therefore, critical race narrative inquiry is the examination of narrative as racialized experiences and it provides opportunities for the voices of the marginalized to be heard and validated (Riessman, 2013; Yosso, 2006). Critical race narrative inquiry interprets stories through a racialized lens to situate marginalized individuals as owners of important knowledge to tell their stories from their racialized perspective (Baszile, 2015).

Positionality and Orientation of Ontology, Epistemology, and Methodology

I am an African American man who grew up in an economically depressed, rougher area of downtown St. Louis, Missouri. My neighborhood was affectionately referred to as the “new houses” because in the 1970s the newly constructed two-story apartments vastly differed from the old high-rise Darst-Webbe public housing projects that shared a common street. I attended a racially mixed urban high school with a college prep focus. For college I then attended a public, predominantly white, state university. After college I eventually settled near the university. My passions for education and sports were cemented through my experiences as a student and athlete at various levels of my journey to adulthood which influenced my decision to conduct this study. It is

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important to acknowledge the influence my personal experiences had on my view of this research. I started this project by writing about my own experience to define my positionality and perspective in this research as I asked the participants to share their experiences. The interests of the participants rather than the researcher must be prioritized and reflected in the final interpretations of lived experiences. I let the participant stories stand as they were told.

According to Creswell (2013), ontology is the nature of reality and its characteristics. Reality is subjective and based on the individual's worldview which is a product of our experiences (Schwandt et al., 2007). Facts within a study cannot be gained without direct interactions and experiences with the phenomena studied (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Facts are a product of theories that are created by human judgment that can only occur when investigators directly interact with and experience the phenomena (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Ultimately, knowledge is actively constructed by people who believe that reality can be influenced by interactions with other people (Schwandt et al., 2007). By comparison, my ontological research philosophy is subjectivism because my view is shaped by context and experiences with constructed truths (Bryman, 2016). Subjectivism, also known as interpretivism, requires researchers to interpret elements of the study which integrate human interest into research and emphasizes qualitative analysis over quantitative analysis (Blaikie, 2018). According to Bryman (2016), interpretivism studies usually focus on meaning and may employ multiple methods in order to reflect different aspects of the issue. This study employs a combined method of CRT and narrative inquiry to examine the K - 12 racialized experiences of African American college baseball players.

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Epistemology is the relationship between the researcher and the study (Creswell, 2013). My epistemological viewpoint matches closely to the social constructivist epistemology of narrative inquiry (Smith, 2010). A social constructivist epistemology specifies that our understanding of our world is subjective and socially constructed (Spector-Mersel, 2011). In narrative inquiry, the ontology and epistemology of a study can become confused because reality or ontological framework is shaped by how we perceive, know, and interpret it which is the epistemological framework (Spector-Mersel, 2011). Social constructivism is how human beings interpret the world in which they live through interactions with others in society which forms an accepted subjective view of various situations. The social constructivist epistemology recognizes the individual meaning-making process through emphasis on the actor's definition of situations and when merged with critical epistemology is aligned with the critical social perspective of CRT (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2011; Schwandt et al., 2007).

According to Kincheloe and McLaren (2005), the use of a CRT framework allows the researcher to extend social constructivism beyond interpretation through social interaction and encourage critical thinking. Critical social constructivism maintains that knowledge and phenomena are socially constructed in historical, social, cultural, economic, and political contexts to promote criticality in the research process. The interplay between these contexts constructs our perspectives on the world, self, and other. Ontologically, critical social constructivists seek to understand how the dynamics of the various contexts influence objects of inquiry. Epistemologically, critical social constructivists seek to understand how knowledge of context influence objects of inquiry. In this study, I examine how African American college baseball players socially construct

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knowledge in the education system and the sports arena through baseball participation (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005) as racism continues to plague the social constructs of African Americans in the workplace, schools, and society (Harrison & Azzarito, 2008).

Critical social constructivism is the paradigm used for the study because it encourages the questioning of dominant systems of knowledge production and the opening-up of a dialogue concerned with critical awareness (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005). Critical social constructivism promotes seeking alternative views while challenging the dominant narrative and provides inclusion of marginalized and previously excluded knowledge (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005). As such, this practice includes previously excluded and marginalized perspectives (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005). This study examined how African American males construct meanings of race and racism in baseball and their choice to participate in the sport. This perspective allowed me to focus on the participants' views during this study (Creswell, 2013). These subjective meanings are formed through interaction with others and through historical and cultural norms that operate in individuals' lives (Creswell, 2013).

Participants and Sampling Strategy

Purposeful sampling was used to recruit participants for this study (DeMarris, 2004, Patton, 2002). The criterion-based sampling strategy emphasizes the shared experiences of African American college baseball players (Palinkas et al., 2015). Participants are student-athletes that identify as African American and play college baseball. This sampling strategy is appropriate because the study sought to hear stories from individuals that meet the specific criteria. African American college baseball players participating at various levels of the sport from Junior Colleges to Division I

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institutions were targeted. The under-representation of these athletes in college baseball is reflected at all levels of baseball (Spearman et al., 2017). This study sought participants from various levels of college baseball to enrich the diversity of perspective and minimize the potential impact from elite Division I institutions that may have greater resources than Division II, Division III, NAIA, and NJCAA institutions. Participants were recruited through email to gain access to the target population. This purposeful sampling allowed me to find study participants that are African American, college baseball players, and had a willingness to discuss their experiences (Palinkas et al., 2015; Patton, 2002). The low participation rate for African American college baseball players may limit the researcher's ability to access these players. Initially, I planned to interview 5 - 10 participants for the proposed study to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the pathways for and educational experiences of African American college baseball players. I ended up with 6 participants in my study. Participant data includes demographics, educational journey and baseball background histories, and current experience obtained through semi-structured interviews. I represented and analyzed data through the counter-story. The results of this study inform understandings of how African Americans can find ways to access and afford opportunities to develop into college ready students and collegiate baseball players. This information can be used to interrogate strategies for increasing African American baseball participation beyond recreational levels.

Consent was obtained through the Institutional Review Board of the University of Missouri. Signed consent forms were obtained prior to the interview. All participants were de-identified with pseudonyms to preserve anonymity and confidentiality.

Data Collection

The ontological and epistemological aspects of narrative inquiry help define its methodology. As noted earlier, narratives are the data used in narrative inquiry to help establish and understand reality (Spector-Mersel, 2011). Narratives are usually produced through interviews (Riessman, 2013). A variety of qualitative methodologies can use interviews for data collection, but the focus on narratives as data is what differentiates narrative inquiry from the other methodologies (Spector-Mersel, 2011).

In this study, I used critical race narrative inquiry to better understand and represent the experiences of African American college baseball players (Riessman, 2008). I preserved sequences to keep the participant stories intact and accurately represent their voices. The primary source of data for this study were two semi-structured narrative interviews (See Appendix A) with each participant. To enhance rapport building, I was transparent about who I am and my positionality prior to asking the initial interview question. The goal of the narrative interview is to get the participants to tell stories about their experiences as African American college baseball players (Mishler, 1986; Riessman, 2008). Pseudonyms were used throughout the data collection process to ensure participant anonymity. Interviews used a semi-structured interview protocol and lasted approximately one hour each. The initial interview allowed for development of a research relationship and provided a rich, detailed story of educational journey and baseball background. The second interview built on the initial interview by detailing current collegiate baseball experience and concluding remarks. Interviewing a participant more than once provided the researcher the opportunity to obtain thicker and richer descriptions through reflecting on the first interview and building on participants'

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responses in the subsequent interviews (Riessman, 2013). The interview guide for these conversations consisted of questions related to the topics of education, sports participation, and racism. Through the interviews, I elicited rich data by engaging in a conversational encounter with my participants. All interviews were recorded for accuracy using Zoom or Facetime then transcribed into text. Copies of transcriptions were sent to participants to ensure their narratives are transcribed correctly. The narratives were then retold in written form and coded for thematic analysis (Patton, 2002).

Creswell (2013) identifies the potential difficulty of coding the data as a weakness of interviews because participants fully express their responses in as much detail as desired making it difficult for researchers to extract similar themes. The selection of participants mitigated the difficulty referenced by Creswell. Participants met the selection criteria and had some similarities in their stories with some rich variations. By controlling the interview with a semi-structured protocol the researcher obtained data that are systematic and thorough (Patton, 2002).

Data Analysis

Data analysis in narrative inquiry offers a plethora of options to the researcher (Riessman, 2013). To analyze data in this study, I used open coding of interviews followed by theoretical coding for themes based on the CRT tenets of permanence of racism, experiential knowledge, and counter-storytelling. According to Riessman (2008), the process of narrative inquiry is interpretive. Listening to the stories told by research participants begins analysis in the interpretive process. The story constructed by the researcher is an interpretation of data. Narrative interpretation continues as the reader

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interprets the final story that represents the relationship between the participant and researcher. Thematic narrative analysis focuses on the interpretation of the narrative content as told by the participant (Riessman, 2008).

In thematic analysis, I focused on the content of what African American college baseball players say during interviews. This strategy allows researchers to understand themes within an individual story rather than components of multiple stories. I represented participant stories by isolating and ordering relevant events in a biographical account similar to my narrative excerpt in the introduction. Riessman (2008) informs that thematic analysis is the most rudimentary form of narrative analysis.

Braun et al. (2016) describe a process of thematic analysis in sport and exercise research using a six-phase model. Thematic analysis involves a recursive, reflexive process of working through data familiarization, coding, theme development, revision, naming, and writing up. Familiarization is the process of becoming intimately familiar with the data through deep immersing by reading (Braun et al., 2016).

Each interview was transcribed verbatim. Next, I listened to the recorded interviews while reading the transcriptions to ensure accuracy (Clandinin & Connelly, 2006; Riessman, 2008). The familiarization process provides a smooth transition to the coding phase (Braun et al., 2016). Transcripts were read again to identify initial codes. Braun et al. (2016) describe phases 3 through 5 as the core analytic work of thematic analysis. Theme development requires organizing codes and coded data into candidate themes. Refinement involves reviewing and revising candidate themes. The naming phase uses a rich analysis of the data to finalize themes. Naming is providing an answer to the research questions of 1) how do African American males who choose to participate

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in college baseball navigate their journeys from boyhood to the collegiate baseball field and, 2) how do African American college baseball players perceive racism in their baseball journey? I read the transcriptions again to identify any themes according to the three CRT tenets of permanence of racism, experiential knowledge, and counter-storytelling which guide this study. The transcriptions were read multiple times to check the accuracy of codes and to engage the narratives deeply for a rich understanding of the participant stories (Riessman, 2008). The final phase was writing up, which occurs throughout the thematic analysis process. Compiling, developing, and editing existing analytic writing while contextualizing it relative to existing literature concludes the thematic analysis process (Braun et al., 2016).

Trustworthiness

Nowell et al. (2017) define trustworthiness as how researchers convince readers of the quality of their work. The criteria for trustworthiness of a qualitative study are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Researchers increase trustworthiness of their studies by various means including practicing member checking and utilizing peer debriefing. The credibility of a study addresses the fit between readers' views and the researcher's representations. Transferability describes how well a study can be generalized. Researchers can increase transferability by providing rich, thick descriptions. Dependability is an interpretation of the research process. A research process that is logical, traceable, and well documented has high dependability. Confirmability requires the researcher to demonstrate how conclusions and interpretations have been reached. Once credibility, transferability, and dependability are all achieved, then confirmability is established (Nowell et al., 2017).

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Creswell and Miller (2000) assert that trustworthiness can be established through the peer debriefing process and member checking. I used my dissertation committee for peer debriefing because they are familiar with the study. The committee members scrutinized my work and provided feedback to advance my thinking about the study. Member checking provided an opportunity for participants to check the data and results for accuracy to verify that their voices have been correctly represented. Participants received emails of documentation then communicate with the researcher through email, text, or phone call.

Limitations

Price and Murman (2004) define limitations of a study as those characteristics of design or methodology that impacted or influenced the interpretation of the findings from your research. The limitations included the scope, data collection method, and data analysis. The scope of the study was limited to six African American college baseball players who may be from different athletic divisions and different schools or the same athletic divisions and same schools. The study did not consider African American college students who may have participated in youth baseball but chose a different path to access higher education. Also excluded from the study were the non-African American college baseball players perspectives on accessing higher education through baseball participation. The selection of participants that are similar means that the sample size is not large enough to produce disparate perspectives (Glesne,1999). The study was limited in terms of its focus on the participants' educational pathways and experiences K – 12 without consideration of their college experiences.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I highlighted the design of my proposed study and the orientation of my ontology, epistemology, and methodology. I provided rationale for why narrative inquiry is appropriate to examine the educational pathways and experiences of African American college baseball players. This chapter also addressed the approach to reliably selecting participants, collecting data, and analyzing data with validity.

CHAPTER IV

Findings

In this chapter, I present the findings of this study which used Critical Race Theory and Narrative Inquiry to examine the lived experiences of six African American college baseball players. Specifically, I utilized Critical Race Narrative Inquiry to examine these student-athletes' experiences from youth to the college baseball field and their perceptions of race and racism along the journey. The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do African American males who choose to participate in college baseball navigate their journeys from boyhood to the college baseball field?
2. How do African American college baseball players perceive racism in their baseball journey?

An analysis of each participant narrative revealed the rich uniqueness and binding commonalities of the lived experiences for the group. I discuss four key findings related to the research questions in this chapter. First, the journey from boyhood to the college baseball field for all six student-athletes was guided by their expectation of obtaining a college education. Second, the athlete in each student communicates a focus on constant hard work and preparation as a focus to promote their success. Third, the young men willingly communicated a sense of responsibility to inform others of their experiences along the journey to the college baseball field in order to promote changes in college baseball that may increase the participation rate for African Americans. Reluctantly, participants' perception of racism in their baseball journey emerged. Coaching relationships greatly impacted this perception and defined how the athletes were treated

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by mentors. These findings are important because they provide insight to how African American college baseball players access higher education through baseball participation.

I use this chapter to introduce the six African American college baseball players whose voices are the focus of this study. During our interviews, each participant shared important events along their journey to college baseball that helped propel them forward and develop them into the men they are today. Each had a goal of a college education and a baseball career. Educational attainment and hard work were values instilled in these men from a very young age by their families. Instances with racism and adult mentors/leaders further unite the participants through common life experiences.

According to Delgado and Stefancic (2006), communicating these commonalities in their own voices displays an important Critical Race Theory tenet that values the lived experiences of these student-athletes. The participants used the storytelling Critical Race Theory method to convey their experiences in their own words. Each of the six narratives represents the experiential knowledge about the navigation of journeys from their perspectives. These interviews were often emotional as the student-athletes appeared to be reflecting somewhat unwillingly on some of their experiences related to their journeys to college baseball. To communicate the emotion elicited in the interviews, participants chose a theme along with an alias to capture and name the essence of their narratives. Tim, Joe, Ty, Junior, Max, and Rob are fascinatingly genuine as they allow us a first-hand account of their very personal experiences along the journey to the college baseball field. Next, I provide a brief description of each student-athlete. The descriptions are primarily based on the participants words and help readers understand the brilliance, determination, and complexities of these six student-athletes.

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After introducing the six student-athletes, I discuss four key findings from my analysis of the interview data.

The six African American college baseball players: Tim, Joe, Ty, Junior, Max, and Rob

Tim: Chasing my dream

Tim is from an urban Midwest city. His parents earned graduate degrees and provided a good home for Tim and his three siblings. The household was busy with four children and his parents were strict. The busyness and strictness were intentional so that the children did not go off the course of being successful people. There was no tolerance for disrespect and discipline occurred when mistakes were made. Tim's parents pushed him and his siblings to strive for perfection academically. Striving to be almost perfect produced very good school experiences as a young Tim was a good student despite attending underfunded schools. Baseball became part of Tim's life as a way of keeping the energetic youngster busy when he wasn't involved in other activities. He fell in love with the game and began to dream of playing professionally. The heavy focus on education caused Tim to alter his dream to include college baseball because he knew he was going to college. He stated,

High school is where I really started trying to get prepared for a chance to play baseball in college. My new coach actually tried to teach us instead of just filling out the lineup card.

Tim's desire for education and a chance to play baseball were already present when the positive influence of a coach helped him believe accessing higher education through baseball participation could be his reality. The impact of Tim's new high school

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coach indicates the importance and necessity of the relationship between coaches and players. A strong work ethic motivated Tim to work hard in the classroom and on the field to access higher education through baseball. He has continued the hard work despite poor coaching, unfair treatment, and starting over multiple times. Tim is now continuing his educational excellence at his fourth college because he has transferred for various reasons to continue chasing his dream of playing professional baseball.

Joe: I stay ready

Joe is from a small Midwest college town. He was raised in a two-parent home where education and activities were emphasized. Both of his parents completed graduate degrees while he was a small child. A college education was the expectation for Joe and his three siblings. His family loved baseball as an activity. The family played baseball games, watched baseball games on tv, and went to baseball games in person. Joe had a normal childhood that was filled with good memories. His strict parents kept the family busy with a focus on school, activities, and being good people. Do unto others as you would have them do unto you was the household rule. His parents didn't put up with any mess and the children learned to always take care of business. Joe described his schooling experiences as a lot of hard work to be a good student. Working hard is Joe's best strategy in response to any challenge. He said,

I wasn't considered a super smart kid. I learned how to be a good student. I put in extra time with the instructors that are willing to work with you to help you understand a subject so you can learn and grow. I least liked the instructors that are un-compromising and unwilling or unable to find ways to help students understand. You must do it their way and if you struggle or don't understand it,

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then that's your problem. I worked hard in school and earned good grades so I would have options after high school.

Joe worked hard on his preparation so he would be ready for an opportunity. The idea of being prepared provides motivation for Joe's efforts in sports too. His family preferred baseball as an activity and he made baseball his sport of choice despite success in other arenas. His father and older brother were influential role models and he wanted to be like the men he admired. Joe got serious about college baseball while in high school. He was a good student-athlete and had an established practice of working hard to stay ready for his opportunity to play. Despite his skill and preparation, Joe had great difficulty getting into the lineup in high school and college. He was told he was not ready and did not receive much guidance from his coaches to improve. Joe earned an Associate's degree after attending two junior colleges and transferred to a third school before finding a coach that would give him an opportunity. Of course, Joe was ready for the opportunity and has found success on the field. He uses commitment to hard work to stay ready for opportunities and challenges in baseball and life.

Ty: I'm going to the League

Ty is from an area rich in college baseball history in the Southern part of the United States. The big city kid was raised to be a baseball player in a religious family. As an only child, Ty garnered all of his parents' attention in the close-knit family. Education was a priority in his home and Ty was an honor student. His parents preached excellence because being good was not good enough for a black man. Ty attempted to be the best at everything he tried as he excelled in the classroom and on the ball field. He noted,

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I had conversations with my parents where they explained that people would think of me as arrogant because I was smart. They said that's the way it is for smart black men. People would also think of me as cocky because I was good in sports. I was just confident.

White (2015) explains that for decades black parents have told their children that in order to succeed despite racial discrimination, they need to be twice as good. The permanence of racism in America elicits this response from black parents to prepare their children for the real world and the struggle against racism. The influence from Ty's family compelled him to work at being the best at everything he tried. The mild climate in the South allowed him to play baseball with his Dad nearly every day. His Dad was a former player and the family loved baseball. Dad taught Ty everything he could about the game of baseball, especially hitting. Ty excels as a hitter and attributes his success to the tutelage from his Dad. Ty has developed into a highly skilled baseball player. He has decided that he is going to play Major League Baseball despite poor recruiting, poor treatment by coaches, and playing out of position in college. He believes racism plays a role in everything including his baseball experience. People who have an issue with his race are the ones with a problem...not him. With an unrelenting work ethic and the support of his parents, nothing will get him off course.

Junior: Big time?

Junior is from the suburbs of a large Midwestern city. He was raised with his three brothers and a sister in a baseball family. His family members played baseball at a high level and some still work in professional baseball. Junior was often the only black person in many of his classes and on many of his teams. This is when he developed

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shallow relationships and started to become closed-off to other people. Junior further described these relationships,

The people I grew up with were nice and friendly but never really friends. They were more like seasonal friends. Friendly during the sports season then acting surprised to see me outside of the sport season. Every time that happened, I knew it was fake. People would act surprised to see me when I know that they saw me seeing them seeing me looking at them. I would say hello knowing they wouldn't say hello to me first. I felt ignored most of the time.

These isolating experiences have produced a Junior who is completely focused on success when it comes to baseball. He has been a good teammate but is not focused on making friends. Junior's collegiate experience could be enhanced with a program and a coach that welcomes players by building relationships. The isolation in Junior's experiences as he has navigated his way to the college baseball field is mirrored by black players at the highest level of baseball. Former MLB player Preston Wilson describes his experience in baseball as a story of isolation (Apstein, 2020). Wilson was running in from left field feeling the euphoria of winning the 2006 World Series with the St. Louis Cardinals when his thoughts centered on the fact that he was the only black player on the team (Apstein, 2020). As MLB attempts to combat the decline in African American baseball players, it must consider the experiences in the journeys of African American college baseball players because MLB drafts two-thirds of its players from college (Cooper, 2018).

Junior grew up in the upper Midwest before moving to the Southwest to attend college and play baseball in warmer weather. Junior doesn't believe he has been coached

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well or supported much beyond his parents along his journey to the college baseball field. He has overcome the challenges of feeling unwelcomed. Through hard work and talent Junior has become a professional prospect as a player despite unfair treatment along the way.

Max: For love of the game

Max is a baseball man. He simply loves the game. He is the youngest of three brothers and grew up immersed in baseball in a large Midwestern city. His parents are college educated and so are his older brothers. A college education is the expectation for Max. Max is a very good student who is particularly social. He likes people. He attended small public schools and really got to know his classmates well. However, Max found developing relationships with some adults more challenging. Max stated,

I'm a social person so the thing I liked most about school was being with friends. My schools were all small neighborhood schools so we got to know each other and go through school together. In high school I had some teachers initially act like I thought I was special or something because I played basketball and baseball. They had it wrong because I was a pretty chill teenager. Eventually, they got to know me in their classes and realized I was a good student. There was so much more to me that my teachers did not recognize. I just kept it moving but learned what it was like to be prejudged as an athlete just because I was a tall black ball player.

Max was able to build strong relationships with peers as he navigated his way to the college baseball field. He was well-rounded as a young student and did not like being labeled just an athlete by his high school teachers because he was a tall black ball player.

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Education is key to upward mobility, but the educational system is home to structural racism like teachers, mentors, or coaches who prejudge students like Max and make unjust decisions that can affect his future. Max was dissatisfied that college coaches prejudged his high school team just because they were from inner city public schools. His high school baseball team was good and had several talented players on the roster. Recruiters ignored them and never came to their games. Max had to conduct his own recruitment to a local private university. His Dad played semi-pro baseball years ago and both of his brothers played college baseball. Max wants to be connected to the game forever, so he plans to be a coach when his playing days are done. Max knows there are very few college baseball coaches who look like him and he plans to be the change he hopes to see.

Rob: It's time for something else.

Rob grew up in a largely African-American suburb in the Southwest. His parents did not go to college, but they emphasized higher education to their only child. Young Rob was a good student and performed well academically. His good grades and baseball ability made college a reality. Rob's Dad was a professional athlete who encouraged his son to attend college as well. Rob admired his Dad and decided he wanted to be a professional athlete like the old man. Rob's father played baseball as a youth and still loved the game despite becoming a professional in another sport. Rob decided he wanted to be a baseball player. He explained,

College really became a topic when I played baseball in high school. I was glad I had good grades once college started to look like my path. Grades and baseball got me to go to college.

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Rob's strong focus on academics comes from home. A college degree is the expectation, and baseball is helping him achieve his goal. Rob is not concerned about his academics because he knows he has that covered. A commitment to participation in baseball helped Rob access higher education. He wants an opportunity to show what he can do on the playing field. Rob's family decided to give him a chance to develop as a baseball player by moving him to a travel team with a reputation of getting players to college. He had to leave his neighborhood to join a team with more commitment and a better opportunity to be seen by scouts. The family had hoped for better coaching and more development like the coach promised when he was saying all the right things to Rob's parents. There was very little coaching and instruction on this team, so Rob and his family found a different travel team. He continued his growth and development as a player and started to look like a college baseball player.

Rob used his strong academics and athleticism to access higher education at a Southwestern Junior College in hopes of finding a professional opportunity after his freshman or sophomore year. After two years of getting "jerked around" in college baseball, Rob explains that he has had enough. He is fed up with a continued lack of coaching and limited opportunities to perform. He is going to try another sport that isn't so dependent on a college coach giving him an opportunity.

The participants' experiences and their parents' experiences with the permanence of racism throughout American society necessitated teaching the concept that African Americans have to be twice as good to get half of the opportunity. All six participants have defined a strong focus on education as motivation to complete college degrees. Baseball participation was a choice for these young men whose strong academics

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propelled them into college regardless of sports participation. Baseball ability and determination landed them on the college baseball field despite obvious obstacles like competition and some not so obvious obstacles like the procedures and practices of coach's choice. The voiced narratives of these athletes explicate their journeys to the college baseball field.

Analysis

The lived experiences of these six African American student-athletes reveal several similarities along their separate journeys to the college baseball field. From these six narratives, four findings emerged: a) influence from home, b) primary strategy for success, c) advising the future, and d) coaching influence. The first three findings are directly related to Research Question 1 that examines how African American males navigate their journeys from boyhood to the college baseball field. The fourth finding relates to Research Question 2 that explores how African American college baseball players perceive racism in their baseball journey.

Exploring Research Question 1

Influence from home

The first key finding from analysis of the narratives indicates the influence from home in the importance of completing a college education to the student-athletes and their families. Life goals, expectations, and identities for African American males come from others as we are all impacted by the expectations of individuals in our environments (Douglas, 2012). Initial interviews with participants focused on background and educational history.

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. The six participants were raised in homes with and without college educated parents. Each student-athlete had strong academic work and achievement towards completing a college degree as normal expectations from home. These student-athletes are not disillusioned to think they are going to be successful in sport and life without an education. While dreams of professional athletics exist for some, these college baseball players are well aware of the small percentage of college athletes that go on to successful professional careers as athletes. Each student-athlete's unique experiences are shared in his own section. The participants explained that the commitment to education began at home and continues today as the student-athletes are approaching the completion of their college educations. All six student-athletes worked incredibly hard to earn good grades and access college. The good students would be accepted to college regardless of sports participation.

Tim

Tim currently attends an HBCU where he has continued his strong academic performance and is finding success on the baseball field. The HBCU is the fourth college in four years for the brilliant young man who is an impressive student-athlete. He originally attended a large PWI where he red-shirted amid an uncomfortable first year of college. Tim performed well academically but received little coaching and did not get an opportunity on the baseball field. He transferred to a junior college to continue developing as a player and earn an opportunity to play in 2020. Unfortunately, the 2020 Spring college sports season was interrupted by a Covid-19 cancellation. Tim then went to a different junior college for the 2021 season where he finally received an opportunity to play. His strong performances in the classroom and on the baseball field earned him

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the academic and athletic opportunity at his current HBCU. The determination to continue his academic and athletic pursuit comes from lessons learned many years before. His parents taught Tim and his siblings the right way to do the right thing always.

Tim said,

I'm from an urban Midwest city. My childhood was good in a two-parent home where my three siblings and I were raised by parents with graduate degrees. They kept us involved in a lot of things so there was never time to go off course. We have a strong family in that we did everything together all the time. We are not perfect, but we have great relationships. Our household was pretty strict with discipline when we made mistakes and there was no tolerance for disrespect. We were taught proper training whether it was talking, table etiquette, yes sir no sir, etc. The dishes were done before we went to sleep and the kitchen was clean. I think this really made the difference in my childhood. I was taught that as a black man I have to be almost perfect.

Tim's comments on his rearing and the importance of education compliment the CRT tenet that race and racism are endemic and permanent to American society. Tim's parents raising him and his siblings to be well mannered and good people was not enough. His highly educated parents taught their children that black people had to be nearly perfect to combat racism. Tim is still driven by a focus on perfection. Doing things the right way without failure as an option was an emphasis in his upbringing. Tim possesses an intrinsic motivation to excel academically. He does not have to wonder who he is because his parents helped define him as a good person before baseball became part of his identity.

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Tim explained that accessing higher education through baseball participation became a goal in his youth. He stated,

School experiences were good because I was a good student and enjoyed learning even though I attended underfunded public schools. Around age 12 I knew I wanted to play college baseball, because I started to dream about playing professionally and I already knew I was going to college. High school is where I really started trying to get prepared for a chance to play baseball in college.

Tim's comments relate to the experiential knowledge tenet of CRT and the value of his lived experience. His explanation of a desire to play college baseball as a pre-teen provides a counter story to the dominant narrative of cultural disinterest in baseball from African American youth (Harper, 2008). During our interviews, Tim was completely engaged and intense as he carefully examined each question before providing a measured response. Tim was admittedly nervous about his interviews somehow creating problems for him at his new school with his new coach. However, he ultimately decided to provide the interview to the best of his ability because he thought his experience could help someone. The concerns of the brilliant student-athlete were assuaged with the reassurance of anonymity. He will complete his college degree which has been the goal since he was a child. Adding his passion for baseball to the equation put college baseball on the radar for the college bound baseball player. Tim explains his parents' teaching a focus on education has allowed him to continue preparing and pursuing his baseball dreams. He has earned academic scholarships at a PWI, two junior colleges, and an HBCU.

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Joe

Joe attends a small Midwestern liberal arts college. Joe feels like he has finally found the right place to continue his academic and baseball careers. The good student is confident that he will do well academically at any college. This is the third college for Joe who has attended each of the institutions on academic scholarships. Joe was poorly recruited out of high school and managed to walk-on at a local junior college. He was never given an opportunity to perform so he redshirted and transferred to another junior college in pursuit of an opportunity. At this school, Joe was given an opportunity to play and he took full advantage. He played well in a few games before suffering a serious injury. As he was set to return and play through the injury, the 2020 Spring college sports season was halted by a Covid-19 cancellation. Joe underwent surgery to repair his injury and returned to the junior college for the 2021 season. His coach explained that he did not think he would be ready to play because of the time needed to recover from surgery. Once again, Joe did not receive much of an opportunity to play despite being recovered from his injury and medically cleared to play before the season started. He played in a college wood bat league during the summer of 2021 and caught the attention of a new coach with his size, strength, speed, and strong academics. He was offered academic and athletic scholarships and is set to continue his academic and athletic careers at a place where he believes he is wanted. Joe found his determinations to continue his academic and athletic pursuits were learned in the lessons emphasized in his youth. His strict parents taught Joe and his siblings to treat people right and always take care of business. Joe said,

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I'm from a small Midwest college town. I was raised in a two-parent home where education and activities were emphasized, particularly baseball. My parents completed graduate degrees while I was a kid. We all played baseball games, watched baseball games, and went to baseball games. Even my sisters played until they were older. Then they played on softball teams. We did many other activities and sports, but baseball was always on the calendar. I think my childhood was normal and filled with good memories. My parents kept us busy with a focus on school, activities, and being good people. Everything started with the Golden Rule. They didn't put up with any mess and we learned to always take care of business. Our home was strict but relaxed. My family is very close, and we stay connected through weekly Sunday dinner at our house.

Joe explains that an unyielding work ethic drives him to be his absolute best at everything he does. Particularly in his pursuit of an education. The impact of the permanence of racism is revealed as Joe discusses his parents' teachings that a black man had to get it right the first time because there would not be second chance. Joe would have to be perfect or twice as good to combat racism for any opportunities. Education, activities, and discipline were emphasized in Joe's upbringing. The family enjoyed baseball and placed significant value on the activity as recreation. Joe was taught the importance of a good education at home as a youth and he maximized his educational skills to academically achieve at a high level. He also learned the value of hard work from home. These values persist as he nears a college degree. Joe continued,

Earning a college degree was the requirement in our house. That's why I worked so hard in school. My parents and older siblings helped me understand that I

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could develop my skills to be a good student. So that's exactly what I did. At a young age, I learned that no one is coming to help you. You got to want it for yourself. Otherwise, this world will chew you up and spit you out. In my educational experience, I learned that as a black man, I didn't have a do over option. I couldn't afford to mess up. I had to get it right or there wouldn't be another chance. The same thing is true in my sports experience. That's why I prepare to always be ready.

Like Tim, Joe references the knowledge gleaned from his parents that he had to get it right the first time. That's why preparation and a strong work ethic are crucial to his daily endeavors as an African American college baseball player. Again, the pervasiveness of racism constantly reminds Joe that he has to do right and do well the first time because a black man like him will not get second chance. Joe expressed eagerness to tell his story. He has a desire to combat the social injustice of unfair and unequal treatment of African American college baseball players by helping other future African Americans obtain an equal opportunity to become college baseball players. He wanted to help by informing others, but he also felt a desire to talk about his experiences if he had an audience. Joe welcomed the opportunity to participate in the study.

Ty

Ty attends a large PWI in the Midwest because that was his best opportunity to access higher education as a baseball student-athlete despite tremendous academic and athletic success as a youth in the South. Through a focus on academic achievement, he has excelled in honors courses, and he looks forward to completing his degree. He was guided to this school by his 'big brother' who was a local star in the south but had to

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leave to find an opportunity. Ty was a very accomplished high school athlete, but he was not seriously recruited in his area. Ty said,

School was really important in our house. I think my educational experience has been good. I always played sports and was good, so I guess I had the whole jock experience. But my grades were good too. My parents preached that I had to be better than everybody else at everything, especially school, because being good is never good enough for a black man.

Ty's comments on his upbringing compliment the CRT tenet regarding the permanence of racism. His parents taught him that being good was not good enough for a Black man. He had to be the best to give himself a chance against racism. His intelligence and preparation were viewed negatively as arrogance and cockiness instead of positively as smart and confident. Ty's academic and athletic abilities were cultivated at home. He explained,

My schooling before college was cool because I really liked taking the honors classes and learning more than the basics. I know that helps my confidence too because it's good to know and understand things. The thing I liked least about school was just feeling invisible all the time. I had conversations with my parents where they explained that people would think of me as arrogant because I was smart. They said that's the way it is for smart black men. People would also think of me as cocky because I was good in sports. I was just confident. I knew I was going to college and I wanted to play baseball.

Ty's comments also indicate the impact of racial marginalization as a motivator to succeed. He explains that a good education was the goal in his house. His parents

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constantly emphasized the importance of performing well in school and sports to be prepared for challenges with confidence. Now, Ty is a college baseball star himself. The good student-athlete has continued his academic and athletic success away from home. He is expected to be a high draft pick this summer. Ty, unlike some of the other participants, was quite eager to tell his story and very grateful for the opportunity. He really wants his voice to be heard and his story told.

Junior

Junior was raised in a baseball family in the upper Midwest but chose to attend a PWI in the warmer climate of the Southwest. He laments the shallow relationships he has formed along his journey. Junior mostly remembers feeling ignored most of the time. He felt ignored by his youth teammates' parents, his high school coaches, and professional scouts. He learned early on that performing well in school and sports where he lived was essential to him earning any opportunities because life wasn't any different in other places. Junior stated,

School before college seemed normal enough. I was the only black kid in many of my classes and on all my teams. The people I grew up with were nice and friendly but never really friends. They were more like seasonal friends. Friendly during the sports season then acting surprised to see me outside of the sport season. Every time that happened, I knew it was fake. People would act surprised to see me when I know that they saw me seeing them seeing me looking at them. I would say hello knowing they wouldn't say hello to me first. I felt ignored most of the time. My father told me I had to keep doing well in school and sports right where I was because it wasn't any different anywhere else.

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I know some people think of me as closed-off now. I also know my (current) teammates think I'm not too closed-off because I'm a good teammate and I work well with everybody. I just don't do that buddy stuff because I know it has always been fake. Especially from the coaches. I don't think I have been really coached until now (college). I always planned to go to college because I wanted to play college baseball in the Southwest.

Junior's comments compliment the CRT tenet of the permanence of racism in America. Junior was taught by his parents that his feelings of isolation and aloneness were products of behaviors that are part of daily life anywhere in America. Junior's father taught him to excel where he lived because the challenges would be just as great anywhere else. Junior's comments also detail the value of relationship building and the lack of doing so by his coaches. These critical mentors have failed to build a relationship with Junior and help him feel welcome to the program and institution.

Junior always wanted to play college baseball in the Southwest so he could complete his education and play in warmer weather. Becoming a professional ball player wasn't really a goal for Junior until recently when he started getting attention from scouts. Junior discovered that his father's words about life not being any different anywhere else rang true when he experienced very little coaching in high school. And now he feels the same thing is happening in college. Junior attributes his success in the classroom and on the baseball field to the personal growth lessons he learned from home. He consistently applies these lessons to his daily life. Junior will likely be drafted to begin his professional baseball career. He is resigned to likely having shallow relationships at the pro level too because that is what he has learned. I find Junior to be a

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very relatable person who would like to build relationships. This will be a challenge because he always has his guard up to protect himself emotionally. His desire for relationships will be his biggest challenge as he continues his baseball career.

Max

Max is from a large city in the Midwest and baseball is huge in his town. He is the youngest of his siblings in a family that loves baseball. Max's Dad and two older brothers all played college baseball. The family affectionately refers to his Mom as a baseball almanac because of her extensive knowledge of the game. The college educated family reared Max to be a good person, good student, and good ball player with a college education as an expectation. A tall, lanky athlete in his youth, Max also excelled at basketball. The good student in Max attended a college prep high school in preparation for meeting the expectation of going to college. Max said,

Both of my parents went to college. We were expected to do the same. I have always been a good student. I was always taller than my classmates so I played basketball and baseball. I'm a city kid so I went to public schools all the way through high school then ended up at a private college. Both of my parents inspired me to go to college so my education could give me some life options after graduation. My father and brothers really inspired me to want to play baseball in college. I enjoyed growing up around their games. Especially going to see my brothers play in college.

Max explains that a college education and baseball were emphasized in his home. Like Joe, he was born into a family that focused on education and sports. Max's parents taught him that he had to be academically better than everyone else because of prejudice.

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Max reflexively recalled a schooling experience with prejudice. He explained,

The message from teachers that really stays with me is the bad vibe I got from teachers who thought I was just an athlete looking for easy grades. There are teachers that just don't like you because you are an athlete. But I had teachers acting like I did something to them when we just met. Later there was respect for the student I showed them, but why the bad vibes before they ever knew me. My mom said they assumed I was just a basketball player because I was tall. She said that's why I have to be a better student than other people because I was judged before I could even take a seat. Race has played a role in my education.

Especially since high school. It was routinely assumed that I was a basketball player because I was the tall black kid. I still haven't had a teacher that assumes my tall, white classmates are on the basketball team.

The continued impact of racism and racist behavior is observed as Max has teachers make judgements about him because of his race and height. His teachers' judgement of Max based on race is racist. Max is a catcher just like his Dad. His father taught Max the importance of the position and how to play the position. Dad also provided crucial advice to help Max stay focused and motivated in baseball. The lessons learned from home still serve Max well. The leader in Max wants to be a college baseball coach so he can do something with the knowledge and passion his Dad shared with him. He wants to be a better recruiter in urban areas. He wants to provide a positive experience for young players when interacting with a college program.

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Rob

Rob is the only child of his parents. The family is from the suburbs on the black side of town in a large Southwestern city. His father was a professional athlete and his mother was a homemaker. Neither of his parents attended college because higher education was too expensive. Both parents worked to teach Rob the importance of a college education. They encouraged Rob to go to college if he could earn the opportunity and the family could afford his college education. He was focused on doing well in school and graduating from high school to pursue higher education. Participation in baseball provided Rob access to college. Rob said,

My father was a professional athlete and he loved baseball. It was just the three of us and I don't really remember missing him while he was working because it seemed like he was always there. My parents finished high school and both say they graduated from the school of hard knocks. My parents didn't go to college because they couldn't afford it. They worked to make sure I had the opportunity if I earned it. That's why my mother focused me on doing well in school and graduating from high school.

Rob's comments centralize a focus on education as the pathway to an improved life. His comments also convey the view of subordination as a motivator to succeed in school. Even though his parents did not attend college, they still taught Rob that education is the key toward upward mobility. Rob is a smaller athlete who feels he has worked harder over the years than most. He recognizes that his hard work helped him develop into a premier player. But others worked hard to help him along his journey.

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Rob knows he will be successful as a college student and wants to be successful as a college baseball player. He really doesn't want to let his supporters at home down.

Primary strategies for success: Hard work and determination

Each of the six participants in this study defined a commitment to hard work and self-improvement as key to their success in the classroom and on the field throughout their journey. This work ethic and determination was instilled by the families of the participants many years before. Hard work as a motto defines the intentional efforts to succeed of these six college baseball players. Constant work to improve academics, athleticism, skill development, diet, mental awareness and capacity, and confidence all define hard work for these college baseball players. The determination to outwork everyone was present in the philosophies these student-athletes applied to their daily endeavors as they seek a college education and success in life.

Tim

Tim's demeanor during our interviews was expressly determined as he was always serious and did not smile. His confidence is undeterred now that he has landed at (his current HBCU). He knows his hard work is paying off. His motivation to continue pursuing his college education and a professional baseball career could not be greater.

Tim said,

I learned that everything in life comes from hard work and being intentional with your time. My new coach actually tried to teach us instead of just filling out the lineup card. I got on a weight plan to workout and started to develop an eating program when I was 15. My parents and my high school coach made numerous sacrifices for me to have an opportunity to join one of my areas best travel clubs

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and start doing showcases across the country. I performed very well at a showcase at large predominantly white institution that had a really good baseball program and received a scholarship offer that would pay for some of my schooling. I felt like the hard work had paid off.

Tim's seriousness is understandable given the large investment of time, resources, and commitment the athlete and person that he is today. Tim is a large athlete at over 240 pounds on his 6'4" frame. Being intentional with his time is why his athleticism and impressive physique are not an accident. He is not just raw talent as defined by some of his previous coaches. His commitment and high-level experience at a formative age helped propel him to the college baseball field. Combining his outstanding academics and strong work ethic with solid instruction propelled Tim to access higher education through participation in baseball.

Joe

Joe's experiences have always been defined by hard work. His parents and older siblings modeled a commitment to working hard at everything to a young Joe. Their efforts had a significant impact on Joe. He refuses to be outworked at anything. Hard work is the key to his tremendous confidence in his preparation. Joe said,

So, I was on my first team when I was three and I had the same number as my brother. I really enjoyed the other sports and activities I had, but baseball was a constant. I became a really good hitter and got serious about playing college baseball in my sophomore year of high school.

I worked constantly to prepare myself for a chance to play in college. When my older brother was a freshman in college, he came home for a visit and told me to

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get in the weight room and don't come out if I wanted a play in college. He was a great player but was considered too small. So, I worked as hard in the weight room as I did in the classroom and on the field. I wanted to be like my pops and brother. They played baseball in college and beyond. I wanted to be like the older players I grew up watching from the bleachers. So, I worked and trained nonstop, played summer ball, fall ball, winter workouts, spring ball, and camps. I had heard coaches describe me as raw talent and I knew it wasn't a compliment. There was no consideration for the hard work I had done. I watched as I progressed past other players, but still received limited opportunities. It was like the coaches were protecting positions for certain players and not giving players like me a chance. I knew I had to be ready to succeed at the first opportunity because I might not get another one.

I worked on all aspects of the game. I learned to pitch, play infield, and play outfield. My pops told me that players with ability in more than one position are more valuable to the team. In high school, I remember being excited and ready to learn from the coaches. There was little to no instruction. The coaches put certain players on the field and that was that. I had really good sophomore and junior years on the JV team and the varsity coach told my dad he hoped I would play the next year. I listened to my brother about the weight room, and I had developed lots of power with my swing.

Hard work is the only way to really earn something of value. I did the same thing in sports and everything. I worked hard to be ready for whatever is next. At a young age, I learned that no one is coming to help you. You got to want it for

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yourself. Otherwise, this world will chew you up and spit you out. That's why I prepare to always be ready.

Hard work is Joe's first response to a challenge. Putting in the work is all he knows. Like Tim, Joe was described as raw talent with no regard for his hard work. He also received little to no coaching from his coaches along the way. Joe has an underdog mentality. He views his success as proving his doubters wrong. Joe continues to work extremely hard in the classroom, weight room, on the field, in the community, and at everything he does. He attributes his current success to the hard work that defines his daily commitment.

Ty

Ty has used hard work to become a dominant baseball player with incredible confidence. He is an offensive threat because of his powerful swing and hitting prowess. His defensive ability complements his offensive success very nicely because of his exceptional throwing arm. Ty feels he is prepared for immediate success every time he takes the field. Ty routinely makes great plays because good is not good enough and failure is not an option. Ty said,

We spent countless hours working on my swing. I work hard and put in the time to play well in games. That's my confidence because I know I'm prepared.

That's why I work to be the best and nothing less. Just being good is not enough. My high level of confidence comes from knowing I'm prepared because I've done the work. I stopped playing football and committed to developing my skill level so I could play college baseball. My parents supported me and made it possible for me to play on some of the better travel teams in my area. Still, the majority of

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my development comes from work with my Dad and on my own because my coaches didn't really work with us.

My parents are my biggest supporters. I constantly get positive support from them. Every game, my Dad says he really enjoys watching me play. He reminds me that I prepared to play well and I'm playing well because I'm prepared. I know he has baseball advice for me, but he chooses to say nothing because he knows I work hard and doesn't want to seem like he's being picky with my game. I don't mind because I know he's got my back. A few years ago he stopped critiquing my game and told me I needed to trust my preparation. He said I needed to be critically honest with myself then adjust and do better. He made me own my work and my play. What can I say? He's brilliant. With God giving me strength to work hard I have everything I need to be the best.

Ty has worked hard and continues his hard work daily. He is extremely confident because he knows he has done the work and experienced success. He is talented but believes a focus on his talent disregards his hard work and constant preparation. He is also committed. Gifted athletes like Ty often play multiple sports in college. Athletically, Ty is solely focused on baseball. Ty honors his family, who are his biggest supporters, by working hard constantly.

Junior

Junior has developed into a professional prospect while his focus has been on college baseball. He didn't really think about becoming a professional because he wanted to earn a college degree. Today, both pro ball and a college education are his reality. Junior knows he has earned these opportunities because of his relentless work

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ethic. Not only has he worked hard, he has done most of the work on his own. Junior said,

I knew I worked hard and I was good, but I never really thought about playing professionally because I heard my coaches pumping up other players to scouts but not me. I did know I was a better player and I could have opportunities after high school. But my focus was college baseball so I could get my education. Once I got to college and was playing well in the fall season I started hearing from my coaches about me showing some things that would get scouts attention. I remember hoping these scouts were not the same as the scouts at home that ignored me. I felt a little hopeful because these coaches were not like any other coaches I had met so maybe the scouts would be different too. Then my coach got another job and we got a new coach. The new coaching staff really didn't do much of what I thought was coaching and teaching. They just put the players on the field that they thought could play. I was back to no coaching or teaching so I worked on my own. I've played well while constantly working on my game and now I should be a pretty good draft pick and I know me and my teammates are learning more from each other than any of the coaches.

Every year that I have played baseball my father has given me the self-discipline talk to start the season. I had to do the work to get better because no one was going to help. For years I didn't understand why, but my father was right. Some people think I am stuck up or have a bad attitude. I'm just working to be my best because baseball is important to me and the few minutes of coaching that my coaches actually do is not for me. They are working with that prize third baseball

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while I figure it out myself. I'm playing right field while everybody knows I'm a better centerfielder than our centerfielder. Whatever man. I've been told by scouts that I can expect a position change in the minors because I have the tools to play center.

Junior is having success as a college baseball student-athlete. He mentioned earlier that he had not been really coached until college. Now, he partially attributes his professional aspirations to the positive impact of his good relationship with his previous college coaches. His current coaches have not continued the impact through relationship of his initial college coaches. He attributes his current success to his individual work and preparation due to the lack of guidance from these coaches. Junior still feels negatively impacted by the current coach's decision to play him out of position. His hard-working perspective is a continuation of the lessons learned at home and in school as a child.

Max

Max had plenty of guidance to become a baseball player. His older brothers and father immersed him in baseball. But Max still had to do the work to be prepared to play well. Max is an excellent catcher because of his high skill level and strong leadership personality. Those traits will serve Max well as he is preparing for a lifetime in college baseball. Max said,

My decision to play college baseball was a no brainer years ago. I'm grateful to my family for teaching me how to play. I remember when baseball season started in my freshman year and my brother told my mom he felt like they were unleashing me on high school baseball. I was ready because my older brothers made sure I knew how to play. Especially at my size. My dad was a catcher and

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so am I. The catcher has the whole field in front of him and is in charge of the game. I've always liked that. My dad was a semi-pro catcher who tried to teach me everything he knew about baseball before he passed. I'm grateful and now it's up to me to do something with all he shared with me.

I chose my school because I wanted to play at a high level and close to home.

Learning to play baseball from my family was an awesome experience. That's why I'm going to be a college baseball coach when I'm finished playing. I'm going to keep teaching the game and do a much better job recruiting the city than the coaches did for me. My strongest supporters are my family.

I'm not sure if I would've done anything differently to become a college baseball player. I'm not even sure if I should have done anything differently. I

mean...I'm here playing college baseball. All of the hard work is paying off. I'm in college and playing baseball. I played basketball, but baseball is my passion.

That's why I always knew I would be here.

Hard work defines Max as a person. He continually applies the lessons learned from his family to remain successful as a person and a baseball player. The hard work to be a successful college baseball player is paying off for Max. He plans to work even harder on his interest in becoming a coach. Max is motivated by a desire to do the work necessary to recruit student-athletes like him. He has shown a calm and relaxed demeanor in our interviews. He is intentionally more excited and aggressive on the field.

Rob

Hard work was modeled for Rob by the important adults in his life. His father was a professional athlete who trained constantly and taught his son to work hard. Mom

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did the same thing for a young Rob. His parents worked hard to provide for their family. Rob learned that working hard would earn him opportunities. That's why he works so hard in the classroom and on the field. A commitment to hard work fuels Rob's daily routine as he tries to get on the college baseball field. He believes he has done the work to get on the field as he continues to work even harder. Rob owes his work ethic to the examples presented by his parents and high school coach. Rob said,

My parents spent a lot and worked extra for me to be on (a travel) team. We committed a lot too. I did everything (expensive lessons) they offered and (I) really developed. My high school coach helped get me on that team. I didn't know that he had lots of conversations with them about my development and lack of opportunity because I had done the work and I was premier. Recently, I learned that my high school coach worked for free for that organization so I could get a chance. He told me he was hooking up with this other coach to provide an opportunity for kids like me without the ridiculous cost of some of the other travel teams. I got mad respect for that.

My college teammates keep asking me how do I put up with not playing more? They say things like, "You're a good player and should be playing more" or "I couldn't do what you're doing day after day without playing more." Success for me would be getting a chance to show I can really play. It's not enough just knowing I can do it and showing success in limited chances. I love playing baseball, but I'm tired of all the mess that goes with it. I'm done after this season. I'm really feeling like trying fighting or MMA. Then I don't have to deal with coaches not giving me my chance when I earn it.

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Rob knows he has done the work and is prepared. He feels his frustration with his lack of opportunities is at an all-time high. Rob is quick to provide examples of how prepared he is through the words of his teammates. He really wants me to know that his perspective of deserving more opportunities is not just his opinion. Rob doesn't lack confidence but knows success in baseball for him will be determined by what he does during games. His frustration and disappointment are obvious as he does not hide his emotions when candidly declaring an end to his college baseball and educational journey. I was genuinely saddened to hear that Rob was resigned to such a fate given all of his hard work, sacrifices, commitment, and passion. The brilliant young athlete quickly interpreted my surprised facial expression and responded to encourage me. He would be continuing the efforts of his hard work in another venture after graduation.

Advising the future African American College Baseball Players

A primary objective of this study was to learn how these brilliant student-athletes successfully navigated their journeys to the college baseball field. Examination of their words revealed consistency among participants of key strategies used to access higher education through baseball participation. These strategies helped each participant matriculate to college baseball despite obstacles like poor support from coaches and feelings of unwelcomeness that were not challenges for all athletes. Some participants specifically indicated their feelings of racial bias as a real and present obstacle as they near the end of their college baseball experience. Their journeys to access higher education through participation in baseball have been successful. The third key finding from this study was the participants' desire to offer advice to future African Americans desirous of playing college baseball.

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Tim

Tim knows that understanding his experience as a baseball player can help other players on the same path. He wants younger players to know that talent will get you noticed by scouts and recruiters but there is no replacement for years of hard work. Young players wanting to learn and play the game at a high level like college baseball must not get down on themselves. They have to listen carefully to the messages from their coaches because some of the people trying to stop your progress will be coaches who have control over player opportunities. Tim said,

I know I was reluctant, but I appreciate the opportunity to share my experiences.

I have never really felt like I could talk to anyone about some of this and there are still things I would rather not talk about. I would like for young players wanting to play in college to know that your talent will get you noticed. But not everyone that is helping you find a school is really looking for your best interest. If you have the funding to do showcases, then you should because those numbers and data are valued a lot. That's what really helped me transfer. Also, try to talk to some of the players about the head coach before you choose a school. Players will be honest about the coach and you can make an educated decision.

The most successful strategy I use is to prepare by working hard in practice and on your own. Be consistent with your work and be confident in yourself. Do not allow anyone to stop you from playing baseball. Believe me, there are plenty of people who will try to stop you. Many of them will be coaches. Do not get down. Keep working to stay prepared for your opportunity. The last thing is (to) pick your coaches wisely.

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Tim's specific advice to younger players conveys the importance of the head coach to player relationship. He urges players learn about the head coach from his players because they will be honest. Tim offers young players the action steps of preparation through hard work and intentionally picking their coaches wisely to empower the young athletes in their baseball journeys. Tim was less reserved when providing advice to coaches. He stated,

For coaches who are seriously interested in recruiting players like me I want them to know that they should not judge the players when everything is going well, judge them on the days when they under perform. Learn their character in those circumstances. Get to know the person behind the raw talent because there is a tremendous player there too. Stop over-looking hard workers. Develop all your players and actually coach them. Coaches need to be honest and do better or give the job to someone else.

Tim's advice for the future of African Americans in college baseball was specific as he offered constructive suggestions to coaches and recruiters in that they should get to know their athletes and actually do a better job of coaching them to promote development or give the job to someone else.

Joe

Joe expressed a willingness to advise future African American college baseball players as well. He wants aspiring young players to know that the most important aspect of your baseball experience that you do not control is the head coach. He touts consistent hard work as the key to be prepared when you finally catch the interest of a quality coach. The work a player does beyond the normal practice time will make the difference at

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improving your ability and confidence as a baseball player. Work to get ready then keep working to stay ready. Joe said,

Aspiring young players and their families should know that the coach makes all of the difference in the world when it comes to your baseball experience. Not the school or level or location...the coach. Prepare yourself to be ready for what your baseball experience throws at you. Then you will be more likely to catch the interest of a quality coach who cares about people and does more than just fill out a lineup card. Also, be honored and respectful of any coach who shows interest in you as a player and person.

My best strategy to be successful in baseball is to always work hard to stay ready.

Only practicing during regularly scheduled practice time is not good enough.

Players need to be willing to work on their own to get better. If you have access to training and lessons, then do them. If you can't access lessons, then train by yourself so you are ready. Part of that strategy is to work consistently as well as hard so you can stay ready.

I would like potential coaches and recruiters to understand the commitment to the team that players like me bring. Coaches have to give all players real

opportunities if they want them to continue the commitment to the program.

Coaches have to stop acting like they couldn't care less if you existed or not. I

think players like me are working hard to earn an opportunity instead of acting

entitled to playing time. Recognize the hard work because I can and will help the team.

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Joe continued his commitment to college baseball by advising the coaches to understand the commitment that talented players like him bring to a team. Coaches need to make getting to know players and building relationships priorities. The hard work on and off the field by talented players like Joe deserves an opportunity. Joe informed me that he was still doing well academically, and he was primed to contribute to his new team because he had built good relationships with the coaches and players in the short time he had been on campus. His excitement for the upcoming season was as obvious as his incredible confidence in his preparation.

Ty

Confidence could be Ty's nickname. He completely believes in his abilities and preparation as he refuses to let anyone bring him down. He wants younger players to understand that their baseball careers are their experiences to enjoy. He echoes the messages of careful consideration of the head coach when joining a team. His messages to promote African American participation in college baseball are instructional to players and critical to coaches. Ty wants young players to learn as much as possible about the coach and his ability to teach and grow players. Young players should work hard to learn how to play and continue the work/learning combination for their entire careers. Ty said,

This is my experience and I'm not letting anyone bring me down when I turn up on the field. That would be part of my message for young aspiring players. It's your experience to enjoy. The other part of my message would be to get on a team with real coaches who coach instead of some of these business guys who are only running a business. I think coaches need to know that players like me are

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looking to learn how to play baseball from them. We want to be coached to become highly skilled players instead of just talented.

I think hiring coaches who are serious about developing players and giving players a chance will help increase the number of us (African Americans) in college baseball. That's all we want is a fair chance to play and help our team win. We need coaches who are willing to recruit and scholarship players like me instead of offers to walk-on and figure out the tuition. Thanks for the opportunity to tell my story and let people know what it's like for me.

Ty advises that hiring new and different coaches who develop players and commit to them with scholarships will help increase African American participation in college baseball. The other participants have echoed Ty's opinion as they believe hiring coaches who build relationships with players will help increase African American college baseball player participation rates.

Junior

Junior's comments to young players and coaches also echoes a commitment to African American participation in college baseball. He advises younger players to have a strong desire to be successful in baseball then outwork that desire. Be courageous in the face of adversity and don't let obstacles stop you from achieving your goals. Self-determination will be essential for young players wanting to play college baseball because there are real obstacles that must be overcome. Prepare to help yourself as you seek a coach who actually coaches. Junior said,

The most challenging aspect of my participation in baseball has been knowing I'm not as welcomed as everybody else and there's nothing I can do about it. I

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used to try to enjoy just playing baseball. Now I only find enjoyment in playing well and winning. My strategy is to work hard and be ready to produce everyday.

I would tell young players to know that they can be successful in baseball if they want it. If you want to play baseball, then do it. Don't let anyone or anything stop you. Coaches need to know that players like me want to feel welcome. Not like we're outsiders or unwelcome. I want to make sure that I say how much I love baseball and I'm looking forward to a professional career. But the path to get here was not all fun and games and was unnecessarily hard. I saw a story where a black Major Leaguer said baseball doesn't care about us and doesn't need us. I know exactly what he means.

Junior continued his commitment to college baseball message for coaches as he advises that they intentionally create more welcoming environments to build better relationships with all of their players. Junior expresses his continued love for baseball while explaining how unnecessary some of his challenges to becoming a college baseball player have been. Baseball coaches and programs act like they don't care about the participation of African Americans when the same exclusionary practices that have reduced the participation rate of African Americans in baseball resulted in the first MLB World Series with no African American players on either roster in 72 years (Walsh, 2022).

Max

Max's comments directly challenge the current lack of representation for African American coaches in college baseball. One of his strategies to help increase African American player participation in college baseball is the hiring of more African American

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coaches. He wants young players to understand the importance of promoting yourself and communicating with programs in which you have interest. Players and families should use these opportunities to determine if the coach is likely to build a relationship with players. Max said,

The biggest challenge for me is staying up and staying positive when I get poor communication and a lack of support from my coaches. The strategies I use to handle this challenge is positive self-talk and I ignore all the negative non-sense. I've learned to stay focused and produce when I play. I'm as prepared as I can be so I can enjoy the games by playing well. That's it. My teammates and I have a healthy respect because they know how hard I work and I put up numbers. My coaches keep putting me in the lineup even though they don't say much to me. So I guess that's going good.

I'm not real religious but I pray and believe in God. I know Jesus is my protection and the reason for my successful baseball career so far. I've played well, earned some respect, and made all-conference. I'm committed to baseball because I want to play as long as I can and learn as much as I can. I also want to build a resume so I can get a job coaching and do it right. The main thing I would say to younger players is you have to push hard and promote yourself to get into college baseball. You can't wait for someone to come see you or someone else to promote you. Do it yourself and find somewhere to go with coaches who at least act like they care a little about you as a person.

Coaches need to know that it is important to get to know your players as people and to support them with some feedback. Better and honest recruiting and

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promoting of players will get more players like me playing baseball. We need more coaches who think and look like me to get more African Americans playing baseball.

Max very candidly stated his goal to be the change that he thinks is necessary to increase African American participation in college baseball. Max wants to be a college baseball coach when his playing days are over. He reiterates the importance of relationships in his statements toward coaches interested in players like him.

Rob

Rob also has encouraging words when offering his perspective on the future of college baseball for young African Americans. His words to aspiring young players are consistent with the feedback from the other participants. Hard work and solid preparation are key to producing when given an opportunity. Specific communication with coaches about their plans for players in their program is a necessary component to determining if the program is best for the player. Rob said,

...I would tell aspiring young players to do the work to get ready and stay ready so you produce when you get a chance. I would tell their parents to get their son on a team with a coach that will teach him and give him a chance. It will cost some money. Then ask him where he is going to play your son and hold him to it. I would tell coaches and recruiters to be a real coach, teach the players how to play, and play them based on ability. Then your players will be loyal and committed instead of resentful and looking for another team. Coaches that coach better and show some integrity will help get more African Americans in college baseball. I'm here. I can play. And I want to play. But I'm still not playing.

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The last thing I would like to say is that the way coaches are recruiting and then treating players is why there are declining numbers of black players. I would like to see the story you write if the coaches would answer some of these questions truthfully.

Rob's advice to coaches to be genuine about teaching and growing players that they bring into their programs restates the need for coaches to facilitate good relationships with their players. This helps promote loyalty to the program from the players. He believes that better coaching with more integrity will help improve the percentage of African Americans in college baseball.

Exploring Research Question 2

Coaching influence

The roles of the coach as a leader, mentor, teacher, role model, and sometimes parental figure are indispensable in the coach and player relationship. People in the position of coach have tremendous influence and impact on players at all levels of sport. The narratives of the six college baseball players in this study range from openly candid to initially reticent when discussing their feelings about the coaches in their baseball experience. The role of race and racism was difficult to acknowledge and even more difficult to discuss for some of the participants. Race is always a present factor when you are the only person of color and there are obvious inequities in the way you are spoken to, treated, and even included in conversations and activities (Ostertag & Armaline, 2011).

Racism occurs when subordination is depicted as policies and practices that exclude non-dominant groups (Ostertag & Armaline, 2011). Practices like stacking African American baseball players in the outfield because those positions were deemed

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less crucial than the infield, pitcher, and catcher positions (Schneider & Eitzen, 1986, Smith & Leonard, 1997, Yates, 2018). Or within the outfield positions, placing African Americans in the corner positions because there is greater responsibility in the premier position of centerfield. College baseball coaches influence experiences when they make daily decisions that impact their players journey. Each participant describes the influence of coaches on his journey to the college baseball field in the sections that follow.

Tim

Tim is grateful to the guidance of coaches and his tremendous work ethic for his success as a college baseball player. However, his gratitude is not for his past college coaches. He is grateful for the time his high school coach and summer coach put into his development. The lessons learned and skill developed caused Tim to realize that the majority of his baseball experience lacked significant coaching. Tim said,

As an urban, public-school student, I didn't really see an impact from race until after high school because we were all the same. After my freshman year, I met a summer coach who was the first black coach I had besides my father in the backyard. He probably taught me the most about baseball in the shortest amount of time. He explained that he could see I was talented, big, and strong as an athlete, but I was also unskilled, unrefined, and uneducated as a baseball player. He taught me about footwork to field a groundball and setup my throws. He taught me how to keep my hands inside on my swing to be a more effective hitter. He then told me that I had to commit to my high school coaches' plan and work on these things daily for the rest of my career to really get good at playing baseball at a high level. I realized that I had never really been coached or taught much. I did

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a lot of figuring stuff out. I recognized the lack of coaching in my experience and decided to work even harder on doing things the right way with my high school and summer coaches. A year later, I was a much better player with much more knowledge of how to play baseball. My journey to the college baseball field has been quite eye opening so far.

Tim's comments highlight the importance of the coach player relationship in the development of the players' ability and confidence. He blossomed under the tutelage of his high school and summer coaches. Then wasn't given an opportunity by initial college coaches. The established procedures and practices of these coaches produced an unwelcoming environment for Tim as he and the only other African American player redshirted while several of his white teammates received multiple opportunities to perform. Those procedures and practices defined an unwelcoming environment in which Tim's raw talent and skill was undeveloped and never given an opportunity. Institutional procedures and practices that exclude based on race define structural racism. While structural racism may be without intent by those utilizing the procedures and practices, the impacts and effects of players becoming increasingly frustrated and leaving programs are inescapably obvious. Tim continued,

I played baseball for as long as I can remember. I have always heard the term "raw" used to describe black baseball players. The coaches at the PWI called me raw. It didn't matter that I outworked my teammates and met every challenge they presented. I still never got a chance to play. The coaches told me that they liked my hands and footwork. And my overall technique was good. They said I was really improved from the player they signed when I was still in high school.

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But I was somehow raw and (my teammate) would be playing ahead of me even though it was obvious that he was not a better fielder, hitter, or player than me during our fall season.

Successful and respected coaches in high school and college referred to Tim as raw talent. This perspective showed no consideration of Tim's hard work and skill development. Coaches also used the raw talent description to limit Tim's opportunities as a baseball player. Tim realized that his recruitment to this PWI had been inviting and welcoming from the infield coach who brought him to (this school). There was no relationship with the head coach who did not make Tim feel welcome and invited him to leave. Tim explained,

I was told the infield coach thought I was ready, but the head coach wanted to see more of (my teammate). Coach thought that he had the look. So, he had the look and I looked raw. The numbers were clear that I was the better player, but that didn't matter because of the look.

I knew then that I was not in the right place with the right people because I wasn't going to get an opportunity. In the spring, (My teammate) struggled in the field and at the plate. The team performed poorly so lots of backups and freshman were getting opportunities. Me and another black player were told we would redshirt instead of play this year. None of the other healthy freshmen redshirted. I wanted to trust the coach's decision, but I knew it was wrong. I just didn't know why. Other players were failing and getting experience for next year. I should have had a chance to fail too. When I sat down with the coach to discuss things, he told me he just didn't think I was ready. I asked what I needed to do to get

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ready. He told me to just keep working and he thought I would be more ready to play next year. He offered to help me find another school if I wanted to transfer.

I almost couldn't believe that he was trying to get rid of me.

I realized that the head coach never really supported me (as a) player. The assistant coach brought me here and is powerless to get me on the field. The head coach had no commitment to me at all. I felt like I wasn't welcome there because I wasn't welcome there. Transferring out meant starting all over, but it was my only move to get a chance to play. Now I am at my fourth school after going to two junior colleges. I'm getting a chance to play and keep chasing my dream just like everybody else.

Tim's head coach described his teammate as having the look while Tim looked raw. The look was never defined for Tim. He had better numbers in the fall season and during intrasquad games but still received no opportunity from the head coach. He did receive a lack of honesty from the coach who dismissively told him to keep working without defining a purpose for Tim's work. He was invited to leave without receiving an opportunity despite his hard work and positive feedback from his position coach. Unsurprisingly, Tim did transfer and began to experience supportive coaching, relationship building, and successful opportunities. The coach player relationship is critical to the success of the player and defines the player's perception of welcomeness to the program.

Joe

Joe has struggled to identify any positive coaching input from his high school coaches. He explains that the misery of these poor coaching experiences continued into

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his first few years of college. Joe still stayed committed to his work ethic and desire to be a good baseball player. He feels rewarded to finally have a coach who actually coaches and teaches the players. Joe said,

After making the varsity team partly for my power, I had a coach tell me to hit the ball on the ground and run it out. It made zero sense to me, because I had the power to put balls off the wall and over the wall. He told me I had raw speed too, even though I wasn't really that fast. It also didn't make sense that he only told me to correct my swing and no one else, but I was taught to NEVER be difficult and to always be coachable. So, I did as the coach said and my average plummeted. It got to the point where I was sick of it and went back to how I normally swing. I was putting balls in the gaps and to the fence. My coach responded to my success with "that's not what we discussed" and benched me for a majority of the season. I didn't understand what I was doing wrong. When I talked to my coach about it, he said we'll work on it in practice. But when practice came, he was too busy helping out his chosen few. It was one of the worst seasons of baseball I've ever had. I wanted to quit so many times, but my pops always told me not to give in, you started something, now you must see it through. So, I didn't quit and kept working, and after the season I was completely miserable. My coach helped other players find a college but not me.

Unfortunately, my initial college experiences with baseball continued the misery from my senior year of high school. I was again the only black player on the team and I was treated differently. During fall scrimmages, other players would get opportunities and it seemed like I would have to wait until 10 different people

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went into the game before I would get an opportunity. I knew the coach did not like me, I just didn't know why. At this point, I lost the little bit of trust and respect I had for my coaches. They made it uncomfortably obvious that they didn't care about me. My journey to the college baseball field has been unnecessarily challenging because my grades, athletic performance, and behavior have not been an issue. I finished junior college and was fortunate enough to be recruited by a coach who works with all players and respects us as people. He follows the golden rule.

Joe's comments detail how his coaches actually tried to change his raw talent and well developed skill of driving the ball for extra bases into something different and less productive. Then fault Joe when his true ability emerged. This resulted in Joe receiving fewer opportunities as he became increasingly confused about performing well and seeing a reduction in his playing time. Joe respected the game and coaches and said nothing although he was well aware that his treatment by the coaches was inappropriate at best. He did not feel welcomed as there was little coaching on the tasks he was asked to perform.

During his initial college baseball experience, Joe once again received little coaching and instruction but continued his strong work ethic on academics and baseball. Joe recognized that he was treated differently by his coach. He firmly believes race was a factor because none of the other white players were treated this way. His coach spoke rudely to him and would not answer his questions about what he needed to do to improve. Joe felt uncomfortable and did not know what to do because he did not understand why he was treated differently. There was no relationship with the coach and no real

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opportunity for Joe to perform. Joe persevered and has found some success after transferring. Still, he recognizes the lasting effects of the racist practices he encountered at his first school as he has struggled to initially trust his other coaches.

Ty

Ty has directly experienced poor treatment of coaches while observing how other players reacted to him being treated poorly. Often his teammates would tell Ty how they couldn't put up with what he was getting from the coaches and keep coming back. He has been frustrated for years at his coaches disrespecting the hard work he does to be prepared to help the team. He believes race has played an important role in his experience because he knows he was treated differently. Ty is encouraged that professional scouts recognize his preparation and skill development. Ty said,

My Dad played at an HBCU and we planned for me to play college baseball. I knew my grades would get me into school and my bat would get me an opportunity. It was pretty painful to watch other players get recruited while I was ignored and putting up better numbers. I know race played a role in my experience. I had a coach tell me that he had already recruited a couple of speed guys like me. It felt like he had fulfilled his quota or something. I remember asking him if he had enough players like some of my (white) teammates he was recruiting. He told me that a few of those guys had good arms that could be developed into something and I was more of an athlete. That coach wasn't interested in the conversation anymore. I was actually an all-state player with overall ability and a power bat. I still am, just a little older and a little smarter.

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Race always plays a role in everything in my opinion. I mean, I was never the smart guy, I was always the smart black guy. I wasn't the baseball player, I was the black baseball player. My parents still remind me that race is the reason why I still have to work harder and be better than everyone else if I want a chance at success. The first thing people observe about another person is their race. All black people should know that negative vibe you get from white people when they notice you. Especially when you are the only black person. Before they hear you speak or even make eye contact. They see your race. I know that there are people who dislike me because of my race and I feel their negative energy everyday. I will not allow that to get me of course. They have a problem, not me.

Right now, I'm playing outfield and playing well, but I'm actually an infielder. I mean I understand that I was moved to the outfield to get my bat in the lineup. I was told I was a good athlete and I could make plays until I figured it out. I'm highly skilled as an infielder and I can play all the infield positions well. One of our infielders was worried about losing his position to me and they (coaches) told him not to worry because he would be playing. I was never told not to worry. I didn't have my position protected. I was told I would get a chance and I should make the most of it. I had pressure to perform while he had the comfort and security of knowing he was going to play infield.

Anybody can see our struggles on the infield for the last two years that I have been here. But we have a skilled infielder standing in rightfield because we are protecting players with weaker skills on the infield. Scouts have told me to be ready for a move back to the infield after I'm drafted. I haven't played infield in a

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couple years, but I'm going to play there as a pro and I can't get on the infield in college. I understand why so many people decide to stop playing or just stop dealing with this tired bs. I'm not quitting but I get it.

My plan to play college baseball really got serious when I joined a prospect team near my hometown. I really thought I would be able to play college ball close to home. I have a friend who is a few years ahead of me and he told me about this prospect team. He was a local superstar and I was following in his footsteps. He's like a big brother to me and he is in the league now. He went to (our local college) to play baseball and never got a chance to play. He told me how unwelcome the environment was for him. He was a pitcher with stuff as good as other pitchers, but never got a chance. He transferred up north and now he's in the league. He put me in touch with (this school) and coming here was a good move for me. At least I'm getting the one thing that we all want which is a chance to play.

I feel educated now that I know I had to leave home in order to find an opportunity while I watched guys with skills inferior to mine get much love from (the local college). All of these weak ass signing announcements and I see these guys still getting opportunities even though they are hitting .190. It is satisfying that we play in the same conference and I have played very well every time we've played them. They don't even have any black players on the team while a player from their town is playing on the visiting team and beating them.

The biggest challenge I have overcome to get to college baseball has been getting recruited. I don't know if I would be here if it wasn't for my big brother. He put

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me on the radar for (my school). I don't see coaches recruiting players like me unless we are the best player in the county. I'm a good player and I've seen white players with lesser ability get recruited over me.

The most challenging aspect of my participation in baseball is seeing bad treatment of players by coaches and saying nothing so I can stay in the lineup. I focus on my preparation to make sure I am ready to perform well so I stay in the lineup. That's how I still have fun playing baseball. I play well and I put numbers. I think my teammates and I have lots of honesty in our interactions. Maybe too much. I'm tired of hearing how talented I am because I know they are not recognizing how hard I work or my skills. There's so much more to me than power and speed. I work hard to make sure I do things right when I'm on the field. That's not just talent. People try to make it seem like things are easier for me because I am talented and the truth is I'm just prepared. Describing me as just talented disrespects my hard work. The scouts know.

Ty comments espouse his awareness of the permanent aspect of racism to life America. Ty provides a detailed description into the lived experiences of being a routinely racialized minority. Race is the first thing noticed about a person. Ty laments that he was considered the smart black guy or black ball player instead of the smart guy or just ball player. He explains that his experience is filled with pressure to perform as opposed to enjoying the game. Ty found success in the outfield despite not playing his primary positions on the infield. He was given an opportunity to play in the outfield while receiving little to no coaching, instruction, or preparation. He was supposed to figure it out. His thunderous bat has kept him in the lineup and he has figured out the

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outfield without coaching assistance. The experiences in the lineup have helped Ty understand why some people decide to stop playing. Especially when they aren't in the lineup.

The role of a mentor is powerfully impactful in Ty's personal experience. Having someone to relate to and communicate with helps motivate him to always be his very best. His 'big brother' has provided support and leadership to help build Ty's confidence while his coaches have offered little guidance or instruction. In Ty's experience, the practices of coaches that do not build relationships and limit player opportunities are ultimately reducing player interest in participating in baseball.

Junior

Junior firmly believes that race has played a role in his experiences in education and baseball. The decisions made by his coaches limited Junior's opportunities to play some positions. He has not felt as welcomed on his various teams as white teammates. He has experienced some feelings of isolation as the only black player on most of his teams. Junior explains that had he understood that he would be treated differently on his teams, he would've played with a different attitude of focus on me before team. Junior said,

When I was younger, I got the most impactful critical message from home and school. That one simple message was you have to be better than everyone else at what you do because being good is not good enough for me. I have no doubt that race played a role in my educational experiences. Especially in baseball. It was hard enough dealing with Daddy ball where their kids got special treatment. They all pitched and played catcher and shortstop and centerfield whether they were

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any good or not. Whether they could play the position or not. I could play those positions better than everyone else and they still moved me somewhere else. I could understand if it was for development or something like that but I heard parents complaining that their kid wanted to play this position and that position regardless of their ability then the coach would put the kid there. Just because his parent said something.

When I got to high school things were supposed to be more fair because he was a real coach. I had an assistant coach that really connected with players and helped us grow. He also projected where we could develop the most and tried to help us do it. My head coach still played favorites and overlooked some players when putting us on the field and there was nothing I could do about it. That's why I stay to myself and handle my business. Now, I am really good at baseball and I enjoy it despite playing behind other kids for so many years.

The biggest challenge was always feeling unwelcomed or like an outsider. People were polite and even nice but that's about it. On one travel team, there were people who would exchange contact information and work together to get players to practice or games. There were unscheduled workouts and practices to give players additional repetitions to get better. But we were not informed or invited. I remember my father asked why and was told that they didn't think we would want to drive that far for an unscheduled practice. He told them that he would take care of his own schedule just provide him with the information. Of course, I was the only player who didn't know about these practices. They actually took the time to communicate with everyone except me. I mean, it wasn't an accident.

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They intentionally skipped me. So no, I didn't feel welcome or any loyalty to the team. I played angry because I was angry and I tore it up. I would like to have laughs and smiles while I'm on the field, but that's not me. I wish I could enjoy playing baseball as much as I love playing baseball. I can't, this is business. I was isolated and I learned to thrive in isolation.

When I was younger, I was told that playing ball would be different for a black player than for the white players. I just didn't understand at the time. I didn't know it meant the coaches would treat me different. I didn't understand or I would've started playing to get mine in little league instead of trying to have fun. Race does impact everything. Especially when you are always the only black player and you are always the one player treated differently. It's all part of the normal baseball experience for black players in my opinion. That's what I was being taught at a young age and didn't really understand until I was older.

Junior provides an example of the permanence of racism in American society when he explains that racism is part of the normal baseball experience for African American players. He recognizes that he is treated differently, but still doesn't understand why. Junior has been the only African American player on his teams and the coaches have treated him differently. He feels unwelcomed and plays angry. Junior learned in high school that the coach had the power to influence and impact his baseball experience and there was nothing he could do about it. He knew he was treated differently from his other teammates but did not understand why. Junior was a good player and could help his team win. It appeared he was last in line to get an opportunity regardless of how well he performed in practice. He felt lonely and isolated and

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continues to stay to himself. Junior believes that race has impacted all aspects of his baseball experience. An obvious lack of coaching and being treated differently as the only black player are his key pieces of evidence to the adverse impacts of exclusionary practices related to race.

Max

Max doesn't recall when he didn't think race was a factor in his baseball experience. He was a very accomplished youth and high school player who was poorly recruited and scouted. Max wants to be a college baseball coach when his playing days are over, so he has paid particularly close attention to his experiences with college recruiters/coaches and professional scouts. Max believes he has learned many things to do and not to do to be successful as a college baseball coach. Max said,

I wish my coaches were more supportive and more positive overall. I occasionally get feedback if I do something wrong. That's about it and I don't think that's really supportive at all. The toughest challenge I had to overcome was not feeling supported. If I made a mistake when I was in youth ball I would get moved on the field and sometimes taken out of the game. And no that did not happen to everyone. Now I think of seven as an unlucky number for me because I had a youth tournament where I batted lead-off and went 7-for-7 on Friday and Saturday. Then on Sunday I was batting 7th. I wondered where I messed up and what did I need to do better. I got nothing from the coaches. I felt confused, unsupported, and uncoached. My dad told me about using self-talk to stay focused and motivated.

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Fortunately, the strategy helped because I wasn't getting feedback from my coaches on anything. My dad also told me to tear it up. I played every game like it was my last and I played well. I am uber aggressive at the plate and that has been my success. I know I can hit anything close and that makes it tough for pitchers to get me out.

I sacrificed a lot to play baseball. But with no support I have to use my self-talk to stay focused and make adjustments. I'm focused and making sure I play well. I know if I make mistakes I'm not going to be playing much longer. That's part of what motivates me to be a college baseball coach when I'm finished playing. I'll make sure I communicate and support my players so they can play their best and feel good about their experience.

I don't know when race hasn't played a role in my baseball experience. Like I said, my high school team was good and no scouts came to watch all of us black kids win. On my summer team, I was the big black guy that played well, but I wasn't promoted to schools by my coaches. I did all of my own promotion and communication with schools. I chose a nearby D1 opportunity on my own. Now I'm here and playing well. I'm grateful that (my school) gave me a chance while other schools didn't even respond.

The big D1 programs I contacted have coaches that didn't even bother to say no. So, they don't come see me where I play and then they don't answer me when I contact them where they are. Guys on my summer team were talking about what this coach said and what that coach said while I never heard from anybody. And all my numbers say I am a good D1 player, but completely ignored by most of the

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D1 programs I contacted. I know that my high school was not recruited by some coaches because they just didn't want to come see this team in the city. They really missed out on some good players that would be helping them on the field right now. They just would not give a college opportunity to some really good local students. I keep learning plenty of things to do and not to do when I become a college coach.

Max's comments detail how exclusionary practices impacted his playing time and recruitment to college. Practices that inequitably exclude members of non-dominant racial groups are racist. Recruiters and scouts refusing to go to urban areas to watch minority players is racist. Max experienced this blatant racism as his accomplished urban high school team was overlooked by recruiters and scouts. His summer coaches promoting white players while not promoting the only non-white player is racist. Max is excelling in the classroom and on the field at his local Division 1 private university. Clearly he has talent, skill, and overall ability. He views his baseball experience as refusing to be stopped by a collection of racist acts.

Rob

Rob also believes that race has adversely impacted his baseball experiences from youth to college. As a youth player, he felt like he was property instead of a person because of the way he was treated. Rob was regarded as the really fast black guy despite high level skill as a hitter, baserunner, defender, and all-around player. He endured playing out of position for years until finally getting an opportunity to apply his premier skill at a premier position on a team with a good coach. Rob's challenges to obtain fair

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opportunities have been perpetuated in college by coaches continuing to undervalue his ability and limit his opportunities. Rob said,

I think race has definitely played a role in my educational experience since I really got serious about baseball. I had to leave my neighborhood to join a team with more commitment and a better opportunity to be seen by scouts. I remember overhearing the coach bragging to another coach that he stole me from my last team. They laughed about how he finally got some real speed. People acted like I should have been happy just being on the team. I had hoped for better coaching and more development like he promised when he was saying all the right things to my parents. There was very little coaching and instruction on this team. We had to do expensive lessons to get any instruction and development. My parents spent a lot and worked extra for me to be on that team. We committed a lot too. I did everything they offered and really developed.

Still, I was considered the really fast black guy. I was a good hitter and base stealer but I batted 7th or 8th. I was told centerfield is a premier position requiring a premier player. So why was I playing left field and another player who was good, but not on my level was playing center. I was a better fielder and a better thrower with better speed. I was a better player and I was premier. My high school coach helped get me on that team. He told me he was not happy that I wasn't getting an opportunity while another player was being protected and was going to let them know about it. I didn't know that he had lots of conversations with them about my development and lack of opportunity because I had done the work and I was premier. In my junior year I learned from my parents and high

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school coach that I had an opportunity to play on a different travel team get exposure. This time I played centerfield and I played it well enough to earn a college scholarship.

Recently, I learned that my high school coach worked for free for that organization so I could get a chance. He told me he was hooking up with this other coach to provide an opportunity for kids like me without the ridiculous cost of some of the other travel teams. I got mad respect for that. My high school coach is an old school white dude who tells it like it is. He told me he thought I had talent and he would help me develop my skill level. He told me I deserved a chance and I truly believed him. I just remember feeling so much pressure. I played well, but I really didn't have much fun because it was all business.

Handling business is how I made it this far.

As far as challenges are concerned there were two big ones. I was small and didn't have a lot of money. I never got the benefit of any doubt from travel coaches until my high school coach. The travel teams just continued the same pay for play stuff I was already tired of dealing with. The kids that could afford the cost got the opportunities for exposure. The ones who couldn't afford it didn't get opportunities even if they were better players.

Rob's comments describe experiences that can cause an athlete to stop participating in baseball and chose another sport. His ability is undervalued as he is in the lineup and playing, but he is playing corner outfield instead of the premier position of centerfield. Rob had done the work, fully committed to the process, and developed his skill to a premier level. The coach still has the final say and control over player

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opportunities. Rob's coach made the decision to play him out of his best position. Rob believes race has played a role in his experience. He was treated like property instead of a person and was not given opportunities despite outperforming other players.

Rob was mentored and coached by his high school coach who provided support and guidance for his players. Rob has managed to play well in limited opportunities with tremendous pressure to perform. Still, the same coaching practices that recruits certain players and builds relationships with certain players ultimately decides to play certain players who look like the coach (Spearman et al, 2017; Bogage, 2019). Rob's story is particularly disappointing because the unfair treatment and racist practices from coaches have led him to give up baseball. Fortunately, he is still focused on completing his college education as he pursues another sport.

Chapter Summary

The data presented in this chapter provided insight into the experiences of six African American college baseball players. The narratives are a powerful source of information for the student-athletes to tell their stories from their perspectives (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). Their stories of their experiences provide a counter narrative to the perspective that African Americans are disinterested in baseball and racism is not an issue contributing to their poor representation in the sport. Each participant used the narrative method to name their own reality, challenge dominant thoughts, and provide readers with strategies to successfully access higher education through participation in baseball.

CHAPTER V

Discussion and Implications

The purpose of this critical race narrative inquiry study was to identify how African American males navigate their journeys from youth to the college baseball field and their perceptions of racism along the way. This chapter includes a discussion of the major findings as related to the literature on African American male college athletes, racism, and what implications may be valuable for use by college administrations and athletic departments. Also included is a discussion on connections to this study and Critical Race Theory. The chapter concludes with a discussion of future research and a brief summary. The discussions are based on answering the following research questions:

1. How do African American males who choose to participate in college baseball navigate their journeys from boyhood to the college baseball field?
2. How do African American college baseball players perceive racism in their baseball journey?

From this study, the theory for how African American males access higher education through participation in baseball and their perceptions of racism is comprised of four themes: (a) each participant relied heavily on important lessons learned from home to persist on the journey to the college baseball field, (b) the participants revealed having a common primary key strategy for success in the classroom and on the playing field, (c) the participants expressed an eagerness to provide advice to future African American college baseball players and their coaches to help improve representation for this group in college baseball, and (d) all participants discussed the influence of coaches

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in their journey. The first three themes (a-c) relate how the student-athletes navigate their journey from youth to the college baseball field. The final theme (d) relates to how these young men perceived the influence of coaches and the impact of racism along their journeys. The narratives of the six young men in this study offer a glimpse into the lived experiences of African Americans accessing higher education through participation in baseball. Storytelling was utilized as participants shared experiences that provide detailed descriptions from their perspectives of the journey to the college baseball field for African Americans. The narratives in this study reveal some key similarities of background and experience while accessing college baseball at various levels, institutions, and regions of the United States.

Summary of Key Findings

While their backgrounds and upbringing included the uniqueness of variation for the participants, each of the four common themes were prominent in the journeys for the six young men interviewed for this study. These themes were consistent across the study group as their individual involvement with higher education varied according to the different levels of college baseball from Junior colleges to Division I institutions. Each theme is discussed in detail in the following sections.

Influence from home

The study's conclusion that the 'twice as good' lessons from home helps African American college baseball players navigate their way to the college baseball field agrees with the literature that indicates Black individuals are more heavily scrutinized in the workplace and must work harder to avoid making errors (Cavounidis & Lang, 2015). A result of the increased focus on errors for Black individuals is the perspective that Black

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individuals are less skilled than white individuals. This creates poorer outcomes for Black individuals including lower performance reviews and a poorer future job outlook (Cavounidis & Lang, 2015). For Black workers to be retained, Cavounidis and Lang (2015) found that they must significantly outperform white workers. Even when the work by Black individuals is twice as good, systemic discrimination persists (Cavounidis & Lang, 2015).

The study also concluded that a focus on educational attainment through hard work helps African American college baseball players find their way to the college baseball field. This agrees with the literature that indicates the pursuit of education as a powerful motivator for these student-athletes to complete college (Singer, 2016). In this study, African American college baseball players emphasized family guidance focused on education. In each interview, the participant expressed the vital role family influence and a focus on education played in their determination to complete a college degree. The focus on education was independent of sports participation as several of the participants accessed college on academic scholarships alone. Educational attainment for these young men is still a primary objective. Even the men who desire to play professional baseball are focused on completing their college degree. One participant, (name), for example, plans to become a professional in another sport, but only after he successfully completes his degree.

The response to Civil Rights legislation of the 1960's was a family emphasis on education to achieve upward mobility (Beamon, 2010; Chetty, 2015; Cole & Omari, 2003; Cooper & Cooper, 2015; Fraser-Thomas et al., 2005; Karen, 1991; Leonhardt, 2013). The participants in this study all expressed a focus on a college education as a key

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motivator along their journey. Tim explained that he and his siblings were raised by parents with graduate degrees. The children were raised to be nearly perfect and to graduate from college. A pre-teen Tim became interested in college baseball because he dreamed of playing professionally and already knew he would be going to college as expected. Joe and his siblings were raised by parents with graduate degrees. He and his siblings were reared to prepare to get it right the first time and a college education was emphasized in his household as well. His parents kept Tim and his siblings focused on education and busy with activities including baseball. Joe put in extra work to develop into a good student and prepare to complete college.

Education was an important focus in Ty's upbringing as his parents expected academic excellence from the brilliant honor student. Ty was raised to be the best at everything he encountered. Junior was focused on a college education as his parents emphasized performing well in school and sports, because he desired to leave his Midwestern home for college baseball in the warmer Southwest. His Dad explained that he had to perform well in his suburban community, because life wasn't different anywhere else. As athletes, striving to be the best focused Ty and Junior on college baseball so they could complete their college degrees.

Max was pushed by his parents and older siblings to be better than everyone else to give him more options in life. Max was always a good student. His college educated parents fully expected Max and his older brothers to complete college degrees too. Max attended a college prep high school because he was definitely going to college. Max's mother provided the consistent push for Max to remain focused on college. Similarly for Rob, his mother provided the major push to keep him focused on a college education.

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While neither of Rob's parents could afford to attend college, they still emphasized the importance of their only child completing a college degree. My interpretation of all six participant narratives identified significant influences from home as a common theme along their journey to the college baseball field. First to be twice as good as counterparts and second, a focus on a college education.

Familial influence through introduction to, competition in, and support in sport was key to these men succeeding on the field of play as well (Roselli and Singer, 2017). The men in this study were successful at crossing a border into a sport that does not appear to want them, in part due to the powerful influences from home (Douglas, 2012). Financial and emotional support and guidance from home made it OK for these men to pursue success in a less popular sport to the African American community (Douglas, 2012; Roselli and Singer, 2017). The individuals in this study were all impacted to pursue baseball by the expectations of important individuals in their environments (Douglas, 2012).

Primary strategies for success: Hard work and determination

All participants referenced constant perseverance through working hard as a key strategy to the success of accessing higher education through continued baseball participation. During our interviews, the participants discussed and defined the necessity of constant hard work as a strategy before the question of strategies was asked. This study's conclusion emphasizes the importance of persevering and working hard to the participants ability to be prepared for an opportunity to succeed. The commitment to hard work was a constant in the academic and athletic arenas for the participants. This key finding offers a counter narrative to the research that suggests African American student

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athletes are academically less motivated and underperform compared to their peers (Cooper et al., 2015; Gaston-Gayles, 2004). The men in this study were all good students and academically prepared to enter and succeed in college. The good students they represented would have been accepted to college based on academics alone. Each of the participants received academic scholarships to their respective schools.

All participants explained the intentionality with which they applied their hard-working mindset to academics and athletics. Athletically, the hard work to prepare was a constant for all participants. It was important that their hard work be recognized in addition to the talent that is characteristic of all gifted athletes. All of the participants worked hard enough to develop the skill to perform successfully even if opportunities were limited. Tim and Joe transferred institutions several times before finding the right opportunity. Both used academic and athletic preparation to earn academic and athletic scholarships at these institutions. Now they are set to graduate as they continue performing on the field. The hard work for Ty, Junior, and Max is expected to result in professional opportunities on the playing field after graduation. Rob's hard work in the classroom will result in a junior college degree while his athletic efforts will be applied in a different sport. The commitment to hard work as a primary strategy was readily identified as a common theme for all six participants as they navigated their journey to the college baseball field.

Advising the future African American College Baseball Players

The narratives in this study detailed how African American college baseball players navigated their journey from youth to college baseball and their perceptions of race along the way. The ways that these men navigated their journeys have not been told

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in their own words...until now. Counter-storytelling is a critical race theory method of telling the stories of people whose experiences are not often told in their own words (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). The navigation strategies shared by the men in this study highlight the narratives of African American college baseball players navigating issues of poor coach-player relationships and racism. Participants specifically described their best strategies to navigate successfully to the college baseball field. Each unique narrative revealed some common strategies utilized by all participants. The common strategies were:

1. Perseverance through consistent hard work
2. Coach Selection

The common strategies are ways that the African American college baseball players prepare for and respond to challenges along their journey to access higher education through baseball participation.

Perseverance through hard work

It is obvious that an athlete should have to work hard to meet the challenges of performing at the college level. But these athletes had to work hard enough to overcome the label of raw talent. The portrayal of African Americans as naturally athletic or blessed with raw talent has created the impression of a lazy athlete who does not have to work at his craft (Rada and Wulfemeyer, 2005). Each of the participants in this study emphatically defined perseverance through hard work as their best strategy to prepare for an opportunity as a baseball player. During our interviews, each shook his head in disbelief when stating how hard he worked at his craft, sacrificing everything else to develop skill as a baseball player. These men respected how much they sacrificed and

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how hard they worked to become good baseball players. They also wanted respect for their diligence. Labelling them as raw or talented and not working (coaching) them to improve is an insult to their work ethic and commitment. The determination and desperation to succeed produces success when these players are given opportunities because of their preparation through hard work. These men viewed their hard work as a badge of honor and the only reason they have been successful in their academic and athletic careers. The participants in this study expressed a desire to inform future African American college baseball players of the need to be prepared for an opportunity to perform. Specifically, preparation through consistent hard work.

Implicit in hard work is commitment. The participants referenced a discipline to work consistently outside of the structured practice schedule. This commitment to work is critical to the success of the consistent hard work strategy. The players explained a lack of coaching and instruction in their journey to the college baseball field. The commitment to work independently for years on skill development is why these players are confident in their preparation and experience success when given an opportunity to perform. Mental toughness to stay committed to the hard work is also essential. This mental toughness goes beyond resilience. These athletes possess and rely upon the mental toughness to overcome racist treatment and continue forward like Simpson Younger, Fleetwood Walker, and Weldy Walker at the beginning of baseball history (Thorn, 2018). Younger in the late 1860's and the Walker brothers in the early 1880's endured blatant racist treatment, isolation, and unwelcomeness while pursuing baseball aspirations (Thorn, 2018).

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Currently, African Americans accessing higher education through participation in baseball must be mentally tough enough to overcome poor communication, being unwelcomed, being labeled raw talent, not receiving coaching, not being given opportunities, and playing out of position when they do finally access the playing field. A commitment to consistent hard work and mental toughness helped these players sustain in the absence of a good coach-player relationship. The men in this study want future players to know that they will make it to the college baseball field though a commitment to hard work.

Coach selection

Future African American college baseball players have the invaluable resource of current college baseball players to help aid in their choice of school. According to Crabtree (2013), when athletic recruits make it onto campus for a visit (official or unofficial) they often overlook the opportunity to gather first-hand information about the coach, program, school, and city from currently rostered players. Recruits should spend as much time around the current players as possible to better assess if the environment feels right for their future. Potential players can learn if they will feel welcome based on the experiences of current players.

Crabtree (2013) explains that coaches believe the conversations between recruits and players on the roster is the biggest reason that nobody really talks about when it comes to athletes picking a college. Experienced college football coach James Franklin explains that current players will often go out of their way to tell recruits the truth about a school. If a coach behaves differently as a recruiter than he is on the field, current players will definitely tell future players the truth. A good coach-player relationship with

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everyone in the program is key for coaches like Franklin to establish a welcoming culture that current players convey to potential teammates. Coaches have found the feedback from current players about conversations with prospects can be valuable during recruiting as well (Crabtree, 2013).

The participants in this study referenced a sense of welcome and/or the quality of the coach-player relationship in their journey to the college baseball field. Future African American college baseball players must use this underappreciated opportunity along the path to the college baseball field. Current players will explain how the coach treats the players. This information will help prospective players understand how they will be treated by the coach. In doing so, the future African American college baseball players can generate more information to obtain a better fit in a college program and produce a better experience. The selection of a quality coach is the initial step to promoting a good experience for athletes accessing higher education through participation in baseball.

Coaching influence

Jowett (2017) informs that the quality of the coach-player relationship functions as a barometer of coaching effectiveness. The active ingredients for a good coach-player relationship are respect, trust, commitment, and collaboration. These ingredients are present in a good relationship and are essential for positive and mutual influence. Coaching suffers when the relationship is poor due to a lack of active ingredients that allow the coach-player combination to effectively commit to and cooperate with one another (Jowett, 2017).

In a study on athlete experiences with great coaching, Becker (2009) explains that athletes who experienced great coaching report that these great coaches were consistent

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in who they were and how they maintained relationships. The athletes' perceptions of great coaches are that greatness is not about what they do. Greatness in coaching is how the coaches perform their coaching actions. Honest communication was a key coaching action to influence athlete experiences (Becker, 2009).

The conclusion from this study does support the necessity of the coach-player relationship in the players feeling welcome to the team. The quality of the coach-player relationship is a measure of coaching effectiveness (Jowett, 2017). Nearly 140 years ago the impact of the coach in the coach-player relationship was displayed when Toledo Blue Stockings Manager Charlie Morton decided to start Fleetwood Walker in an 1883 contest against the Chicago White Stockings (Rosenberg, 2006). In a blatantly racist attempt at exclusion, Chicago threatened not to play if Walker was in the lineup (Golenbock, 1997; Thorn, 2018). The White Stockings did not want to lose the financial proceeds from the game and decided to play the game with the first African American big-league player, Fleetwood Walker, in the lineup for Toledo (Pietrusza et al., 2000; Rosenberg, 2006). Walker was prepared to play but his opportunity relied on the Morton's decision.

Each of the participants detailed experiences in their journey with good coach-player relationships and poor coach-player relationships. Tim's experiences with his high school coach and summer coach were instructional, respectful, and developmental. Causally, he developed into a skilled and confident scholarship college baseball player. Upon his arrival at his first college, Tim did not receive the great coaching action of honest communication to build a good relationship. His coaches acknowledged that he had developed into a skilled player, but he was labeled raw and told he was not ready to play. Tim never had the support of the head coach who offered to help him find another

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school. The lack of relationship between Tim and his head coach defined his initial college baseball experience as unwelcomed.

Joe found that his initial college baseball experiences lacked a good coach-player relationship. There was an absence of the key coaching action to communicate honestly from coach to player. Joe explained that he was a non-scholarship athlete or walk-on who was told he would have an opportunity to compete. He did not. The communication from coaches that he would have an opportunity was inaccurate at best. Joe lost respect for these coaches as their coaching actions slowed the progress of his journey to the college baseball field. The influence of these coaching actions left Joe feeling unwelcomed and he transferred to another school.

Ty speaks with obvious frustration when discussing the coaching influence in his college baseball experience. Ty has been given an opportunity to play and he has been successful. His frustration begins with his lack of recruitment and continues with the lack of coaching instruction from his college coaches. Ty was poorly recruited as his coaches promoted other players ahead of him. He found his school through the influence of another player. Ty's thunderous bat got the skilled infielder into the lineup. But he was stacked into the outfield without coaching to play the positions. These coaching actions have resulted in Ty feeling unwelcomed. His biggest challenge in baseball has been remaining silent to the poor treatment of players by coaches who do not build good relationships with their players.

The lack of a good coach-player relationship in Junior's baseball experience was revealed during his recruitment. His coaches promoted other players to scouts and recruiters. Junior found a college where the coach was masterful at building relationships

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with his players. Junior and his teammates flourished under the influence of a good relator as a leader. Junior's good coaching staff with strong relationship skills was hired at another school. The new coaching staff reintroduced Junior to a poor coach-player relationship with limited instruction. The now mature college baseball player continues to work on his own or with teammates to improve his game. The unwelcoming environment established by the coaches was unwelcomed by the players. The coach-player relationships are poor due to poor leadership from the coach.

Max's college baseball experience reminds us that the coach-player relationship begins in the recruiting process. Relationships with college coaches were not good for Max during his recruitment because he was so poorly recruited. Max attended an inner-city high school where college baseball recruiters do a poor job of viewing and assessing players abilities (Bogage, 2019; Gamble, 2019; Klein, 1990; Spearman et al, 2017). He was a good player on some good high school teams and never saw a recruiter at any of the games. Max initiated his own recruitment to the school of his choice. His summer coaches didn't promote him well and college recruiters didn't come to see his high school teams. His only option was to recruit himself if he wanted to play in college.

The relationship Max has with his college coaches is not good. The coaches don't communicate much with Max. Omitting this key coaching action prevents the establishment of a good coach-player relationship. Max has gained wisdom from his college baseball experience. He intends to become a college baseball coach. Consistent, honest communication will be a key coaching action for his plan to build good coach-player relationships.

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Rob, like Junior, has had the benefit of a good coach-player relationship in his journey to the college baseball field. His high school coach helped train and develop Rob's skill level before finding him a better opportunity for increased baseball exposure on a travel team. The experience with his initial travel team presented Rob with poor communication, no coaching, and no development. This poor coach-player relationship compelled Rob's high school coach and his family to find him a different travel team with a new promise of a fair opportunity. With a better relationship and better coaching Rob flourished and landed a junior college opportunity. Unfortunately, Rob's journey returned to poor coaching actions that did not build a good relationship or develop the player.

The experiences with poor coaching and limited opportunities to perform have fatigued Rob's desire to play the coach's game. He still loves baseball but will give up playing the game for an opportunity at an individual sport. The brilliant athlete in Rob will try his hand at boxing or mixed martial arts where he will have individualized coaching. He expects to get the opportunities he has earned in an individual sport.

Each of the participants in this study discussed being the only African American player and receiving different treatment from the coaches than their white teammates. The coaching practice of treating players of different races differently is racist despite the decades long denials by college coaches of racism as a factor in the poor representation of African Americans in college baseball (Klein, 1990; Spearman, 2017). Race is always a present factor when you are the only person of color and there are obvious inequities in the way you are spoken to, treated, and even included in conversations and activities (Ostertag & Armaline, 2011). Racism is policies and practices that exclude non-

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dominant groups (Ostertag & Armaline, 2011). Systemic racism occurs when these policies and practices combine prejudice based on skin color with the power to subjugate and create a system of advantage based on skin color (Cineas, 2020; Hauser, 2020).

College baseball coaches treat African American players differently when they don't build relationships with them while building relationships with white players. College baseball coaches treat African American players differently when they stack them in the outfield while placing white players on the infield, at pitcher, and at catcher positions. College baseball coaches treat African American players differently when they pressure them to perform out of position while protecting white players at another position on the baseball diamond. College baseball coaches treat African American players differently when telling them that their numbers-based performance is just raw talent instead of skill, so they are not ready and need to keep working. Acts like these that define the experiences of some African American college baseball players are racist because these players are treated differently by a coach who has the power to subjugate players in the batting lineup, on the playing field, and in the baseball program.

The permanence of racism in baseball is as American as apple pie. While individual acts from coaches may involve unintentionally racist behaviors, the system of policies and practices in college baseball perpetuates racism. The practice of professional scouts and college recruiters refusing to see African American players in urban areas is intentionally racist (Klein, 1990; Comeaux, 2012; Spearman, 2017). The counter narrative of African American players persisting despite experiencing racism in college baseball provides a plausible explanation, in part, for the low representation of these players in the sport. The NCAA limit of 11.7 scholarships for division 1 baseball, high

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costs of participation in baseball, reduced access to youth baseball, and the systemically racist practices of poor and unwelcome treatment by college baseball coaches from recruitment to development are all reasons that contribute to the low percentage of African Americans in college baseball (Klein, 1990; NCAA.org, 2018; Bogage, 2019; Gamble, 2019; Witz, 2019).

Implications for Theory

Critical Race Narrative Inquiry

According to Ray and Gibbons (2021) CRT has come under fire from people unwilling to acknowledge America's racist history and how it impacts the present. CRT opponents have erroneously claimed the theory is racist, teaches racism, and admonishes all white people for being oppressors while classifying all African Americans as oppressed victims. These criticisms are not correct. CRT states that American social institutions like the criminal justice system or in the case of this dissertation, the education system operate with racism as part of the policies and practices that lead to differential outcomes by race. CRT acknowledging institutional racism makes the theory ideal for this research as indicated in the findings of racist and differential treatment contributing to the declination of African American baseball players (Ray and Gibbons, 2021).

The permanence of racism against African Americans in the educable space of sports (Singer, 2015) makes the CRT framework applicable and informative when investigating issues of race and racism in college baseball. The current research affirms the premise in the challenge by Singer (2015) to have researchers use CRT as a theoretical framework to characterize what is wrong with American society and the

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educational and sport systems African American college baseball players are affiliated with, instead of a deficit-based perspective of what is wrong with African American college baseball players and their participation with social systems and organizations. The CRT framework is particularly useful in providing voice to a marginalized group. CRT's position that racism is endemic to American society provides for a more thorough examination of the role of race and the impact on people of color (Patton et al., 2011). Utilizing CRT allowed examination of the role of racism in the structure of educational systems like the hiring of coaches where less than 1% of college baseball coaches are African American. This study examined the experiences of African American college baseball players and their perceptions of racism along their journey to the college baseball field. Both race and racism play a role in the institutional integrity of collegiate athletics with regard to the experiences of African American student-athletes (Bimper & Harrison, 2017). And African American college athletes believed that race plays a role in how they operate in college sports (Agyemang et al., 2010). The findings of the current study are consistent with the literature in that African American college baseball players report that race and racism play a role in their college sports experience. The study findings provide theoretical implications for CRT through support of the permanence of racism, experiential knowledge, and counter-storytelling concepts of the framework.

The CRT tenet of the permanence of racism as normal to the lived experiences of African Americans was strongly supported by the accounts of the study participants (Bell, 1992; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Daftary, 2018). The different treatment of African American players by their coaches included a lack of communication and poor coach-player relationships that contributed to these players feeling unwelcomed. These

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players were stacked in the outfield while their white teammates were protected on the infield. The impact of the systemic racism experienced by these players has not dissuaded them from persevering to the college baseball field. These players have worked independently and progressed despite a lack of coaching. The student-athletes in this study performed well academically, did not present behavioral issues, worked hard in practice, and played well when given opportunities. The acts of treating someone differently based on race and doing so with power to determine outcomes defines racism (Cineas, 2020; Hauser, 2020). The data from the current study suggest that race effects how college baseball players are treated and supports the CRT tenet of the permanence of racism in the experiences of African American college baseball players.

A second implication for theory was provided in the participants own words as this study focused on the voices of African American college baseball players telling their stories of their experiences. CRT recognizes that the lived experiences of African American college baseball players are essential to analyzing and understanding the role of racial subordination in college baseball (McCoy, 2014). The participants in this study provide a first-hand account of the pervasiveness of racist acts in their journey to the college baseball field. This experiential knowledge is communicated through counter-storytelling and narratives that provide examples of the college baseball practices that distort the experiences of African American college baseball players (Bell, 1992; Decuir & Dixson, 2004; Gillborn, 2015; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). Studies examining the experiences of people of color must include the voices and experiences of people of color.

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The findings revealed a third implication for theory that supports the counter-storytelling tenet of CRT. Each of the African American college baseball player narratives provide a counter story to the majoritarian view of African American disinterest in baseball (Ogden & Rose, 2005). The influence from home for each of the student-athletes in this study is at the forefront of their baseball journey. Their families focused these young men to be twice as good on academic and athletic education. Fathers, mothers, siblings, and mentors provided strong influence for the participants to strive towards academic and athletic success. These African American baseball players and their families or circle of influence are profoundly interested in baseball. Some were players, some were mentors, some were employees, some were fans, but all expressed a love for the game that supersedes mere interested in baseball. Thus, the perpetuation of that love for baseball through teaching and commitment to the game. Perhaps the unwelcomeness experienced by the African American college baseball players in this study isn't just limited to players. Odgen (2004) suggested that Welcome Theory offers some explanation for the low attendance of African Americans at baseball venues. The Welcome Theory research states that certain groups feel a sense of belonging in certain events while members of other groups do not (Odgen, 2004).

Smith (2017) reviewed the cost to play club sports and found that youth travel teams for baseball cost nearly \$4,000 per player each year. The participants in this study discussed families and mentors sacrificing to provide access to expensive travel teams throughout their journeys. The perceived African American disinterest in baseball could be partially explained as limited access to baseball at developmental ages. The average costs to participate in youth baseball without including travel team expenses is about

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\$700 (Aspen, 2019). Youth baseball is about \$200 more than basketball or football (Aspen, 2019). The narratives in the current study suggest that there is African American interest in baseball despite the greater financial cost to participate.

These narratives provide specific accounts of the continuation of stacking in baseball at the college level. Historically, African American baseball players were labeled as raw talent with God-given speed and athleticism (Denham, 2020). White baseball players were credited with overcoming these physical shortcomings by being more intelligent and harder working (Denham, 2020). Some of the participants in this study expressed exasperation over the raw label and the lack of recognition of their constant hard work. The impassioned counter-stories of these African American college baseball players define their commitment to hard work and understanding of the game despite the practice of college coaches stacking these players in the outfield. The practice of stacking limits African American player access to only 3 of the 10 positions on the diamond when the designated hitter is included.

Implications for Practice

The findings of this study indicate coaching improvements as implications for practice. The unwelcoming behaviors of coaches at all levels of baseball must improve to enrich the experiences of African American baseball players. Higher education institutions cannot control the baseball practices of secondary schools and youth settings. However, colleges can provide a leadership example of practices to improve experiences for African American players in post-secondary institutions. The lack of diversity in college baseball head coaching mirrors the lack of diversity overall in college baseball.

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College baseball coaches recruit players who look like them (Gamble, 2019). More diversity in coaching should produce more diversity in recruiting.

The coaching practices of poor communication, lack of instruction, and stacking of African American players requires hiring new coaches with new perspectives. Hiring coaches, regardless of race, who intentionally recruit players from urban areas, build relationships, teach, and provide players opportunities will increase players feeling welcomed and a part of the program. Coaches building these good coach-player relationships will benefit from players providing positive review of the program to future recruits. College athletic directors and administrators have the responsibility of hiring coaches with the proper perspectives and directives to improve college baseball.

Higher Education

The participant narratives provided insight to player perspectives on the coaching styles experienced by these college baseball players. Several players explained that they received poor communication and poor instruction. Those players worked independently to develop their skill and maintain preparation for an opportunity to perform. Some players explained the positive impact of a good coach-player relationship based on communication and instruction. All players expressed the disgust of a poor coach-player relationship that lacked good communication and instruction. Not all coaches can or will be replaced. All coaches can be required to undergo positive coaching training and then be held accountable for implementing those strategies to build good coach-player relationships. Positive coaching is a science and research-based approach to better coaching and working with athletes (Goldman, 2021). The player narratives in this study offer suggestions to improve coach-player relationships that are reflective of the positive

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coaching foundations from a university graduate program on positive coaching. The program supports coaches in communicating with athletes, teaching and modeling the process of success, nurturing intrinsic motivation, respecting and protecting the self-worth of every athlete, and shaping each athlete's will without breaking his or her spirit (Ivey et al., 2015; McGuire, 2019).

Recommendations for Future Research

Utilizing critical race narrative inquiry provided rich data in the words of African American college baseball players. While there is abundant research on the decline of African American participation in Major League Baseball (Jackson, 2023), this study added the voices of African American college baseball players to the conversation around the participation of African Americans in the nation's pastime. One of the participants states that he would like to see the results if the coaches answered some of the interview questions honestly. For future research, it would be informative to hear coaches' perspectives on some of the issues raised by the players. What do coaches think of the coach-player relationships on their rosters? What are coaches' goals regarding the effectiveness and honesty of communication with players. Are the practices of athletic departments within educational institutions perpetuating or dismantling white supremacy in college baseball? CRT recognizes that systemic racism results from institutional policies and practices and may not necessarily be an overt act of racism by the offender. Future research could involve interviewing athletic administrators and coaches regarding practices that are systemically racist in college baseball to learn and educate their perspectives. These acts may be unintentionally racist, but part of the system of doing business in college baseball. College coaches not recruiting urban areas because they can

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go to a select showcase tournament and see many talented players in one visit is racist (Klein, 1990; Bogage, 2019). College baseball coaches reflexively recruiting players who look like them and not recruiting players who do not perpetuates white supremacy when over 98% of the coaches are white (Gamble, 2019; Lapchick, 2019). Recruiting is an important point of control over who participates in college baseball and who does not. These decisions are key to the low rate of participation for African Americans in college baseball (Gamble, 2019).

Bogage (2019) explains that intentionality on the part of the coach is required to repudiate the excuses for not recruiting African American areas for baseball talent in addition to select and limited access showcase tournaments. The University of Michigan and Vanderbilt University baseball programs were applauded for their diverse roster composition when they met in the 2019 College World Series championship with rosters that featured seven African American players each. The seven players represent 20% of the roster for each university. The Michigan coach commented that he intentionally wanted his roster to reflect the United States of America through targeted recruitment of inner-city kids. He intentionally wanted to offer a Michigan education to as many kids as possible and intentionally pursued under-represented, under recruited and under scouted African American areas. Both Michigan and Vanderbilt are elite higher education institutions with elite college baseball programs that demonstrate how college baseball and higher education are impacted by intentionally acknowledging and addressing the injustice present in the recruiting of African American college baseball players (Bogage, 2019; Hiraldo, 2010).

Conclusion

The findings in this study demonstrate the utility of CRT in sports-based research (Singer, 2015). The use of CRT centralized the voices of African American college baseball players in their experiences along the journey to the college baseball field. The narratives provide counter-stories to the dominant discourse of African American disinterest in baseball and its utility to access higher education. The narratives represent success stories of these young men completing college educations through participation in baseball. This research also documents how unnecessarily challenging the journey was for these participants. The excesses of systemic racism adversely impacted the experiences of these young men who offered concrete suggestions of ways to improve the experiences along the journey and influence increased participation from African Americans in college baseball. During Junior's interview, he stated that the path to get (to the college baseball field) was not all fun and games and was unnecessarily hard. He explained that he saw a story where an African American Major League baseball player said baseball doesn't care about us and doesn't need us. Based on Junior's experience, he believes he knows exactly what that African American Major Leaguer meant.

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APPENDIX A
RESEARCH INTERVIEW PROTOCOL
DATA FORM

Participant _____

Pseudonym _____

Interview 1 Date _____

Length of Interview 1 _____

Interview 2 Date _____

Length of Interview 2 _____

APPENDIX B

Interview 1 – Introduction, educational journey, and baseball background

Demographic Background

1. How would you describe your demographic background?
 - a. Where did you grow up? (State, city, neighborhood, etc.)
 - b. How would you describe your childhood?
 - c. How would you describe your family growing up?
 - d. What is the highest education level of your parents? (Mother, Father)
 - e. Tell me about how you were raised (matriarch vs. patriarch, strict)
 - f. Do you have siblings? If so, how many?

Educational Journey

1. How would you describe your K-12 experience: great, good, average, not good, awful?
2. What did you like most/least about your school? Please explain
3. Did you plan to attend college or university? Why or why not?
4. Was there a personal and family expectation to attend college or university?
5. How did you plan to get to college or university?
6. What inspired you to pursue a college education?
7. What are some of the critical messages you received from your teachers, family members and acquaintances that shaped your educational life?
8. Has race played a role in your educational experience? Tell me about it.

Baseball Background

1. How and why did you get involved in baseball?
2. What other sports or activities did you compete?

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3. What influenced your decision to play college baseball?
4. When did you realize that you wanted to play college baseball?
5. Tell me about your preparation to be a college baseball player?
6. Could you share a story with me about the most significant influences in your life that lead you to attend college as a baseball player?
7. What was your support system as you progressed through school and played baseball?
8. What specific challenges did you overcome/deal with as you progressed through your education and youth baseball? What strategies did you use to overcome those challenges?
9. How has your educational journey impacted your personal relationships (e.g. family, friends, teammates)? Have you made sacrifices/ been required to make sacrifices in order to participate in baseball along your educational journey?
10. Looking back, is there anything you would have done differently in your journey to becoming a college student through playing baseball.
11. Did you plan to go to college without playing baseball or another sport?
12. Did you have an opportunity to go to college without playing baseball? Was another sport or activity involved?
13. Has race played a role in your baseball experience? Tell me about it.

APPENDIX C

Interview 2 – Current Baseball Experience and Conclusion

Current Baseball Experience

1. What is the most challenging aspect of your participation in baseball?
2. What strategies do you use to cope with your challenges?
3. What is the most pleasurable aspect of your participation in baseball?
4. In your opinion, does your identity shape your interactions between you and your teammates?
5. When issues of diversity are raised in baseball – What do you feel are the expectations for you?
6. What kind of support do you receive from family and friends?
7. Does religion play role in your life?
8. How would you describe success?
9. Would you say you are successful in your baseball career to date? Tell me some significant experiences you felt made you successful.
10. What keeps you committed to baseball in school?

Conclusion

I envision this dissertation as a source of information for young African American baseball players in particular and baseball enthusiasts in general. These baseball people might want to follow in your footsteps as an African American college baseball player or maybe attempt to increase the number of African American baseball players. Your perspective on accessing higher education through baseball participation can be helpful.

1. What would you like for those aspiring young players and families to know that may help them on their journey?
2. What would you like potential coaches and recruiter to know so they can successfully recruit players like you?
3. What do you think it is going to take to see an increase in the number of African American college baseball players?

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4. Is there anything else you would like to share that we have not already covered?
5. Can I contact you, if necessary, to clarify/augment answers?
6. Thank you for your participation in this study.

APPENDIX D

UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI - COLUMBIA

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND POLICY ANALYSIS

CONSENT TO ACT AS A HUMAN PARTICIPANT

Title: Going, going...but not yet gone. Counter-storytelling the Socialization of African American college baseball players

Principal Investigator: Kendall Lewis under the guidance of Dr. Emily Crawford-Rossi and Dr. Sarah Diem.

What is the study about?

The purpose of this study is to examine the journeys of African American males and their perceptions of race and racism as they access higher education through participation in baseball.

Why are you asking me?

You are being asked to participate in this study because you are one of the few African American college baseball players in the area and country. I believe your story will provide valuable perspective from the players about how to use youth baseball to access college. Your participation will include three interviews of not more than 1-hour each. After conclusions are drawn from the study, you will have the chance to review and confirm the accuracy of the findings drawn from the interview. If you find that the

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results do not accurately reflect your perceptions, we will negotiate until agreements are reached.

Is there any audio recording?

Yes, participants in this study will be interviewed and have their voice recorded. While the interviews will be audiotaped and transcribed verbatim for accuracy, neither your name, nor your institutional affiliations will be associated with the tapes, the transcripts, or any reports resulting

from this study. All your identifying characteristics will be replaced with pseudonyms.

Code list that will be generated from the interviews and signed consent forms will be kept under lock in a file cabinet. Upon completion of this dissertation, I will destroy immediately the code list, the consent forms, resumes, notes, and the transcripts. The audiotapes will be destroyed after seven years.

What is the risk involved?

There is no physical harm; however, you may find that some of the interview questions may raise sensitive issues resulting in mild emotional discomfort. You may refuse to answer any of the questions and may take a break at any time during the interview. In addition, you may withdraw from this study at any time, either during or after the interview, without any negative consequences.

Are there any benefits to me for taking part in this research study?

There are no direct benefits to participants in this study. However, your insight may provide a guide for young African Americans aspiring to attend college as baseball players.

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Will I get paid for being in the study? Will it cost me anything?

Participation in this study is strictly voluntary. There are no costs to you for participating in this study.

Contact Information

For questions about this research, please contact ***** Ph.D. candidate, Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis, University of Missouri at (573) ***** or *****@mail.missouri.edu, or dissertation committee co-chairs, Dr. Emily Crawford-Rossi, Associate Professor, Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis, University of Missouri, at 202 Hill Hall, Columbia, MO 65211 or crawford@missouri.edu and Dr. Sarah Diem, Professor, Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis, University of Missouri, at 303 Townsend Hall, Columbia, MO 65211 or diems@missouri.edu.

Voluntary Consent

I confirm that I know the purpose and parameters of the research study outlined above. I am aware that my participation is completely voluntary and that I may withdraw from the project at any time with no complications. I hereby provide consent for the use of my quotations and wish to participate in this research endeavor now.

Name (Print or Type) Telephone

Signature Date

VITA

Kendall Lewis is a native of St. Louis, MO and a graduate of St. Louis Public Schools. After graduation from Metro Academic and Classical High School, Kendall attended St. Louis Community College at Forest Park where he received his Associate degree. He continued his educational pursuits at Iowa Wesleyan College (BS, Chemistry), Columbia College (MEd, Administration), and the University of Missouri-Columbia (MS, Biochemistry; MS, Science Education; PhD, Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis). Dr. Lewis is a servant leader as a high school administrator in Columbia, Missouri where he also teaches life lessons through diamond sports. He is married to Suzanne Lewis, a nursing administrator. Kendall and Suzanne are blessed with four children, daughters Xarria Alisandra Lewis and Synaya Markayla Lewis, and sons Xavier Alexander Lewis and Kayden Joseph Lewis.