

Journal of Issues in ***Intercollegiate Athletics***

The New Plantation: Black Athletes, College Sports, and Predominantly White NCAA Institutions.

By Billy Hawkins. Published in 2010 by Palgrave Macmillan, New York. 238 pp., Index, Bibliography - \$62.23).

Reviewed by

Earl Smith, PhD

Rubin Distinguished Professor, American Ethnic Studies and Sociology, Wake Forest University

Professor Billy Hawkins new book *The New Plantation* looks to be a sequel or expansion to his first book *The new plantation: The internal colonization of black student-athletes* (2000).

In the book under review Hawkins focus is on the institutional context of African American student athletes and the schools they attend as well as the multiple roles played by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) as the major umbrella institution governing intercollegiate sports.

Readers will be interested in the sub-topics Professor Hawkins covers from a broad overview of Black students at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) to the literature on athletic superiority (but intellectual inferiority) and Athletic Reform.

These sweeping investigations are largely well written, fairly researched and important.

At a time when parity looks to have arrived for African American student-athletes who can attend any institution in any state appearances can be very deceiving.

The major investigations of what I term academic fraud at colleges such as Florida State University, SUNY-Binghamton and the University of Michigan, just to name a few, reveal that in the 21st Century African American student-athletes are still

being treated differently from students in the general student population (and, often, differently from their White teammates) by offering to admit them less well prepared for academic success than their non-athlete counterparts, enticements such as under the table payments for their parents to rent homes and, sadly, illegitimate curriculums—Basketball 101, Coaching Strategies for Baseball, and Tennis-- that would never stand for legitimate college or university courses and unfortunately lessen the value for those who do eventually earn a degree.

Who would have thought since the days when Emeritus Professor Harry Edwards (University of California at Berkeley) first revealed courses like “basket weaving I” or “Tidily winks 2” were being offered to these African American student-athletes?

Yet, in 2010 the *New York Times* reports that at the State University of New York at Binghamton African American student-athletes are being accepted into this flagship institution with full credit for courses such as “Theories of Softball” and “Bowling I.”

Professor Hawkins scrutinizes practices such as these as well as a host of other disingenuous practices that do nothing for the future of these student athletes once they “graduate” from the institution.

In these ten chapters Professor Hawkins provides a systematic analysis of intercollegiate sports but it is his chapter nine –Athletic Reform and Decolonization—that gives us a premier overview of the reform efforts taken up by activists, concerned citizens and even the NCAA although none of these actually works. To be sure nothing has been reformed.

When looking at the newest reform effort, for example, The Academic Progress Rate (APR), that was supposed to penalize institutions who fail to keep student-athletes in specific sports above course eligibility levels reports reveal that the programs that are receiving sanctions for APR violations are almost entirely in non-BCS conferences and it appears that the major sports factories are either allowed to slide or are providing “extra help” to athletes so that APR minimums can be assured. The recent disclosure of cheating at Florida State points to a much bigger problem all over the US and one wonders how the NCAA misses this at a tier one institution?

In closing let me state a general problem with research on African American Student Athletes who attend Predominately White Institutions (PWIs). Most, if not all, of these projects make an a-priori assumption that because these athletes are attending PWIs they are, by default, objectified and hence exploited.

The use of the term exploitation is not clear in these works in that Marx introduced the classic understanding of exploitation in the labor force and according to Marx the exploitation is built into the social relationship of owner and worker (Parkin, 1979).

Medical students who become residents are exploited in the classical sense but MOST of these students go on to become physicians and the exploitation is a part of the pathway to obtaining the professional degree and status (Everett, 1963).

Most African American athletes who play intercollegiate sports never go on to be successful professional athletes. In fact, as I point out in my book *Race, Sport and the American Dream* (Smith, 2009) less than 1600 African American athletes earn a living at their sport.

This is where the terminology becomes important and I would argue that the contention that exploitation is occurring at PWIs would stand a better chance of becoming heard if the researchers would apply good sociological research methodology to their work and conduct comparative research that is longitudinal and with samples of African American student athletes from both PWIs and HBCUs (Historically Black Colleges and Universities).

Why? Inherent in the assumptions about African American student athletes at HBCUs is that they do not feel alienated and, additionally, the assumption is that only African American students who attend PWIs are stressed, alienated, and segregated without investigating the similarly situated students of other racial/ethnic backgrounds—including Whites--many of whom are not from middle to higher class status groups and may experience marginalization and alienation as well.

Overall, this is an important book and one that will do well in undergraduate and graduate college courses.

References

- Everett, H. (1963). Sleep Paralysis in Medical Students. *The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease*, 136(3), 283-287.
- Parkin, F. (1979). *Marxism and class theory : a bourgeois critique*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Smith, E. (2009). *Race, Sport and the American Dream*. Durham, North Carolina: Carolina Academic Press.