

UC Berkeley

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The Bay's Team

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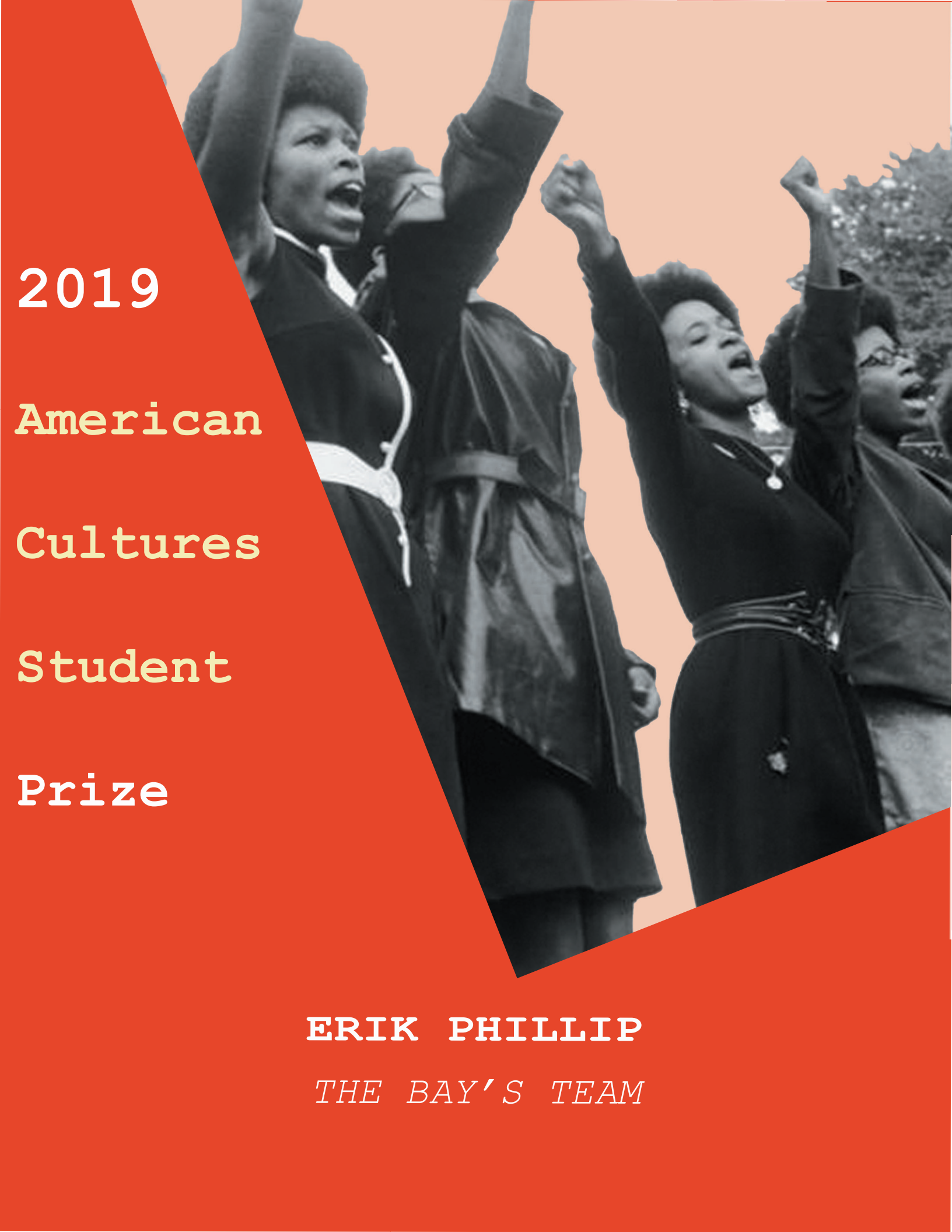
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ERIK PHILLIP

THE BAY'S TEAM

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The American Cultures Student Prize

Awarded since 2008, the American Cultures Student Prize provides students with the opportunity to highlight work taken in an American Cultures course which promotes understanding of race, ethnicity, and culture. The prize also recognizes student's work as a standard of excellence in scholarship wrestling critically with the complexities of our diverse social conditions in illuminating ways.

For more information about this award, please visit: <http://americancultures.berkeley.edu/ac-student-prize>

Erik Phillip

Submission Title: "The Bay's Team"

Ethnic Studies 122AC and Ethnic Studies 180

Instructor: Raymond Telles

During 2001-2012, UC Berkeley increased recruitment of local Black football players to strengthen the Cal football team. The presence of local Black football players like Marshawn Lynch at UC Berkeley has not only become heroes to Erik and people from his community in Oakland, CA, they inspire him and others to see themselves as students and athletes on campus. However, once here, Erik found himself on a campus disconnected from his community, with an embarrassingly low percentage of Black students, and lacking in resources to support local Black athletes. During his senior year, Erik left the Cal football team so that he could develop "The Bay's Team," a documentary centered on the experiences of black football players at UC Berkeley from 2001-2012. This documentary explores the disconnect between the athletic and academic community.

Personal Statement

To whom it may concern,

This project is derived from my experience as a local, Black, student-athlete here at UC Berkeley. Born and raised in Oakland, California, I grew up dreaming about one day being a student and football player on this campus like Marshawn Lynch and the rest of my local heroes. After seeing this dream become a reality, I found a campus that was very different from the one I had dreamt of attending. I saw a university cut off from the community I call home, lacking faces that look like mine, and surrounded by teammates from areas nowhere near California. I took on this film as a final project for Ethnic Studies 122AC, race and ethnicity in contemporary American films, taught by Professor Telles, who has mentored me throughout this process. This year, I decided to forego my senior season of football to develop this very complex documentary project which is very dear to my heart. I researched and developed this project in the spring of 2018. I shot my footage in the summer and completed editing in the fall while enrolled in Ethnic Studies 180, a continuation course to Ethnic Studies 122AC. This film is an attempt to look back at the culture of Cal football and the Berkeley campus from 2001 through 2012; when local athletes brought the unique culture of urban Black youth inside the walls of both Sather gate and Memorial stadium.

As demonstrated at the beginning of the film, many Black students at UC Berkeley feel that the campus environment is very hostile towards them. The embarrassingly low percentage of Black students is a significant deterrent for even the most qualified students of color. By focusing on local Black students, one can see that this percentage has created an invisible barrier between the campus and the surrounding communities. Many local minority students don't see UC Berkeley as being a realistic option for them. The only area of campus where it is not uncommon to see Black students is within the athletic department. What is unique about the period that this film

covers are how the Black football players were able to bridge a gap between their local communities and UC Berkeley. Figures like Marshawn Lynch, Robert Jordan, and others were able to transform Cal football into a nationally competitive team while also inspiring young Black men from the Bay Area. Even with all of these great accomplishments, the controversy that surrounded this era is what sets this story apart from others.

Historically, there has always been a divide between the athletic community and the academic community here on campus. It is as if Berkeley is split into two different establishments; there is UC Berkeley, the prestigious institution, and there is Cal, which represents the athletic programs. Towards the end of the last decade tensions between these two groups were enormous when a report claiming that Cal football had the worst graduation rates of any team in the country was made public. When this news broke, the campus erupted with questions about how the number one public university in the country could be struggling this much to graduate its players. As confusion turned to anger, many focused their blame on different individuals throughout the football department. Some questioned the ability of the athletic study center to serve the academic needs of these football players. Many of the players came from high crime areas with low resourced schools. To be able to keep up with the rigorous Berkeley curriculum, especially while playing major college football, requires an immense amount of support staff. The Athletic Study center did not have enough resources for the number of students on the team who needed them. This caused widespread criticism of not just the ASC, but of college football in general.

As this film explains, the role of a college football coach is not always clear. Is their main job to win games based on the work of predominantly Black athletes, or do they owe it to these young men to be committed to helping them get a quality education? In the film, many previous Cal football players admit that at first, they did not care about obtaining a degree, they were

using Berkeley as a steppingstone to the NFL. These discussions resulted in yet another dark cloud being cast upon Black students on this campus. Given the extremely low percentage of Black students on campus, there is a general assumption that every Black student at Berkeley is a student-athlete. So as the criticism towards football players grew, it inadvertently affected the majority of the Black males on this campus. The University eventually took different measures to raise the academic standards on athletes, restricting the areas from which the coaches were allowed to recruit. The result was that there were fewer local Black students on the football team and even more stigmatization towards Black students on campus.

Through a historical lens, this film tells a story that is relatable for many local Black athletes and Bay Area residents. The impact that these football teams had on local Black children is immeasurable. These players inspired people like me, especially as a child, not through their talent on the field, but simply by their presence on this campus. Seeing young Black men with dreadlocks and gold teeth walking through this campus had a lasting impact on both myself and many others like me. Their image let me know that it was possible for me to attend this school even though no one in my family had any relation to UC Berkeley, other than as fans. As Black faces are becoming less prevalent in both the Bay Area and the Berkeley campus, this story becomes more important. It serves as a reminder to little Black boys from places like Oakland that they too can live the UC Berkeley school motto of fiat lux; letting their light shine.

WATCH "THE BAY'S TEAM"



SHORT FILM BY ERIK PHILLIP

<https://tinyurl.com/thebaysteam>