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Migrant Labor, Black International Athletes, and the NCAA Cartel: A Critical Mixed
Methods Examination

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Education

by

Eric Matthew Davidson

December 2025

Dissertation Committee:

Dr. Eddie Comeaux, Chairperson
Dr. Uma M. Jayakumar
Dr. Michael W. Moses II

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2025

The Dissertation of Eric Matthew Davidson is approved:

Committee Chairperson

University of California, Riverside

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DEDICATION

In solidarity with the athletes in this study and beyond – we will see justice done.

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Migrant Labor, Black International Athletes, and the NCAA Cartel: A Critical Mixed
Methods Examination

by

Eric Matthew Davidson

Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate Program in Education
University of California, Riverside, December 2025
Dr. Eddie Comeaux, Chairperson

This dissertation employed exploratory mixed methods research to examine the labor site conditions, experiences, and migration patterns of international NCAA Division I men's basketball players. Using a combinatory theoretical framework grounded in both racial capitalism and neo-racism, the study sought to understand how an international athlete's social location impacted their movement into, within, and through DI competition. Given the NCAA's long history of cartel labor practices- particularly toward Black athletes in revenue-generating sports, as well as basketball's growth as a major global enterprise steeped in postcolonial relationships between states, Black international athletes were found uniquely vulnerable to exploitation in US college sports. The first phase of the study engaged in critical discourse analysis to uncover athletics interests' racial capitalist and neo-racist perspectives toward Black international athletes. In addition, the CDA revealed that NCAA institutions exploit the vulnerability of countries on the global margins- particularly Black states in Africa and the Caribbean- to engage in predatory and paternalistic athlete recruitment. Next, critical quantitative inquiry tested the factors

affecting international athletes' labor migration patterns. Social location- a combinatory measure of an athlete's expected racialization and region of origin- strongly predicted differences in pre-college professional opportunity, future professional pipeline position, and premature exit from the sport. Black athletes from Africa and the Caribbean were found to occupy an abject position on all these counts, and Black athletes from Europe and the Anglosphere frequently lagged behind their nonblack peers. The study's mixed methods findings illuminate an internationalized college athletics labor market that treats Black athletes as expendable commodities rather than human laborers. When viewed through the guiding theoretical frameworks, the results support major restructuring of both the NCAA and US policies that undergird this market. College athletics is an exploitative cartel enterprise masquerading as an amateur avocation. Black international athletes' labor conditions and migration patterns shed urgent light on necessary change in college athletics to protect human and migrant rights in global sport, including the abolition of amateurism guidelines, the adoption of work visas for international college athletes, and the disruption of harmful recruitment, coaching, and reporting practices that uphold the NCAA cartel.

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Migrant Labor, Black International Athletes, and the NCAA Cartel: A Critical

Mixed Methods Examination

Chapter 1: Introduction

International college athletes are a significant yet understudied population in United States (US) higher education. The National Collegiate Athletic Association reports that more than 20,000 athletes from 193 countries participated in intercollegiate athletics at its member institutions during the 2020-2021 academic year (National Collegiate Athletic Association [NCAA], 2023). The fellow core Anglosphere countries of Canada (3,035), the United Kingdom (1,184), and Australia (821) send the most NCAA Division I athletes to the US, while 13 other countries- Spain, Germany, Sweden, France, New Zealand, the Netherlands, Italy, South Africa, Jamaica, Brazil, Mexico, Norway, and Kenya- each send between 200-800 athletes. By gender, 7,521 international athletes compete in DI men's sports, 8,476 compete in women's sports, and seven compete in co-educational sports. Significant differences in national and regional representation also exist by sport. For example, Sub-Saharan African men's basketball players make up 18.2% of the international total, whereas Latin American players make up 3.8%. In men's tennis, the values are roughly opposite, with sub-Saharan African and Latin American athletes comprising 3.0% and 16.3% of the international total, respectively.

These differences in regional representation are often drawn along racial lines. A significant body of critical research on major college athletics has uncovered an explicitly racialized structural arrangement (e.g., Comeaux, 2018; Gayles et al., 2018) in which

NCAA institutions routinely exploit Black labor to generate capital (Donnor, 2021; Hawkins, 2010). The two primary revenue-generating sports in NCAA Division I competition are football and men's basketball. These sports garner most of the media attention paid to college sports at the national level and supply most of the operating budgets for the remaining sports within a given athletic department. Football and men's basketball, however, are also unique among Division I sports for the disproportionate percentage of Black athletes competing within them. In fact, Black athletes made up 52.4% of Division I men's basketball participants and 44.7% of football participants in academic year 2021-2022 compared to 23.1% across all sports (Lapchik, 2022). As a result of this disparity, NCAA Division I institutions overburden Black athletes with the task of generating revenue to sustain these institutions' remaining sports programs, which in contrast to football and men's basketball are overrepresented by white athletes (Hawkins, 2010). Additionally, due to the archaic NCAA *principle of amateurism*, Black athletes are coerced into performing essentially free athletic labor to sustain the outsized salaries paid to coaches, athletic directors, university presidents, and other athletics interests (Hawkins, 2010; Huma & Staurowsky, 2012).

Structural Racism and College Athletics

The relationships of Black athletes to their institutions and to the NCAA cannot be divorced from the challenges of American structural racism. The US federal state's origins and current constitution are embedded with histories of African enslavement and Indigenous land dispossession, which manifest in legal, social, economic, and- of particular importance to this writing- educational capacities in modern American society

(Lee et al., 2020; Harris, 1993; Wilder, 2014). Ongoing white supremacist racial projects including- but by no means limited to- residential redlining, school-to-prison pipelines, policing, and voting disenfranchisement confer innumerable advantages onto members of the dominant white group while enacting outright violence and everyday discrimination against Peoples of Color, particularly Black and Native groups (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Under this structure, social institutions such as colleges, universities, and their auxiliaries- including athletics- are sites of racial inequity and race-based social reproduction (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Thus, any athletic labor rendered for an NCAA program carries racial implications and consequences for both Black domestic and international participants.

Hawkins (2010) identified the NCAA as *the new plantation*, articulating how major college sports are engaged in a unique form of this race-based social reproduction- maintaining white capital accumulation via the coercion of unpaid work from Black laborers. Coaches and other athletics interests often recruit Black players out of underserved and impoverished communities, convincing these young athletes that college sports are a viable means to upward social mobility. As the population of international college athletes grows, coaches are employing these same recruiting tactics in the international space, by relying not only on *intrastate* racial inequity to secure an exploitable Black labor force but also on *interstate* power disparities between the US and Black athletes in their home contexts to sign these athletes to F-1 student visas (Sethi et al., 2022; Wallace, 2025). Thus, Black international athletes competing in US college

athletics resemble migrant laborers with a precarious immigration status that makes them uniquely vulnerable in an already racist system (Wallace, 2025).

Black International Athletes

As they navigate their multiple identities as migrants, elite athletes, and university students, Black international college athletes face the same broad challenges as all international athletes- legal (e.g., Abbey-Pinegar, 2010; Roth, 2013; Sethi et al., 2022; Stewart, 2013) and acculturative (e.g., Lee & Opio, 2011; Popp et al., 2010; Terzis & Beasley, 2022) barriers to participation and active engagement in the college athletic and academic environments. On the legal side, international athletes' prior athletic experiences can be difficult to interpret under NCAA amateurism guidelines, creating threats to their competitive eligibility even after they enroll (Abbey-Pinegar, 2010; Roth, 2013). The NCAA's "sharp dichotomy between amateurs and professionals" differs significantly from club systems in Europe and other regions where scholastic achievement is not a precondition to athletic competition, so international athletes often enter US universities underprepared for the coursework required to maintain their eligibility (Stewart, 2013, p. 238). Additionally, the right-to-work laws governing international athletes' student visas limit these athletes in the emerging name, image, and likeness (NIL) marketplace vis-à-vis their domestic counterparts (Sethi et al., 2022). Culturally, Black athletes find themselves subject to uniquely racist and xenophobic treatment both on and off the campuses in which they reside (Lee & Opio, 2011) and often face difficulties seeking support from faculty, academic staff, and their coaches, given that most campus affiliates are not well versed in these athletes' native languages

and cultural values (Popp et al., 2010; Terzis & Beasley, 2022). These experiences are in many ways rooted in the NCAA's unusual position in the global sports industry.

The NCAA, Global Sport, and Basketball

The institutional sponsorship of broadly popular, highly professionalized intercollegiate athletics is a unique feature of the US vis-à-vis the tertiary education systems and sports industries of other countries, which also creates differentiated experiences for international participants (Mooradian, 2015; Roth, 2013; Stewart, 2013). Collectively, NCAA Division I championships generate more than \$1 billion annually, with member institutions' athletics enterprises frequently generating revenues in the eight- and nine-figure ranges (Bass et al., 2015). Given that the NCAA sponsors many sports that are played at the highest levels worldwide, its member institutions' high-capacity facilities, wide-reaching television contracts, and robust player development programs make US college athletics an important part of the global sports industry (Bass, et al., 2015; Garant-Jones, 2007).

This is particularly true for basketball, because unlike other US-developed sports that enjoy significant public interest only domestically (e.g., American football), basketball is now a global phenomenon. The North American-based National Basketball Association (NBA) is still considered the worldwide pinnacle of the sport, but major grassroots and professional expansion efforts in China, Europe, Australia, and many other countries enjoy significant popularity in their home regions (Martin, 2014). A variety of pathways to professional participation in these major leagues exists, including sports clubs and development leagues, but many talented, university-age competitors from

around the world view NCAA Division I college basketball as a viable- and in some cases exceptional- strategy to advance their careers in the sport (Martin, 2014). In recent years, international athletes make up 16% of NCAA Division I men's basketball players, with 166 first-year athletes joining the sport in 2021 alone (NCAA, 2022).

Thus, it is important to consider US men's college basketball as an important site of both intranational and international athletic labor and labor migration. Actually, major university athletics may have a claim to the lion's share of the pre-professional basketball pipeline in the United States, particularly into the NBA. While international development leagues and the NBA's own G-League enjoy limited popularity and limited availability in the US television market, top Division I basketball programs routinely play games to sold-out arenas that are broadcast on national television; this allows professional scouts and agents greater access to talented players. For these reasons, it is more appropriate to frame college athletes- particularly Black college athletes- as laborers in the professional basketball pipeline than as university students participating in amateur sports.

Purpose

The purpose of this research was to understand how the US systems of neo-racism and racial capitalism affect the labor conditions and migration patterns of international men's basketball athletes competing at NCAA Division I institutions. While prior scholarship had identified some of the political and cultural challenges experienced by international college athletes, particularly Black international athletes (e.g., Lee & Opio, 2011), no system-level understanding of their labor existed at the time I began the study. To address that gap in the literature, I conducted an exploratory mixed methods study

(Creswell, 2014; Hesse-Biber, 2010) drawing on both critical discourse analysis (CDA) and critical quantitative inquiry (CQI). First, I employed CDA to uncover the ways in which athletics interests' discourses revealed racist and xenophobic perspectives on Black international athletes, affecting their labor conditions. Second, I conducted a statistical analysis to determine how the labor conditions present in NCAA Division I basketball contributed to differentiated labor outcomes for these athletes. The results of the study uncovered the compounded onus that neo-racism and racial capitalism places upon Black international athletes, distinguishing their labor conditions and migration patterns from their white and other nonblack international peers. I argue that this knowledge is critical for multiple interest groups in US higher education, intercollegiate athletics, and the global sports market and has the potential to ensure fairer labor practices and more secure transnational human rights provisions in the elite college athletics landscape.

Positionality

My interest in this research stems from my position as a keen cultural observer of men's Division I college basketball for more than a decade. In particular, I have long experienced discomfort at the disjointedness between popular discourses about the positive impacts of major intercollegiate sport and the problematic nature of the relationships between athletes and their institutions. I consistently struggle to reconcile my own enjoyment in the sport from this discomfort, and find an important channel for my observations in research that identifies and disrupts systems of injustice within Division I sport. In addition, my background in international relations gives me a unique

lens through which to view the study of higher education more broadly. I believe college that sport and international politics, in addition to their explicit relationship to one another, each offer kindred meaning-making capacities. Namely, (1) the American university system is a valuable lens through which to examine the United States' position in the global postcolonial world order and (2) major spectator sports present a microcosm of the prevailing social, political, and economic systems in which they are positioned.

With these values and orientations in mind, the idea for the present study came to me in part as I followed the University of Arizona men's basketball team throughout the 2021-2024 college basketball seasons. These seasons' rosters were notable for a high prevalence of international players, many of whom were starters or received significant playing time. These athletes were from a diverse array of countries including Mali, Cameroon, France, Sweden, Lithuania, and Canada. I noticed repeat patterns in how the team and its players were discussed by institutional representatives and sports media. Typically, players from Northern Europe were assumed to have exercised significant agency in their journey to competing at this elite level- they and their families had leveraged critical resources to develop their talents and get in front of recruiters. In contrast, players from Sub-Saharan Africa were presented as passive recipients of opportunity; opportunity which was bestowed on them by benevolent coaches and scouts who had sought them out in their war-torn, poverty-stricken home countries.

One notable example of this dichotomy is a 2023 *Arizona Daily Star* feature, which describes the relationship between UA men's side center Oumar Ballo and women's side guard Sali Kourouma and their connection to their home country of Mali

(Brown, 2023). In the article, the author highlights Mali's low ranking in measures of human development, discusses the athletes' gratitude to their coaches for giving them spots on the team, and describes the plight of the African children residing in the athletes' home villages. Additionally, descriptions of international Arizona Wildcats' physicality and athletic abilities, as well as which athletes were given agency and voice in sports journalism differed between racial groups. A *Heat Check* article from the 2021-2022 season (Harkins, 2021) describes Ballo as a "monstrous force," whereas white Swedish forward Pelle Larsson is lauded for his "playmaking ability." A feature in *The Athletic* (Davis, 2022) contains nuanced, standard English quotes from white international athletes about cross-cultural adjustment and basketball strategy, while Black French athlete Adama Bal is quoted only once in a faux-accent and frequently portrayed to be "confused." These discursive incidents align with prior journalism and scholarship about racial disparities between the portrayals of Black and white athletes by coaches and journalists (Foy & Ray, 2020; Haslerig et al., 2018, 2019), with an added international dimension. I believe that these differences not only reinforce dominant deficit narratives and ideologies about Black peoples and their countries of origin, but also deprive a whole group of sport laborers in the United States their personal agency in an athletic system which is already the subject of significant critique for its exploitation of Black players. In an era where many organizational fields- elite sport included- become ever more transnational, my research fulfills a critical need to understand how exploitative labor systems continue to thrive.

I came to this study as a white male US-citizen researcher with a vested interest in global justice, decolonization, and Black liberation. However, my affiliation with the US university system and its white supremacist foundations and operations makes engaging in truly critical work extremely difficult. From my position within both racial and global political hierarchies that were expressly designed to benefit me, I adopted a paramount responsibility to center marginalized voices and perspectives, speak truth to power, and hold perpetrators of racial and xenophobic violence to account, including a process of self-reflection when my own internalized biases and prior socialization intersected with my research. In all elements of this work, including my research design, choice of theoretical frames, and engagement with the literature, my goal was to reject deficit framings of my population of study- Black international athletes- and provide tangible means by which the research could bring about equitable change to the systems that commit injustice upon this population.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This brief review of extant literature highlights several interwoven elements of intercollegiate athletic labor, from broad to narrow. I begin with an articulation of the capitalist world order of sport labor and athletic labor migration, touching on how power in elite athletic systems is concentrated within the countries of the global center. Next, I move to place NCAA Division I athletics within this concentration by discussing how the current neoliberal economic regime has influenced American higher education to pursue intercollegiate sport as a capitalist market venture that ultimately results in an exploitative labor relationship between athlete and university. Third, I articulate how the terms of this labor relationship shape the experiences of Black university athletes specifically, particularly in terms of their rights within their sport. To close the review, I present what is known of international college athletes, and their labor conditions, and their racialized experiences. I conclude by articulating the gap in our current understanding of this population, which is based on a lack of systemic examination.

Global Sport Labor, Academic Capitalism, and the NCAA Cartel

At the onset of the twenty-first century, multiple nexuses of independently concentrated elite athletic labor have consolidated within a core of countries at the global center including the principle white-dominated nations of the Anglosphere and Western Europe (Jarvie, 2003; Maguire & Pearton, 2000). These core countries control the sociocultural, political, and capital resources associated with sport in the global setting at the expense of countries and regions comprising the various distances of the global periphery, particularly those most marginalized: Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America and

the Caribbean, and South Asia (Maguire & Pearton, 2000). Prominent sports organizations within dominant regional nexuses exercise significant pull in the global athletic labor market, drawing talent from the peripheral countries into the West. In this context, athletic labor migration can occur within and between countries and is “interwoven with the commodification of sports within the capitalist world economy” (Maguire & Pearton, 2000, p. 760).

Global Basketball and the Postcolonial Geographies of Sport

With a vested interest in seeking out new labor markets under this unequal transnational framework, the National Basketball Association began launching development academies in 2017 across a number of strategic international locations to provide young athletes with a “predictable pathway” to professional basketball (Jindal, 2024; Marquette University, 2022; Wallace, 2025). The NBA Academies established connections between the US and the postcolonial states of Africa, South Asia, and Latin America that not only develop athletes from these regions, but also connect these athletes with NCAA DI coaches and scouts. Thus, the NBA has institutionalized the global basketball labor pipeline, creating a codified migratory channel between the global periphery and the NCAA. Furthermore, the Academies “provide dormitories and educational services” for athletes “intended to model college life,” reinforcing Western knowledge hegemony prior to many of these athletes enrolling at US universities (Jindal, 2024; Wallace, 2025). At the time of this writing, the NBA has six Academies in operation (Tipton, 2022). Two are in China, where basketball has become exceedingly popular in recent history (Martin, 2014), one is in New Delhi, India, and one is in San

Luis Potosi, Mexico. NBA Academy Africa is headquartered in Thies, Senegal, and the Global Academy, which serves as a hub for many regions, is headquartered in Canberra, Australia. The NBA Global Academy “serves as a college-like atmosphere in which players go to classes during the day and work with support staff on strength and nutritional training” (Brockway, 2023). Thus, the NCAA’s collegiate model exercises clear influence on the sport’s international development initiatives.

The NCAA Cartel: Historical Consolidation, Contemporary Exploitation

One additional arena where sport commodification has occurred as a direct result of capitalist interests is elite college athletics itself, where the US-based network of NCAA member universities now prepares both domestic and international athletes akin to the club systems in other countries (Mooradian, 2015). While intercollegiate athletics in the US have always been tied to economic interests, their transition from primarily cocurricular activity to spectator industry is related to a broader shift in American higher education from state support to market ventures known as academic capitalism (Giroux, 2019; Slaughter & Leslie, 1997; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). During the latter half of the twentieth century, US federal and state governments adopted a system of austerity politics that saw a significant reduction of budget allocations to higher education, forcing institutions to generate most of their revenues independently in the open market (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). Major athletic programs became a priority for university leadership based on their existing public popularity, potential benefits to the institution, and emerging media relationships (Bass et al., 2015; Nixon, 2014).

With amateurism guidelines already in place, the NCAA and its member institutions moved to secure an essentially free labor force for their capitalist athletics enterprise, establishing the *new collegiate model*, a “labor relationship where the athletic scholarship is a form of payment for athletic services rendered” (Hawkins, et al., 2015, p. 320). Thus, the NCAA narratively and politically justified gratuitous athletic labor by ostensibly providing its athletes with educational opportunities, and crafted the term *student-athlete* to prevent athletes’ classification as employees (Comeaux, 2020; Hatton, 2020; Staurowsky & Sack, 2005). This maneuver reinforced public perception of the NCAA as a provider of educational opportunities, and allowed it to avoid responsibility for athlete welfare and benefits (Comeaux, 2020; Hatton, 2020; Staurowsky & Sack, 2005). The NCAA’s aforementioned strategies to legitimate their exploitative operation were accelerated by market forces, and aligned with a longer historical entry into the elite sport market that also drove the rise of racially targeted athlete recruitment and the adoption of a cartel structure. I present this historical context in the following passages.

At the turn of the twentieth century, intercollegiate sport was still in its relative infancy, yet commercial interests were already pressuring sponsoring institutions toward misconduct (Duderstadt, 2009; Nixon, 2014; Thelin, 2015). Concerned with the burgeoning campus activity’s social and economic ethics, US President Theodore Roosevelt convened a group of university leaders and formed the organization that later became known as the NCAA (Comeaux, 2020; Duderstadt, 2009). The group decided that intercollegiate competition must rest on a *principle of amateurism*, presented here in its entirety:

Student-athletes shall be amateurs in an intercollegiate sport, and their participation should be motivated primarily by education and by the physical, mental and social benefits to be derived. Student participation in intercollegiate athletics is an avocation, and student-athletes should be protected from exploitation by professional and commercial enterprises. (National Collegiate Athletic Association, n.d.)

In order to understand the evolution of the NCAA from amateur provisioner of cocurricular development to exploitative commercial sports enterprise, it is critical to consider the evolving relationship between college athletics and race. The language of the principle of amateurism offers the opportunity for analysis; in the early days of the NCAA, institutions of higher education were explicitly segregated by race to exclude Black people, and college sport's primary participants were wealthy, white male elites. The language concerning the protection of student-athletes should be interpreted literally. The NCAA's organizing committee attempted to codify the importance of protecting these white elites from both (a) physical harm on the playing field and (b) the corrupting influences of external economic forces that might interfere with athletic participation's contribution to their holistic development (Satterfield, 2015). As the NCAA evolved, the *language* of the amateurism principle remained rigid. The policy as presented above still appears verbatim in the NCAA Handbook despite its drafting more than a century ago. Its discursive and political-economic meaning, however, shifted along with the organization's aims and scope.

Duderstadt (2009) delineates the history of college sport into three distinct phases- the amateur phase, the exhibition phase, and the show business phase. I have discussed the amateur phase above; the exhibition phase began in the postwar era, when American increases in college attendance, leisure capacity, and media availability gradually began to pull institutions toward a model of intercollegiate sport that more closely reflected established major professional sports organizations (Comeaux, 2020; Duderstadt, 2009; Nixon, 2014). University presidents, seduced by the material and reputational benefits incurred upon universities by strong athletics programs, took on the principle role of administering the NCAA and its more than 1,000 member institutions (Lemons, 2017; Nixon, 2014). In doing so, the most powerful among these institutions looked to maximize athletics' revenue-generating capacities, forging formal relationships with corporate partners and media organizations (Nixon, 2014), transforming their football and men's basketball coaches into millionaires (Sperber & Minjares, 2015), and pushing their athletes to spend ever-increasing amounts of time on sports activities versus academics (Comeaux, 2020; Comeaux & Harrison, 2011; Jayakumar & Comeaux, 2016; Wolverton, 2008). These activities ushered in the show business phase.

During the NCAA's corporatization, the principle of amateurism remained steadfast within the NCAA's bylaws. Division I football and men's basketball were becoming enormous cash cows on the backs of an essentially free (and mostly Black) labor force. Institutional investment in sport as a means of revenue generation aligned with the broader shift in American higher education toward institutional reliance on capitalist market activities (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). Member institutions' seemingly

irreconcilable commitments to maintaining their athletes' amateur status while vastly expanding athletics' capital accumulation potential motivated the NCAA to employ a set of discursive and political strategies to generate public goodwill and secure the exploitative status quo (Jayakumar & Comeaux, 2016). First, the organization advanced the term *student-athlete* to "persuade lawmakers, courts, and the public that athletes were ordinary students rather than professionals or employees" (Comeaux, 2020, p. 9; Sack & Stauirowsky, 1998). This maneuver also allowed the NCAA to avoid responsibility for athletes' economic and physical well-being through the denial of wages, benefits, and worker's compensation (Comeaux, 2020; Hawkins, 2010; Huma & Stauirowsky, 2012).

Second, the NCAA leaned heavily on the nonprofit, educational missions of the university to mask professionalized athletics as a cocurricular activity. If participant athletes could not be paid due to their status as university students, their scholarships and later- cost-of-attendance stipends cemented this student status and prevented compensatory claims against the institution (Hawkins, et al., 2015). These strategies- still in use today- maintain a public imaginary of the NCAA's operations that allow it to act alone in its organizational field, considering its athletes not as human laborers, but as commodifiable asset property. The *principle of amateurism*, therefore, transformed into a tool of capitalist consolidation and led to the emergence of the NCAA's modern cartel practices: (1) fixing the compensation of its laborers, (2) controlling the labor supply, (3) unilaterally distributing profits, (4) protecting its member institutions from external competition, and (5) punitively enforcing its rules on laborers (Lemons, 2017; Miller, 2012).

Black Athletic Laborers and the Reification of Race as Capital

Any interpretation of the NCAA as not only a capitalist enterprise, but also as a cartel must center the raced nature of its programs. Earlier, I named the principle of amateurism as a protectionist policy to safeguard the wellbeing of white elites during the historical period when Black athletes were barred from competition and excluded from university admission. However, the NCAA's relationship with race evolved in a commensurate capacity to its commercialization. As American higher education (gradually) integrated, Black athletes became targets of athletic recruitment. White coaches and athletics administrators' racist attitudes about Black peoples' intellectual capacities and physical disposability rendered them attractive as an exploitable labor force (Comeaux, 2018; Gayles et al., 2018). Indeed, Black athletes compete in the revenue sports of football and men's basketball at rates roughly two-and-a-half times those of other sports (Lapchik, 2022). I therefore return to the language of the principle of amateurism, long divorced from its sentiments toward white elite athletes' well-being. In the modern intercollegiate athletics landscape, it now serves to protect the asset property (Black bodies and labor) and accumulative capacities of white athletics stakeholders (Donnor, 2021; Hawkins, 2010). The centrality of components such as "participation should be motivated primarily by education" and "student-athletes should be protected from exploitation by professional and commercial enterprises" lies not with the athlete, but with the capitalist venture of college athletics.

The Black College Athlete Experience

The NCAA cloaks its exploitation of Black labor and bodies under discourses of virtuous amateurism and educational opportunity, but Black college athletes' lived experiences disclose how the NCAA and its member institutions render them abject. In order to maintain their current exploitative capital generation enterprise, Division I universities maintain rigid control over both domestic and international Black athletes by restricting their rights to compensation, quality education, free expression, and autonomy. In the subsequent sections, I articulate the deleterious impact that the NCAA's racist structural arrangement has on Black athletes by discussing each of the above elements of their experiences in turn. In addition, I draw attention to the limited body of scholarship detailing the combinatory effects of Black and international identities on athlete's experiences at Division I institutions.

Restricted Rights to Compensation

As discussed in prior passages, the NCAA's structural and political commitments to amateurism result in a labor relationship whereby athletes receive scholarships and cost-of-attendance stipends as a form of "payment" for their athletic services (Hawkins et al., 2015). This labor relationship justifies institutions' withholding of fair-market compensation from Black athletes, who are denied any share of the revenues they generate for their institutions (Hawkins, 2010; Huma & Staurowsky, 2012). In fact, universities' commercial interest in revenue sports coupled with their racist attitudes about the disposability of Black bodies leads to both tacit and explicit institutional denials of Black athletes' very *rights* of compensation, protecting white athletics interests'

economic benefits (Comeaux, 2013, 2018). An economic examination of men's basketball athletes found that a significant majority of participants in the sport earn more revenues for their institutions than the values of the scholarships they receive, an issue that disproportionately impacts Black players who are overrepresented in the sport (Donnor, 2021; Lane et al., 2014).

Given Black athletes' ubiquity in the revenue sports, institutional leadership views the Black body as an exploitable commodity through which to accumulate capital (Comeaux, 2018; Donnor, 2021; Gayles et al., 2018; Hawkins, 2010). Donnor (2021) posits that NCAA Division I institutions not only secure revenue that athletes earn through sports activity, but also use Black athletes' racial identities to enhance the sale of marketable goods and increase the value of institutional branding, avoiding financial accountability to these athletes on the basis of universities' tax-exempt, nonprofit status. Additionally, Black athletes report deep-seated feelings of exploitation by their athletic programs that have a detrimental impact on their experiences at their institutions (Beamon, 2008). While recent name, image, and likeness (NIL) legislation has provided athletes with the ability to seek market opportunities outside their institutional contexts, universities still fiercely resist direct compensation for Black athletes who generate significant monies and commodifiable assets for their universities (Simmons, 2023).

(Mis)education

Educational outcomes for Black male athletes routinely trail behind their white counterparts (Harper, 2018), an inevitable result of universities and their athletics departments devaluing Black athletes' capacities as scholars and critical thinkers

(Comeaux, 2018; Cooper, 2012; Cooper et al., 2017; Gayles et al., 2018). White coaches and athletics administrators maintain interest in Black athletes' educations only to the extent that these athletes' academic success aligns with athletic goals, pushing them into less rigorous, less relevant courses with greater frequency than white athletes (Comeaux, 2020; Donner, 2005, 2017; Singer, 2015). While the NCAA nominally limits the number of hours that athletes may spend on athletic activities to 20 hours per week, the reality is closer to 40 hours per week (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011; Wolverton, 2008). In order to sustain such time commitments, Black athletes routinely find themselves clustered into majors misaligned with their interests to accommodate their athletic responsibilities, potentially leading to increased income inequality after college (Fountain & Finley, 2009; Fountain & Finley, 2011; Comeaux, 2020; Sanders & Hildenbrand, 2010). Interviews with African American former athletes reveal that negative academic experiences and educational exploitation led to difficult post-college transitions into the workforce (Beamon, 2008). Evidence also suggests that academic clustering affects Black players at higher rates than their white counterparts due to the combination of white athletic elites' racist perceptions of their academic capacities and their overrepresentation in the revenue sports where the pressure to stay academically eligible is higher (Cooper, 2012; Cooper et al., 2017; Gayles et al., 2018).

While much of the scholarly and lay discourse around Black athletes portrays them as passive participants in the academic clustering system, they demonstrate an acute awareness of the contradictions their coaches and athletic departments express regarding academic and athletic priorities (Beamon, 2008; Donner, 2017). An ethnographic study

of African American football athletes revealed that these athletes viewed their athletic participation as “work,” refuting the *student-athlete* identities pushed on them by their coaches and recognizing their programs’ dependence on- and prioritization of- their athletic labor at the cost of their academic wellbeing (Donnor, 2017). Additionally, athletic departments routinely engage in clandestine practices, shuffling Black athletes through fabricated classes or pressuring them into academic misconduct; indeed, the majority of academic misconduct scandals center Black athletes (Donnor, 2017; Gragg, 2000). Athletic programs’ academic mistreatment of Black athletes leads to reinforcement of negative racial stereotypes at the institutional level, in which the prevailing racial attitudes and perspectives of fellow campusgoers negatively impact these athletes’ wellbeing (Beamon, 2014).

Influenced by the broader campus racial climate, athletics department staff and other institutional affiliates such as peers and faculty routinely underestimate and mistreat Black athletes (Benson, 2000; Comeaux & Harrison, 2007; Cooper, 2012). Within their sports programs, Black athletes feel that coaches’ and athletics department staff’s racist beliefs regarding their intelligence limits their playing opportunities and academic autonomy (Singer, 2005). Ethnographic examinations into African American male athletes’ experiences with racism reveal that these athletes confront peer perceptions of their un-deservingness as university students, harmful stereotypes about their criminality from fans and other campusgoers, and racially hostile treatment from faculty and other students, particularly if the population of Black people in their environments is low (Beamon, 2014). A critical race theory analysis of Division I athletics found that Black

athletes face increased barriers to both academic and athletic participation based on NCAA amateurism and eligibility guidelines, and that they labor for disproportionately white athletics department staffs that do not possess culturally competent knowledge or practices (Cooper et al., 2017). Additionally, a qualitative survey of 122 Division I athletes revealed that Black athletes in particular felt the academic and social environments of their institutions- including faculty and peer interactions- were racially problematic (Comeaux, 2012). Comeaux and Harrison (2007) found that faculty spent far more out-of-class time with white athletes than Black athletes, essentially depriving Black athletes the benefits to academic achievement associated with student-to-faculty relationships.

Restricted Rights of Free Expression and Autonomy

Athletics departments stringently enforce restrictive behavioral and public speech guidelines against Black athletes, prohibiting political engagement (Hawkins, 2010) and socialization with the broader campus community (Comeaux, 2015), as well as punishing free expression on social media via content restrictions and department monitoring (Sanderson, 2011). Given the aforementioned constraints imposed on Black athletes in the revenue sports, their meaningful opportunities for academic and social engagement with the broader campus community, particularly cross-racially, are limited (Comeaux, 2015, 2018). This contributes to Black athletes' reported feelings of social isolation (Cooper, 2012).

Athletics interests also routinely surveil Black athletes to ensure their academic eligibility to labor. Departments employ so-called "class checkers" and digital attendance

technologies to track athletes' movements on campus and enforce Black athletes' study behavior (Comeaux, 2018; Grummert, 2021, 2024) in an academic environment that positions them as irresponsible and unintellectual (Comeaux, 2012, 2020; Cooper, 2012; Cooper et al., 2017). Beyond ensuring academic eligibility, departments' hyper-surveillance of Black athletes also functions as a means of social control; limiting athletes' abilities to engage in social and political discourse, particularly around race and racism (Comeaux, 2018; Hawkins, 2010). In Singer's (2005) case study of African American athletes' on-campus experiences with racism, the participants reported harsher punishments for violations of program expectations and more frequent testing for drugs. These athletes demonstrated an acute awareness that the surveillance and disciplinary practices employed against them were racially motivated (Singer, 2005).

International Athlete Experiences

A small body of scholarship reveals that international college athletes face legal and political challenges based on their migrant identities. International athletes struggle with homesickness, cultural differences, and language barriers while attending NCAA institutions (Pierce et al., 2012; Popp et al., 2010; Terzis & Beasley, 2022) and their coaches may be unaware of international athletes' unique acculturative needs compared to their domestic peers (Baghurst et al., 2018). NCAA amateurism guidelines negatively impact international athletes who spend their pre-college years competing in the club systems more common to other countries' sport industries (Abbey-Pinegar, 2010; Roth, 2013; Stewart, 2013). Additionally, the softening of restrictions against player compensation recently forced on the NCAA by name, image, and likeness legislation

does not apply equally to international athletes. US immigration and foreign work laws including the F-1 student visa limit their abilities to profit from their athletic labor (Sethi et al., 2022; Solomon et al., 2022). These unique experiences of international college athletes, however, must be enhanced through an analysis of race as immigrants do not share a universal set of acculturative experiences in the US.

Black International Athlete Experiences

A germinal examination into the experiences of African international college athletes using a neo-racism lens found that “most of the student athletes had not experienced discrimination as part of an ethnic minority but upon coming to the United States, they encountered considerable problems beyond the typical challenges of balancing school with sport” (Lee & Opio, 2011, p. 636). Lee and Opio’s (2011) study gathered data via a two-stage process of field observations and athlete interviews, and determined that African college athletes experienced ignorance, discrimination, and alienation from white campus affiliates at their institutions- but not equally. Critically, white African students in the study were able to blend into the majority white US culture more easily, while Black athletes experienced multiple discriminatory dimensions- phenotypical and xenophobic (Lee & Opio, 2011). This result demonstrates a need for further empirical examinations into how international college athletes experience their US sport labor sites differently depending on their racialization in the US context (Lee & Opio, 2011).

Gaps in the Literature and Novel Research Directions

Relatively little is understood about international college athletes vis-à-vis their domestic peers; even less is understood about their racialized experiences. The work that does exist in this arena has discovered legal, economic, and cultural challenges that affect international athletes in ways not shared by domestic college athletes (e.g. Roth, 2013; Sethi et al., 2022; Pierce et al., 2012). Additionally, germinal inquiry into the racialized experiences of African international athletes demonstrates the efficacy of the neo-racist framework in this realm of study, particularly when comparing the different experiences of Black and white African athletes (Lee & Opio, 2011). I argue then, that Black international college athletes are subject to disadvantage not only on the basis of their Black identity, but also the potential with which the US-based NCAA can exploit their labor without recourse based on power differentials between countries in the global market. A deeper disclosure of their experiences will yield new understandings of the NCAA's operations within the global sports industry and enhance justice not only for Black international athletes competing within it, but also for Black domestic athletes who find themselves within an exploitative, American capitalist sport labor system. I argue that research into race and international college athlete labor migration provides a system-level analysis of this topic, bolstering existing research that employs participant- or case-level analyses. This study also helps address the need in college athletics scholarship for studies with "large-scale data sources with a range of contextual and student characteristic variables" as well as those with the potential to uncover and challenge anti-Black racism (Comeaux, 2020, p. 40).

Chapter 3: Theoretical Orientation

I employed two primary theoretical frameworks to examine athletic labor in NCAA Division I men's basketball: racial capitalism and neo-racism. When used in conjunction with one another, these two analytical tools account for both the unique racialized experiences of international athletes vis-à-vis their domestic peers as well as the global and domestic (US) ordering of a neoliberal hierarchy that economically subordinates Black and other Bodies of Color. Racial capitalism articulates the economic system's dependence on racialized power differentials to maintain its capital generation and consolidation efforts, while neo-racism posits that racism directed toward groups outside the US context includes discrimination based on linguistic and cultural perceptions in addition to phenotypical perceptions. With these frameworks as a guide, I moved to understand how race and racism influence international athletes' labor conditions and migratory patterns into, between, and out of NCAA Division I institutions.

Racial Capitalism

In the United States (US) and many contexts abroad, the political-economic operations of capitalism fundamentally depend upon the subordination and exploitation of racialized bodies- particularly Black and Indigenous bodies- (Robinson, 1983/2020), as evidenced *par exemple* by historical and contemporary systems of chattel slavery and convict leasing, respectively (Calathes, 2017; Donnor, 2021). Capitalism's consolidation in the US took place via a systematic process of settler-colonial land seizure and racial hierarchy solidification (Robinson, 1983/2020). Robinson's (1983/2020) theory of racial capitalism, therefore, argues for the necessity of framing race, systematic race-based

disenfranchisement, and racialized modes of production as inherent to the capitalist structure (Calathes, 2017; Melamed, 2015; Robinson, 1983/2020). In addition, capital production and wealth accumulation functionally depend on the dominant white class's dispossession of Black, Indigenous, and other Laborers of Color, "provid[ing] the state and its privileged classes with the material and human resources needed for their maintenance and further accumulations of power and wealth" (Leong, 2013; Robinson, 1983/2020, p. 21).

In a direct challenge to prior Marxist interpretations of capitalism's founding as the world's dominant economic *modus operandi*, Robinson (1983/2020) argues that capitalism did not emerge out of a rejection of the feudal order, but out of an extension of that feudal order into wider global political and economic relationships. European (Western) civilization, Robinson (1983/2020) asserts, "was constructed on antagonistic differences" between races, tribes, language groups, and regions from its outset (p. 10). Thus, any consolidated economic system stemming from European notions of social order must inherently rely upon in-group, out-group difference to generate and maintain the flows of capital production and accumulation. Racial capitalism, however, is not merely a set of connections between racial difference and economic difference (Bhattacharyya, 2018). Rather, the capitalist political economy- particularly in the US- was fundamentally constructed via the white ruling class's extraction of economic value from racial "others" (Bhattacharyya, 2018; Calathes, 2017; Leong, 2013). Racialism and its associated means of coercion, control, and exclusion, therefore, are roots to the logics of late capitalism (Robinson, 1983/2020).

African enslavement, plantations, sharecropping, convict leasing, and numerous other racialized legal-economic structures have yielded almost untenable levels of wealth accumulation among white groups since the US' founding (Calathes, 2017; Melamed, 2015). Indeed, subsequent interpretations of Robinson's (1983/2020) theorizing on capitalism rely on the centrality of dispossession and expropriation as the dominant white group's fundamental affordances within a capitalist system (Bhattacharyya, 2018; Melamed, 2015; Ralph & Singhal, 2019). Melamed (2015) advances this idea by articulating that racial capitalist analyses of modern political, social, and economic systems must consider the omnipresence of *primitive accumulation*- the idea that the accrual of capital occurs principally through the ruling elites' enactment of racial violence upon the disenfranchised. In order to safeguard their abilities to commit racial violence for accumulative ends- to dispossess and expropriate- the white elite class promotes racial animus to maintain inequity between racial groups (Calathes, 2017; Robinson, 1983/2020). In this system, which depends on racialized modes of accumulation and adheres to a social imaginary of racial difference, race also becomes a component of asset property (Harris, 1993; Leong, 2013). A legal interpretation of racial capitalism holds that there must exist in some capacity a definable *racial capital* possessable by an individual; the economic value derivable from racial identity and the potential of that racial identity to enact or sustain violence (Harris, 1993; Leong, 2013).

Racial Capitalism in Higher Education and College Athletics

Racial capitalism manifests in the educational institutions of the United States (US), including higher education (Lee et al., 2020; Cowley, 2022; Myers, 2014; Wilder,

2014) and intercollegiate athletics (Frazier-Smith, 2021; Gayles et al., 2018; Hextrum, 2016). From the colonial period onward, US colleges and universities have treated Black bodies as asset property in order to establish economic and social dominion over the settled and colonized North American continent, with Black peoples' labor routinely enslaved and exploited in both codified and uncoded capacities (Wilder, 2014). Indeed, the American system of land-grant public universities was established via the US government's theft of Indigenous lands; these lands still generate significant public revenue for which tribal communities receive no reparations or repatriations (Lee et al., 2020). Similarly, many of the physical and technological infrastructures of the US university system were constructed by enslaved Africans, the descendants of whom have yet to be repaid (Wilder, 2014). These instances of mass violence by the US federal state reinforce the Black Marxist interpretation of capitalist operations- warfighting and the exercise of dominion over land are necessary underpinnings of modern capitalism (Robinson, 1983/2020). In the case of the tertiary education system's involvement in the aforementioned US racial and genocidal projects, feudal conflict occurs not in sectarian or *interstate* capacities, but in an *intrastate* deprivation of social and material resources from Black and Indigenous groups via violent conflict and bondage.

In addition to these racialized historical dimensions of the US tertiary system, universities continue to operate within a racial capitalist framework, reinforcing Harris' (1993) property values of whiteness, profiting from diversity and inclusion initiatives while discarding Students of Color, and employing neoliberal logics to address racial inequity (Cowley, 2022; Myers, 2014). Intercollegiate sport in particular provides the

white settler colonial university system with an avenue to continue profiting from and eventually discarding Black bodies and lives (Comeaux, 2018). NCAA Division I labor practices largely mirror plantation and migrant sharecropping economics wherein institutions reap capital benefits from Black athletic laborers for the comparatively insignificant cost of scholarships (Donnor, 2021; Gayles et al., 2018; Hawkins, 2010; Hextrum, 2016; Lane et al., 2014). Additionally, since racial capitalism “asserts that white people and institutions can extract monetary and social value from the racial identity of non-white people,” (Cowley, 2022, p. 209; Leong, 2013), it is important to recognize how the white ruling class of college athletics (i.e., athletics directors, coaches, and university presidents) commodify Black bodies, Black culture, and Black identity, particularly in the revenue generating sports of men’s basketball and football (Donnor, 2021; Gayles et al., 2018).

Racial capitalism also provides insights into the ways in which elements of labor including sector position and mobility are racially transmuted (Strauss, 2020). The disproportionate representation of Black athletes within Division I football and men’s basketball highlights these raced labor geographies as they manifest within intercollegiate sport. In keeping with prior scholarship’s application of the racial capitalism framework to labor geographies, I contend that these differentiated patterns of racial participation in the revenue sports vis-à-vis the nonrevenue sports result not from the Black athlete’s decontextualized free exercise of preference, but from the systemic patterns of inequitable economic development that result in restricted labor choices for Black athletes (Hawthorne, 2019; Strauss, 2020). This argument counters a dominant narrative

often used to explain Black overrepresentation in football and basketball; the narrative supposes that Black communities prioritize sport rather than education as a means to economic advancement (Cooper, 2012). Rather, the geographical functions of racial capitalism including the temporal continuities of racialized labor and the systematic mechanisms by which the state and its white elite clients position racialized bodies within certain labor sectors results in the intentional grouping of Black bodies in the most exploitable labor positions (Hawthorne, 2019; McClintock, 2018; Strauss, 2020).

Neo-Racism

Race and racism are worldwide systems of social organization, yet their meanings and consequences vary from country to country (Hervik, 2013). As the forces of globalization have accelerated since the onset of the twentieth century, racism has become an increasingly transnational political project, exacerbated by international conflict and colonialism (Balibar, 2007; Viktorivna, 2019). Dominant racialized discourses- particularly in the Anglosphere and Western Europe- advance a position that immigrant groups from regions such as Africa, South Asia, and the Middle East contribute to Western cultural erosion, sharpening white societies' misguided perceptions of in-group, out-group difference between themselves and racialized others (Hervik, 2013; Viktorivna, 2019). In this evolving form of neo-racism, dominant white groups justify their political oppression of Peoples of Color not only from the social construction of observable physical difference, but also from perceived white linguistic and cultural superiority (Balibar, 2007; Hervik, 2013; Viktorivna, 2019). Thus, for white groups to maintain their status quo as the dominant group in the world hierarchy, they must

position the differences between white society and the societies of Peoples of Color- particularly Black peoples- as insurmountable, justifying protectionism and nationalism as necessary cultural preservatives (Balibar, 2007).

Theoretical and empirical exercises using neo-racism have determined that societies with highly normative cultural ideologies and practices, rigidly ascribed social roles, and a lack of significant intercultural contact tend to express neo-racist attitudes more significantly (Černigoj, 2022). In Western states, political leaders have used the rise of populist philosophies combined with the existential threat of terrorism to enact neo-racist border security and domestic surveillance policies (Kurz & Berry, 2015), as well as prevent the natural flows of human migration between states (Anik, 2021). The connections between neo-racism, nationalism, and protectionism create inhospitable environments for immigrant, migrant, and other international Groups of Color residing in Western countries, particularly the United States during the first (and now second) Trump administration and COVID-19 pandemic (Anik, 2021; Hou, 2024; Lee & Li, 2023). In the US, institutionalized racism affects all racially marginalized domestic groups, but neo-racism carries distinct consequences for international groups. The white US majority's prevailing xenophobic, linguistic, and cultural beliefs about peoples from different countries informs its perceptions- and therefore its interactions- with these peoples. In this way, "discrimination becomes, seemingly, justified by cultural difference or national origin rather than by physical characteristics alone and can thus disarm the fight against racism by appealing to 'natural' tendencies to preserve group cultural identity" (Lee & Rice, 2007, p. 389).

Neo-Racism in Higher Education and College Athletics

Neo-racism manifests in all social, political, and cultural institutions within the United States, including higher education and major athletics enterprises. On a systemic scale, neo-racist ideologies have justified institutional violence against Asian international students during COVID-19 (Hou, 2024) and political restrictions on scientific collaboration with other countries (Lee & Li, 2023). On a local scale, international university students attending US institutions are subject to cultural and phenotypical discrimination from their peers, professors, and academic support professionals (Boafo-Arthur, 2014; Lee, 2006, Lee & Rice, 2007; Lynch, 2021; Mitchell et al., 2017; Onyenekwu, 2017; Squire et al., 2024). Black African international students in particular feel socially isolated via white campusgoers' discrimination and violence, as well as the shift from the "primarily interdependent worldview of their home environments" to the highly individualized white US culture (Boafo-Arthur, 2014, p. 120; Onyenekwu, 2017).

As a result of neo-racism, international college athletes- particularly Black international athletes- from outside the Anglosphere encounter unfamiliar racialized experiences when they move to the United States (Lee & Opiyo, 2011; Mitchell et al., 2017; Onyenekwu, 2017). These experiences may come as a result of formalized policy structures or informal interactions with other university affiliates, particularly their domestic peers, instructors, teammates, coaches, and student service professionals. Additionally, athletics interests such as fans, boosters, alumni, and surrounding community members may act in neo-racist capacities toward athletes from outside the

US. International college students must cope with negative academic evaluations, xenophobic rhetoric, political misinformation, and inadequate support services on campus (Jean-Francois, 2019; Lee & Rice, 2007). As members of their university communities, international college athletes are subject to these same experiences on campus in addition to the neo-racist experiences they encounter as laborers for the NCAA- a national sports entertainment cartel with a monopsonistic set of controls over its field.

Central Theoretical Argument

Ultimately, I argue that neo-racism and racial capitalism have a combinatory effect on Black international athletes competing in Division I men's basketball. These athletes' marginalized position within the social order motivates US university athletics programs to exploit their labor and drain their bodies of resources for capital gains. At the same time, their status as "foreigners" who speak different languages and maintain different cultural practices than those of the white-dominant US social system provides higher education institutions and their affiliates with grounds to dismiss their needs, goals, and even humanity on the seemingly legitimate basis of outgroup difference (Lee & Rice, 2007; Lee & Opio, 2011). In a neo-racist and neoliberal labor market, Black international athletes face significant, unique alienation and exploitation that impact their labor conditions and migration patterns within college athletics.

This argument offers a theoretically informed articulation of Black international NCAA athletes' position in the global sport labor market. The racial capitalist extension of feudal warfare and imperialist violence into the modern globalized landscape results in

Black peoples' mass displacement across a number of labor sectors (Robinson, 1983/2020). As a direct result of colonial erasure, most Black international athletes do not have access to stable sporting organizations or development leagues in their own countries and must migrate toward their oppressors in order to pursue advanced opportunities in the field. Prevailing attitudes in the US suggest that pursuit of such opportunities is motivated by a free exercise of choice rather than as a result of the US' violent economic dominion within the global market. Thus, it is paramount to consider the US' and NCAA's relationship to- and treatment of- these athletes, as the present arrangement is likely reinforcing violent racial capitalist realities for these athletes in an era of labor hypermobility and hyper-volatility, given that war and exploitation are ongoing projects driving influxes of labor into Western countries.

Chapter 4: Methodology

In order to effectively study the labor migration of international NCAA Division I men's basketball athletes through the lenses of neo-racism and racial capitalism, I employed an empirical mixed methods design that featured both critical discourse analysis and critical quantitative inquiry. Mixed methods research provides a holistic approach to examining social systems, drawing on multiple forms of data and analysis that function independently yet simultaneously inform one another (Creswell, 2014; Hesse-Biber, 2010). Specifically, mixed methods improve the complementarity of the studied system and allow for the researcher to use results from early phases of the project to inform subsequent phases (Hesse-Biber, 2010). Additionally, my approach attends to the emerging philosophical argument that the binary distinction between quantitative and qualitative methods is a fallacy since "most methods have both quantitative and qualitative dimensions;" (Haig, 2018) an argument which is illustrated in this study's case by the relationship between NCAA discourses and the measurable impacts of its exploitative economic arrangement.

In considering this aforementioned relationship as well as the limited body of scholarship studying international college athletes, I identified an *exploratory sequential mixed methods design* to be the most apt for my chosen problem. Exploratory sequential mixed methods designs separate data collection and analysis into two distinct phases, qualitative first and quantitative second (Creswell, 2014). The intent of this approach is to determine whether data gathered and analyzed on a small subset of a population can be generalized to a much larger, more comprehensive sample (Creswell, 2014). In this case,

developing a robust quantitative investigation of international athletes' raced labor migration patterns was difficult without a better understanding of the conditions in which they labor. Thus, the sequential design was most appropriate as I intended not to compare or relate qualitative and quantitative data simultaneously, but rather to establish an informational foundation in the first phase upon which to build the second phase (Creswell, 2014; Hesse-Biber, 2010).

Conducting a critical discourse analysis in phase one allowed me to “form categories of information that [could be] explored further in a quantitative phase” (Creswell, 2014, p. 226). From this analysis, I developed a thematic framework for the factors that construct and maintain athletes' labor site conditions, perceptions, and experiences which informed variable selection and modeling strategy in the critical quantitative inquiry phase. In the following passages, I articulate my exploratory sequential approach in two phases beginning with the qualitative component (phase I) and concluding with the quantitative component (phase II). In the study, qualitative data provided a lens for understanding how the NCAA constructs and reinforces exploitative labor conditions for Black international athletes. Then, quantitative data uncovered the impacts of these conditions on Black international athletes' migratory patterns and career outcomes.

Phase I: Critical Discourse Analysis

The qualitative phase of my research design was grounded by the following research questions:

- How do race, international status, and capitalism manifest in athletics interests' discourses about Black international men's basketball athletes and their athletic labor vis-à-vis white and nonblack international athletes?
- What do Black international men's basketball athletes' contributions to these discourses reveal about the exploitative economic arrangement of US college athletics?

In order to effectively interrogate the aforementioned research questions regarding the labor experiences of international NCAA Division I men's basketball athletes through the lenses of neo-racism and racial capitalism, I employed critical discourse analysis. CDA is a qualitative analytical approach that primarily concerns itself with the manifestations of power and inequality in discursive language (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000). CDA provides a basis for understanding the ways in which discourse is socially constituted and socially conditioned, and how it conceals, affirms, and reproduces dominion and marginalization in both linguistic and practical capacities (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000; Fairclough, 1992). This methodology is an apt choice for examining "applied... ..topics and social domains such as racism, economic discourse, institutional discourse, and education" (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000, pp. 450-451). As college athletics, athletic labor, and athletic labor migration are social systems and international college athletes are social actors, their related discourses are sites of social reproduction for which CDA can provide a critical and complex qualitative foundation of understanding.

Critical Discourse Analysis: Principles and Examinatory Capacity

While CDA is an evolving and interdisciplinary set of approaches to linguistic analysis with varied interpretations, Fairclough's (1992) seminal theoretical articulation of CDA offers a "three-dimensional framework" for critically "conceiving and analyzing discourse" (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000, p. 448). The three dimensions are (1) discourse-as-text, (2) discourse-as-discursive-practice, and (3) discourse-as-social-practice (Fairclough, 1992). Discourse-as-text focuses on the linguistically concrete; examining discourse-as-text reveals how textual discursive choices such as vocabulary, grammar, tense, structure, and usage communicate or obscure power relationships in social, political, and economic systems. Second, discourse-as-discursive-practice focuses on how discourse- in both actual observable texts and in subsequent discursive reiterations or reinterpretations of these texts- is produced, distributed, and consumed in society. The third element, discourse-as-social-practice, offers a Gramscian (1971) interpretation of texts; namely, discourse is a (re)articulative feature of hegemonic and ideological processes in society (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000; Fairclough, 1992). Thus, analyses of discourse must account for reinforcements of- or challenges to- dominant social orders.

Fairclough's (1992) multidimensional framework for CDA research does not establish a codified method of discourse analysis. Rather, it provides social science researchers with a foundation for critical perspective taking that positions discourse as culturally constituted, ideological, historically informed, and socially mediative (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; van Dijk, 2015). Compared to other forms of discourse

analysis, CDA centers the social and political contexts of discourse, attempting to explain how discursive structures “enact, confirm, legitimate, reproduce, or challenge relations of power abuse (dominance) in society” (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; van Dijk, 2015, p. 467). Therefore, the methodology provides the researcher with an interpretive capacity to examine the “semiotic dimensions of power” embedded within language and texts that are not frequent foci of ethnographic and phenomenological approaches (Wodak, 2014, p. 302). For the aforementioned reasons and in accordance with Gramsci’s (1971) notion of hegemony, I argue that CDA is an effective method for studying the discursive construction and maintenance of labor sites, particularly those that operate an exploitative structural arrangement between laborers and organizational elites, such as college athletics.

Critical Discourse Analysis in Athletics Research

CDA has been employed as a mode of inquiry in prior studies of college athletics and race. Notably, Ofoegbu and Ekpe (2022) examined how college athletics leaders’ statements in response to George Floyd’s murder served to distance athletics departments from actionable responsibility for redressing institutional racism. In this study, institutional and athletic leaders’ discourses projected unity between whites and People of Color through the use of “we” and “us” statements, yet these statements served more to highlight white authority over racial discourse (Ofoegbu & Ekpe, 2022). Additionally, Keaton (2022) employed CDA to uncover how white athletes attending historically Black colleges perpetuated ideologies of whiteness and race evasiveness in their personal racial narratives. While the athletes in this study espoused the social and educational benefits of

attending historically Black institutions, their dominant identities including whiteness and maleness influenced their discursive framing of Black people and culture as aberrant, even though “whiteness and maleness [are] minoritized” within their institutional contexts (Keaton, 2022, p. 982).

Where Ofoegbu and Ekpe (2022) and Keaton (2022) uncovered racially evasive and avoidant discourses among athletic leaders and white athletes, Easy (2012) conducted an extensive critical discourse analysis of the NCAA’s language reinforcing the notion of college athletes as “student-athletes,” a term which- as discussed in this study’s literature review- the organization crafted during the mid-twentieth century to prevent athletes’ classification as employees and thereby avoid responsibility for fair-market salaries, benefits, and worker’s compensation (Comeaux, 2020; Hawkins et al., 2015). Findings from this study revealed that the NCAA publicly uses repeat patterns of carefully articulated language to subtly rob college athletes of their agency (Easy, 2012). Member institutions are able to shield their exploitation of athletes’ labor on the discursive basis that educational provisions supersede compensation, and that the national letter of intent (NLI) represents an entrance into voluntary inurement rather than an indentured labor contract, which it more closely resembles from a legal standpoint (Easy, 2012).

From this emerging CDA-in-athletics scholarly tradition, I posit that the NCAA, as well as its associated member institutions and their leadership, engage in discursive strategies that shield the organization’s racist ideological underpinnings and economically exploitative labor arrangements. According to this study’s neo-racism and racial capitalism frameworks, I moved to understand the NCAA as a racial-nativist

capitalist hegemon, which employs specific discourses to cloak its racial projects from public view. Additionally, the discursive maneuvers of NCAA elites (e.g., coaches, athletic directors, and university presidents) reveal racist attitudes and behaviors toward Black international athletes' labor. On the contrary, Black international athletes hold their own perspectives on their experiences and offer knowledge pathways to resist the status quo. Thus, critical discourse analysis on Black international men's basketball athletes offers the potential to decloak, challenge, and reorder perspectives on athletic labor in college sports.

Phase I Data Collection

Sampling strategies in qualitative inquiry derive their justification not from size or randomization as in quantitative research, but from contextually and conceptually driven research decisions in service of achieving richness in the data (Creswell, 2014; Saldaña, 2011); this broad philosophy is echoed by CDA methodologists for use in CDA applications (Le & Le, 2009; Mogashoa, 2014; Mullet, 2018; Ziskin, 2019). The first step I took in collecting qualitative, discursive data about international men's basketball athletes was to compile a consolidated directory of athletes. The NCAA reported 699 international men's basketball athletes from 87 countries who competed in Division I during the 2021-2022 season (NCAA, 2023). While the NCAA tracks general information regarding athletes' countries of origin, the organization does not provide name-by-name directory information. Therefore, I used program websites to generate this directory. While Division I includes more than 360 institutions, I developed a working list of international men's basketball athletes from the institutions which competed in the

2024 NCAA Division I Men's Basketball Championship, a 68-team single-elimination tournament popularly known as "March Madness." The purpose for this sampling strategy was threefold. First, teams competing in the tournament are more likely to be successful programs from high-profile conferences which maintain the greatest level of financial and discursive commitment to the commercialized athletics enterprise. Second, teams competing in the tournament receive significant media coverage, so the discourses around these programs and their athletes are more robust. Third, high profile, successful programs make a greater impact on the perceptions of young international athletes due to increased recruitment travel budgets and media coverage abroad. From my working list, I used athletes' names and institutional affiliations to conduct internet searches for analyzable texts. Detailed information on the final dataset is discussed in chapter 5.

Phase I Analytical Strategy

While analytical practices vary significantly in the broad scholarly tradition of CDA, I employed Fairclough's (2015) guidance model involving three distinct processes: (1) textual analysis, (2), processing analysis, and (3) social analysis. During textual analysis, the researcher selects and describes the units of research and their relationship to the research problem (Fairclough, 2015). Next, processing analysis involves critically and closely reading each piece of the data for the linguistic and structural meanings within its contents, while the third and final stage- social analysis- considers the data's contextual relationship between sociopolitical histories and realities (Fairclough, 2015). My data selection processes above represented the textual analysis stage of this framework.

During the processing analysis and social analysis phases, I examined the assembled data through textual, discursive practice, and social practice lenses (Fairclough, 1992). My analysis was guided by van Dijk's (2015) composite CDA framework of *power as control*, which assumes that the social power over discourse rests in the hands of the dominant group within a social system. In my research, I hypothesized that white ruling elites in college athletics (e.g., the NCAA, coaches, university presidents) maintain a hegemonic level of control over athletic labor discourses (Gramsci, 1971). Sports media outlets reproduce the discourses of the dominant group, leaving athletes- in this case Black international athletes- with limited or nonexistent control of text and context within the discourse (van Dijk, 2015). Additionally, I examined the discourses of mind-control and domination that maintain the NCAA's racial capitalist and neo-racist underpinnings; namely, the implications and presuppositions, metaphors, lexical expressions, passive structures and nominalizations, and linguistic morphologies that white ruling elites apply to Black international athletes, and how these athletes interpret their own positioning within the social system based on discursive application of the aforementioned strategies to their labor (van Dijk, 2015). I present definitions and examples of each of these discourses in table 4.1.

Table 4.1

Definitions and examples of mind-control/domination discourses in van Dijk's (2015) power as control composite

Discourse	Definition	Example
Implications and presuppositions	Oblique assertions of unverifiable or untrue information	athletes advocating for compensation are <i>entitled</i>
Metaphors	Concrete expressions of abstract mental models toward a particular discursive aim	Black athletes are <i>forces of nature</i> ; white athletes are <i>strategists</i>
Lexical expressions	Language choices coupled with social power aimed at influencing knowledge and opinion	College athletes are <i>students first</i>
Passivity and nominalizations	Accounts which hide or downplay actions and power relationships between actors	Black athletes <i>were oppressed</i> ; Black athletes <i>face oppressive forces</i>
Morphologies	Diminutive or generalized references toward particular groups	that Black athlete is from a <i>third-world</i> country

Phase II: Critical Quantitative Inquiry

I identified two principle research questions to guide the quantitative component of my study:

- What factors affect Black international men's basketball athletes' labor migration patterns into, within, and out of NCAA Division I competition?

- To what extent do Black international athletes' social locations in the US context impact their labor migration patterns and professional outcomes vis-à-vis the social locations of white and other nonblack international athletes?

Critical quantitative inquiry (CQI) provides an effective methodological foundation for exploring the answers to these questions because CQI seeks to describe the experiences of those marginalized within the education system by (a) rejecting “traditional” quantitative methods’ positivist frameworks and (b) revealing systematic inequalities on a large, comprehensive basis (Frisby, 2024; Stage, 2007; Stage & Wells, 2014). Dominant scholarly commitments to scientific realism and objectivism have historically defined quantitative inquiry in the social sciences; this approach suppresses the researcher’s position as a *knowing subject* who influences- and is influenced by- social and historical realities (Carter & Hurtado, 2007; Haig, 2018). Recently, critical theory-informed challenges to this heuristic have created space for quantitative inquiry that acknowledges the researcher’s positionality and considers justice-oriented outcomes that challenge existing dominant empirical and conceptual models used to understand social inequality (Carter & Hurtado, 2007; Cokley & Awad, 2013; Rios-Aguilar, 2014). Therefore, CQI methodology “does not seek merely to verify models; it seeks new models and ways of measuring” educational processes to uncover oppression and inequity (Stage & Wells, 2014, p. 5). I considered NCAA Division I athletic competition and global sport labor migration primarily at systemic and institutional scales; thus, critical quantitative research was an appropriate methodological strategy.

Critical Quantitative Inquiry: Principles and Examinatory Capacity

As methodologists, CQI practitioners attend to the tension between liberatory philosophies of science and the harmful potential of hegemonic reinforcement characteristic of quantitative inquiry (Cokley & Awad, 2013; Frisby, 2024). Critical quantitative inquiry emerged not as a formally defined set of specific methods, but as a philosophical orientation to statistical inquiry based on an acknowledgement that systemic power differences between social groups arise not by chance, but from dominant groups' intentional oppression and marginalization of social *others* (Baez, 2007; Rios-Aguilar, 2014). In order to disrupt these systems, researchers must understand their research questions as ideological practices and reflexively interrogate their approaches to data collection and variable construction (Frisby, 2024; Stage, 2007; Kincheloe & McLaren, 1994; Rios-Aguilar, 2014). Stage (2007) offers two principle tasks for CQI researchers examining higher education: (a) use data to reveal inequities and (b) question the models and measures of quantitative methods to offer counters to dominant interpretations of social systems. These tasks ensure the researcher's accountability for enacting changemaking as a necessary result of their research (Baez, 2007).

Where qualitative research may examine a phenomenon or individual to develop transferable knowledge and apply it to other cases, quantitative inquiry allows the researcher to form generalizable understandings of an entire social, political, or economic system. CQI's focus on critical whole-systems interpretation of data affords the methodology with an examinatory power distinct from either "traditional" quantitative

studies or qualitative inquiry. This is particularly true for the emerging subfield of critical race quantitative inquiry, in which researchers consider how their data and modeling strategies measure complex social locations, identities, and personhoods, count the previously uncounted, and assign accountability and responsibility to oppressors (Carter & Hurtado, 2007; Covarrubias et al., 2018; Covarrubias & Vélez, 2013; Garcia et al., 2018; Teranishi, 2007). Additionally, scholars of critical geography have effectively utilized critical quantitative approaches to examine how racially and economically detrimental sociopolitical processes result in the inequitable distributions of space, place, and opportunity (Kwan & Schwanen, 2009). Given the CQI methodological tradition's attendance to intersectional measurement, I argue that it is appropriate for my study due to the complex combination of Black international athletes' racial and migrant identities, particularly as this population navigates the artificially restricted, exploitative labor geographies of college athletics.

Critical Quantitative Inquiry in Athletics Research

While numerous statistical analyses of college athletics exist, the number of studies engaging with explicitly critical or justice-forward approaches is limited. However, there are notable quantitative studies of college athletes and athletics organizations that have exposed racial injustice at systems-level. Smith (2018) engaged an explicitly critical quantitative approach to challenge deficit orientations toward athletes of color, determining that academic involvement is roughly equal across racial groups. It is also important to this study to note that quantitative inquiry can measure the impact of faculty relationship factors on Black male athletes' academic outcomes

(Comeaux, 2008). This justifies a critical quantitative approach for examining the broader institutional and athletic factors related to Black international college athlete labor migration.

Phase II Data Collection

All quantitative data was obtained from publicly available sources. First, a combination of institutional directories and online sports information repositories yielded athletes' countries of origin and expected racialization in the US context, as well as their national team, professional, and college player histories (as applicable). Additionally, I used qualitative phase data and internet searches to identify and glean additional labor outcomes for each athlete including their professional advancement and migratory movements, in some cases taking advantage of athletes' social media presences and international reporting on their careers. Next, in keeping with my exploratory sequential mixed methods approach, I used findings from the critical discourse analysis to inform the selection of explanatory factors and controls for quantitative modeling. These findings included determinations on the importance of social location (expected racialization plus region of origin), coaching relationships, and other programmatic factors. Also based on emerging knowledge from phase I, I collected controls for program success, program player development histories, and program resources via sports media databases and nonprofit watchdog organizations such as the Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics. Detailed information on the final dataset, including variable construction and descriptive statistics, is discussed in chapter 6.

Phase II Analytical Strategy

I used generalized linear regression analysis- both binary logistic and multinomial- to understand the factors related to international men's basketball athletes' migration into, between, and out of NCAA Division I institutions. Generalized linear modeling (GLM) affords the researcher the ability to regress a number of continuous or categorical independent variables onto a discrete dependent variable using an array of estimation strategies to predict the probability of a particular choice outcome against an alternative baseline outcome (Guillén, 2014; McCulloch, 2000; Neuhaus & McCulloch, 2011; Olsson, 2002). Black athletes' labor migration depends on a combination of their decisions- either independent and sound or as a result of external pressure- and a number of latent factors present within the labor market. Therefore, GLM was a logical choice of method.

Using the accumulated data, I generated four unique outcome variables: athletes' pre-college pipeline experience, athletes' decision to migrate out of their current institution, athletes' future pipeline position, and athletes' attrition from basketball altogether. These outcomes were regressed onto social location and a number of covariates to explore how racist, exploitative, and xenophobic conditions impacted athletes' movements through the sport.

The primary explanatory variable measured athletes' distinct social location via a combination of the racial and international elements of their identities as informed by the theoretical frameworks of racial capitalism and neo-racism. I included covariates to examine labor site factors with the potential to contribute to differentiated outcomes for

Black international athletes including coaching, international representation, program success, and athlete success. It was important to control for a set of variables measuring the athletic and organizational elements of the athlete's experience that may confound the influence of neo-racism and racial capitalism on their migration decisions and labor outcomes. Controlling for these factors allowed me to capture the true effect of the explanatory variable of interest more accurately. GLM results are presented in chapter 7.

Limitations

While I am confident in the methodological robustness of my research design, all social scientific inquiry is bound by methodological constraints that merit identification. Thus, I turn my attention to two primary limitations of my study. First, while public discourse is an important component of social reproduction, actors within the system of college athletics will always be bound by the constraints of scrutiny and punishment when engaging in the discourse. In particular, my focus on discourse leaves out the Black international athletes' unbound, first-person accounts of their experiences with neo-racism and their personal observations regarding the racial capitalist institutions for which they labor. I believe the conceptual framework my qualitative phase establishes can be used as a basis of understanding for future research that conducts interviews or develops programs with Black international athletes, so their voices can be amplified to more pointedly critique the NCAA cartel. Second, the quantitative data I am sourcing cannot be used to make causal inferences about Black international athletes' decisions regarding their movement into, within, and out of US college sport. Rather, I am examining the relationships between their labor outcomes, social locations, and other

factors that they experience at their labor sites. Future quantitative studies of this population should focus on survey research to construct instrumental variables based on these athletes' self-reporting of their experiences.

Chapter 5: Qualitative Findings

I began my qualitative data collection process by assembling a purposeful sample of athletes. According to institutional roster data, 147 international athletes competed in the 2023-2024 NCAA Division I men's basketball championship. After compiling my working roster of 147 international athletes, I conducted the data search process on Google News with the search terms "[player name]" and "[university name]" for each athlete. I sorted the search return by date and examined all search results for relevance to the research questions. Because this study aimed to understand international athletes' motivations, migration patterns, and labor site conditions rather than their measurable labor outputs (i.e., in-game performances, "stat lines"), I did not include articles or press releases detailing individual game results, box scores, or professional draft prospects in the working databank. For each article/presser to be included in the databank, I conducted a preliminary rapid scan of the content directed by my theoretical framework, knowledge of prior research, and embodied reaction. Included texts all shared language related to at least one of the following factors: (1) athletes' motivations, (2) athletes' histories and identities, (3) coaches' and other interest groups' perceptions of athletes, and/or (4) discourses related to the amateur-professional continuum of college athletics.

My search for analyzable media on the 68 participant teams in the 2024 NCAA tournament yielded a final total of 917 texts covering 154 athletes representing 53 countries from all six inhabited continents. Only six of the 68 teams did not have any international players on their rosters. These figures demonstrate both the widespread influence of basketball in the global sport labor market and the ubiquity of international

players in NCAA Division I competition. Texts broadly fit into five categories: news stories, breaking announcements, player profiles, home country publications, and institutional press releases. I present A breakdown of these text categories and their descriptors in table 5.1.

Table 5.1

Categories and descriptors of texts in the qualitative dataset

Category	Descriptors	Number
News stories	Human interest stories, press conference transcripts, interviews, postgame writeups, injury updates	510
Breaking announcements	Commitments, signings, transfers, declarations for NBA draft, moves to play overseas	171
Player profiles	Profiles on institutional directories	127
Home country publications	All news and announcements published by non-US outlets	23
Institutional press releases	All news and announcements from US-based universities, conferences, or other sports organizations	86
Total		917

Discourses on international athletes broadly adhered to three overarching themes which themselves moved from broader to more narrow elements of the global athletic labor landscape: (1) internationalization, (2) athletes’ histories and migratory journeys, and (3) athletes’ labor conditions and experiences. In this chapter, I address each of these themes in turn, as well as the distinct findings within. I summarize these findings by discussing

how they began to inform the data collection and variable construction processes for the quantitative phase of the study.

“Supply and Demand:” The New International College Basketball Labor Market

Owing to basketball’s popularity on the global stage, American college coaches demonstrate an acute awareness of the value in establishing recruiting efforts abroad. Their awareness is often grounded in a transactional worldview, with one coach stating “it’s economics: *supply and demand*. If you go internationally, you can find... ..players that might not have the same recruitment... ..that players do [in the US]” [emphasis mine]. Some institutions develop specific, targeted recruitment efforts to sign international athletes, which one article claims is a “sustainable way to maintain a program” and “remain competitive on the national stage.” To this end, articles in my data often highlight connections between specific universities and countries/regions: a “Croatian connection,” an “Australian pipeline, a Lithuanian pipeline, “a tradition of African Centers.” At one point, the University of Arizona touted eight international players on its roster, a direct result of coach Tommy Lloyd’s desire and “ability to *attract* top international talent” [emphasis mine], as demonstrated by the headline in figure 5.1.

Figure 5.1

A headline describing the international makeup of the Arizona men's basketball team

The New York Times

<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/23/sports/ncaabasketball/arizona-march-madness.html>

Arizona, a Team From Everywhere, Finds a Common Language

Arizona's march through the N.C.A.A. men's tournament is powered by an international roster dedicated to unselfish basketball. Coach Tommy Lloyd wouldn't have it any other way.

However, one article dehumanized these players by describing the team as being “stocked with internationals” and discussed how Lloyd “imported” Black French athlete Adama Bal, lexical expressions which emphasize the commodification worldviews embedded in college athletics culture.

Discourse also points to a growing awareness of US college basketball among international players, and reinforces the pull that NCAA competition exerts in sports cultures worldwide. The internet and other modern communication technologies give international players insights into how individual programs are developing other athletes from their home country or region. On this point, one coach remarked “they’re more interested in playing college basketball in the U.S. simply because they’ve seen guys come over and have success.” Lithuanian Augustas Marciulionis mentioned the most significant factor in his commitment to St. Mary’s “was [their] ability to develop international guards.” On Tommy Lloyd, 2025 Dutch commit Dwayne Aristode asserted

“I think he has the ability to make a relationship with (international players) and understand where they come from.” Some athletes also report that playing college basketball in the US is a longstanding goal, including Miro Little of Finland: “playing college basketball, especially in the NCAA tournament, has been a dream since I was very young.” Jonathan Tchamwa Tchatchoua of Cameroon deepens this narrative by pointing to the communal interests he shared with his family: “in Africa, it’s more about getting a scholarship to go to the U.S. My dad was all-in... ..I told him it was my dream.”

Targeted: Racialized Routes Through the Anglosphere

Athletes profiled in the dataset came to US college basketball with near-universal experience in either national team or professional basketball, or both. For particularly elite international athletes, the NBA Academies also loom large. One article describes that due to their “mission of growing the game in part by developing some of the top youth prospects around the globe,” they often “target[ed]” Black African players such as Oumar Ballo. In fact, most athletes from Black states in African and the Caribbean began their in-earnest basketball careers by migrating to one of the core Anglosphere countries as adolescents or children, with coaches or other members of the basketball development industry serving as their host families. South Sudanese Australian Achor Achor demonstrated awareness of the predatory nature of international recruiting by stating “it was really weird not knowing who was genuine and who really wanted me and who had really seen something in me.” In contrast, another article’s author discusses how white Australian Alex Ducas “joined” the NBA Global Academy in Canberra- he was not said

to have been *targeted*. As evidenced by the discursive distinction between Ballo and Ducas, Black players are less likely to be portrayed as the central subjects in their own recruitment. Rather, they tend to be “discovered,” while white international athletes enjoy greater affordances in the public sphere to describe their college choice process. However, relationships and networks between athletes suggest that they rely on both their own agencies and each other to scout institutions, rather than merely being targets of coaches’ recruitment efforts. BYU player Fousseyni Traore contacted recruit Aly Khalifa after the two connected personally at their matchup in the FIBA U-16 African Championship. Professional basketball player Monny Niaimke used her influence to connect fellow Ivorians Aboubacar and Lassina Traore to the coaching staff at Long Beach State. Aleks Szymczyk of Germany connected with his college coach via another former German player.

Amateur Professionals: Home Country Perceptions of NCAA Basketball

Local sources often reinforced the NCAA’s purported educational benevolence. One release from a Tanzanian newspaper reported on Atiki Ally Atiki, a center at BYU who had recently received an NIL deal. This news story featured an interview with a high-ranking official in the Tanzanian Basketball Federation (TBF). Throughout the piece, author and interviewee alike made references to Atiki having been “blessed” by “opportunities” and described college athletes as “amateurs” who “secure scholarships.” These expressions, long used by the NCAA and sports media to reinforce the notion of college athletes as lucky students, portray Atiki as a passive recipient of the NCAA’s gifts. While individual athletes may thrive in the student role as well as the athlete role,

the presence of *student-athlete* discourses on the international scene may further solidify the NCAA's perceptive legitimacy as an educational program, as seen below in figure 5.2.

Figure 5.2

Headline and excerpt from a Tanzanian newspaper article detailing Atiki Ally Atiki's NCAA basketball career and success in the NIL market

Atiki sees stairway to heaven in US



by MBONILE BURTON January 24, 2023



basketball youth Atiki Ally Atiki

SPORTS benefits opportunities have continued to light up basketball youth Atiki Ally Atiki as he has landed an advertisement deal with American health products company Nutricost.

While the NCAA and its educational benevolence myths have taken hold abroad, some evidence suggests that the international community already considers DI basketball to be a professional enterprise. An Indonesian basketball camp's press release described

Indonesian Derrick Michael Xzavierro as a “professional basketball player” who currently plays in NCAA Division I competition, which may indicate that international attention already places the NCAA at least proximally to other professional organizations, if not conflating it as a professional league entirely. Xzavierro announced his commitment to Grand Canyon University via the Indonesian Basketball League’s official mouthpiece, highlighting the prominence of US university-bound athletes in their home countries, particularly those countries just beginning to emerge on the world basketball scene. A South Korean newspaper further confirms international perceptions of NCAA basketball as a professional enterprise, holding that the NCAA as “acts as a preliminary stage for the NBA.” Athletes themselves often view NCAA basketball as a steppingstone in the professional pipeline. When asked about his transition from college to the NBA, Black Canadian Quincy Guerrier remarked “I’ve been a professional my whole life, to be honest, so there’s nothing really I have to adjust to.”

In Atiki’s case, TBF saw his success in the NCAA as a potential boon. The official quoted in a piece detailing the Tanzanian athlete mentioned “it is our turn to make deliberate strategies and continue utilising Atiki position [*sic*] in promoting Tanzania... ..abroad.” The TBF discussed Atiki’s ability to serve as a public face for generating interest in basketball among Tanzanian youth, as well as an unofficial goodwill ambassador for the country on the world basketball stage. Home countries, such as Atiki’s Tanzania, are clearly invested in their athletes playing at US colleges and universities. Additionally, many athletes in the data had already become stars in their home countries. Malian Oumar Ballo had been a leader on his successful national team

and a professional in the Canary Islands, thus garnering significant media attention in Mali. Japanese player Keisei Tominaga shared similar adoration among his countryfolk, as “throngs of Japanese media [followed] Tominaga closely” in the United States “for fans back home.” In a story reported by a South Korean news outlet, Gonzaga player Yeo Jun-seok- the only South Korean DI player at the time- also became a favorite player among Asian *American* college students and game attendees, indicating international representation in college basketball also drives support from American diaspora communities.

“America Isn’t as Different:” Racialized Interest in Athletes’ Migratory Journeys

In announcing Atiki Ally Atiki’s signing to BYU, the institution’s athletics department mentions that “growing up [he] would have to travel 45 minutes to play basketball at the nearest court,” but once he moved to Canada in the Anglosphere, his basketball career accelerated significantly. Thus, BYU institutionally legitimates and reinforces to the reader the notion that African countries are poverty stricken by nature, and that Black Africans’ migration to the colonial powers provides them with untold opportunities for athletic success. Journalists described various countries in Africa as “the poorest and most dangerous.” These morphologies reinforce white American readers’ imaginaries of Black African instability, violence, and deprivation, painting the continent and countries within it with a universally broad brush. An article detailing Mady Sissoko describes Mali as a country where “two-thirds of adults are illiterate, life expectancy is 59,” and one that has “poor sanitation and no access to safe drinking water.” Another journalist draws a comparison to popular culture by speculating that “coming from an

African village with no electricity or running water, this probably gave Mady almost as much shock as Brendan Fraser's character in *Encino Man*," a film in which Fraser plays a caveman. When acknowledging Black African athletes' acculturative difficulties in immigrating to the US and NCAA, journalists commonly reinforce Western and white supremacy. For example, one article editorializes Malian Fousseyni Traore's homesickness in the following terms:

He missed the *tiny room* where he *slept on a mattress protected by a mosquito net*. He missed the *compound* where he lived with family in the market town of Kati. He missed kicking a soccer ball with his friends on the *dirt roads* after he had finished his homework. [emphases mine]

Even in discussing Traore's family and community life, the author chooses to highlight the elements of his experience most touched by poverty, implying that the reader should react to his homesickness with surprise rather than empathy. Traore himself later responds to questions on his upbringing in Mali with regard to its political and economic struggles, noting "I never thought it was difficult to live there because I really love it... ...I have my whole family there... ...I always feel happy there."

Hardship and suffering abound in discussions of Black African athletes in particular. Featuring Sissoko, one writer contends:

Sissoko, whose parents are farmers, grew up in the rural town of Bafoulabe as the youngest of 10 children – six sisters and three brothers. He started playing basketball in in 2015 and *was noticed by Mike Clayton*, who was on a trip to Mali

and is now his guardian. That led to an *opportunity to move to America*.

[emphases mine]

Common Western-enshrining discursive tropes are evidenced in this excerpt, from white saviorism to the primitivity inherent to the African continent, revealing racial capitalist and colonial overtones. Quoted later in the article, Sissoko himself reveals “when they first asked me if I wanted to come [to the United States], I said no, I don’t know nobody here, I don’t want to come here” and that his family back home provided him with the support and guidance he needed to continue in the US. Sissoko’s contribution to the discourse challenges the implied social benevolence of Clayton’s “discovery” and his subsequent “opportunities” in America that “allowed” him to open his foundation. In his open letter to his mother in *the Players’ Tribune*, N’Faly Dante further counters journalists’ racist depictions of Africa:

America isn’t as different from Africa as some people here seem to think.

Sometimes I’ll get asked if I grew up around lions and zebras, which is crazy.

They don’t realize that in Mali there are cities, like where we lived in Bamako.

[emphases mine]

This suggests that news outlets, institutions, and other actors invested in maintaining a public imaginary of the NCAA’s benevolence seek to mine Black athletes’ experiences for trauma to appeal to the embedded sympathetic biases of white American audiences. This is evidenced in figure 5.3, in which a State News article’s implication that Michigan State provided Mady Sissoko a platform to give back to his community is juxtaposed against an image of him engaging with youth in his home village of Tangafoya, Mali.

Figure 5.3

Excerpt from an article covering the Mady Sissoko Foundation School in Tangafoya, Mali



Courtesy image from outside the Mady Sissoko Foundation School

When Michigan State University basketball player Mady Sissoko left his home of Tangafoya, Mali at 15 years old to play basketball in the United States, he knew he wanted to eventually give back to the people in his village.

Seven years later, Sissoko is a starting forward for Michigan State Basketball and has the platform to do just that.

Writers routinely mention the recency with which Black African players began playing basketball when discussing their abilities and experiences. One writer informed readers that Cameroonian Yves Missi “moved to the United States at 16 without ever having played in an organized basketball game.” Another, in discussing Khman Maluach and the South Sudanese national team’s historic performance in a 2024 exhibition against the United States questioned: “how did someone who picked up a

basketball for the first time in 2019 play on his country's Olympic team?" The answer to this question- as presented in the article- is the NBA Academies, anchored by the US-based NBA, which "assist talented players globally to reach their aspirations while playing in their home countries." In all these examples, but particularly transparent in the last, authors' highlighting of the lateness with which Black African players take up the game relative to their white peers serves two discursive functions: (a) reinforce a belief in the Black body as physically predisposed to athletic ability and (b) portray the colonial hegemony of the US in global sport as fundamentally beneficial for Black athletes from war-torn, underdeveloped African states.

"You Heard the Name Correctly:" Enforcing Cultural Distance

While media focuses heavily on Black African athletes, as discussed above, other nonblack international Athletes of Color are not exempt from racist portrayal. Discourses about Asian athletes reinforced reductive, orientalist ideas. One journalist introduced his interview with Japanese University of Nebraska player Keisei Tominaga by suggesting the athlete's hometown "Moriyama is as different from the American Midwest as one might find." Another article reported on spectators' racist nickname for half Chinese Canadian athlete Zach Edey, "foul Ming," a reference to notable Chinese NBA player Yao Ming. While the article condemns the nickname as "disrespectful," the author continues by stating "call him whatever you want, but Edey has Purdue in the Final Four," suggesting that athletic success wholly erases the effects of racism. Japanese player Keisei Tominaga received racist comments after a video of him shedding tears during his final game went viral. One journalist described him as "constantly lurking,"

playing into racist stereotypes. Additionally, after Nebraska's season-ending loss in the NCAA tournament, a contributor to the Pat McAfee Show joked that Tominaga "performed seppuku on himself." In the only example in my data of an explicit mention of racism, a contributor to *Awful Announcing* stated "this entire exchange was, at best, in poor taste, and at worst, racist." An Auburn fan at an AU-Tennessee game was ejected for telling Uruguayan Tennessee star Santiago Vescovi "go back to your land! This is America." Open xenophobia such as this example was rare in the discourse, but does serve as an external expression of internally held *in group*, *out group* beliefs among college basketball interests and shows that international athletes may be subject to racist and xenophobic attacks even if they are successful contributors to their teams.

In 2023 and 2024, Ramadan fell during the NCAA Division I basketball postseason, with many international Muslim players observing the fast. While some media offered nuanced interest stories that at least attempted to educate the reader on Islam and fasting while humanizing the athletes profiled, other sources seemed to have been created just to alert readers of Muslim players' (particularly Black Muslim players) presence on local teams, to the extent that one article offered a table titled "a complete list of Final Four participants practicing Ramadan." Subtextually, these sources read like cable news terrorism alerts, with one titled "UConn men's basketball players observing Ramadan: Adama Sanogo, Hassan Diarra and Samon Johnson" evoking fear-mongering lower third graphics during such broadcasts. The brevity of the article itself, coupled with framing the players' fasting practices akin to injury forcing UConn to give its "back-up

center... ..some longer stretches” removes players’ humanity from their religious practices.

Linguistics also played an important role in identifying international athletes’ status as “foreign” to readers. One author quipped “yes, you heard that name correctly... ..the Bulldogs’ star player is named Achor Achor.” Even if written in good humor, the author labels Achor, a Black Australian of South Sudanese descent, as aberrant due to his African name, reinforcing his cultural distance from white American audiences. Below this quip, the article questions, in bold header text, “where is Achor Achor from?” Questions of identity, origin, and family history are complex for many international athletes in my sample, and particularly for Black athletes, they are steeped in postcolonial structures and relationships. As the article details: “his mom – Ator Ucala – fled South Sudan during the country’s civil war. Achor was born in Cairo, Egypt and speaks Arabic fluently, even though his family moved to Melbourne, Australia when he was 5 years old.” In cases in which Black international athletes hail from the Anglosphere or Europe, discourses often note that they are the children of immigrants or from recently-immigrated families. For example, Canadian Kobe Elvis is the son of a Guyanese mother. Similarly, his fellow countryman Marquese Josephs’ “roots lie in the Caribbean;” both of his parents are Jamaican.

“Representing Our Country:” Players’ Career Motivations

Across racial groups and countries of origin, players’ motivations for competing in US college basketball- as well as migrating within and out of it- are typically athletic career-oriented, with Cameroonian Yves Missi articulating:

I have an amazing relationship with [Baylor's] coaching staff, the style of play is exactly what I'm looking for and most importantly it feels like home. It's a place where I can reach my goal which is to get to the [NBA].

Here, Missi names a fairly comprehensive list of athletes' top motivations for committing to a particular university: (a) the opportunity for mentorship and development, (b) the fit of the athletes' skillset with playing style, and (c) the institution's professional connections and reputation. These motivations were reflected by numerous other athletes in news and human-interest stories. Senegalese athlete Baye Fall mentioned the importance of his institution having "good relationships with the [NBA] teams, which can help us get to where we want to get to," sentiments echoed by teammate and countryman Assane Diop. Players tacitly denounced the NCAA's academic model in quotes regarding their motivations; Kajus Kublickas of Lithuania mentions in an interview "I'm not a big school guy." However, editorial choices often highlight the false NCAA/amateur vs. overseas/professional dichotomy; in one example praising North Macedonian Andrej Jakimovski's signing with the Colorado Buffaloes to further develop his game despite "what likely would have been plentiful professional opportunities overseas."

In many cases, athletes used the transfer portal to attend new institutions where they had opportunities to further develop as basketball players while earning revenue via NIL deals. In the case of Black British player Great Osobor, a speculated \$2 million in NIL deals held significant weight over his decision to transfer to the University of Washington, yet policies continue to muddy the waters around compensatory packages-

particularly for international athletes- as NIL is “still not regulated or typically discussed in open forums.” F1 student visas restrict students from earning in the US market, and while they may earn in their home countries or earn passive income provided it does not amount to quid pro quo, these pathways are often legal and logistical minefields for players and programs. Additionally, according to one journalist, players can apply for an *extraordinary ability visa*, yet no reports in my data exist to suggest that this process has been successful for any athlete. Purdue’s Zach Edey took to the discourse to comment on this directly, stating “I lost out on a lot of money this year. At the end of the day it needs to change, for sure. I understand... ..the legal process takes a while.” His coach Matt Painter further calls attention to the problems inherent to the NCAA’s amateurism model: “they’re viewed as amateurs, but they weren’t amateurs.” International athletes’ voices ring loud enough in the discourse to attract attention from US lawmakers. Two Senators introduced the College Athlete Economic Freedom Act, which would “address international college athletes’ inability to engage in most NIL activities while in the U.S... ..without any violation of their F-1 student visa status.” One article posited that given the F1 visa restrictions, international players are more likely to make their college choices based on fit and opportunities for basketball development, which largely mirrors the NCAA’s pre-NIL ideal. However, editorial perspectives on athletes’ decision-making processes frequently undermine this notion; one article describing Nigerian Ugonna Onyenso’s decision to withdraw from the transfer portal and return to Kentucky cites “a lack of NIL financial opportunities showing up through interested parties.”

Most athletes, regardless of race, point to the benefits of being on a roster with other international players including solidarity and connection over common experiences.

Estonian Henri Veesaar asserted

It helps to fit on the team not being the only foreigner, and the play style is different because [Arizona] is used to having different players from different continents. The basketball background varies a lot depending on where you grow up, so I think they have a nice mixture from different countries.

Veesaar's teammate Motiejus Krivas echoed this sentiment: "I like the fact that the team is full of international players. It will definitely make my transition on and off the court much faster." On playing for the same team, Aboubacar states "having someone that you grew up with, came from the same country, had the same culture... ..you don't feel alone." Malian Oumar Ballo spent a significant amount of time with Malian women's side player Sali Kourouma, describing the experience of having a Malian friend on campus as "a great opportunity for me to get even (more) connected to Malian people... ..her cooking or we've been talking Bambara... ..always reminds us of where we come from and who we are."

In some cases, academics also played a role. Baye Fall of Senegal showed thoughtfulness in explaining his college choice should both develop him toward his goal of professional basketball and allow him to "get my degree, so that even if I go pro, I can come back." Similarly, prep teammate Assane Diop valued that the University of Colorado connected with him on his enjoyment of coursework and the importance of academics, saying he "feel[s] like there's more to his success than just basketball."

Aboubacar Traore emphasized his and teammate Lassina Traore's focus on academics through reflection on their backgrounds in Côte d'Ivoire: "we know where we come from. We know what this opportunity means. So we take school very seriously."

In some cases, athletes explicitly tied their migration toward US college basketball to their desires to serve their home communities. Fousseyni Traore noted "my goal is one day to play pro and be able to help my family back home in town [and] to help people with the same chance I had." N'Faly Dante described his aim of making the NBA after college as "a goal to make it because you have a kid in Mali looking up to you... ..it gives them hope to get it done too." His perspective was editorialized as follows: "Dante's path to the NBA hasn't been without its challenges, but his story of *overcoming adversity* serves as an inspiration to young athletes in Mali and around the world" [emphasis mine]. The nominalization "overcoming adversity" again disguises the histories of western hegemony and colonialism contributing to Dante's migratory experience, and the isolation he often reported experiencing in the US. Dante asserted "for basketball players from Africa, we're not just representing our family or our city, we're representing our country." Samson Johnson, a breakout player from Togo, described his dual role in promoting (a) basketball within his home country and (b) Togo's basketball profile on the world stage:

Togo is a really small country and I'm trying to put basketball on the map. I would say there's a lot of raw talent in Togo, but a lot of people don't have the opportunities to take it far. So I'm taking this opportunity to make something happen.

Understanding the Struggle: Players' Connections to Home

Fousseyni Traore established a nonprofit to develop a sports complex in his home country of Mali. Also in Mali, Mady Sissoko used NIL restrictions for international players to his advantage by starting a nonprofit which built a well, school, and medical clinic in his hometown. Duke walk-on Stanley Borden of Türkiye hosted a 7.8km run on Duke's campus to raise money for earthquake relief in Istanbul. Many university press releases, such as those from Duke related to Borden's efforts, serve simply to inform the public and highlight players' contributions to their communities. However, universities also use the discourse to drum up institutional support of their own, often using Black international athletes' stories to solicit donations or promote athletic events.

One of the most meaningful contributions to the discourse in my dataset is an open letter written by N'faly Dante to his mother in Mali, published in *the Player's Tribune*. In the letter, Dante lays out in stark terms the challenges he experienced with isolation, overwork in the gym, and the difficulties of being so far removed from his home and family. He thanks his mother for the values she imparted on him in his upbringing, and highlights the importance of foodways in maintaining a connection to home and personal identity: "I can't find dishes from home anywhere here – it's impossible. So I've taken up cooking over the past few years. I learned from watching you while I was growing up." This theme is reinforced throughout the letter as seen in figure 5.4, where Dante draws contrast between Malian and American food economies to articulate how his upbringing in his home country strengthened his resolve to succeed in American college basketball.

Figure 5.4

Excerpt from N’Faly Dante’s “Dear Mom” letter

One thing I’ve definitely learned about America since moving here – and trust me, there have been plenty of lessons – is that people don’t really appreciate peanut butter.

It’s not that they don’t like peanut butter – they definitely love peanut butter.

I’ll put it this way: The first time I went to a grocery store in the States, it blew my mind. I walked down one aisle and they had stacks and stacks of jars of peanut butter. All these different colors and varieties neatly in one place next to a millions kind of jelly – it was crazy.

In America, getting peanut butter was easy. Back in Mali, peanut butter was different. It was hard work. It was stressful. It was how you provided for our family.

When I was growing up I watched you work countless hours in front of the fire making peanut butter from scratch to sell at the market. It was really difficult work but you were a master at it.

Seeing you work so hard taught me what I needed to know about how to provide for myself. Even though we didn’t have much, what we did have was all because of you.

Japanese athlete Keisei Tominaga also expresses the difficulties of adapting to American foodways and his motivations to cook Japanese food as a way to maintain healthy eating while in the US. Many other international Athletes of Color, particularly Black athletes, also discuss the challenges of balancing their geographical distance from their families with the knowledge that their decision to play US college basketball is in direct service to their loved ones and communities. Adama Sanogo and Youssouf Singare bonded as teammates due to their shared experiences growing up in Mali.

Our Esquina, a news organization publishing stories about the Latinx experience in sport, highlighted Black Dominican Texas A&M player Andersson Garcia, discussing his grassroots shoe drive for aspiring players in his home country and his role on the A&M team. In this article, the author profiles not only Garcia, but also his mother. The two construct an editorial narrative which resists conceptions of poverty and marginalization. His mother Inelvira asserts “We are a low-income family. I’m not ashamed to say he would borrow shoes to be able to practice.” Garcia follows this up with a reflection of his own experience: “I didn’t see borrowing shoes as something to be ashamed of, because there is no shame in growing up humbled without many resources.” In parallel, *Latin Times* profiled Black Dominican Chad Baker-Mazara on his experiences playing college basketball. In this piece, Baker-Mazara explicitly ties his identity and culture to his success: “being Hispanic helps understand the struggle to achieve goals.” Like Garcia, he challenges popular white American cultural poverty myths, asserting

Where I come from I didn’t have much but at the same time I wasn’t lacking anything. I knew how hard my parents worked to give me everything I needed. I feel like I have a chip over my shoulder.

Mazara thoughtfully acknowledges the benefits competing in US college basketball has on his career compared to the Dominican Republic, while also refuting notions that his home country is as destitute as he speculates white American readers may believe.

“Just Another Body:” Black Athletes’ Abject Labor Conditions

Across a number of different media categories including interest stories, signing announcements, and more, coaches’ perspectives of their international athletes differed

significantly by race, region and country of origin. In line with prior research on the discursive valuation of Black versus white college athletes (Haslerig et al., 2018, 2019), coaches tended to highlight the physicality, labor capacity, and deference of Black players and conversely espouse the leadership, intellect, and industriousness of white and, often, other nonblack players. No media in my dataset drew on this dichotomy more explicitly than two University of Florida press releases introducing fans to Lithuanian Kjus Kublickas and Nigerian Rueben Chinyelu. On Kublickas, the spokesperson wrote “with his Euro background, bet on [him] being tight with his fundamentals and armed with a high hoops IQ.” On Chinyelu,

his basketball skills set [*sic*], as far as shooting and dribbling, is somewhat raw.

His athleticism and physicality, however, are elite. So is his 7-8 wingspan. So is his motor, which is always revved and might need of some fine-tuning... ..that’s where coaching comes in.

This racially dichotomous perspective is also echoed by coaches. Keith Dambrot of Duquesne evaluated Czech player Jakub Necas and Malian player Fousseyni Drame- both playing the same position- in the following terms: “[Necas is] a *professional*. He *knows* what it takes to be a winner. And you add that to Fousseyni, who is an *absolute beast*” [emphases mine].

White athletes were indeed more likely to be associated with the educational and leadership dimensions of college sport. Croatian Kentucky frontcourt player Zvonimir Ivišić’s commitment was announced in the terms that he had been “admitted to the university,” implicitly connecting him to academia before basketball. White Australian

Alex Condon's white coach describes him as "hav[ing] a huge impact on culture" and, in more discursively racist terms, that "he comes from great bloodlines." This second statement contextually describes the Condon family's athletic prowess, but linguistically mirrors white supremacist rhetoric. On Lithuanian Augustas Marciulionis, St. Mary's head coach Randy Bennett describes his improvements: "what he *gives us* has continued to grow. Now, he's starting to lead and understand he's an important player" [emphasis mine]. On Swedish athlete Pelle Larsson, coach Tommy Lloyd noted "he's a guy who has great attention to detail." On Estonian Markus Ilver, coach Greg Gard reported "he has a very good understanding of the game" and that he "has embraced [the physicality] of the game" in a series of reports lauding Ilver for his decision to remain at Wisconsin and develop rather than transfer in search of more playing time, reinforcing the supposed value of the *new collegiate model* (Hawkins et al., 2015)

While coaches and sportswriters often pointed to an international recruiting pipeline as a general benefit to their respective basketball programs, Black athletes elicited significantly greater attention to the cultural diversity benefits for their teams than white athletes. Brigham Young head coach Mark Pope announced his program's signing of Tanzanian center Atiki Ally Atiki with this description of the athlete:

Growing up in Tanzania, Atiki will bring to our team a *fresh world view and added diversity* in our continued pursuit of the best locker room in America. He is *humble, hungry* and has an overwhelmingly-special [sic] work ethic that Cougar Nation will fall in love with. He is a *gifted athlete* with length, athleticism and

touch around the rim. He is sure to become a fan favorite and have a major impact on BYU basketball and our entire community for years to come. [emphases mine]

In this transcription, Pope employs multiple discursive moves that highlight the uniquely abject position of Black international athletes in DI men's basketball. First, in mentioning the "added diversity" that Atiki brings to the BYU locker room, Pope reveals the unequitable dimensions of racialized labor inherent to major US university sports. Here, "adding diversity" becomes an additional labor burden that Pope, the program, and the institution place on Atiki in addition to his basketball responsibilities. Second, describing Atiki as "humble" and "hungry" again calls attention to the afterlives of slavery. Similarly, Mady Sissoko's American guardian praises his "height and athleticism and humility." These terms nominally articulate Atiki's and Sissoko's character, but reveal instead the necessities of obedience and capacity to toil in Black African bodies that undergirds DI men's college basketball. Rueben Chinyelu of Florida likewise articulated that in his role in his basketball program, he was expected to "stay within his boundaries." Finally, athletic "giftedness" divorces Atiki and other athletes described in this capacity as discursive subjects from the labor in which they engaged to develop their basketball skills, giving them no agency over their own athleticism. This term reinforces notions of the Black body as athletically and laboriously "superior" by way of biological order (Haslerig et al., 2018, 2019).

Authors routinely articulated this particular mythology in almost predatory racial terms, with one writer describing South Sudanese center Khaman Maluach to be a "blossoming *product*" as a "7-foot-2 center with a *natural rim protection ability* and

functional 3-point jump shot” who “already *makes college coaches salivate*” [emphases mine]. A journalist announcing the transfer of Nigerian Ugonna Onyenso to Kansas State remarked “one of the biggest *prizes*, literally and figuratively, in the transfer portal is no longer on the *market*” [emphases mine]. An article on South Sudanese Mississippi State player Gai Chol mentions that he is fluent in six languages and a multisport athlete, ostensibly pointing to his intellect and talent. However, the author immediately follows this with “his *genes caught up with him* and forced him to focus solely on basketball,” [emphasis mine] reinforcing racist mythologies about the Black body and robbing him of the human agency afforded him in the preceding clause. To further emphasize how Black international athletes are commodified on the unfounded basis of their physical superiority, the article discussing Chol drew its title from white head coach Chris Jans’ testimony about Chol: “a huge, huge valuable *asset* for us” [emphasis mine].

In contrast, Alex Condon, a white Australian and another multisport athlete, played football (AU) and water polo before “focusing in on his basketball skills.” Here, Condon exercises focus; he is not “forced” to play basketball by virtue of his biology. Other international Athletes of Color still receive greater agency in editorials than Black athletes. South Korean Jun Seok Yeo’s game is described in generative terms: “Yeo’s *comfortable* playing on the perimeter” and will “call for a pick-and-roll to *create* his own shot.” Comparing these statements, readers perceive white and nonblack athletes as self-actualizing with an internal locus of control and Black athletes as objects whose experiences are dictated by the biological, institutional, political, and social forces around them.

Deficiency vs. Composure: Race, Region, and English Development

Across all races and regions, discourse is highly focused on athletes' language backgrounds and abilities to speak and understand English. Croatian frontcourt player Ante Brzovic is fluent in English, though it is not his first language. This fact was detailed from a slightly humorous angle in a writeup wherein the author speculates that Brzovic's American teammate Dalton Bolon offered him public encouragement before a postgame presser with the express intent of tricking the assembled media into believing Brzovic would struggle with English. By the end of the presser, national sports media personalities were praising Brzovic and hinting that his composure and affability during the presser identified him as a potential future sports radio personality. The media's instinct to offer a white, non-Anglophone international athlete accolades and future career prospects for such an event is not extended to Black international athletes, who are often met with different reactions. Dominican Andersson Garcia was at first denied a visa by the US consulate due to what the consulate perceived as linguistic "deficiency." In one article, the author asserted that the cause of his "deficiency" was his gravitation toward other Spanish speakers at his high school, which allowed him to "neglect" learning English. Rather than placing the responsibility of educating Garcia on his prep school, Hamilton Heights Christian Academy, the author culturally pathologizes him by placing the blame on him for developing relationships with others who spoke his native language.

In keeping with the narratives of English dominion presented above, discourses rarely portray Black athletes' multilingualism as an asset in growing their English skills. Oumar Ballo spoke Bambara and French prior to his enrollment in a British prep school

on the Canary Islands, which he rightfully claims felt isolating and made it difficult to communicate with those around him. An article profiling his move assigned all the agency for his English development to the intervention of one of his teachers, portraying him as intellectually static to readers. On the contrary, one editorial claims that Russian Vladislav Goldin's English "was limited, reduced to basketball phrases he'd *picked up* from a coach in Russia... ..But he slowly *picked up* the language" during his high school and early college experiences. Lexically, "picked up" assigns the agency to Goldin, portraying him as capable of intellectual growth. When rumors circulated that Ivišić was struggling with an English proficiency exam required for his admission, the university intervened and defended him on his behalf.

Bodies on the Line: Racialization, Athletic Performance, and Conduct

In the discourse, descriptions of Black players' physiques and physical abilities tend to be left to either coaches' testimonies or editorial evaluation, both of which can rely heavily on racial pathology. In one instance, a student author writing for their campus newspaper praised Barbadian Iowa State player Hason Ward for how he "*bullied* the rims" and for his "willingness to *put his body on the line*." These terms place a labor value on white perceptions of Black international athletes' propensities for violence and disregard for their own physical safety, doubly reinforcing their position in the field as primitive and expendable. Another piece detailing BYU's season outlook entirely dehumanized Malian player Keba Keita by referring to him as "an *explosive* rim-running athletic *specimen*" [emphasis mine] and discussed how white American coach Kevin Young could "use" and "take advantage" of Malian Fousseyni Traore. Conversely,

authors act as apologists for potential critiques of white international athletes. In discussing Zvonimir Ivišić, one author equivocates “while some facets of his game remain raw, Ivišić has been praised for his ability to stretch the floor, shoot from beyond the arc and create mismatches.”

Authors also give white players the quote to discuss physical performance on their own terms, allowing them to intellectualize the physical elements of the game in the mind of the reader. Quoted in one article, white Australian Alex Condon mentions “I may not be as talented or skillful as other players in this league, but I’m *willing to be as physical* and put my all out there” [emphasis mine]. The decision to print this quote reinforces the notion that Condon’s physicality is not a result of his nature, but a conscious set of decisions he exercises in game situations. This subtextual interpretation occurs elsewhere in the data, as white Dutch athlete Bas Leyte “hopes to *bring* physicality as well as experience” [emphasis mine] to Clemson University. I emphasize the word “bring” to note how journalists’ lexical choices assign physicality as a choice for white international athletes, yet it is more often portrayed as an immutable characteristic for Black athletes.

Mississippi State head coach Chris Jans described South Sudanese athlete Gai Chol’s practice efforts in gladiatorial terms: “he’s just a sponge and is not afraid. He gets knocked down every other day... ..and gets up off the ground ready to fight back.” The author’s editorial analysis further confirms the value of Chol’s ability to take physical punishment: “all the blows and bruises he’s endured while matched up against the other Bulldog bigs during practices are already paying dividends.” Chol, however, reintroduces his humanity to the discourse by reflecting on how the physical dimensions of practice

provide him with a relational space to build his skillset: “I keep learning from [teammates] every day. They teach me and show me ways to get better. It’s a big advantage for me so I’m trying to use it.” Even if his coach and the writer profiling him see him in commodified terms, he still asserts his agency and embodied knowledge of self.

Even nominally positive descriptors of Black players contain layered racist meanings. *On3* described Bahamian Fredrick King as “possessing intriguing skill, poise, and maturity,” while *SBNation* praised Ivorian Aboubacar Traore’s “body control.” Nigerian Nelly Junior Joseph received editorial praise for his “impressive length and coordination.” Often, writers evaluating Black international athletes discuss them in this capacity; that their most human qualities are outside the norms of expectation. Furthering this idea, authors or coaches describe Black players from Europe or the Anglosphere in more human capacities than their African or Caribbean counterparts, yet these human capacities rarely escape the condition of Blackness. Oklahoma Coach Porter Moser describes Black Canadian Kobe Elvis as a “skilled guard [who] *played an important role* in Dayton reaching the NCAA Tournament” [emphasis mine]. Still, his skills merit him only the title of “role player” rather than “leader,” as is often applied to a white athlete.

Reporting on in-game incidents involving international athletes reveals how discourse justifies punishment philosophies and practices directed toward Black athletes. I reviewed multiple stories on an incident that occurred during an NCAA tournament game on March 17, 2023, in which officials ejected Chad Baker-Mazara, a Black Dominican athlete, on a flagrant 2 foul for elbowing white Yale athlete August Mahoney

in the chest after Mahoney hit him in the throat on the preceding play. Pearl's comments nominally question the official's decisions and support Baker-Mazara in the wake of negative media attention, portraying Pearl as a benevolent, paternal figure to his athlete. These portrayals are reinforced by sports media authors, who choose to center white coaches in the discourse as shown below in figure 5.5.

Figure 5.5

Headline from an article detailing the aftermath of Chad Baker-Mazara's flagrant 2 foul call in the opening game of the 2024 NCAA tournament

AUBURN BASKETBALL

'Stop messing with my son': Auburn's Bruce Pearl goes on fiery rant defending Chad Baker-Mazara

Updated: Mar. 28, 2024, 3:04 p.m. | Published: Mar. 28, 2024, 2:35 p.m.

However, when discussing the consequences of Baker-Mazara's removal, Pearl offered

He's one of our very best playmakers, and was *a huge part of our game plan*, so to lose him in that situation was really, really disruptive to our team on both ends of the floor.....Chad's a big part of our team, even *just as another body out there*. [emphases mine]

The morphologies I have emphasized in the excerpt above serve to frame Baker-Mazara's ejection as a loss of production for the team, equating his value with his labor and thus dehumanizing him. Additionally, articles often distance Black international athletes from their human agency by printing quotes of coaches speaking on behalf of athletes, rather than seeking out primary source information from the athletes themselves. This is true for the discourse surrounding the ejection. In one piece of media, Pearl mentions that

“[Baker-Mazara] feels bad about it. He wished he had a do-over.” This is in direct contrast to an alternative source that reports on Baker-Mazara’s social media activity immediately following the ejection decision, in which the athlete takes to social media to encourage his teammates and, more critically, engage in an already active online discourse challenging the officials’ judgement and calling out their potential racial biases. Many online pointed to the referees’ neglect to call Mahoney’s initial blow for a foul, pointing out that Mahoney’s presentation as white and socioeconomically elite influenced the officiating. While Baker-Mazara added some of these posts to his social media accounts, reporting mentions they were later removed, calling to mind evidence of athletics departments monitoring athletes’ social media, particularly around issues of race and bias (Hawkins, 2010; Sanderson, 2011). For the African Caribbean Baker-Mazara, writers covering his ejection engaged in presupposition and metaphor reflective of slavery discourses, describing the foul call as his “marching orders.” judging his social media reactions as “flippant.” These excerpts remind the reader that Black international athletes’ critiques of their own punitive labor conditions are inherently insubordinate, and that these labor conditions are necessary to pen in their natural primitive predilection for violence. Fouls and other conduct incidents are framed differently for white athletes. In praising one of Zvonimir Ivišić’s game performances, one author quipped “he even got into a little trouble; his only basket in the second half prompted a technical foul... *...we need more of this fella ASAP*” [emphasis mine]. This example shows how discourse affords white international athletes significant leeway to take risks that potentially impact game outcomes not afforded to Black athletes.

“Really Durable:” Black Athletes’ Pain, White Athletes’ Recovery

The subtextually racial yet quotidian manner that sportswriters and coaches adopt when discussing player injuries desensitizes the reader to the impacts of bodily trauma on Black international athletes. White head coach Scott Drew described his Black Cameroonian player Yves Missi’s back injury between NCAA Tournament games: “good thing is you have a day off and Yves is really durable.” One journalist covering Houston states J’Wan Roberts “played through an extremely painful knee injury for much of last season that required surgery this offseason.” Additionally, journalists often frame injuries in terms of their negative impact on the team’s production capacity rather than their negative impact on the player. Despite suffering repeated injuries to the same ankle and foot, one of which required surgery, Hason Ward’s health struggles were brushed aside in favor of team success: “[Ward] receiving limited time... ..would be a blow to the Cyclones.” Coaches also frequently acknowledge that laboring while injured is an inevitable component of college basketball. Iowa State coach TJ Otzelberger, quoted in a discussion on Hason Ward mentions “I don’t know the specifics [of the injury], but our guys are really mentally tough... ..you get to this point in the year and there’s gonna be things that don’t feel great.”

Black international players who experienced injury found their positions on their teams precarious. In the documents I examined, they were more likely than white international athletes to discuss playing through injuries; sportswriters and coaches also made more effort to diminish the seriousness of their health issues. Oumar Ballo, a Malian center playing for the University of Arizona, encountered back-to-back bacterial

infection and sprained thumb. One journalist covering him described that Ballo “lost about 12 pounds from the illness and, although he never missed a game, his production was limited.” Concluding this statement with a report on Ballo’s limited production downplays the effects of the athlete’s illness in the mind of the reader. Additionally, this commentary implicitly praises him for *playing through the pain*. Further down the page, Ballo alluded to this expectation by discussing the challenges of playing with an injured thumb, an issue for which he also did not miss any game action:

The thumb gets hit and as a big man, you get the ball, they guard and hit you again, then it starts bothering you again. So you just have to tape it and make sure that you are taking care of it because *it always gets hit, heals and then you get hit again*. [emphasis mine]

Both the author of the article as well as Ballo’s selected dialogue never consider whether the athlete should step away from game action to properly care for his body and heal, even when the author suggests that players on the opposing team may target Ballo intentionally if they notice the tape on his thumb. Ballo quickly counters this notion, showing his good-naturedness and capacity for empathy. However, the discourse here serves to tacitly endorse Black athletes performing at the cost of their health. In one game, a journalist describes how N’Faly Dante “had to be carried off the floor by medical trainers,” yet since his x-rays were negative, he “was given a shot to help him deal with the pain” and returned to the floor.

White athletes, on the other hand, seem to receive less pressure to heal from injuries; discourse tends to highlight the time and space these athletes take away to

recover. Estonian Henri Veesaar, a teammate of Oumar Ballo's at Arizona, sat out an entire season due to an injury sustained in a golf cart accident. The author of a story about him contends "he continu[ed] to redshirt... ...and has had an extended opportunity in the preseason." It seems time and space to heal are affordances most often given to white players, with Veesaar himself quoted as stating "I basically had a double off-season just to get better... ...I always want to play, but we were looking at what's best for me." In addition, Dutch athlete Rienk Mast of Nebraska underwent knee surgery, and while his recovery progressed ahead of schedule, he sat out an entire season to recover while "in contact with [Nebraska] staff throughout the process, and [his coaches were] in agreement" that it was the best option. Here, Mast is shown as having the agency and authority to advocate for his own recovery, and coaches gave deference to his own embodied perception of his recovery. This is also true for other nonblack Athletes of Color, particularly those who have earned a significant role on their teams. Japanese athlete Keisei Tominaga's coach at Nebraska wasn't "interested in rushing the guard back into action so early on. He wants to protect [himself] from further injury that could cost more time and more games." Not so for Ballo, as Black African athletes appear to be rushed onto the court soonest. Indeed, discourse paints programs as more likely to center the wellbeing of nonblack athletes, and injury recovery as a partnership between athlete and staff, whereas Black athletes- particularly those from Africa- seem more at the mercy of coaching and doctor decisions made on their behalf.

“They’re Going to Hit Adversity:” Coaches’ Relationality and Perspectives

Coaches, often those familiar with the international recruitment pipeline, express knowledge that their players will undergo acculturative challenges. University of Arizona Coach Tommy Lloyd offers “you know how difficult it’s going to be. You know where the pitfalls are. And you’re going to be able to support them when they hit some adversity, because they’re going to hit adversity away from home.” While many coaches echo these sentiments, there is not one example of a coach who articulates the differences in experience between racial groups or regions. In particular, no coach mentions the compounded challenges for Black international athletes.

Some coaches do discuss their athletes’ migratory journeys explicitly. Speaking on Senegalese athlete Assane Diop’s journey to the US, Colorado head coach Tad Boyle seems to recognize the athlete’s strengths: “you’re going to a whole different country... ..the fact that he did it – and not only did he do it, but he had success – is really incredible.” However, coaches’ perspectives are often complicated. Boyle continues by discussing how Diop “hasn’t seen his family in almost four years now. The thing that makes Assane so special is *he doesn’t complain about it.*” Either coaches tend to view acculturative challenges as common to all international athletes, regardless of race, or they are unwilling to comment on their athletes’ racialized experiences in the public discourse. Regional distinctions arise in coaches’ testimonies, often with racially-subtextual implications. On Aboubacar Traore, Dan Monson mentions

I’ve coached a lot of foreign players, especially African players, and their biggest thing is their feel for the game and their understanding of the game... ..Of all the

African players I've coached, he has the highest basketball IQ. *Even by American standards it's a high basketball IQ.* [emphasis mine]

It is likely that Monson was simply describing the adjustment in playing style that African players experience when transitioning to US-based basketball. In the mind of the listener and reader, Monson paints Traore as an exceptional African due to his “basketball IQ” approaching that of an American, tacitly reinforcing Africans’ intellectual inferiority in the process.

While coaches may engage in racialized or racially-evasive rhetoric as presented above, international athletes routinely articulate more positive experiences if they feel their coaches and domestic teammates are culturally engaged and invested in their personhoods. In fact, Black Canadian player Ryan Nembhard cited the need for trust in his relationships with coaches as a motivation for transfer to a different institution. Egyptian BYU player Aly Khalifa reported that head coach Mark Pope and director of sports medicine Robert Ramos fasted with him during Ramadan, and the program’s staff created a plan with Khalifa to manage playing during the fast. During a press conference, Lassina Traore publicly thanks Long Beach State coach Dan Monson and his family for making his experience in the United States positive. In addition, Monson took to the discourse on teammate Aboubacar Traore’s behalf to advocate for improved NCAA policies for accommodating Muslim athletes during Ramadan. In this example, Monson’s advocacy for his athletes contrasts with the impact of his comments about substandard basketball IQ in African players, demonstrating how coaches’ contributions to discourse can both maintain and disrupt the discriminatory *status quo* toward Black African

athletes. Figure 5.6 shows an image of Aboubacar Traore (center) and his teammates celebrating their championship win in the 2024 Big West tournament with Monson (center left) framed as a supportive authority figure.

Figure 5.6

The Long Beach State men's basketball team celebrates their automatic bid to the 2024 NCAA tournament in a still image from a feature article



BASKETBALL LONG BEACH STATE

FEATURE: Long Beach State's Aboubacar Traore Observing Ramadan During NCAA Tournament

Visuals in media often reinforce coaches' testimony about their athletes in this manner, for better or worse. Thus, the data points toward coaches having a profound impact on public perceptions of the international athletes, as authors and editors choose to center their written or spoken remarks while choosing images which subtextually indicate they stand with or behind their athletes. Thus, sports media awards coaches a tremendous

amount of power to control discourse, and, therefore, power to advance or dismiss athletes' rights.

Evidence of coaching impact abounds further in the data. Auburn head coach Bruce Pearl communicates plays in Spanish to Dominican Chad Baker-Mazara. Ryan Nembhard cites the need for trust in his relationships with coaches as a motivation for transfer. Tom Izzo of Michigan State used his platform to solicit donations from alumni for Mady Sissoko's foundation. One of Andersson Garcia's domestic teammates provided testimony that shows international athletes' success and wellbeing in US college basketball may improve with the team's cultural consciousness: "he did not grow up like a lot of us did, coming from a different country to the U.S.A." Similarly, one of Fousseyni Traore's domestic teammates at BYU states he "com[es] from a country none of us really understand... ..to know him as a basketball player and a person has been awesome."

On rare occasions, multiple voices in the discourse triangulated to paint Black international athletes as human subjects. A student journalism piece on Houston player J'Wan Roberts discussed how he voluntarily accepted a role on the bench to allow a teammate recovering from injury to start. Both the author and Roberts' coach Kelvin Sampson frame his selflessness as relational knowledge rather than a simple act of labor and discussed Roberts' patience as an act of practice. Speaking on Roberts, Sampson highlights his growth and personal development and the way these impacted the team: "now he's an elder statesman. He's commanded respect... ..J'Wan has evolved into a winner, a leader, someone that coaches and players have great respect for." Another story

detailing Connecticut forward Samson Johnson of Togo interviewed his high school and college coaches, mentors, and teammates, to paint a picture of the athlete's worldliness and empathy for others. The article's author highlights one of Johnson's drawings, a self-portrait. On Johnson, one former coach mentioned "He's extremely empathetic... There's something to be said when you're well-traveled. It gives you a level of awareness that most of us don't have as young men." These relational experiences between international athletes, their coaches, and their teammates demonstrate that while the racial capitalist structures of NCAA basketball remain ever present, athletes' experiences might improve at the level of their individual labor sites if coaches are culturally engaged.

Looking Ahead to the Migration Analysis

In summary, my critical discourse analysis of the assembled media in my dataset has revealed a growing interconnection between the NCAA, its member institutions, and international basketball. Driven in large measure by the NBA Academies and FIBA, US college coaches can easily access the international labor market, and find that talent from abroad can enhance their programs' successes. Likewise, international athletes recognize the value of NCAA competition for enhancing their basketball careers, with new media and preprofessional linkages bringing the US college game directly into their burgeoning careers. However, given the US' structures and histories of white supremacy and imperialism, domestic perceptions of international athletic labor are not the same for all athletes. Coaches, analysts, journalists, and institutions themselves commodify Black athletes, particularly those from Africa and the Caribbean, on racist bases, overworking

their bodies and profiting from their backgrounds. This labor system relies on the American public's perceptions of (a) the NCAA as an opportunity provider and (b) Black peoples as incapable of self-determination. Thus, college basketball's continued push into the international basketball labor market extends its plantation model into global trade relationships, which themselves reflect the afterlives of slavery. Despite the racial capitalist and neo-racist realities of the system in which they labor, Black international athletes demonstrate significant navigational and self-advocacy skills as they move into, through, and out of Division I competition.

The qualitative analysis also yielded critical directions for quantitative analysis in the next phase of my study. While international athletes may discuss the importance of earning their university degrees in the US, their transfer decisions are rarely- if ever- motivated by institutions' academic reputation or prestige. Rather, athletes in my data view the academic benefits of competing in college basketball as auxiliary to the advancement of their basketball careers. Thus, I deemed the inclusion of such measures of academic "quality" in quantitative modeling as unnecessary. Given that athletes typically look for opportunities to maximize their basketball development including increased playing time and greater exposure through success, I did find it important to test various measures of athletic success, both individual and programmatic.

Additionally, it seems coaching plays a significant role in international athletes' comfort with their labor sites, particularly for Black international athletes, whose coaches often view them as expendable commodities. On the contrary, coaches who take- at least publicly- a holistic view of their athletes' acculturative challenges and identities may

improve athletes' overall labor experiences. Thus, I adapted coaching and program factors for inclusion in quantitative modeling. The next chapter, chapter 6, details the connections between phase I and phase II, including factor construction and data assemblage. Quantitative models and their results are presented in chapter 7.

Chapter 6: Interphase

I started my search for athletes during the 2018-2019 season and ended with the 2023-2024 season, a period of six years. The 2018-2019 year marks the first in the *transfer portal* era, in which athletes intending to transfer enter their names into a directory. The NCAA makes this directory available to coaches and provides communication channels between transferring athletes and interested coaches (Johnson, 2019; Scoggins, 2019). The transfer portal marked a significant increase in athletes' migratory agency within DI that accelerated in the ensuing seasons with the abolition of a long-standing and restrictive NCAA policy that required athletes to sit out the first season after transferring to a new program. Additionally, many athletes competing during the 2018-2024 period received an additional season of competitive eligibility due to the pandemic-imposed cancellation of the NCAA men's basketball championship in 2020. Finally, California passed Senate Bill 206 in 2019, which paved the way for NIL legislation in other states, ultimately pressuring the NCAA to adopt a universal NIL policy across all its member institutions (Czekanski & Siegrist, 2024). Thus, the international athletes competing during my sample years experienced numerous important shifts in US college athletics. I cover the changing landscape of college athletics in detail during chapter 8, but it is worth noting that all currently active athletes from the 2018-2024 international cohort, as well as hundreds of others who have finished their college careers, will likely be touched by the 2025 *House v. NCAA* decision. This landmark US federal court case mandates institutions to offer direct revenue remittance to athletes based on NIL market value, and also guarantees nearly \$3 billion in backpay to

athletes who competed in college sport between 2016-2024 (Knight Commission, 2025).

The ways in which this decision will impact both current and former international athletes remains to be seen, but it does mark yet another shift in Division I athletics toward a truly professional structure. With the aforementioned labor developments in mind, I turn to my cohort of identified athletes and how I considered their racial and national identities in the study.

Athlete Cohort Statistics and Social Locations

After multiple directory searches, I developed a final list of 1,926 international athletes who competed in DI basketball between 2018-2024. Of the 366 institutions currently listed on the NCAA's directory of DI institutions (NCAA, n.d.), only 16 (4.4%)- including the three DI service academies- did not field any international athletes during the period specified; this figure *further* highlights the ubiquity of international recruitment in modern college athletics. These athletes hail from 116 different countries. For my study's purposes, *countries* include sovereign United Nations member states as well as nations experiencing colonization and/or occupation (e.g., Kosovo, Puerto Rico) and independently-governed territories with client relationships to sovereign states (e.g., Cayman Islands, Martinique). Table 6.1 Shows the distribution of athletes across their 116 representative homelands.

Table 6.1*Distribution of athletes (N = 1,926) across represented countries (N = 116)*

Athletes	ISO 3166 Alpha-3 Country Codes (n)	Count
>100	CAN (320), AUS (177), NGA (111)	3
<100	SRB (80), GBR (68), SEN (64), FRA (57), LTU (48), NLD (42), ITA (36), DEU (36), SWE (35), ESP (34), MLI (34), NZL (33), SSD (30), PRI (30), COD (29), DOM (27), TUR (26), FIN (26), HRV (22), BRA (22), LVA (20)	21
<20	CMR (19), BHS (19), RUS (18), GRC (16), CHE (15), CHN (15), SVN (14), IRL (14), EGY (14), BEL (14), GEO (13), EST (13), CZE (13), DNK (12), VIR (11), UKR (11), POL (11), MNE (11), JAM (11), GIN (11), GHA (11), BIH (11), MEX (10), JPN (10), ISL (10)	25
<10	ISR (9), AGO (9), NOR (8), HTI (8), TWN (7), CIV (7), ARG (7), VEN (6), SVK (6), KEN (6), COL (6), ZAF (5), ROU (5), PRT (5), AUT (5)	15
<5	SUR (4), MKD (4), LBN (4), HUN (4), BGR (4), BLR (4), RWA (3), COG (3), CHL (3), TCD (3), URY (2), GMB (2), KOR (2), SXM (2), PAN (2), NER (2), MTQ (2), GUY (2), GLP (2), GAB (2), CRI (2), CAF (2), VGB (2), BRB (2), ATG (2)	25
1	ALB, DZA, BHR, BEN, CPV, CYM, GRD, GUM, IND, IDN, IRN, XKK, KWT, LBR, LUX, MNG, MAR, NIC, CYP, QAT, REU, SLE, TZA, THA, TGO, TTO, TUN	27
Total		116

Guided by this study's *neo-racism* perspective (Balibar, 2007; Lee & Rice, 2007), I evaluated two distinct components of sampled athletes' identities to construct the distinct social locations employed as the primary explanatory variable in my analyses: (a) expected racialization in the United States context and (b) region of origin. Determining unique social locations within which to place athletes was a significant challenge.

Expected Racialization

It is important to note that there is no formal log of international athletes' *self-reported* racial identity, as race is federal protected-class information and therefore institutions cannot publicly disclose it. In addition, as Lee and Opio (2011) discuss in their study of African college athletes, the social construction of racial identity is national context-dependent. Many of their study participants articulated the difficulties adjusting to both US norms and culture as well as an active process of Americans racializing them in ways novel compared to their experiences in their home countries (Lee & Opio, 2011). Therefore, the construction of *race* as a wholesale identity category and, transitively, *racism* as an organizing system of dominion and marginalization is (a) complex (Roth, 2016) and (b) distinct between countries (Lee & Opio, 2011). This argument supports my intention in articulating a race variable in terms of how I expect athletes will be racialized in the US context, rather than self-report. However, I experienced significant ethical tensions in assigning race through my white American gaze to international athletes without their consent, on phenotypical grounds, as I primarily relied on roster images of athletes to make these determinations. Whenever possible, I engaged in discursive searches for information about athletes' backgrounds and histories, yet these searches were not consistently reliable across all athletes in my dataset. Thus, in order to explore my aforementioned tensions, reflect on my position in the research, and take a critical perspective on my data collection, I examined several critical works on *phenotypicality* as a means to- and element of- racial categorization.

Roth's (2016) *race dimensions typology* includes observation, ancestry, and phenotype as metrics through which race is determined, both in social science research and in everyday life. Thus, in lieu of self-identification or self-report, researchers often draw on these dimensions as a means to study phenomena of race, racialization, and racism (Roth, 2016). However, I felt it critical to reflect on observational construction of race before engaging in these strategies. The US racial structure includes a prominent perceptive division between Black people and nonblack people, in which multiracial or nonblack identities of color are erased or viewed in closer proximity to the top of the social hierarchy- whiteness (Feliciano, 2016; Skinner & Nicolas, 2015). Skinner and Nicolas (2015) determined that observed phenotype was a stronger predictor of racial categorization than ancestry. Additionally, while observers' racial categorizations of others may rely on numerous phenotypical characteristics, skin color is the most salient and thus perceptually erases complex measures of racial/ethnic identity (Feliciano, 2016). In turn, Maddox (2004) constructed an intertheoretical framework of racial phenotypicality bias which demonstrates how social perception and judgement of phenotypical characteristics such as skin tone and hair contribute to active harm against Black and other Peoples of Color. Thus, white supremacy and racism against Black people do not depend on empirical/biological distinctions between racial groups (which are dubious to begin with). Rather, *salient features* form a primary everyday basis for racial violence and discrimination (Maddox, 2004; Maddox et al., 2022). Thus, even as a critical researcher, I draw on my internalized racial phenotypicality bias to consider how I expect white supremacist US society will racialize and subsequently mistreat Black and

other racially marginalized athletes. I maintained a reflective awareness of my own white American biases throughout the variable collection process, taking care to consider the primacy of observation in perpetuating racial violence.

On these grounds, in addition to the aforementioned confirmatory information I gleaned when possible about athletes' identities, my record of athlete expected racialization breaks down as follows: (a) Black ($n=989$, 51.35%), (b) Latinx ($n=70$, 3.63%) East/Southeast Asian ($n=38$, 1.97%), (c) Middle Eastern/North African ($n=69$, 3.58%), (d) Pacific Islander/Aboriginal ($n=20$, 1.04%), (e) South Asian ($n=5$, 0.26%), and (f) white ($n=735$, 38.16%). In keeping with CQI, I was concerned with over-aggregating diverse racializations within each social location, thus diminishing accuracy among smaller subsets of athletes. Yet, the frequencies of expected racialization within my sample largely reflected that of the overall breakdown in college basketball, with Black and white international athletes comprising 89.5% of the total population. This visible Black/white binary is common to NCAA revenue sports, where Black athletes are overrepresented to the point of rendering the whiteness of NCAA sports writ large functionally invisible to the public (Hawkins, 2010). For the purposes of this study, I decided to aggregate the racialization component of athletes' social locations to three categories: Black, white, and Nonblack Athletes of Color (NAC). My study is guided by a focus on the conditions of Black international athletes and their unique vulnerabilities in the racial capitalist arrangement of college sport. Although the subgroups contained within the broader NAC group represent vast, unquantifiable differences in experience and life history, they share the common experience of being racialized as neither Black

nor white in the Black/white binary logics of American racism and college basketball. Additionally, NAC subgroups often represented <0.1% of the total sample as seen above. Thus, I merged these groups into one coalition category to ensure valid counts in my statistical modeling. However, the dataset preserves disaggregated observations in the event of future modeling strategies that seek to study these groups specifically. Notably, Black athletes represent broadly the same percentage of the international cohort as the overall cohort: 51.4% and 52.4% respectively, whereas white international athletes makeup a greater percentage of the international cohort at 38.2% than white athletes' 24.3% overall (Lapchik, 2022).

As a final note, the Institute for Diversity and Equity in Sport reports multiracial identities (Lapchik, 2022), whereas I found these identities beyond my observational capacity to determine. Racialization in the US is complicated; scholars have examined how white supremacist American society frequently places people with multiracial identities in monoracial categories according to their most marginalized phenotypes (e.g., Waring, 2014). Thus, for those athletes I observed who hold, for example, Black bi- or multiracial identities, I still expect that in large measure they will experience racialization as Black during their time in the US. However, I acknowledge that the monoracial categorization of athletes in my dataset is a limitation of my study that may be addressed in future research.

Region of Origin

Broadly, athletes hailed from six global regions: the core Anglosphere (primarily Canada, Great Britain, Ireland, Australia, and New Zealand, $n=618$), Sub-Saharan Africa

($n=362$), Latin American and the Caribbean ($n=187$), the Middle East and North Africa ($n=56$), Asia ($n=36$), and Europe ($n=667$). These regions themselves comprise innumerable subregions with unique cultural ties that often extend beyond national or regional borders. Reporting on athletes reviewed during the qualitative phase also supported these six broad regions to consider athlete social location.

Final Social Location Categories

The finalized social location variable contains eight unique groups: (a) Black Sub-Saharan African (BSSA), (b) Black Latin American/Caribbean (BLAC), (c) Black European (BEUR), (d) Black Anglosphere (BANG), (e) Nonblack Athletes of Color, Home Country (NACH), (f) Nonblack Athletes of Color, Displaced/Diaspora (NACD), (g) white European (WEUR), and (h) white Anglosphere (WANG). After careful consideration, I found these groups to offer the most diverse analytical power while still maintaining measurement accuracy. Black athletes, representing a majority of all athletes in the dataset, were split into four unique groups. White athletes were split between the Anglosphere and Europe. Meanwhile Nonblack Athletes of Color, representing small minorities in the dataset, were grouped not by specific region, but along a geographical distinction- originating from their home countries versus originating from diaspora communities or Native communities displaced by Anglo/European settler colonialism. Thus, while I did not have the raw numbers to measure differences between varied racializations of color or specific regions, I was able to construct groups with the potential to provide critical information about how Athletes of Color might experience college basketball differently depending on their geographic origin.

Athlete-Level vs. Year-Level Data

After compiling the initial athlete record, I split all 1,926 athletes' college careers into individual year-by-year cases. For example, if the athlete competed in three seasons of Division I basketball, they became three separate cases in the data. Thus, each individual case in this new year-over-year dataset represented an athlete's migratory decision- whether they would stay at their current institution or not. The year-level dataset includes 4,611 cases as opposed to the 1,926 cases in the athlete-level dataset. I had initial concerns that expanding the dataset in this way would distort the percentages of cases in each social location. Thus, I compared their frequencies between the athlete-level and year-level dataset. The frequency distributions for each dataset are presented below in table 6.2.

Table 6.2

Comparison of social location frequency distributions for athlete-level (N=1,926) and year-level (N=4,611) datasets

Social Location	Athlete-Level Data		Year-Level Data	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
BSSA	362	18.80%	919	19.93%
BLAC	121	6.28%	297	6.44%
BEUR	147	7.63%	346	7.50%
BANG	359	18.64%	896	19.43%
NACH	149	7.74%	317	6.87%
NACD	53	2.75%	136	2.95%
WEUR	519	26.95%	1177	25.53%
WANG	216	11.21%	523	11.34%
Total	1,926	100%	4,611	100%

The maximum difference between strata frequencies in the athlete-level versus the year-level dataset was 1.42 percent, highlighting the retention of distributive accuracy when the data was expanded. With these frequencies maintaining the representation of each social location in the new dataset, I moved forward with addressing the phase II research questions.

Answering the Research Questions

The research questions I initially identified to guide phase II were left intentionally broad:

- What factors affect Black international men's basketball athletes' labor migration patterns into, within, and out of NCAA Division I competition?
- To what extent do Black international athletes' social locations in the US context impact their labor migration patterns and professional outcomes vis-à-vis the social locations of white and other nonblack international athletes?

I framed the questions this way in order to allow the qualitative phase to inform a more targeted approach to statistical modeling in phase II. The CDA yielded repeated patterns of discourse that I deemed important to test quantitatively including (a) the nature of athletes' common participation in pipeline organizations such as clubs, national teams, and NBA Academies, (b) athletes' motivations for choosing their college teams during their years of DI competition, (c) differentiated labor conditions between social locations that may lead to divergent outcomes for athletes along racial or geographic lines, and (d) athletes' pursuit of professional basketball careers post-college. In light of the qualitative results, I generated four subquestions to better achieve the aims of the overall study.

These subquestions are ordered in such a way that their results provide a chronological narration of athletes' migratory journeys into, within, and out of Division I:

- **Subquestion 1:** does an international athlete's social location predict pre-college professional basketball pipeline experience?

- **Subquestion 2:** what factors predict an international athlete migrating from their current DI institution to a different basketball labor position?
- **Subquestion 3:** what factors predict the basketball pipeline position in which an international athlete finds themselves during the following season?
- **Subquestion 4:** of the international athletes who leave college, what factors predict whether they continue a professional basketball career or leave the sport altogether?

Using generalized linear regression, I developed a corresponding modeling strategy for each of these subquestions. In the subsequent sections, I address the factors I developed as covariates to answer each, as well as the findings from phase I that informed their inclusion in the data and models. Regression results and significant comparisons for each model are presented in the next chapter.

Factor Selection

In order to assemble a dataset of variables with which to answer the above questions, I considered findings from the qualitative phase of the study as a conceptual framework. The primary determination from the CDA in phase I found that neo-racism and racial capitalism are baked into the discourse around international men's basketball athletes. Thus, athletes' social locations as described in the prior section remained the principle explanatory variable of interest to the study. In order to effectively isolate the impact of an athlete's social location on their labor migration in Division I, I used additional themes from the discourse to inform important factors to use as controls. In the

following passages, I discuss each factor used in the study, how it was collected, constructed and encoded, and how it aligns with the themes presented in phase I.

Athletes' Pre-College Pipeline Experiences

Qualitative analysis revealed that international athletes frequently begin their careers competing in either their national youth team system or in professional clubs' development organizations. Additionally, the NBA Academies added a recent but impactful third option for elite basketball players to develop their skills and communicate directly with US college coaches. These pre-college basketball pipeline experiences operate in contrast to the traditional North American preparatory ("prep") process. Most youth basketball players in the US and Canada compete on their high school teams, or in amateur travel organizations such as the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) or the Nike Elite Youth Basketball League (EYBL). The NCAA's dominance in the North American athletic labor market informed these organizations to develop with the explicit goal of maintaining athletes' *amateur status*.

Access to pre-college pipeline experiences beyond the traditional North American prep process is not distributed equally. As I found during the CDA, international basketball development inequities exist between global regions. In Europe, where human development metrics are high, elite sport development infrastructures are well-established and robust. However, Europe and the Anglosphere's history of exploitation in Africa often leaves that continent's young elite athletes with few options beyond leaving their homes to pursue their pre-professional careers in the regions of the colonial powers. These findings led me to believe that pre-college pipeline experience- or lack thereof- is

an important component of athlete's migratory journeys into Division I basketball. For each athlete in my dataset, I used a combination of institutional directories and online sports information repositories such as RealGM to note pre-college pipeline experience. At first, I separated this factor into three distinct components- professional experience ($n=412$), national team experience ($n=780$), or NBA Academy experience ($n=94$). From these individual components, I created a composite binary variable to indicate whether or not an athlete had experience in one or more of these dimensions prior to joining a Division I program. In all, 959 athletes- 49.8% of the total cohort- had experience in at least one of the three pre-college pipeline experiences identified above. The other 967 athletes- 50.2% of the total- took the traditional North American amateur prep route to college.

Migratory Considerations

Tracking labor migration and measuring the influences of various personal and structural factors on migration patterns required me to document athletes' movements during their time in college basketball. First, I created a binary variable indicating whether an athlete competing at the year-level remained at their current institution the following year or left that institution. Of the 4,611 cases in the dataset, 2,172 (47.1%) left their program at season's end. A 47.1% migration rate showcases the high turnover in modern college basketball, brought on in part by transfer portal and NIL policies that took shape and solidified during the 2018-2024 period. This high turnover rate is also evidenced by an indicator I collected on whether or not an athlete had attended at least one or institution prior to the institution of their current year case. Attending a prior

institution measures mobility within the labor field. Latent information in this factor includes an athlete attempting to find better opportunities within the labor sector, either by choice or by lack of support at their previous institution. Athletes in my dataset had played for a prior college program 34.0% of the time, or 1,569 cases. After determining athletes' movements within the field, I had to account for NCAA eligibility policies.

As a general rule, NCAA athletes are limited to four years of college competition, equivalent to the traditionally-agreed-upon (albeit outmoded) time to complete a bachelor's degree in American higher education. These four years competing may be stretched out over a five-year period should the athlete preserve a season using a *redshirt* option. Once the athlete competes in four seasons, their eligibility expires, and they must leave NCAA sports. I found determining the accurate rate of athletes who exhausted their eligibility difficult, as all athletes competing during the 2020 and 2021 seasons received an extra year of eligibility in light of COVID-19 cancelations. Additionally, with the *international* athlete cohort specifically, delayed academic eligibility or visa processes often led to higher levels of appeal. Finally, in a few cases, medical redshirts also extended an athlete's college eligibility. In the most significant example, one athlete remained in college for seven years (including all six seasons in my data) and competed for five. In all, 349 cases- 7.6% of the total- exhausted their eligibility at the end of the season in question.

In order to determine labor outcomes, I developed a typology of possible pipeline positions to construct categorical variables. The typology includes the following categories: (a) professional basketball, (b) Division I high major, (c) Division I mid

major, (d) Division I low major, (e) Division I non-football, (f) lower-level college competition, and (g) left the sport. The first category, professional basketball, indicates that an athlete, upon leaving their current-year institution, either began or returned to professional competition by signing with a pro club either in the US or abroad. Additionally, this category included athletes who became basketball *professionals* after college, e.g., coaches, front office staff, analysts, development officers, etc. As my study emplaces the NCAA within the global professional pipeline, my analysis also assumes a professional career in basketball as the logical outcome of competition. Thus, this category was treated as the reference.

For Division I competitors, I broke DI itself into four categories as listed above. These categories are delineated primarily through an analysis of program resources by examining earned revenues using the Knight-Newhouse College Athletics Database. Earned revenues are the sum of athletics revenue less institutional, student, or government subsidization. Thus, this category represents not only an institution's popularity via ticket sales and donor contributions, but also its prominence and visibility in the field via conference distributions, media rights, and corporate sponsorship. High major institutions, which operate most like elite professional franchises, belong to the traditional power conferences in the Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS, i.e., Big XII, Big Ten, Southeastern, Atlantic Coast, and, prior to 2024, Pac-12) and the Big East. While the Big East is not a traditional power conference, its long history of success and resource richness specific to men's basketball warrant its inclusion in this category. Mid major institutions belong to the remaining FBS conferences. Low major institutions comprise

the conferences of the Football Championship Subdivision (FCS), and the non-football members make up the fourth category. Earned revenues drop off sharply, clearly distinguishing the wealth and prestige of each category within the field. In 2024, high majors earned roughly \$8.38 billion, mid majors earned \$1.06 billion, low majors earned \$0.57 billion, and non-football members earned \$0.22 billion (Knight Commission, 2024).

After delineating Division I, I created two final categories. The first of these two represents a level of collegiate competition outside of DI; these levels include NCAA Division II and Division III, the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA), two-year colleges in the National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA) and the California Community College Athletic Association (3C2A), Christian college athletics organizations, and Canadian organizations U Sports and the Canadian Collegiate Athletic Association (CCAA). The final category represents cases in which I could (a) determine that the athlete left the professional basketball pipeline on a permanent basis or (b) their status was indeterminate. In the vast majority of these cases, former athletes' public LinkedIn and other social media profiles assisted in confirming their current career path. From these seven categories, I created two variables: case-year pipeline position and following-year pipeline position. The case-year instance includes only the four DI categories, while following-year includes all seven. I present the frequency distributions of each of these categories for both variables in table 6.3.

Table 6.3

Comparison of pipeline position frequency distributions for case-year and following-year variables (N=4,611)

Pipeline Position	Case-Year		Following-Year	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Pro	-	-	779	16.89%
High major	1025	22.23%	682	14.79%
Mid major	833	18.07%	631	13.68%
Low major	1252	27.15%	878	19.04%
Non-football	1501	32.55%	1030	22.34%
DII+	-	-	370	8.02%
Out	-	-	241	5.23%
Total	4,611	100%	4,611	100%

Coaching and Program Factors

The qualitative component of the study revealed the important influence of coaching in international athletes' perceptions of their labor site conditions. Additionally, coaches themselves often spoke to the value of developing international recruitment pipelines. Thus, I felt it critical to test the impact of coaching on the athlete's current-year basketball program quantitatively. Initially, I sought to gather data around race, as race and racism are central foci of the study. I noted the observed race of head coaches and

created an indicator for a coaching staff employing at least one Black coach. However, in keeping with Lee & Opio's (2011) findings around the complex distance of racial reality between US populations and international populations, I found no relationship between the head coach's race and athlete's migratory decisions or outcomes. Additionally, 4480 out of 4611 (97.2%) of athlete cases in the year-level data had at least one Black coach on staff. While I do not conclude that there is no impact of race between coaches and international athletes (particularly in light of the qualitative findings), I determined examining that impact outside the scope of my quantitative modeling.

In light of this determination, I sought alternate measures of coaching and its relationship to international athlete migration. The first is a simple binary factor of whether or not the head coach of an athlete's program departed that program- for any reason- at the end of the case-year. Multiple stories from the CDA in phase I included athletes' self-reported testimony or media speculation that departures from their current programs were motivated in whole or in part by their coach leaving said program. In some cases, the athletes followed that coach to their new institution, and in others, the athletes simply transferred out or pursued professional opportunities. In my dataset, athletes experienced the departure of a head coach in 799 of 4,611 cases (17.3%). The second variable is the number of international players on an athlete's team. Athletes in the qualitative phase of the study routinely spoke to the value of competing with other international teammates, particularly if there were closer cultural ties between them. Additionally, this variable also speaks to the international-mindedness of the coaching staff. Media reported on- and quoted- coaches such as Tommy Lloyd of Arizona, Randy

Bennett of St. Mary's, and Keith Dambrot of Duquesne, all of whom used international recruitment as a deliberate strategy for basketball success. I encoded this variable in two ways, the first being a binary variable indicating the presence of at least one other international player on that year's roster ($n=4,103$; 89.0%). However, this did not measure the nuance of increased international presence on a team, so I took the total number of international players on the roster (mean-centered). Cases averaged 3.66 athletes per roster with a common minimum of zero and a maximum of 12 (University of Maine, 2020 season).

Athlete Factors

Qualitative results revealed how international Division I athletes make labor site decisions. The CDA revealed that athletes were motivated significantly by their basketball career aspirations, and thus chose their first or subsequent college teams based on the potential of those programs to further their careers. I noted multiple instances in the discourse in which athletes chose their college based on a desire to place themselves in the best possible position to develop as basketball players and draw the attention of professional clubs. Success (or lack thereof) on the basketball court is a significant reason why an athlete might choose to transfer to a different institution or exit DI basketball to pursue professional opportunities. I considered multiple measures of individual athletic performance before deciding to record each athlete's playing time during a given season for the year-level data. Playing time is a complex metric that contains significant latent information. Players increase their own playing time through consistent success; those who receive the most minutes are often the greatest contributors to their teams, either

through individual statistical performances or team benefits. Coaches also hold sway over the playing time that athletes receive, so increased playing time also measures coaches' views of their athletes' development and importance to the team. Finally, added playing time increases an athlete's visibility to the public and to basketball professionals, thus contributing to their professional prospects after college.

I recorded playing time in total minutes played during the season. Institutional records and sports information repositories log total minutes as a common statistic. Once I determined total minutes, I divided this total by 60 to give playing time in hours and mean-centered the variable- this improved interpretive capacity for statistical outputs. For the 4,611 year-level cases in the data, playing time ranges from zero minutes- athletes do not always see game time in a given season- all the way to 1,341 minutes. In this athlete's season case, 1,341 total minutes translated to 35.3 minutes per game. College basketball games are 40 minutes long, suggesting that this athlete was a top contributor to a team that played 38 games and advanced well into the NCAA tournament. Mean playing time across all cases was 367 minutes. The mean of games played was 21, so minutes per game averaged roughly 17.5 across all cases.

For each athlete, I also encoded two other important athlete factors as dummy variables- redshirt and injury. Athletes may see limited or no playing time for reasons beyond their skill, performance, or potential. Thus, it was important to control for factors both within and outside of an athlete's purview that may confound playing time as a catchall for individual success. First, I recorded an athlete's decision to redshirt a given season in the year-level data ($n=278$). As introduced in the prior section, the NCAA

provides its athletes with four seasons of competitive eligibility across five total years. The fifth year is an optional *redshirt* year, wherein an athlete opts to forgo game action on the season. If the athlete redshirts, they are still eligible to participate in practices and team activities. Athletes choose the redshirt season to preserve eligibility if (a) their coaches advise them, (b) they feel they will see limited playing time behind a current first-string teammate, or (c) they feel they need additional physical or skills development before competing. Athletes and their coaches can also appeal to the NCAA for additional *medical redshirt* seasons due to injury or treatment for injury. Injury may not always result in a redshirt, nor will injury or illness always reduce an athlete's playing time to zero. In some cases, injury sidelines an athlete for only a few games, or limits their minutes across all games. Whenever possible, I recorded if an athlete dealt with injury or illness at any point during the season ($n=431$). Institutions reported athletes' injuries on their player profiles. In cases where I noticed that athletes experienced a sharp drop in playing time season-over-season that the institution had not noted, I checked external injury reports. I hypothesized that redshirts and injury impact not only playing time, but also athlete's migratory decisions as well.

Team Factors

In order to best measure the impact of social location on labor migration, program success was important to control. Athletes may be more likely to remain at their current institution if the team is enjoying success on the court, and more likely to leave a struggling program for better options. I recorded two controls for program success at the year-level, team win percentage (mean-centered) and a dummy variable for whether or

not the team received a bid to compete in DI basketball's postseason. Teams self-report win percentages, and these data are also available through external online sources. The average win percentage across 4,611 cases was 0.513, with a maximum of 0.969. In 26 cases, the win percentage was zero. These cases are a result of the eight institutions in the Ivy League conference and a select group of historically Black institutions cancelling their 2021 seasons due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Higher win percentages often led to postseason invitations, which included the NCAA Division I Men's Basketball Tournament, the National Invitation Tournament (NIT), and a number of other invitational postseason events. In all, 1,314 cases competed in postseason basketball. 742 of these 1,314 competed in the NCAA Tournament.

Chapter 7: Quantitative Results

Once I collected and encoded all factors under consideration, I developed four unique generalized linear regression models to answer the four phase II subquestions presented in the preceding chapter. The first is a simple binary logistic regression, the second and fourth models are also binary logistic, but employ the factors developed last chapter as covariates. The third is a multinomial model, also presented with covariates. I conducted all data validation, assumptions testing, regression modeling, and post-hoc comparisons using the statistical software package R. Below, I present the regression results, including model construction and justification, descriptive statistics, significance testing, and post-hoc comparisons between social locations for each model.

Relationships Between Social Location and the Covariates

Prior to developing the regression models, I wanted to determine the nature of the relationships between social location and the other factors. I conducted χ^2 tests of independence on social location against pre-college experience, prior college attendance, decision to leave, case-year pipeline position, following-year pipeline position, redshirt, and injury. The results of these tests determined social location to be independent of decision to leave, decision to redshirt, or injury ($p>0.05$). However, tests against pre-college pipeline experience, case-year pipeline position, following-year pipeline position, and prior college attendance were highly significant ($p<0.001$), suggesting that social location is not independent of these migratory factors. I then conducted an analysis of variance (ANOVA) to test the relationship between social location and playing time, which was significant at the $\alpha=0.001$ level. There was no need to test relationships

between variables entirely external to the athlete such as head coach leaving, win percentage, or postseason berth.

Model 1: Into DI

Before examining athletes' labor migration patterns during their DI careers, I wanted to explore the differences in pre-college basketball pipeline experience between social locations. The qualitative phase of this study revealed that Black athletes, particularly those from vulnerable areas, are much more likely to further their basketball careers by migrating to the United States well in advance of enrolling at a Division I institution. Due to the NCAA's significant influence over the sports pipeline in North America, elite athletes must maintain their amateur status in order to remain eligible for competition at the college level. Therefore, athletes living in the US and Canada are much more likely to attend private high and prep schools, as opposed to signing professional contracts with clubs and competing in development leagues akin to their European counterparts. Additionally, many international athletes represent their home countries on youth or senior national teams, gaining valuable experience and counsel *en route* to their collegiate and professional careers.

I conducted a simple binary logistic regression with pipeline experience as the outcome and social location as the predictor to determine whether empirically-provable differences in pre-college pipeline experiences ("Prep") exist between social locations ("SocLoc"). The model specification is:

$$\text{Log}(\text{Prep}) = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{SocLoc}$$

A χ^2 test revealed that social location and prep were not independent of one another; model 1 tests whether or not the combination of racialization and region of origin *predict* national, professional, or Academy experience. I present frequencies and percentages of athletes with pre-college pipeline experience for each social location in table 7.1.

Table 7.1

Distribution of athletes' pre-college pipeline experiences (N=1,926) across social locations

Social Location	Total	Pipeline Experience	Percentage
BSSA	362	64	17.68%
BLAC	121	30	24.79%
BEUR	147	100	68.03%
BANG	359	122	33.98%
NACH	149	99	66.44%
NACD	53	29	54.71%
WEUR	519	391	75.34%
WANG	216	124	57.41%

Black African athletes were least likely to participate on professional or national teams prior to enrolling in college, with only 17.68% enhancing their basketball resumes beyond amateur competition. In many cases, roster information for these athletes shows early migration to the US in order to pursue basketball opportunities, confirming findings

from phase I's CDA. Private prep schools and AAU teams often take the place of clubs for African athletes. Thus, these athletes are subject to the NCAA's artificial amateurism restrictions at the highest rates, with eligibility guidelines restricting their ability to capitalize on their skillsets more than other social locations. Black Latinx and Caribbean athletes fared little better at 24.79%, the second lowest rate of participation across all categories.

Interesting comparisons exist in the three regions with higher diversity of expected racialization, which are broken into the final six social locations. European athletes in general maintain the highest rates of participation in professional/national basketball organizations, including more than three quarters of white Europeans and two thirds of Black Europeans. Among athletes from the Anglosphere, where amateur competition holds much more sway than club systems, white athletes participate beyond traditional prep at a much greater rate than Black athletes- 57.41% versus 33.98% respectively. From these comparisons, I argue that even in the same region, white athletes hold an advantage of opportunity early in their basketball careers. Where colonial exploitation and development challenges in home countries may better explain the lack of participation among Black athletes in Africa and the Caribbean, racial capitalist exploitation may account for differences within colonial powers. The NACH group participated at comparable rates to BEUR, and the NACD group to WANG.

Logistic Regression Results

The results of the simple logistic regression of social location on pre-college pipeline experience yielded highly significant results. For this and all subsequent models,

white Anglosphere serves as the reference category for the social location variable. I encountered tension about treating whiteness/Anglo nationalism as the “norm.” However, from a measurement perspective, we can see that white supremacist, xenophobic US culture *sets* this social location as the norm. Therefore, quantitative differences between the white Anglosphere group and the other groups measure the impact of aberrance to this racist and xenophobic norm on groups and the individuals within them, and thus adds to the interpretability of the results. I return to my theoretical frameworks of neo-racism and racial capitalism to center Black athletes in my analysis of these results. Odds ratios, confidence intervals, and statistical significance of the coefficients for the explanatory variable are presented in table 7.2 below:

Table 7.2

Logistic regression on pre-college pipeline experience with social location as the predictor (N=1,926)

Social location	Frequency	<i>Dependent variable:</i>
		Pre-college experience
WANG (ref.)	216	-
BSSA	362	0.159** (1.95)
BLAC	121	0.245** (0.252)
BEUR	147	1.579* (0.224)
BANG	359	0.382** (0.177)
NACH	149	1.469 (0.221)
NACD	53	0.897 (0.308)
WEUR	519	2.266** (0.171)
Observations	1,926	
Log Likelihood	-1,127.676	
Akaike Inf. Crit.	2,271.351	

Notes: standard error in parentheses. *p<0.05; **p<0.01.

All but two social locations (the NACH and NACD groups) reported statistically significant differences in pre-college pipeline experience than the white Anglosphere reference category. Converting the odds ratios to probabilities using relative risk (Torres-Reyna, 2014), the results highlight stark between-group comparisons. Black athletes from postcolonial states outside Europe and the Anglosphere hold a significant disadvantage in professional and national team pipeline opportunities. The probability of Black African athletes entering college with professional or national team experience was 84.1% lower than that of white athletes from the Anglosphere. Black Latin American/Caribbean

athletes fared similarly at 75.5% lower than white Anglosphere athletes. The predictions for both the BSSA and BLAC groups were highly statistically significant at $\alpha=0.01$. Thus, I conclude that these two groups are subject to the highest reliance on amateur pre-college preparation, lacking the resources and benefits of enhanced professional development in the field. Furthermore, expected racialization differentiates probabilities between strata within the same geographical locations. Black athletes from the Anglosphere were 61.8% less likely to join professional clubs or national organizations than their white counterparts in the same region. Additionally, white athletes from Europe- where club systems and national organization resources are the most robust- reported a 126.6% greater likelihood of participation than white athletes from the Anglosphere. Conversely, Black European athletes who nominally enjoy the same opportunities as white European athletes only reported a 57.9% greater likelihood than white athletes from the Anglosphere. All Anglosphere and Europe groups' coefficients were statistically significant at least at the $\alpha=0.05$ level.

Nonblack Athletes of Color fared better than the reference group within their home countries (46.9% more likely), and marginally worse within diasporic/displaced communities (10.3% less likely), but neither result achieved statistical significance. However, the NACH group almost achieved statistical significance at $p=0.082$. I interpret the results of these significance tests with caution, as smaller sample sizes and greater levels of social difference within these two strata compared to the other six may confound modeling accuracy. The aggregation required to include valid counts of all sampled athletes impacts significance parameters, so while future studies may take different

approaches to measurement I still encourage the use of the reported effect sizes to guide understandings of these two groups.

In order to compare effects between groups, I ran a post-hoc test using *estimated marginal means* (EMM), which allows for between-group comparisons of factor variables in generalized linear models (Searle et al., 1980). The results of the EMM test reinforce the results of the regression model, showing significant differences in pipeline experience between the following groups: WANG versus WEUR, BANG, BSSA, BLAC; WEUR versus BANG, BSSA, BLAC, NACD; BANG versus BEUR, BSSA, NACH; BEUR versus BSSA, BLAC; BSAA versus NACH, NACD; BLAC versus NACH, NACD.

Model 2: Within DI – Athletes’ Decisions to Migrate

Model 1 established that athlete’s social locations strongly predict pre-college pipeline experience, with Black international athletes from primarily Black regions enjoying the fewest pre-college benefits of all groups, and Black athletes from Europe and the Anglosphere faring worse than their white peers from the same regions. Next, I looked to examine how social location influenced athlete’s migration patterns and labor outcomes. In considering the former, I hypothesized that international athletes, regardless of social location, shared a mostly universal set of career motivations. This hypothesis was based on repeated patterns of athlete testimony during discourse analysis in phase I. Thus, I felt that social location would likely not strongly predict an athlete’s decision to leave their current-year institution. Rather, these decisions would be motivated primarily by labor site factors and conditions. While social location is still my predictor of interest

in the overall study, demonstrating null results for this variable when predicting athletes' decisions to leave strengthens evidence that the racial capitalist system of college athletics is responsible for athletes' outcomes, even when athletes' own navigations of the labor system are roughly the same across groups.

For this model, I used the year-level dataset. However, it was necessary to eliminate cases wherein an athlete's eligibility expired, since in these cases the athlete in question did not choose to leave their institution. Rather, NCAA policy forced them out. This resulted in a reduction of cases to 4,262 from the original 4,611. Frequencies of the social location variable on the outcome are presented in table 7.3.

Table 7.3

Distribution of athletes' decisions to leave (N=4,262) across social locations

Social Location	Total	Leave	Percentage
BSSA	829	352	42.46%
BLAC	269	115	42.75%
BEUR	326	144	44.17%
BANG	827	375	45.34%
NACH	298	138	46.31%
NACD	129	50	38.76%
WEUR	1098	472	42.99%
WANG	486	177	36.42%

Compared to the frequencies of pre-college pipeline experience across social locations in the model 1 section above, the comparisons between groups in this distribution are much less stark. A difference of only ~10% separates the lowest group (WANG) from the highest group (NACH).

Logistic Regression Results

After running numerous model specifications, including tests for interaction effects and polynomial relationships, I specified the final model with leave as a predictor:

$$\begin{aligned} & \text{Log}(\text{Leave}) \\ = & \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{SocLoc} + \beta_2 \text{Prior} + \beta_3 \text{Hours} + \beta_4 \text{Redshirt} + \beta_5 \text{Injury} + \beta_6 \text{Pct} + \beta_7 \text{Post} \\ & + \beta_8 \text{HCLeave} + \beta_9 \text{PosYr} \end{aligned}$$

This model, with no interaction effects or polynomials, proved the most parsimonious of all specifications. It includes the athletes' social location as well as eight covariates: attended a prior college, "prior;" playing time in hours, "hours;" redshirted, "redshirt;" dealt with injury, "injury;" win percentage, "pct;" postseason berth "post;" head coach left at end of season, "hcleave;" and case-year pipeline position, "posyr." Analysis of deviance (X^2) test results showed significance of model fit; all covariates achieved significance at the $\alpha=0.05$ level except for the case-year position variable, which was significant at $\alpha=0.1$. However, I kept this variable in the model due to a reduction in Akaike Information Criterion (AIC) as well as the significance of one of its coefficients.

One variable notably absent from this model is the number of international players on the athlete's team in the case year. Given the prevalence of athletes reporting the benefits of international teammates in the qualitative data, I assumed more

international players would predict a decrease in an athlete's likelihood to leave. However, all specifications with this variable included neither approached coefficient significance nor yielded an optimal AIC, so it was left out of the final model. I therefore speculate that benefits to an athlete's labor site conditions during the season do not necessarily influence their migratory decisions. Additionally, I omitted the following-year pipeline position variable as athletes most frequently announce transfer portal or professional eligibility before signing with a team for the following season. Regression results including frequencies, odds ratios, standard errors, and statistical significance for the covariates are presented in table 7.4 below:

Table 7.4*Logistic regression on athletes' decisions to leave with nine predictors (N=4,262)*

Predictor	Category	Frequency	Dependent variable:
			Athlete's decision to leave
Social location	WANG (ref.)	486	-
	BSSA	829	1.095 (0.123)
	BLAC	269	1.160 (0.161)
	BEUR	326	1.289 (0.151)
	BANG	827	1.339* (0.122)
	NACH	298	1.375* (0.154)
	NACD	129	1.095 (0.209)
	WEUR	1098	1.223 (0.115)
Attended a prior college	No (ref.)	2941	-
	Yes	1321	1.566** (0.070)
Playing time in hours	-	-	0.963** (0.007)
Redshirted	No (ref.)	3984	-
	Yes	278	0.308** (0.154)
Impacted by injury	No (ref.)	3855	-
	Yes	407	0.608** (0.114)
Team win percentage	-	-	0.992** (0.002)
Team postseason berth	No (ref.)	3078	-
	Yes	1184	1.221** (0.086)
Head coach left program	No (ref.)	3527	-
	Yes	735	1.711** (0.084)
Pipeline position	High major (ref.)		-
	Mid major		0.921 (0.103)
	Low major		0.776** (0.097)
	Non-football		(0.878) (0.091)
Observations		4,262	
Log Likelihood		-2,805.333	
Akaike Inf. Crit.		5,646.666	

Notes: standard error in parentheses. *p<0.05; **p<0.01.

Model 2's results demonstrated that my initial hypothesis largely held true. Only two social locations showed a statistically significant difference to the WANG reference category. All else held constant, Black Anglosphere athletes were 33.9% more likely to leave, while Nonblack Athletes of Color from their home countries were 37.5% more likely to leave. In fact, although the other groups' coefficients did not achieve statistical significance, it is worth noting that they all reported greater likelihoods of leaving than white Anglosphere athletes. Thus, taken purely on effect size and direction, migration frequency increased as cultural distance from the white/Anglo US norm increased. For the BANG group, this is particularly notable as a statistically significant result on two categories separated only by expected racialization points to the direct impact of race on migratory volatility.

Other findings from model 2 point to labor conditions and programmatic factors' predictive power on an international athlete's decision to leave their current-year institution averaged across social locations: variables for prior college, playing time, win percentage, postseason play, and head coach departure all reached significance at the $\alpha=0.01$ level. Likelihood of future migration strongly increased as a function of past migration; athletes across social locations who had already attended a different college before the case year were 56.6% more likely to leave than those who had not, all else held constant. Additionally, 60 minutes of playing time above the average corresponded with a 3.6% increase in the likelihood of an athlete remaining at their current institution. This stands to reason, as increases in playing time represent a beneficial change in labor conditions. Team success also predictably impacted the outcome. A 1% increase in win

percentage decreased an athlete's likelihood of leaving by 0.8 percent, indicating that increased season-long team success motivates athletes to remain. Meanwhile, postseason berths increased the relative risk of leaving by 22.1 percent. Postseason appearances generally bring more media attention to an athlete, so particularly successful athletes in the postseason may invite attention from coaches and scouts leading to transfer offers. Head coach departure corresponded with a 71.1% relative risk of athlete departure.

The redshirt and injury variables also significantly decreased the likelihood of leaving, with large effect sizes. An athlete who chose to redshirt was 69.2% more likely to remain than one who did not. This also makes practical sense given that the decision to redshirt is often forward-thinking; athletes redshirt under the assumption that the additional year of development will yield greater competitive benefits in future seasons. Thus, this result supports the conclusion that a redshirt is a migratory decision in and of itself- it represents a likely commitment to remain at a given institution. All else held constant, injury decreased the relative risk of leaving by 39.2 percent. Athletes receive medical care for injuries both within and between seasons; medical intervention or time away from competition may therefore both stall athletes' migrations.

Post-hoc EMM comparisons between social locations in model 2 yielded no statistically significant results. These comparisons were averaged over the levels of the covariates, so I conclude that social location is not a strong predictor of an athlete's decision to leave. Rather, labor site factors including athletes' experiences, team success, and coaching more strongly influence migration decisions across expected racialization and region of origin. With this finding in mind, I turn to model 3, which examines

migratory outcomes for athletes by social locations, regardless of their migratory decisions.

Model 3: Within DI – Athletes’ Pipeline Outcomes

In the third stage of statistical modeling, I aimed to determine the factors influencing athletes’ year-over-year position in the basketball pipeline, *controlling* for their decision to leave. That is, depending on an athlete’s social location and labor experiences during the case-year season, where they would find themselves during the following season. This analysis took the form of a multinomial generalized linear model, with following-year pipeline position as the dependent variable ($N=4,611$). I considered running a probit regression model, more useful for ordinal outcome categorizations, but determined that ordering the above categories would be problematic. On one hand, I could not account for athletes’ free exercise of preference, meaning that an athlete’s move from, for example, a high major DI institution (e.g., Arizona, Duke) to a low major DI institution (e.g., Eastern Washington, San Diego) may in fact be the more preferential career move for that particular athlete. Additionally, treating these labor positions as distinct, ordered categories would have required me to place a value judgement upon each position, and judging high major DI competition to be “better” than other positions on the pipeline reinforces the lionized position of the very institutions who most exploitatively profit off of the Black athletes in my study. Therefore, a multinomial model allowed for group comparisons between different labor positions without artificially implementing an ordered structure onto the professional basketball pipeline.

The final model specification for this stage is similar to the specification in stage two, with a few key differences.

$$\begin{aligned} & \text{Log}(\text{PosNxt}) \\ = & \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{SocLoc} + \beta_2 \text{Prep} + \beta_3 \text{Prior} + \beta_4 \text{Hours} + \beta_5 \text{Redshirt} + \beta_6 \text{Injury} \\ & + \beta_7 \text{Pct} + \beta_8 \text{Post} + \beta_9 \text{HCL} + \beta_{10} \text{PosYr} + \beta_{11} \text{Leave} \end{aligned}$$

The outcome variable for following-year pipeline position “posnxt” is comprised of seven nominal categories. The reference category is professional basketball; the four DI categories, low level college, and left the sport serve as the test categories. In addition to regressing onto a multinomial outcome, model 3 inserts the pre-college pipeline experience variable “prep” as a predictor. While this variable decreased model parsimony when examining the choice to migrate, I hypothesized that enhanced professional or paraprofessional experience may influence international athletes’ future labor outcomes. This variable did indeed strengthen the overall model, confirmed by lower AIC values. Analysis of deviance (X^2) test results again showed significance of model fit. Additionally, this model controls for the outcome variable in model 2, athletes’ migration decisions (“leave”).

The frequency distribution of pipeline position across social locations is presented below in table 7.5.

Table 7.5*Distribution of athletes' next-season pipeline positions (N=4,611) across social locations*

Social Location	Total	Pro	High maj.	Mid maj.	Low maj.	Non-FB	DII+	Out
BSSA	919	101 (10.99)	198 (21.55)	135 (14.69)	127 (13.82)	204 (22.20)	79 (8.60)	75 (8.16)
BLAC	297	53 (17.85)	38 (12.79)	49 (16.50)	51 (17.17)	58 (19.53)	29 (9.76)	19 (6.40)
BEUR	346	59 (17.05)	65 (18.79)	46 (13.29)	51 (14.74)	91 (26.30)	27 (7.80)	7 (2.02)
BANG	896	148 (16.52)	141 (15.74)	120 (13.39)	192 (21.43)	187 (20.87)	79 (8.81)	29 (3.24)
NACH	317	59 (18.61)	42 (13.25)	45 (14.20)	67 (21.14)	52 (16.40)	28 (8.83)	24 (7.57)
NACD	136	26 (19.12)	23 (16.91)	9 (6.62)	29 (21.32)	31 (22.79)	11 (8.09)	7 (5.15)
WEUR	1177	234 (19.88)	133 (11.30)	153 (13.00)	239 (20.31)	274 (23.28)	81 (6.88)	63 (5.35)
WANG	523	99 (18.93)	42 (8.03)	74 (14.15)	122 (23.32)	133 (25.43)	36 (6.88)	17 (3.25)

Note: percentages in parentheses

The X^2 test of independence found a strong relationship between social location and the outcome variable in this modeling stage. The above table shows important comparisons between the pipeline distributions of each group at the end of the case-year. Nearly 20% of both white social locations ended up in professional basketball compared to only 10.99% of Black Africans. The BSSA group was also the group with the highest percentage of athletes who left the sport at 8.16 percent, followed by the NACH group at 7.57 percent. For most groups, frequencies were greatest at the low major and non-football levels.

Multinomial Regression Results

I present model 3's results below in table 7.6.

Table 7.6*Multinomial generalized linear regression on athletes' next-season pipeline positions with 10 predictors (N=4,611)*

Predictor	Category	Freq.	Dependent variable:					
			High maj.	Mid maj.	Low maj.	Non-FB	DII+	Out
Social location	WANG (ref.)	523	-	-	-	-	-	-
	BSSA	919	5.874** (0.337)	2.820** (0.291)	1.981* (0.278)	2.769** (0.262)	2.248** (0.308)	3.539** (0.338)
	BLAC	297	2.215 (0.435)	2.091* (0.360)	1.385 (0.357)	1.577 (0.342)	3.264** (0.385)	2.976** (0.416)
	BEUR	346	3.161** (0.376)	1.705 (0.339)	1.500 (0.331)	2.058* (0.304)	1.912 (0.377)	0.861 (0.504)
	BANG	896	4.238** (0.328)	2.366** (0.281)	2.148** (0.259)	2.459** (0.252)	2.983** (0.302)	1.476 (0.362)
	NACH	317	2.233* (0.406)	1.131 (0.351)	1.032 (0.335)	0.871 (0.334)	1.120 (0.368)	1.924 (0.394)
	NACD	136	1.401 (0.546)	0.411 (0.570)	0.727 (0.471)	0.758 (0.460)	1.273 (0.500)	1.470 (0.544)
	WEUR	1177	1.468 (0.323)	0.920 (0.268)	0.857 (0.247)	0.939 (0.239)	0.814 (0.287)	1.289 (0.325)
Pre-college pipeline exp.	No (ref.)	2313	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Yes	2298	1.157 (0.180)	1.211 (0.165)	0.859 (0.158)	1.089 (0.152)	0.656* (0.177)	0.609** (0.192)
Attended a prior college	No (ref.)	3042	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Yes	1569	0.436** (0.169)	0.499** (0.152)	0.465** (0.151)	0.443** (0.142)	0.399** (0.166)	0.701* (0.171)
Playing time in hours	-	-	0.997 (0.015)	0.928** (0.014)	0.896** (0.014)	0.907** (0.013)	0.688** (0.024)	0.791** (0.021)
Redshirted	No (ref.)	4333	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Yes	278	3.723* (0.605)	3.150 (0.588)	2.478 (0.594)	2.698 (0.587)	3.927* (0.573)	1.307 (0.699)
Impacted by injury	No (ref.)	4180	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Yes	431	0.977 (0.270)	1.129 (0.258)	0.951 (0.267)	0.879 (0.250)	0.421** (0.319)	1.331 (0.275)
Team win percentage	-	-	0.994 (0.006)	0.988* (0.005)	0.986** (0.005)	0.991 (0.005)	0.975** (0.005)	0.982** (0.006)

Team postseason berth	No (ref.)	3297	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Yes	1314	1.840** (0.197)	1.548* (0.189)	1.259 (0.196)	1.282 (0.178)	1.261 (0.219)	0.939 (0.236)
Head coach left program	No (ref.)	3812	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Yes	799	3.358** (0.201)	1.725** (0.185)	1.795** (0.175)	1.913** (0.167)	1.025 (0.199)	1.548* (0.198)
Pipeline position	High major (ref.)	1025	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Mid major	833	0.034** (0.278)	4.370** (0.199)	1.361 (0.269)	0.755 (0.252)	8.039** (0.357)	2.970** (0.305)
	Low major	1252	0.012** (0.305)	0.135** (0.283)	7.628** (0.236)	0.431** (0.257)	15.314** (0.342)	4.019** (0.289)
	Non-football	1501	0.011** (0.283)	0.149** (0.256)	0.509* (0.271)	4.724** (0.199)	14.990** (0.334)	4.267** (0.276)
Left current institution	No (ref.)	2439	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Yes	2172	<0.001** (1.399)	<0.001** (1.395)	<0.001** (1.393)	<0.001** (1.392)	0.101 (1.490)	2.750 (4.140)
Observations			4,611					
Residual Deviance			8,631.4					
			57					
Akaike Inf. Crit.			8,871.4					
			57					

Notes: standard error in parentheses. *p<0.05; **p<0.01.

While I found social location to be largely unpredictable of an athlete *leaving* their program at season's end, it was highly predictive of their pipeline *position* the following season, when controlling for the covariates. Black African athletes were significantly less likely to compete professionally than their white Anglosphere counterparts across all categories of the outcome. Black athletes from the Anglosphere fared similarly, with statistical significance across all categories save leaving the sport entirely. Black European athletes were significantly less likely to pursue professional opportunities than WANG athletes at the high major and non-football levels, while BLAC athletes were likelier than the reference group to end up in mid major DI colleges, low level colleges, or to leave the sport rather than enter the professional ranks. Broad statistical significance across Black athletes' social locations points to the NCAA's restrictions on Black athletes' basketball career advancement. Meanwhile, the NACH, NACD, and WEUR groups reported almost no significant differences to the reference group in pursuing professional opportunities versus the other categories of the outcome, save for nonblack Athletes of Color from their home countries. This group was much more likely to end up at the DI high major level than in a professional setting.

Other covariates also yielded significant results. Prior college attendance strongly predicted an increased likelihood of leaving college at any level to turn pro, and also decreased the probability that an athlete would leave the sport rather than pursue professional opportunities. Athletes who competed in 60 minutes of playing time above the average also increased their chances of turning professional versus all levels except high major, where the coefficient was not statistically significant. An increase in team

win percentage also generally improved athletes' odds of a professional pipeline position versus the other categories. Head coach departure had the opposite effect, predicting all levels of DI basketball as a more likely pipeline position than professional participation. Finally, an athlete's case-year pipeline position within DI was highly related to their pipeline position the following year. Unsurprisingly, the odds of a lower future pipeline position generally increased as a function of a lower case-year pipeline position, with high major institutions best positioning athletes for professional roles versus college roles or leaving the sport, across the average of social location and the other covariates. As mentioned above, while the pipeline position categories should not be considered ordinal, it is notable that the high major collegiate pipeline position most closely resembles professional clubs. Thus, athletes at this level are likely best positioned to transition to professional organizations upon concluding their collegiate careers.

Using least squares means (LSM), I conducted two sets of post-hoc comparisons on model 3, one comparing social locations at each level of the outcome, and one comparing social locations across the multinomial distribution of the outcome. Level-by-level comparisons confirm the results from the model coefficients. Black athletes in the BSSA group find themselves at a distinct disadvantage in upward pipeline mobility. Averaged over the levels of all covariates, they fared worse than white athletes from both the WANG and WEUR groups in the professional and high major categories. Additionally, BANG athletes face a comparative disadvantage to WANG and WEUR athletes in the professional category. No other group comparisons at the category level achieved statistical significance. However, when comparing social locations across the

distribution of pipeline position, additional significant results arose. Athletes from the BSSA and BANG groups still reported difference between the WANG and WEUR groups, and were joined by the BLAC and BEUR groups. Black Anglosphere athletes held significant difference on the outcome to Black African athletes, as well as both NAC groups. Black African athletes also significantly differed from the NAC groups. The results of these comparisons show the combinatory impact of expected racialization and region of origin on pipeline outcomes. I now turn to the final model, through which I examined differences in the professional versus left the sport categories on all athletes who exited college basketball in a given case year.

Model 4: Out of DI

For model 4, I reduced the sample size to only those athletes who left college at the end of their current season, either by choice or due to eligibility expiration ($N=1,020$). Model 4 retained the same set of covariates as model 3, minus the binary variable for the athlete leaving their case-year institution, as all cases in this subset left.

$$\begin{aligned} & \text{Log}(Out) \\ = & \beta_0 + \beta_1 Strata + \beta_2 Prep + \beta_3 Prior + \beta_4 Hours + \beta_5 Redshirt + \beta_6 Injury + \beta_7 Pct \\ & + \beta_8 Post + \beta_9 HCLearn + \beta_{10} Pos24 \end{aligned}$$

In this case, I wanted to examine how social location might predict an athlete's exit from the sport after their college career while controlling for athlete, team, coaching, and program factors. The new outcome variable reduces the following-year position variable to just two categories (0=professional, 1=left the sport), as none of the athletes in this subset remained in college basketball after the case-year season. A final X^2 analysis

justified the model fit. Table 7.7 shows the frequency distributions for the outcome across social locations:

Table 7.7

Distribution of athletes leaving the sport after college (N=1,020) across social locations

Social Location	Total	Leave	Percentage
BSSA	176	75	42.61%
BLAC	72	19	26.39%
BEUR	66	7	10.61%
BANG	177	29	16.38%
NACH	83	24	28.92%
NACD	33	7	21.21%
WEUR	297	63	21.21%
WANG	116	17	14.66%

Differences between groups are wide. Black African athletes left the sport at the highest rate, with 42.61% of athletes reporting departure. This stark difference distinguishes the BSSA group from all others. Less than 20% of BEUR, BANG, and WANG athletes left the sport versus remaining in the professional ranks. The other four groups reported 20-30% of athletes concluding their basketball careers.

Table 7.8*Logistic regression on athlete's exit from the sport with 11 predictors (N=1,020)*

Predictor	Category	Frequency	<i>Dependent variable:</i> Athlete exits the sport
Social location	WANG (ref.)	116	-
	BSSA	176	4.541** (0.372)
	BLAC	72	3.170* (0.453)
	BEUR	66	0.798 (0.542)
	BANG	177	1.640 (0.392)
	NACH	83	1.620 (0.407)
	NACD	33	1.211 (0.559)
	WEUR	297	1.197 (0.339)
Pre-college pipeline exp.	No (ref.)	512	-
	Yes	508	0.599* (0.202)
Attended a prior college	No (ref.)	502	-
	Yes	518	0.631* (0.190)
Playing time in hours	-	-	0.812** (0.021)
Redshirted	No (ref.)	1011	-
	Yes	9	1.384 (0.730)
Impacted by injury	No (ref.)	943	-
	Yes	77	1.376 (0.290)
Team win percentage	-	-	0.991 (0.006)
Team postseason berth	No (ref.)	736	-
	Yes	284	0.943 (0.254)
Head coach left program	No (ref.)	836	-
	Yes	184	1.436 (0.209)
Pipeline position	High major (ref.)	214	-
	Mid major	183	1.941* (0.332)
	Low major	274	2.418** (0.300)
	Non-football	349	2.765** (0.300)
Observations		1,020	
Log Likelihood		-420.251	
Akaike Inf. Crit.		878.502	

Notes: standard error in parentheses. *p<0.05; **p<0.01.

Logistic Regression Results

Model 4 yields stark results; regression results for this final model are presented above in table 7.8. Black athletes from African and Latin American/Caribbean regions were 454% and 317% more likely than white Anglosphere athletes to exit the sport entirely upon leaving college while controlling for all covariates. This finding acutely reinforces prior critical research on the precarity of Black collegiate athletes within the racial capitalist and antiblack racist system of college sport (e.g., Comeaux, 2018; Gayles et al., 2018). While model 2 determined that Black athletes from these regions do not make migratory decisions at noticeably different rates than their white Anglosphere counterparts, model 4 tracks decidedly different ultimate career outcomes between groups. No other groups' measurements were significantly different from the reference category, although it is worth noting that only Black European athletes were more likely than white Anglosphere athletes to remain in professional basketball.

Pipeline experience, prior college, playing time, and case-year pipeline position all proved to be important controls, the results of which were all consistent with *a priori* inference. An athlete's professional or paraprofessional career prior to college increased the likelihood they continued a basketball career after leaving college by 40.1 percent. Migration from a previous institution ("prior") may latently indicate a more developed sense of pipeline navigation, with athletes reporting a 36.9% higher likelihood of remaining in professional basketball. Athletes in high major institutions had a stronger likelihood than any other DI category to continue professionally, a finding that reinforces the strength of the high major category in model 3. Redshirt, injury, and the two team

factors, while not statistically significant, improved overall model fit. Surprisingly, the injury variable did not achieve statistical significance as injuries, particularly repeated injuries, can often end athletes' sports careers. At least in this small crop of athletes who dealt with injury, I could not reject the null. However, the effect size does point to a possible impact of injury increasing the likelihood of exiting the sport.

Testing for group differences using EMM, I determined significant differences between the following groups: WANG and BSSA, WEUR and BSSA, BANG and BSSA, BEUR and BSSA. It seems that Black African athletes are particularly vulnerable to exit, even when compared directly with other groups of like racialization. These results also confirm prior findings in model 3, which determined a strong connection between the combined factors of racialization and region of origin on pipeline outcomes. Taken in sum, these results show that Black African athletes are more likely than white Anglosphere athletes to be held in the NCAA's artificial amateur system for longer, yet also more likely not to continue professionally upon leaving college.

Labor Migration Patterns and Commonalities

The four unique regression models I have presented provide compelling evidence that an international athlete's social location, as a combination of their expected racialization and region of origin, influences their labor migration journey into, within, and out of Division I competition. First, my study found that social location predicts sharp differences in pre-college pipeline experience; Black athletes from Africa and the Caribbean are most subject to the amateur prep process, while those from Europe and the Anglosphere do not enter college with comparable club or national team experience as

their white peers from the same regions. Once international athletes enter Division I, however, their motivations for migrating between DI institutions and out of DI basketball to the professional ranks seem largely motivated by the same factors, as social location generally does not predict whether an athlete will depart their institution at season's end. Rather, playing opportunities, dealing with redshirt seasons or injury, coaching changes, and team success tend to inform migratory decisions.

While athletes may depart their institutions for similar reasons across the spectra of racialization and region of origin, social location does influence pipeline outcomes. Namely, Black international athletes- particularly Black African and Latin American/Caribbean regions- are far less likely than white international athletes to advance to the professional ranks expediently, suggesting that DI programs influence control over these groups' free migration through the sport labor market. Furthermore, membership in these same two vulnerable groups predicts higher rates of departure from the professional basketball pipeline. These results are illuminating yet deeply concerning, as they reinforce the commodity worldviews through which coaches and programs viewed Black athletes during the qualitative phase of this study. In order to paint a more complete picture of the international men's college basketball labor market, the findings from both phases of the study must be more fully integrated, and analyzed through the lenses of neo-racism and racial capitalism. In the final chapter, I place the results of the qualitative and quantitative phases of the study in context with one another and use the study's guiding theories to deepen them.

Chapter 8: Mixed Methods Findings and Discussion

At the end of chapter 3, I made the conditional argument that systems of *racial capitalism* and *neo-racism* would have a joint impact on the labor site conditions and migration patterns of international Division I men's basketball players. In this argument, I postulated that these two theories help illuminate the abject position of Black international athletes specifically, who, based on prior research (e.g., Comeaux, 2018; Lee & Opio, 2011; Sethi et al., 2022), would likely find themselves particularly prone to exploitation in the NCAA cartel. When taken together, the findings from both empirical phases of my exploratory mixed methods study not only confirm this argument, but also provide various interest groups with a complex understanding of NCAA basketball's role in the sport labor market and its impact on Black athletes from the world over.

In this final chapter, I integrate the findings from the qualitative and quantitative phases of research with the study's guiding theories and literature to provide a comprehensive understanding of Black international athletes' labor and migration within Division I men's basketball. I also address the study's limitations and offer directions for future research to both address these limitations and deepen its findings. I conclude with the study's implications for policy and practice, and reflect on its overall significance to the fields of higher education, sport, and international studies.

Discussion

In the opening chapter of this study, I highlighted the uncommon prominence of university athletics in the US sport labor market when compared to other countries, where professional clubs hold the principle responsibility of developing athletic talent

(Mooradian, 2015). The NCAA's origins, consolidation, and contemporary exploitative arrangement were born of uniquely American circumstances- circumstances undergirded by antiblack racism (Comeaux, 2018, 2020; Donnor, 2017, 2021; Wilder, 2014). The US higher education system's practices of enslavement and land theft ensured the white ruling class's ability to accumulate near-limitless capital via racial violence (Melamed, 2015; Wilder, 2014). During the latter half of the twentieth century, Division I athletics shifted from amateur avocation to commercial enterprise at the same time that Black and other People of Color fought- and achieved- inclusion in the colleges and universities *sponsoring* DI programs. The fact that the twenty-first century NCAA accrues the bulk of its wealth on the backs of a disproportionately Black labor force is no coincidence. Rather, it represents NCAA institutions' intentional, calculated exploitation of civil rights progress to continue benefitting from the system of racial capitalism that made US higher education successful in the first place (Hawkins, 2010), just as the logics of slavery adapted to serve the broader US economy after the *de jure* abolition of slavery (Robinson, 1983/2020).

Hawkins (2010) described DI sports' wealth accumulation project as the *new plantation*, an enterprise that exists solely by virtue of its ability to control and extract resources from Black bodies. This argument has been deepened in the years since; Comeaux (2018) articulated the ways in which college sports programs render their Black athletes a subhuman and disposable means to secure revenue, while Donnor (2021) shed light on NCAA institutions' commodification of Black athletes' marginalized racial identities to monetize material and cultural goods. Despite the gains made in athletes'

rights in recent decades, these arguments still hold weight. In fact, given the NCAA's uncanny ability to sway public discourse and opinion, it has extended its foothold into the international market to exact its violent labor practices on a growing international talent pool.

My study's consideration of global sport labor and international college athletes provides analytical inroads to understanding the NCAA's uniquely dangerous position in elite sport. An emerging and compelling argument about major US college athletics suggests that the embeddedness of NCAA programs within universities represents an extension of American state power both within and, as is critical to this study, outside its borders (Hextrum, 2021; Grummert, 2021; Sethi et al., 2022). Given the National Basketball Association's position at the zenith of worldwide professional basketball, and the NCAA's role as a pipeline organization delivering top prospects to NBA rosters, it would be fair to assume that the NBA exerts significant influence over the NCAA rather than *vice versa*. However, the NCAA's role as a state agent gives it a tremendous amount of policymaking (and policy-enforcing) authority over athletes as they move through college basketball into the top professional ranks. Even more importantly, I argue that the NCAA's influence on the international basketball pipeline should be viewed as an imperialist exercise of American soft power. When establishing its six Academies, the NBA did not model these Academies' programs on the club development systems common to most other regions; rather, it set up quasi-collegiate structures wherein its athletes are socialized into the NCAA's exploitative *student-athlete* arrangement. Additionally, the educational benevolence myths of college sport have insidiously taken

root in other countries, as evidenced by the international publications I examined in my qualitative data.

The NCAA reified the *principle of amateurism* to exploit the wave of Black participation in higher education that resulted from the civil rights movement a half century ago. Now, in the twenty-first century wake of NIL, its member institutions are moving abroad, using the discourses of opportunity to lure young athletes- particularly those from the global periphery- into competing in its cartel. The F-1 student visa, which will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter, is a method by which the NCAA can exploit new labor markets and maintain its racial capitalist system now that the domestic tide seems as though it is turning in athletes' favor to remove amateurism restrictions altogether.

The New Middle Passage

If DI labor sites are the *new plantation* (Hawkins, 2010; Donnor, 2021), I liken international athlete recruitment to a *new middle passage*. My critical discourse analysis revealed the growing interest in international athlete recruitment among DI college basketball coaches. I uncovered the commodity worldviews of these coaches and the programs they represent, as they saw their view beyond US borders as an act of tapping into new markets to sustain capital operations. In particular, their evaluations of Black African and Caribbean players disturbingly evoked the language of the auction block, reducing these athletes to *products*, *specimens*, and *beasts*. These discourses show both the ruling class's racial capitalist investment in maintaining an exploitable labor force (Melamed, 2015) and its neo-racist perspectives on Black peoples' native nations and

cultures (Balibar, 2007). In contrast, discourses around white Anglo and European players much more closely reflected the (neo)liberal ideals of international cooperation and free trade, describing the reciprocal relationships between programs and athletes in these regions. Additionally, documents I examined portrayed white international athletes as agentic subjects, exercising choice and reciprocal evaluation of their programs. Thus, *white* athletic labor migration becomes an act of cultural and intellectual exchange. White athletes- who were more likely to participate in professional experience *before* college and thus violate the NCAA commitment to amateurism- still came to be portrayed as model students who fit better in the *student-athlete* role. *Black* athletes, however, were objectified. They were passive recipients of opportunity whose migratory patterns were less agentic, laborers brought to their institutions via the *new middle passage*.

In part, the discourses I have highlighted above speak to the realities of the global sport labor market. Young elite athletes from every corner of the world begin their careers in an international space defined by postcolonial power relationships between states, sporting organizations, and the people who move within and between them. As a consequence of the West's imperial dominion over global modernity, international athletes must navigate a neoliberal economic regime in which sporting opportunities and resources are unequally distributed between the global center and the global periphery (Jarvie, 2003; Maguire & Pearton, 2000). The NCAA and its actors have been only too eager to exploit these power differentials in order to secure a low-cost labor force, particularly as US higher education has adapted to the fit neoliberal climate with startling effectiveness (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004; Giroux, 2019). As a result, international

athletes' pathways into collegiate competition reflect the postcolonial labor geographies of global sport.

Maguire and Pearton (2000) articulate how elite athletic labor organizations in the US- and global center more broadly- drain talent from the global periphery, expanding the social and economic power of Western-based sports organizations in the international market. My study shows this process in action; Black athletes do not enjoy the same access to pipeline opportunities or navigational resources as their white counterparts, which holds true both within and between regions. In Africa, where the legacies of Anglo-European colonialism are the freshest and most deleterious, young athlete development programs and professional clubs do not exist in the capacity they do in Europe. Therefore, the pre-college basketball experiences of Black athletes from this region in particular more often reflect those of domestic athletes from the US and Canada, where artificial amateurism restrictions and academic eligibility concerns dominate. Thus, Black international athletes are more vulnerable to exploitation even before they enter college, where AAU programs and prep schools generate revenue on these athletes' labor without remittance (see Runstedtler, 2018; Wallace, 2025). While Black European athletes may participate in professional pipeline activities at greater rates than their white Anglosphere counterparts, they still significantly lag behind white European athletes. Thus, racialization acts as a mitigating factor for region of origin in keeping with the tenets of neo-racism; combinations of phenotypes, cultural factors, and linguistic factors compound to position racialized groups differently in the international realm (Balibar, 2007; Lee & Rice, 2007; Lee & Opiyo, 2011).

My CDA uncovered an athletic recruitment system in which college coaches and basketball development professionals in the US target young Black African players specifically, moving them from their home countries to host families, prep schools, and amateur development programs in the US. Upon completion of their educational requirements, these athletes are primed to labor in the NCAA cartel, but far less prepared for their professional careers than other social locations in the study. In fact, I found during the quantitative phase that Black African and Caribbean athletes enjoyed significantly lower rates of participation on professional club or national team rosters prior to college, and significantly diminished rates of entering professional leagues after their college seasons. This finding is in no small part due to the US' hegemonic drain of young athletes from vulnerable regions, and the subsequent labor restrictions it imposes on them to maintain its accumulative capacities (Bhattacharya, 2018; Calathes, 2017; Robinson, 1983/2020).

Young Black athletes in this system rely on opportunistic US-based coaches and scouts to guide them in their athletic careers (Runstedtler, 2018). Meanwhile, these same coaches and scouts view Black international athletes more as sources of production and accumulation than as human beings, in no small part thanks to their racist and xenophobic perceptions of Africa and its people from across the diaspora (Wallace, 2025). This system is predicated on African countries' underdevelopment and lack of opportunities for young elite athletes, underdevelopment directly imposed on the region by the colonial violence of the West. Here, global sport labor reflects a broader racial capitalist project- as imperialist violence deprived Africa of its resources and forced the

outward migration of its peoples, Western opportunists recognized a newly vulnerable and exploitable labor supply (Robinson, 1983/2020).

The labor geographies of racial capitalism help explain both the lack of sport opportunities and resources for African athletes as well as Black athletes' lower rates of participation in the professional pipeline infrastructure in the Anglosphere and Europe than their white counterparts. The NCAA and other international sporting organizations such as the NBA have both taken advantage of existing racialized labor differences and contributed to Black athletes' position in vulnerable sectors to draw them into college basketball, where institutions can maintain primitive accumulation practices (Hawthorne, 2019; McClintock, 2018; Melamed, 2015; Strauss, 2020).

Athlete Experiences

According to my findings, Black international athletes face labor site conditions that share both similarities and departures from their Black domestic counterparts. In the discourse analysis, I found evidence that coaches and programs subject Black international athletes to physical trauma by downplaying the severity of their injuries and health concerns, a finding echoed in prior research (e.g., Comeaux, 2018; Gayles et al., 2018; Grummert, 2024). The athletes I studied also found themselves subjected to punitive practices based on their coaches' expectations of deference to authority, reflecting the carceral regime of college athletics, exercised in conjunction with state power and permission (Grummert, 2024; Hatton, 2020). In a racial capitalist economy, the white ruling class exercises racial violence on the disenfranchised, employing punishment philosophies and coerced labor to generate wealth (Calathes, 2017; Hatton,

2020). In this case, the compounded identities of race and migrancy place Black international athletes in the most vulnerable position within the labor system. Compared with their Black domestic peers, international athletes' precarious F-1 student visa status limits their ability to contest their subhuman treatment for fear of deportation. Additionally, Black athletes from non-Anglophone countries receive at best very little communicative support from their coaches and institutions, and at worst outright hostility. While Black domestic and international athletes both experience racism, those whose origins lie outside the United States also face discrimination based on their labels as foreigners, which impact them not only in day-to-day relational terms, but also in how worker's rights are applied to athletes in their specific position.

Damaging neo-racist attitudes about these athletes' lack of natural intelligence, genetic predisposition and predilection for physical labor, and cultural inferiority motivate athletics programs and coaches to dismiss their concerns and enforce unfair labor practices (Haslerig et al., 2018, 2019; Lee & Opio, 2011; Lee & Rice, 2007) all while the conditional nature of the F-1 visa adds risk to athletes' pursuit of compensation rights (Sethi et al., 2022; Libit, 2025). The hold that DI programs place on Black athletes is evidenced not only in the discourse, but also in the finding that Black athletes across all regions of origin were more likely to be held in college year over year than their white counterparts, who had, at nearly every point on the pipeline, a higher likelihood of turning pro sooner. I argue that programs' exercise of dominion over Black athletes' bodies, voices, and choices as gleaned from the qualitative phase explains- at least in

part- the aforementioned finding from the quantitative phase, and speaks to the NCAA cartel's ability to control its most exploitable labor supply without recourse.

Cooper et al. (2017) found that athletics departments lacked the intercultural care necessary to create meaningful spaces of belonging for Black athletes. In my study, I found this effect was exacerbated for Black international athletes, whose home cultures and languages often differed significantly from those dominant in the US. Journalists, coaches, host families, and other athletics interest groups framed young African players' forced migration to the US as optimal outcomes for these athletes, downplaying the simultaneously exhausting impacts of leaving home and family, acculturating to the US, and competing in elite athletics. Prep and college coaches alike often justified pulling athletes from their homes by citing the wealth of opportunities in US college basketball, both athletic and educational. Additionally, journalists' foci on the poverty, war, and primitivity that supposedly define life on the African continent reinforced the idea that the NCAA- as a state actor- is engaged in a state-sanctioned humanitarian effort by extracting young Black sportsmen from their homes, rather than feeding a deleterious system primed to exploit these athletes' labor (Hawkins, 2010; Runstedtler, 2018). These findings speak to the NCAA's ability to perpetuate a cultural cover-up, hiding its cartel practices while maintaining legal nonprofit status (Jayakumar & Comeaux, 2016; Lemons, 2017).

Language discrimination also warrants discussion. I noted in chapter 5 how patterns of discourse routinely pathologized Black athletes' struggles with English yet praised white and other nonblack Athletes of Color's multilingualism and emerging

English skills. This finding speaks to the importance of how acculturation is framed between racial groups, a consequence of the dominant white group's racist and xenophobic beliefs (Balibar, 2007; Hervik, 2013). Authors, journalists, and coaches engaged in linguistic pathology even when discussing Black athletes from Europe, despite this region's closer cultural ties to the US and Anglosphere at large than, for example, Africa. While the variable I constructed to represent athletes' social locations did not draw its primary distinctions based on language, language is certainly a latent component of social location. Thus, an analysis of the differentiated migration and career outcomes between groups must also consider the impact of language on career navigation in the US context, particularly where neo-racist attitudes toward migrants pinpoint nonfamiliarity with English as a clear dividing line (Balibar, 2007; Hervik, 2013; Lee & Rice, 2007).

Athletes' contributions to the discourse show that they know their worth as humans, scholars, and basketball players. Thus, while they are clearly laboring in an exploitative system, it would be inappropriate and dangerous to label them as victims. Indeed, their lived experiences highlight their senses of self-awareness and navigational capacities. Many athletes, faced with severely limited abilities to profit from their name, image, and likeness channeled their clout and cachet to open foundations and uplift their home communities. While the hyper-individualistic white US culture creates poignant challenges for Black African college athletes (Bafo-Arthur, 2014; Lee & Opio, 2011; Onyenekwu, 2017), they resist these challenges by leveraging both their homegrown values of interdependence and status as public figures for acts of service. However,

institutions and programs (re)enact the NCAA's discursive machine to extract racial capital from these athletes (Donnor, 2021; Leong, 2013), drumming up donations to the athletics program, and, most dangerously, reinforcing the mythologies of cultural distance between the US and Africa (i.e., the US' neo-racist perceptions of Africa). This is just one example of how the findings from the qualitative data reinforce my argument that all responsibility for Black international athletes' exploitation in NCAA basketball rests with coaches, institutions, sports media, and the NCAA itself.

International athletes across social locations named opportunities for career advancement and comfort with their coaches, teammates and programs as significant factors in their college choice processes. This was true both for first-time collegians and those transferring to new institutions during the course of their college careers. Indeed, the combination of racialization and region of origin did not strongly predict emigration *out* of an institution- athletes' career goals vary much more significantly within groups than between groups. Rather, my phase II results point to common factors that do strongly predict an athlete leaving; these factors are mostly markers of athletic success and coaching. While the presence of other international athletes failed to significantly account for an athlete's decision to leave, the phase I results still show that athletes benefit from the company of international teammates during the year, especially if they share common geographical, linguistic, or cultural experiences. Coaches' mindfulness to the needs of international athletes, particularly those with marginalized identities, also emerged in discourse. Athletes develop strong relationships with their coaches, and these relationships manifest in their migratory choices and outcomes. Even the simple act of a

head coach departing their current program led to significant outward migration across social locations, and vignettes from the discourse suggest that the compounded relational effects of coaching likely extend well beyond the scope of this simple finding. Later in this chapter, I will discuss coaches' practical responsibilities to disrupt college basketball's exploitation of Black international athletes.

Ultimately, the NCAA's discursive claims of the benefits its *student-athlete* model provides for young elite basketball players fall apart under the scrutiny this study's findings provide. International players migrate to the United States in a common search for career advancement, yet the sharp differences in their labor site conditions and outcomes by measure of expected racialization and region of origin highlight the problems inherent to the NCAA system. Black international athletes- particularly those from regions well apart from white supremacist and xenophobic American cultural norms- face systematic exploitation and everyday violence as they navigate US men's college basketball. While their agencies and capacities for self-reliance define their contributions to the discourse (even a racist discourse), the exploitative nature of the NCAA cartel's labor arrangement alters their trajectories when compared to their white international peers. The quantitative phase of this study concluded that while athletes' motivations for their migration decisions are consistent across their social locations, their outcomes are not. The greater the cultural distance from white Anglo norms, the greater the precarity within the labor market. First, white athletes seem to retain the right to move freely within the professional basketball pipeline, while Black athletes experience restrictions on their mobility (see Harris, 1993). Both within and between regions, Black

players were less likely to move into the professional ranks versus remaining in college year-over-year than their white peers. Yet, upon exiting DI, Black African players were much more likely to leave basketball altogether than their white Anglosphere peers. Considering that these findings reflect labor outcomes averaged over the range of performance and program factors included in the statistical models, I conclude that the chance of coincidental difference between these groups is highly unlikely.

Additive Arguments

Racial capitalism and neo-racism thoroughly explain the compounded impact that the NCAA cartel's labor practices exact on Black international athletes, yet my findings suggest that they each provide unique windows into the varied structural and temporal events that shape these athletes' careers. Racial capitalism exposes how Division I college basketball's unapologetic extraction of Black bodies from dispossessed regions and communities reflects the Western neoliberal regime's broader investment in imperialist racial violence abroad (Bhattacharya, 2018; Melamed, 2015; Robinson, 1983/2020). Meanwhile, Black athletes participating on DI programs experience overwork, heightened scrutiny, and restrictions on speech and movement that support (a) prior theorizing on racial capitalism's daily operating mechanics (Calathes, 2017; Robinson, 1983/2020) and (b) its profound impacts on US higher education (Cowley, 2022) and college athletics (Donnor, 2021; Hawkins, 2010). Meanwhile, athletics departments and their host institutions accumulate capital not only on Black players' athletic labor, but also on their racial and migrant identities while restricting their rights of compensation (Comeaux, 2013, 2018; Donnor, 2021; Huma & Staurowsky, 2012;

Lemons, 2017; Leong, 2013). Finally, Black international athletes encounter exploitation sharp enough to nullify their labor and migratory rights, ultimately reinforcing the cycle of embodied expropriation and disposal that leads to their early exit from meaningful careers in basketball (Comeaux, 2018; Gayles et al., 2018).

More than a decade ago, Lee and Opio (2011) shed light on their Black African athlete participants' compounded acculturative difficulties in US college sport. The racism they experienced could not be explained by phenotype nor culture alone, rather, the combined impact of racialization, linguistic differences, and cultural distance to prevailing US norms and customs all coalesced to create their uniquely abject position in the field. My findings deepen this germinal study by highlighting how neo-racism accounts for both (a) athletes' treatment within their labor sites and (b) athletics elites' ability to shield this treatment from scrutiny. First, international athlete recruitment is informed largely by racist beliefs about physical and intellectual differences between Black and white laborers, beliefs exacerbated by perceptions of cultural superiority between Western societies versus Black societies and their diaspora communities (Haslerig et al., 2018, 2019; Hervik, 2013; Viktorivna, 2019). These differences manifest in how coaches and writers evaluate players, with Black international players valued for their physicality, deference, and abilities to sustain pain, while white international players are valued for their leadership, intellect, development capacities, and acculturative abilities. Once players are on college rosters, these beliefs inform how coaches and other athletics interests treat them on and off the basketball court (Lee & Opio, 2011). Neo-racism is not only the motivation for Black athletes' mistreatment, but also, insidiously,

its justification. Discourses continuously reinforce an imaginary of white Western cultural superiority over that of Black athletes' home regions, as well as the regions of other nonblack Athletes of Color (Balibar, 2007; Hervik, 2013). This imaginary plays to preexisting biases in the college athletics viewing public, morphing the NCAA program's exploitation of Black athletes into the provision of opportunity, education, and social mobility. In the ensuing passages, I consider the means by which research, policy, and practice can improve Black international athletes' labor conditions and migration patterns in men's college basketball and beyond.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

I considered the methodological limitations of each phase of my study in chapter 4. In light of my findings and conclusions, I reflect on the study's limitations writ large to aid readers in the interpretation and application of its results and provide future directions for research to fill in remaining knowledge gaps. The most significant limitation of the study rests with me, the researcher. As a white US citizen, my privileged racialization and socialization certainly impacted my interpretation of racial capitalism and athletic labor migration in US college basketball. While I attended to the tenets of critical research as intentionally as possible in both phases to best serve my population of interest, it would be inappropriate for me to speak *on behalf* of Black international athletes, as I do not share their identity-based experiences, nor did I solicit their first-person perspectives as a component of the research. To address this limitation during the course of the study, I kept reflective memos on my interpretations of the data, and evaluated my written argumentation to ensure I was communicating Black international

athletes' labor conditions and migration patterns from an explicitly anti-(neo)racist and anti-deficit lens. Still, I acknowledge that fair critique of my work will call my positionality to attention as a shortcoming. As I move forward and take this scholarship to both academic and lay publics, I hope to learn from these critiques and find ways to co-construct further knowledge on the subject with Black international athletes themselves.

A second general limitation of this work is the specificity of the test case itself. Division I men's basketball is an extremely narrow component of the NCAA's total operations, and an even smaller component of the global sport labor market. Furthermore, focusing the study on this sport contributes to the overrepresentation of revenue sports in college athletics research. Focus on revenue sports such as men's basketball and football not only reinforces raced and gendered perspectives on college athletics as a whole, but also prevents the stock of knowledge around nonrevenue and Olympic sports from growing as rightfully as it should. I chose DI men's basketball as a prime labor site to examine the exploitation of Black international athletes for very sound reasons- the global popularity of the sport, the increased institutional focus on revenue, and prior research on Black athlete exploitation. However, I believe it is important to state that the arguments I advance in my study represent a limited view of the innumerable ways in which racial capitalism and neo-racism affect the lives of international athletes competing in US college athletics. I caution future researchers from *generalizing* my findings to other sports and contexts, and instead encourage using them as a *transferable*, contextual basis for considering the NCAA's role in the international sport labor pipeline. In the

passages below, I review the methodological constraints that I dealt with in each phase of the research, using hindsight from the study's results to consider them more deeply.

Phase I Limitations

Critical discourse analysis is a useful strategy for examining the reproduction of dominant social systems and processes. However, discursive texts available in the public sphere are always mediated by social forces, including the systems of dominion and oppression that affect contributors to- or subjects of- the discourse. Therefore, any evidence I gleaned about Black international athletes' first-person perspectives on their own labor was funneled through mediative channels that may have *diminished* the racist and xenophobic conditions under which they labored, even as these conditions made themselves more than apparent during my reading of the assembled texts. Additionally, high reliance on journalism skews the discourse in favor of editorial decisions over what to emphasize or diminish, what to include versus exclude. Thus, while I found compelling testimony from both athletes and the college basketball interests that shape their careers, it is entirely possible that the most blatant examples of neo-racist thought and behavior were shielded from my view by media investments in US nationalism and white supremacy.

Phase II Limitations

As discussed in chapter 6, the construction of athletes' social locations is the primary limitation of my quantitative work. My use of observation to capture expected racialization did not allow me to account for athletes' self-reported racial identities or any multiracial identities. This limits the granularity of the results to broad racial categories,

an issue further compounded by my aggregation of all nonblack Athletes of Color into whole groups. While I found this necessary to ensure robust counts and accurate estimates in my models, a diversity of experience surely exists within these aggregates that warrants more granular examination. Additionally, the factors I selected as covariates were informed by the qualitative results of the study, but did not capture the true depth of the day-to-day exploitation that my CDA revealed.

Directions for Future Research

In order to advance knowledge about this study's topic beyond its current bounds through future scholarly work, I propose a number of possible studies that (a) address its limitations I have outlined above and (b) improve on its significant findings. First and foremost, future qualitative studies should solicit Black international athletes' (and other international Athletes of Color) first-person narrations of their journeys in US college sport. Phenomenological interviews or ethnographic field site research each have the potential to circumvent the hegemonic mediation present in public discourse and seek personal accounts of experience. I would also highly recommend future researchers to employ critical, culturally-sustaining, and epistemologically-diverse methodologies that uphold and center Black international athletes' identities and worldviews. I am particularly interested in artistic or participatory methodologies, and specific data collection strategies such as sharing circles, journaling, and photo elicitation (to name a few) as means by which the college athletics research community could more responsibly involve this vulnerable community and place their considerable agency at the forefront of research.

Quantitatively, I recommend survey research to deepen multiple dimensions of this study's findings. My quantitative modeling largely pinpointed specific moments in athletes' career trajectories measured at the conclusion of their most recent season of competition. Thus, the factors I constructed, while undoubtedly meaningful given the study's results, could be improved with temporal nuance and experiential granularity. As respondents to surveys, athletes themselves could provide future studies with better understandings of (a) their individual strengths, motivations, and migratory decision matrices, (b) the quotidian capacities in which their racial capitalist and neo-racist labor sites impact their trajectories, and (c) their perspectives on the NCAA vis-à-vis the other professional pipeline organizations in which they hold experience. Surveys could also be administered to other athletics interests including coaches, student services professionals, and athletics leadership to solicit their perspectives on international athletes and athletic labor directly. In addition to drilling down to the level of individual experience, surveys offer researchers the added benefit of instrumentation. Factor analyses and reliability analyses could create instrumental variables which have the potential for enhanced meaning-making.

I hope that future studies enjoy a diverse coalition of researchers and examine a diverse selection of NCAA sports across gender and revenue status. Black international athletes and other international Athletes of Color need to contribute as coresearchers, and I believe researchers from the various geographic regions and expected racializations covered in this study will give this line of inquiry necessary weight. Furthermore, basketball is not the only sport sponsored by the NCAA that enjoys worldwide

popularity, nor is it the only sport that attracts a high percentage of international athletes. Thus, further research should consider the findings in this study a jumping-off point to consider how racial capitalism and neo-racism manifest in other sport settings. In particular, I see a distinct need to consider women's sports, as race, gender, and migrancy almost certainly delineate Black women, trans*, nonbinary, and genderqueer international athletes and their experiences from their male-identified peers. In fact, I argue that Black feminist thought, womanism, postcolonialism, and Queer theory likely have much to contribute as theoretical lenses through which to examine the NCAA's forays into the international sport labor market, contributions not yet addressed by this study's limited scope and theoretical grounding. I now turn to strategies for improving Black international athletes' current state of affairs in the policy and practice realms.

Implications for Policy

Since the NCAA's consolidation into its modern cartel structure midway through the twentieth century, its athletes and those invested in their wellbeing have pushed for fair labor practices in major college athletics. However, since the early 2010s, momentum in the fight for athletes' rights and equity has accelerated at unprecedented rates (Comeaux, 2017; Raphael & Abercrombie, 2017). The cohort of international men's basketball athletes I studied in my research were party to numerous seismic shifts in NCAA operations, most of which occurred due to external policy and advocacy pressures. For example, the transfer portal, immediate post-transfer eligibility, and comprehensive NIL allowances expanded athletes' abilities to self-advocate, enlist representation, and earn fair shares of their program's market value. While these changes

impacted all college athletes, international athletes' affordances have not kept pace with those of their domestic peers, particularly as they relate to earning potential and legal status.

As Sethi et al. (2022) determined, the F-1 student visa remains a major roadblock for international athletes. I have discussed how the NCAA classified college athletes as students rather than employees not to preserve the amateur integrity of interscholastic competition, but to preserve its own accumulative revenue streams and avoid compensatory responsibility to its laborers. The F-1 visa represents a significant policy consequence of this classification, and highlights how the NCAA's connections to the US federal state work to enshrine racial capitalism in the legal system and preserve American dominion over global sport. Even as the NCAA conceded NIL rights to domestic athletes, international athletes' required F-1 visas rendered them amateurs as a matter of law. Black international athletes in my dataset comprised a majority of the total, mirroring Black overrepresentation in NCAA revenue sports such as men's basketball. Thus, the NCAA preserved restrictions of compensation on a disproportionately Black labor force by increasing the stock of international athletes within a revenue sport that enjoys global popularity. The recent *House v. NCAA* decision shines an unprecedented spotlight on the organization's cartel practices by legally acknowledging that its member institutions function as professional sports organizations. Athletes' nominal classification as students no longer precludes their right to shares of earned revenue. However, this decision has not been met without significant political resistance.

The Student Compensation and Opportunity through Rights and Endorsements (SCORE) Act was introduced to the US House of Representatives in July 2025 and backed by executive order (EO) the very same month. SCORE and the associated EO14322 expressly prohibit college athletes from being classified as employees, thus upholding NCAA institutions' freedom from responsibility with regard to both worker's compensation claims and fair labor standards (Siegal, 2025a). Although SCORE introduces a so-called *Athlete Bill of Rights*, the terms included may fail to secure gains that would be achievable via "employee status or collective bargaining" (Siegal, 2025a). Opposition parties have since introduced the Student Athlete Fairness and Enforcement (SAFE) Act as a countermeasure to SCORE. The SAFE act broadly expands rights provisions for athletes and "modifies the F-1 student visa to create a new subcategory that would allow international student-athletes to receive NIL compensation without affecting their visa status" (Siegal, 2025b). It seems that further legislative change to college sports is imminent, yet neither the SCORE nor the SAFE Acts, in addition to the *House* decision, represent the radical change truly needed to bring NCAA athletics in line with global standards of fair labor in the elite professional sport market. If F-1 visas remain international athletes' only legal pathway- proposed modifications or otherwise- to Division I athletic labor migration, their exploitation will continue in parallel with improved affordances for domestic athletes. Scholars would do well to consider Black international athletes' precarious position as a foil to the NCAA's seemingly impervious influence on the US federal state. While backers of both SCORE and SAFE claim that their bills aim to restore integrity to college sports, their alignment with the *principle of*

amateurism- even in a reified form- belies their overall goal of maintaining a controllable, predominantly Black labor force made up of athletes from both the US and abroad. In the ensuing sections, I discuss overhauls to NCAA DI athletics beyond the purview of current legislative initiatives to determine how college sport may be made more just.

Professional Club Model

Throughout this work, I have made passing reference to the club systems of professional sport development common to other regions. Rather than tying the elite athletics pipeline to their education systems, most countries delineate sport as a separate career path from academia. As a result, major professional sports clubs sign youth athletes to their development organizations. Athletes in these systems are employees who receive fair compensation for athletic labor rendered and retain the rights to sign with agents, profit from their likenesses, and pursue their education independently if desired. While my study's results revealed that these systems shut Black athletes out from the same rate of opportunity as white athletes, club systems are undoubtedly fairer labor systems than the NCAA cartel. In the following sections I provide an overview of two proposals to bring the NCAA more in line with these systems and away from its current constitution as a cartel.

On one hand, athletics departments could keep their current ties with higher education institutions, but do away with the principle of amateurism altogether. Under this scheme, athletes would still be nominally classified as students. However, unlike the terms outlined in the proposed SCORE Act, the institution would become responsible for

signing them on as employees and paying them a salary commensurate with the fair open market value of the revenues they generate. Given that coaches from elite programs frequently earn salaries in excess of \$10 million per year yet without their players generate exactly zero dollars in revenue for their institutions, this seems like a reasonable proposal. There is another racial capitalist implication to this proposal, however.

The revenue sports of football and men's basketball frequently generate most (if not all) of the operating budgets for an athletics department's remaining programs, which are disproportionately white and wealthy (e.g., Hawkins, 2010; Hextrum, 2021). Therefore, the question of fair open market value becomes difficult to calculate, particularly when the labor market places clear distinctions on earning potential between sports. Questions that would have to be answered include (a) whether or not sports generating more revenue would continue to supply monies to those generating less and (b) whether or not institutions would be legally or ethically bound to pay athletes equivalent salaries regardless of their market values. I argue that either way these questions are answered, race and racism would continue to place Black athletes in the most abject position within the field. Additionally, athletes' continued classification as students would create significant barriers to eliminating the NCAA's exploitative labor practices. Academic clustering and miseducation could still continue to plague athletes-Black athletes in particular. International athletes offer a tacit challenge to the student-athlete role in this regard.

My discourse analysis revealed that basketball career aspirations almost universally inform international athletes' motivation to migrate to the US. While

academic opportunities may play a role, athletes in my data always expressed their degree programs as secondary benefits to athletic competition. Thus, the imposition of an academic major serves only as a tool for the athletics department to control its laborers rather than as a legitimate interest in athletes' futures. I argue that universities could craft academic programs specifically geared toward athletes whose intentions were to pursue a career in the professional ranks of their sport upon concluding their time in college. "Majoring in basketball" could provide athletes with the foundational knowledge required to navigate their future careers including (a) the selection of appropriate representation, (b) contract negotiations, (c) immigration and policy knowledge, (d) sound long-term salary investment, (e) endorsements and public image, and (f) career options within sport beyond professional competition. Such academic programs could be made available to athletes, and those who chose an academic major outside of sport could still opt to do so if desired. However, robust time protections must be built into college athletics so as not to restrict an athlete's right to their chosen major, even if it interferes with sports activity.

Another proposal involves universities divesting from their athletics enterprises entirely. In this solution, universities would license their branding to DI programs, who would lose their nonprofit status and transition to a legitimate professional club structure. This option was notably suggested by Casement (2013), who argued for a delineating line between programs operating as "big-time" and the remaining NCAA member institutions (i.e., DI separates entirely; amateur sports still exist at the NCAA DII and DIII levels, as well as other non-NCAA college athletics organizations such as the NAIA and NJCAA).

Casement's (2013) proposal applied this model across all sports, not just the revenue sports of football and men's basketball; this would force athletics departments to operate their sports independently in the open market, rather than relying on Black athletes to generate the revenues required to sustain the other majority-white sports. Athletes would become employees of their organizations, and both the student-athlete role and new collegiate model would be officially retired at the DI level. One significant benefit of this option over continuing to affiliate with universities is the athletics program's ability to sign international athletes and help them migrate to the US on work visas akin to the NBA, rather than F-1 student visas.

Work Visa

One of the theoretical aims of this study was to shift a primary interpretation of the NCAA from a misguided campus auxiliary to a professional sports organization. The F-1 visa requirement for incoming international athletes restricts their agency in the professional sports pipeline and slashes their earning potential in the NIL marketplace. At the time of this writing, the F-1 visa represents international athletes' only migratory pathway into US college athletics, creating too great a risk for athletes to resist the artificial amateurism restrictions it imposes lest they lose their legal labor protections and migrant statuses, however tenuous these may be. While the SAFE Act proposes a modification to the F-1 visa to allow NIL compensation, I argue that *student status* is the true crux of international athletes' rights restrictions. Thus, I suggest the US not subject college athletes to F-1 visas, but instead afford them eligibility to acquire either an H1-B specialty occupation visa, and P1-A recognized athlete visa, or, ideally, an employer-

sponsored immigrant visa- also known as a *green card* so that athletes could continue in residence at their institutions (Bureau of Consular Affairs, n.d.; Libit, 2025). While all these options would allow athletic departments to sponsor international athletes through statutory employment channels, the latter would allow athletes the optimal ability- based on current US law- to remain in America at length while competing in DI athletics, including the offseason. An even greater outcome rests on a fundamental overhaul of the US' settler colonial, restrictive, and xenophobic immigration codes.

Implications for Practice

There is precedent for major restructuring in college athletics, yet it often occurs slowly and with tremendous resistance from athletics interests. I argue that athletics programs, their coaches, and their host universities cannot wait for significant policy changes to reform their current labor practices as athletes- Black international athletes in particular- experience the harmful impacts of racial capitalism and neo-racism on a daily basis. Therefore, I turn my attention to potential implications for current athletics practice, as well as short-term solutions to improve athletes' labor conditions until major policy changes occur- SCORE, SAFE, or otherwise.

Coaching

The importance of coaching in international college athletes' lives was confirmed by both phases of my study. In phase I, athletes routinely reported feelings of belonging at their programs when their coaches advocated for them and celebrated their unique identities. In the quantitative phase, head coach departure from an athlete's institution strongly predicted the athlete leaving that institution for other opportunities. Football and

men's basketball coaches comprise nearly 80% of the highest paid public employees in each state (Sperber & Minjares, 2015); the accumulative wealth, institutional privileges, and public sway that such employees hold in their areas of influence necessitate their involvement in anti-racist, anti-nationalist advocacy for their athletes. Given that college basketball coaches are expanding their vision into international talent pools and welcoming increasing numbers of migrant athletes onto their rosters, I argue that coaches have a paramount role in procuring human rights protections for their athletes. Indeed, coaches' very *decisions* about player development and program operations likely impact athletes' experiences in either deleterious or transformative ways.

Coaches need to dedicate themselves to acquiring the cross-cultural knowledge necessary to communicate effectively with their athletes and ensure that these athletes' safety and comfort is secured within their labor sites. Additionally, the concerning frequency of neo-racist and racial capitalist attitudes among coaches, athletics administrators, and writers in the discourse suggests an immediate need for (re)education on the subjects of race and international justice. Coaches must also use their public platforms to advocate for immigration reform, anti-racist action, and policy changes at the NCAA level to secure greater human rights protections for migrant college athletes, specifically Black athletes. There is some evidence to suggest coaches' prior awareness of these deep-seated problems- Dan Monson's challenge to the NCAA in favor of expanded religious rights for his Black Muslim athletes is a notable example. However, isolated incidences of justice-minded program leadership are not enough to fix the problem- systemic action is required.

Disrupting NCAA Discourses

The documents I analyzed in phase I of this study point to the power of discourse in reproducing exploitative conditions for Black athletes, particularly Black international athletes. The discursive similarities exhibited between international athletes' career decision making and self-actualization practices indicate that racial and cultural exploitation are structurally imposed by the NCAA. I believe this finding is particularly important as NCAA-sanctioned and other popular discourses often employ deficit perspectives about Black international athletes' intellects and agency when compared to their white peers. Thus, it seems that the carceral paternal treatment coaches and institutions exercise upon their Black international players is maintained through the NCAA's reproduced benevolence discourses, in which it portrays itself and its member institutions as saviors and bestowers of opportunity.

The *principle of amateurism* and *student-athlete* role were intentionally crafted to consolidate institutional power over athletes and maintain athletic elites' accumulative capacities, yet these histories are almost completely masked from the lay view (Comeaux, 2020; Jayakumar & Comeaux, 2016). Scholars have commented on the American public's romantic obsession with the supposed purity of amateur athletics, evidenced in common discursive tropes such as college athletes competing *for the love of the game* as opposed to their professional counterparts who play *for money*. These tropes helped the NCAA and its member institutions mask their cartel structure and exploitation of Black labor for almost a half century at home. Now, these same mythologies have influenced the international athletics pipeline as well. Still, while international athletes and their

home countries' perceptions of the NCAA may highlight its supposed educational foundations, they also conflate it with professional leagues, revealing- at least in part- the true nature of US college athletics operations (Jayakumar & Comeaux, 2016). Thus, journalists in both the US and abroad should assume a greater responsibility for resisting the NCAA's control over its narratives.

Linguistic choices, even at the micro level, impact both public perception and athlete navigation of major college athletics. Therefore, writers and editors alike need to interrogate their own internalized racial and cultural biases. Additionally, individuals and groups within news media, athletics departments, and other organizations involved in publishing documents need to consider voice, weight, and abridgement when selecting quotes and perspectives from actors within the labor field. I found that white international athletes have more agency to define themselves and their career trajectories than Black athletes. Likewise, authors more often gave coaches the quote to discuss Black athletes rather than the athletes themselves in comparison to white athletes. These issues are results of editorial choices, some of which are made due to subconscious bias. However, subconscious bias does not excuse the reproduction of racial capitalism and neo-racism. Therefore, journalists must write with intention, consider themselves activists, and hold the NCAA and its agents to account when reporting on major college athletics both writ large, and, more specifically, when dealing with Black international athletes and other particularly marginalized groups within the field.

Conclusion

In the case of men's basketball, the NCAA cartel represents the US' (and, more broadly, the West's) hegemonic influence over global sport labor and labor migration. Its member institutions artificially impose punitive amateurism guidelines and institutional dependency on their athletes, yet DI college basketball enjoys global recognition as an excellent avenue for elite athletes to begin their careers in the sport. In part, the highly professionalized nature of Division I and its track record for furthering athletes' careers earns this reputation. However, its ability to act alone in its organizational field, set unilateral policies, and exercise near-universal authority over its athletes' movements and conduct sets it apart from development organizations in other countries, where athletes hold greater economic protections and bargaining power. US university basketball programs' recent forays into international labor markets have enforced the NCAA's exploitative system onto a truly worldwide population of athletes in recent years, which merits attention from scholars, policymakers, sports organizations, and the lay public alike.

While recent judicial and legislative action (i.e., *House v. NCAA*, SCORE, SAFE) may point toward overall improvements in the NCAA's labor arrangement, Black international athletes' labor conditions and migration patterns continue to shed light on the necessity of a revolutionary overhaul to elite US college sport. All international athletes are at risk of exploitation in the NCAA's labor sites, yet due to the realities of racial capitalism and neo-racism Black international athletes are particularly vulnerable. They face high levels of precarity and disposability within their programs, and unique

migratory challenges that set their trajectories apart from other groups. In light of the arguments I have presented in this study, I call on the NCAA and its member institutions- as well as its assembled actors and interest groups- to take immediate action on both large and small scales in order to remedy these effects, which in my view amount to significant human rights violations. If the NCAA holds both the supreme privilege of state power *and* a privileged position within the global athletic labor pipeline, it also holds equal responsibility to secure the rights and privileges of its laborers in accordance with their needs and demands. Finally, individuals actors as well as those actors representing organizations committed to the advancement of justice in global sport must pressure the NCAA through both research and activism to restructure its present arrangement in broad and local capacities. Black international athletes deserve the same robust rights protections, fair labor practices, and, indeed, the very basic affordances of humanity enjoyed by their nonblack peers. This study provides the germinal inroad to understanding Black international men's basketball players' present labor conditions, so as to better inform our collective development of knowledge, coalition, and action to see these conditions through to a just future in both college athletics and global sport.

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