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Black athletes bought, sold, and traded

Nov 18, 2010



Brittney M. Walker | OW Staff Writer

America's most wanted slaves

Dare we not forget the solemnly shameful, yet strangely glorious past of American history, when Africans were stolen from their homes, stripped of their languages, religions, cultures, and families; when countless ancestors perished over the Atlantic in the bowels of grand ships, locked in chains and human waste; when Black people were bought, sold and traded.

Our Black skin, divinely crafted bodices, and innate ability to “just do it” better than the average uncolored man has reminded America of just how great people of African descent really are, how hard we work, how passionate we fight, but also how long we have suffered.

Dr. Frances Cress Welsing teaches the world that everyone wants to emulate us, from our beautifully sun kissed skin to our arguably genetic superiority. But since they can't, they enslave us, and although chattel slavery is no longer legal, the land of the free and home of the brave finds other ways to enslave and exploit the Black people.

Back in 2006, a Black sports journalist published a thought-provoking and quite disturbing piece of literature that likened the Black athlete to the American “Negro” slave.

William C. Rhoden, New York Times columnist and author of the provocative “Forty Million Dollar Slaves” turned Black Americans’ attention to a disguised form of slavery called professional sports.

Albeit these pros make large sums of money, Rhoden points out who the real beneficiaries are in the industry.

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Former USC running back Reggie Bush generated millions in revenue for the university.



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Leading Heisman candidate Auburn University quarterback Cam Newton is currently under investigation by the NCAA and FBI for possible monetary violations.

He says athletes are just world-class slaves, working on the plantation, with no control of anything. All they do is play the game and move from plantation to plantation as the “massa” says so.

In the prologue of Rhoden’s provocative discourse, he had a conversation about the title with Bob Johnson, owner of the Charlotte Bobcats, who happens to be an African American. Questions arose about the seemingly contradictory phrase, “40 million dollar slave.” How can anyone be a slave making that kind of cheese?

In the same interview, Johnson eventually agreed that sports could be perceived as a plantation.

“Do the players see themselves on a plantation? I think they do, in that all of the owners are White. That creates the dynamic. The owners are White, the coaches work for the White owners, and the industry is run by White commissioners. Anyone who exercises power over them is White, and they feel or believe that the owners are taking more value out of them than what the owners are putting in,” Johnson said in the interview.



Crenshaw high school's De Anthony Thomas' the original “Black Mamba,” will generate plenty of revenue for USC once he dawns the cardinal and gold.

During chattel slavery, Black people were forced to tire themselves in sports. They were forced to demonstrate their fine athletic abilities by being entered into Saturday night sports to entertain the White folks. White masters also placed wages on their slaves. Claud Anderson, Ed.D writes in “Black Labor, White Wealth” that enslaved Blacks were often entered into a hunting contest called, “Coon Hunting.” A rebellious or stubborn enslaved African was covered with a scent, released into the woods, and hunted by dogs and White people.

“For Blacks, there was a direct path from the cotton fields to the athletic fields. While a Black person was despised for his color, most were respected for their endurance, strength and athletic abilities,” Anderson writes. “The Black man’s role in athletics was symbolized by the Harlem Globe Trotters. Integration led to the demise of the all-Black basketball league in the 1940s. Major league White basketball teams eventually hired a few of the Black players on a quota basis.

To salvage the Black talent that was being wasted, Abe Saperstein signed the best players to be Harlem Globe Trotters and showcased their antics and skills around the world.

Just as with Black music, people in different nations were excited by the physical dexterity of the Black-skinned players. During the past 50 years, individual Black players have moved beyond simply being paid as clowning athletes. However, the larger share of the profits still go to Whites involved in ownership and team management.”

Perhaps athletics is just a step above slave labor; maybe it’s more like sharecropping. Curt Flood, formal Major League Baseball player who caused quite a stir in his day, likened the

pros to a step-above-slavery business, although he was making close to a million dollars a year. Rhoden writes that players are like property— bought and sold according to what the owners deemed necessary.

“This was—and still is—allowable in sports, because athletes are supposed to be grateful for the opportunity. This mode of treatment was legitimized by the Reserve Clause in Major League Baseball,”

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Big Ten Conference	\$242,000,000
Southeastern Conference	\$205,000,000
Big 12 Conference	\$78,000,000
Atlantic Coast Conference	\$67,000,000
Pac 10 Conference	\$58,000,000
Big East Conference	\$33,000,000
Total	\$683,000,000

Figures: 2009

Rhoden says.

Flood conceded, “The reserve system was the same system used in the South where the plantation owner owned all the houses that you lived in. And you worked for them and you shopped in his store, and you never got over the hump.”

For centuries, White people have dominated just about every aspect of life in America from politics and entertainment, to economics and education. Some way, some how, White people as a group have long profited from the labor and riches of African descendants. Some would agree that sports are another platform in which Black talent is exploited for the pockets of rich, White owners.

“... It would be beneficial to take one final look at the economic impact that Black slavery had and continues to have on economies in America and worldwide,” Anderson concludes. “A close examination of financial data reveals why Whites have been so adamant about keeping Blacks as permanent underclass laborers. The world saw Blacks and their labor as sources of wealth—Black gold.”

Los Angeles native Andrew Jackson, a former NFL player, has a slightly different perspective. When asked, “would you call pro sports a plantation?” Jackson said, “No, I disagree with that. It’s a choice to play sports. No one is forcing you to play. I just think that was someone trying to sell a book. You can’t compare slavery and sports. They’re two different things.”

Jackson has been involved with sports since the tender age of 10. Football is what he grew up with, what he did and what he loved. As he went on to the pros, he had a Black agent. At no point did he feel like he was a slave or did not have a choice.

However, like Flood said back in the 1969, Jackson did feel like a piece of property at times, because of not having a voice on the business side of things. He said the only time he felt he had control was on the field when he had the ball.

“I love the game, the competitive side of it. The money was good, and I had been playing since I was 10-years-old. That’s what I knew how to do, and that’s what I was best at,” he said.

If you remember history enslaved Africans were put on stages, weighed, measured, tested, and checked for disease and good health. Jackson believes the slave to sports comparison came along, when people looked at how athletes were drafted and picked by owners.

“(Investors) are checking to make sure (athletes) can think, react. They are getting your measurements, how tall you are. They are giving you tests for your mental capacity, because they are getting ready to invest \$25 million,” Jackson explained. “They just want to make sure you are healthy. I guess (people) try to relate that to (a) slave, when he’s up on the block getting ready to get sold off. The difference is you don’t have a choice as a slave.”

He also says these days, pro-athletes get paid more than they’re worth and owners really do not have boundaries because they set the prices and athletes make the choice to sign with them.

College field and plantations

Another realm of the sports we have not even begun to explore is college. Former USC Trojan, Reggie Bush ignited a fire that will probably not die down for a long time. The New Orleans Saints running back was accused of receiving a million dollar home from his agent while in college. When his Heisman and dignity were taken, the world of college sports was taken aback. His alleged decision to take the gift then started a conversation about college athletes and their money.

The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) says scholarship athletes may have their funds revoked if it is discovered they have taken money or gifts from an agent.

But athletes are prohibited from working during the school year.

USC has grossed nearly \$75 million annually from athletics, with football being one of the most profitable arms of the whole operation.

Some athletes, however, are simply provided a full ride scholarship, room and board, books, and probably a few pairs of tennis shoes; enough to keep performing.

Jackson, who also played for the Trojans back in his hey-day, believes the rules need to change for the sake of the athlete.

He says student jocks are tempted, when their agents and other entities are waving money in their faces. The money looks good to a “starving student.”

“Nothing else is promised to the athlete afterward,” he said. “But it’s on the individual, if they think they are bigger than the rules. I think the rules should be changed to help athletes, so they can have a little money in their pockets. If they did that, guys wouldn’t be tempted.”

With all of the recent investigations, it appears as if the NCAA is cracking down on pros and watching student stars a bit more carefully. Auburn quarterback and Heisman Trophy candidate, Cam Newton is under investigation as we speak. The FBI and NCAA are investigating whether or not the College Park (Ga.) native knew of the negotiations regarding his college commitment. There was money involved.

According to reports, Newton’s father was allegedly trying to sell his son’s commitment to the Mississippi State Bulldogs for \$180,000. Suspensions also rose after the family’s church, which was urged by local authorities to make \$50,000 worth of repairs since 2008, suddenly found money to fix the building.

College stars are conceivably worse off than the pros, according to some opinions. Bush’s agent bought his family a house and there is speculation that Newton’s church possibly benefited from his stardom and athletic abilities. When you look at the rules governing collegiate sports where student athletes play for their respective schools, but are not allowed to share fully in the benefits, some could argue there is an accurate comparison to sharecropping.

In hindsight...

Anderson acknowledges that sports and entertainment are quite profitable and could be a reasonable means of building Black economy. He says that Blacks athletically nearly rule most major sports; are the number one consumers of sports equipment and paraphernalia; and watch sports more avidly than most other groups. But the wealth does not stay within the Black community. Instead it is circulated through the hands of those in power.

“Vertical business opportunities, like trees, grow best when they have strong, deep roots from which to draw nourishment and support. Music and sports represent such business opportunities for Blacks, for in these industries, Black people’s roots are indeed strong and deep. In addition, the raw resources are readily available. Missing are the capital, entrepreneurs, and the Black community’s commitment to pursue economic empowerment by using its valuable resources for its own advantage and self-sufficiency.”

Just as our ancestors build this nation from the ground up, Black people have established another system of wealth called sports. But as they say, history repeats itself and in this newer sphere of industry, the main beneficiaries are still not the architects.

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Related Articles

- Reggie Bush to give up 2005 Heisman Trophy -

LOS ANGELES - Former USC running back Reggie Bush—the focus of a probe that led the NCAA to ban the Trojans from post-season play for two years, along with other sanctions—will give up the Heisman Trophy he won in 2005, he announced today.

In a statement, Bush, who now plays for the New Orleans Saints, said winning the Heisman was the "one of the greatest honors of my life," and he credited coaches, teammates and fans for helping him win college football's top prize.

- Slice of Pye -

Notes, quotes and things picked up on the run from coast-to-coast and all the stops in between and beyond.

Two of the NCAA's Sweet 16 teams will be coached by men of color—Oklahoma's Jeff Capel III, (a graduate of Duke) and Missouri's Mike Anderson. Only one of the Pac-10's five entries—Arizona—survived as a Sweet 16 team.

- USC appeal of the NCAA penalties to be heard Jan. 22 -

LOS ANGELES, Calif.— USC's appeal of the NCAA penalties against its football team will be heard Jan. 22 in Indianapolis, athletic director Pat Haden stated.

The NCAA issued a two-year bowl ban against the Trojans in June and stripped the team of 10 scholarships for the 2011, 2012 and 2013 seasons because of improper benefits received by star running back Reggie Bush.

In an interview with SC TV this week, Haden said he was "not terribly optimistic that we are going to win the appeal."

- [Michael Vick and the politics of “second chances”](#) -

The Monday night football game this week was a lesson in life and redemption. I only saw the first half, but that was enough. I got so excited about the performance of Philadelphia Eagles Quarterback, Michael Vick, that I shelved my intended column topic for this week and started over.

- [Conjuring in Black culture](#) -

African Americans are a colorful people, who claim some of the most phenomenal talents, elaborate philosophies, and eccentric belief systems. One thing about Black religion and spirituality is that we know how to have us some church.

From the dancing and singing to the worshiping and preaching, when we get down, we get down. It would almost be appropriate to say that in church, temple, mass, mosque and whatever other service you can think of, we always seem to welcome in the spirit of the Higher Being, the ancestors, or respective spirits.

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