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Managing Black Guys: Representation, Corporate Culture, and the NBA

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This article explores the intersection of representation, management, and race in the National Basketball Association (NBA) through a larger question on the relationship between corporate strategies for managing racialized subjects and popular representations of race. The NBA "brand"is situated in terms of recent developments in corporate and popular culture and then analyzed as an example of diversity management. Relying on original interviews with NBA corporate employees, as well as business and marketing industry reporting, the article analyzes the NBA as simultaneously an organization and a brand. As such, the NBA helps to "articulate" the corporate with the popular, largely through an implied racial project that manages race relations by continuing to equate corporate interests with Whiteness. The analysis contributes to ongoing discussions about the role of sports in perpetuating social disparities based on race at a time when "colorblindness" remains the paradigm of White approaches to race.

Cet article explore l'intersection de la représentation, la gestion et la race dans la ligue nationale de basket-ball (NBA) par le biais d'une question plus large qui porte sur les relations entre les stratégies des corporations pour gérer des sujets « racialisés » et les représentations populaires de la race. La marque NBA est située en termes de développements récents dans la culture populaire et corporative, puis analysée comme exemple de « gestion de la diversité ». À partir d'entrevues avec des employés de la NBA et des rapports sur le commerce et le marketing industriel, cet article analyse la NBA simultanément comme organisation et comme marque. La NBA aide à imbriquer le corporatif et le populaire via un projet racial qui gère les relations raciales en continuant à associer intérêts corporatifs et « blancheur ». L'analyse contribue aux débats sur le rôle du sport dans la perpétuation des disparités sociales fondées sur la race au moment où l'absence de considération de la couleur demeure l'approche (blanche) privilégiée par rapport à la race.

This article explores the intersection of representation, management, and race in the National Basketball Association (NBA). In their survey of research on sports and race, Davis and Harris assert that "The association between athletics and African American success is not surprising, given that sports is just about the only type of mainstream (nonfictional) media coverage in which one can see images of many successful African Americans" (1998, p. 166). Certainly, anyone who has followed the NBA over the past 25 years knows that the league has confronted various and complicated issues having to do with race. The recent upsurge of international players notwithstanding, the NBA remains a primary circulator of

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images of African American men for mass audiences. And it almost goes without saying that to speak of race and the NBA is to invoke, through to our current cultural moment, a deeply troublesome U.S. history of the figure of the Black male.

Black men in the public sphere are typically afforded a limited and limiting representational framework traceable to the historical politics of the White imaginary that manages race through a choreography of proximity and distance to White norms and expectations. Good Blacks are welcomed into the center of American cultural life, bad Blacks are condemned, and, at the same time, proximate Blacks are always haunted by the condemned because they are defined by what they are not. In fact, at the moment of this writing in the fall of 2003, yet another of the NBA's young Black stars is embodying that figure on TV, his hypermarketed smile and extraordinary play now overshadowed by serious, media-frenzied accusations of sexual assault. It is less important who this player is than that his scenario is so familiar. This is because, given all of the other possible cultural frameworks that might provide less restrictive stagings, the sociological nuances of their recurrence, appeal, and effects continue to warrant scrutiny.

In particular, the prominence of Black players in U.S. sport is not unrelated to the fact that so many White people in the U.S. continue to experience race in rather stark Black-and-White terms; and that White experience is not unrelated to the fact that Black men, as a group, remain incredibly overrepresented in the criminal justice system.[1] Furthermore, since the NBA is a widely marketed and recognized league brand, and since the players in the NBA are more likely to be Black than in any other league, the analysis here might also be described as an investigation of the NBA's position in relation to the fact that the Black male remains the most problematic racial subject in the White imaginary.[2]

Although it might be tempting to think that the NBA's success in the U.S. has been achieved despite the recurrent scandals of misbehaving Black men, today's NBA has, at its core, a strategy for managing player behavior, as well as people's perceptions of those efforts. The NBA's success cannot, in fact, be separated from those representations. When current NBA Commissioner and CEO David Stern took over in 1984, the league's image was in trouble. In his words, "sponsors were flocking out of the NBA because it was perceived as a bunch of high-salaried, drug-sniffing Black guys" (quoted in Maharaj, 1999, p. 231). Tracing this business sentiment through to the present, we can see the NBA's current success—its profitability and its visibility—as a marketing victory that has pivoted on a highly strategized and racialized image. Whereas NBA spokespersons claim that what keeps the NBA brand vibrant is the amazing athletic ability of the players who, for the most part, really are great guys, it is nonetheless true that the NBA is marketed and managed with a specific, if often tacit, goal of making Black men safe for (White) consumers in the interest of profit. As such, the story of race in the NBA is also a less visibly troubled story of Whiteness—White anxiety and fear and White strategies for threat management.

Generally speaking, marketers like to think about their brands as sets of perceptions that exist in the minds of consumers. This marketing understanding of brands is incomplete, however. Because brands are also perceptions in the minds of everyone with a relationship to them, limiting our understanding of brands to consumer perceptions obscures the nuanced and influential manifestations of brands occurring elsewhere—in sites of production, in the minds of producers, across the

field of competing brands, and, if they are prominent enough, throughout the vast scope of what we might call the business-marketing imaginary. Marketers know that brand perceptions translate into actions and practices related to the brand, and, by sociological extension, we can assume that everywhere there are brand perceptions there will also be some set of practices informed by those perceptions.

In particular, since branding is the management of consumer perceptions, production-side brand perceptions are an important focal point—one typically not made explicit by practitioners or critical scholars—for examining the relationship between the corporate inside and outside, as well as between the identities and subjectivities that populate that terrain. Indeed, this project's major contribution is to critical discussions of race, representation, sport, and corporate interests. But rather than reading corporate interests off of representations, this project moves from the inside out in an effort to provide a textured sense of how actual corporate subjects and logics have come to inform the representation of Black male basketball players.

This project is, theoretically, an attempt to map concrete developments of corporate interests in the form of managerial trends as they traverse and bring together the spheres of corporate and popular culture. The specific example of the NBA also illustrates the role of race in the constitution of those trajectories. The fact that the corporate is bound up with the popular, and even that it establishes some of its ideological limits, is not so surprising, although I think the specific terms of their relation are. Whereas corporate interests obviously exert some determining force over both the structure and content of popular culture, to paraphrase Stuart Hall (1996), there is no necessary correspondence between them, no guarantees in any particular instance for how they are brought together, articulated, and to what effect. A primary reason for an articulation's uncertain determinacy can be explained by the double meaning of the term. It is at once a kind of linkage among elements, with no inherent or necessary relation to one another, and it is a type of linkage created by human practices of meaning making, by the production of social discourse (Grossberg, 1996, p. 141). Such a theory of articulation offers both a way of grasping "how ideological elements come, under certain conditions, to cohere together in a discourse, and a way of asking how they do or do not become articulated, at specific conjunctures, to certain political subjects" (Grossberg, pp. 141-142).

Stuart Hall's theory of articulation is complemented by Michael Omi and Howard Winant's theory of racial formations, which asserts that truths about race become socially dominant when they form links between social structures and policies, on the one hand, and patterns of representation on the other. Such formations are political in that they arise out of struggles among competing racial projects over how race should properly be understood. The NBA is a participant in one such racial project because it constitutes "an interpretation, representation, or explanation of racial dynamics" that is inseparable from a particular social structure of race that distributes resources accordingly (Omi & Winant, 1994, p. 56). The NBA is but one prominent site for exploring the relation between corporate and popular culture, one in which a particular racial project combines with a constellation of corporate–managerial–marketing projects to articulate a new variation on the relationship between racialized representations and social structures.

In order to expose and examine the NBA's popular corporate conjunctures, my research methodology focuses on production-side understandings of and

practices related to the brand. The term *production side* refers to the strategy behind the NBA's brand positioning and the corporate culture that facilitates it, as well as to perceptions of what the NBA means in the broader corporate field. Thus, in the fall of 2000 and winter of 2001, I conducted audio-recorded, open-ended, conversational, on-site interviews with ten NBA corporate employees. The interviews were arranged by a junior-level marketer and were limited to two short research trips. Although the resulting sample did not extend into the highest executive levels, interviewees ranged in rank from interns to managers to divisional directors, all with at least some brand-positioning responsibility. Six of the ten participants were men. Each interview flowed from two related questions: First, I asked interviewees to describe their working sense of the NBA brand. Second, I asked them to talk about brand strategy in relation to various "audiences," both internal and external, including various NBA corporate divisions and team franchises, corporate employees and players, corporate sponsors and partners, news media, and fans. I then organized the content of the transcribed interviews around a central theme of how the process of branding actually occurs in the NBA; how, that is, the NBA brand is created, managed, and experienced inside the organization.

Racialized anxieties recurred in the interviews in different ways, and, consequently, I turned my attention toward the broader corporate field, giving attention to that issue. Specifically, I conducted database searches of management and marketing literature that discussed the meaning of the NBA within business frameworks, and, in those sources, I looked especially for evidence that could inform the issues of race that emerged from the interviews.

This article is an organized presentation of an analysis that took shape as I moved through the various data. After an initial discussion of the NBA's "problem" with race, I contextualize it in terms of the recent, embedded histories of the NBA, business and sports intersections, and recent developments in business and corporate culture. From that discussion, I then consider the NBA as an example of diversity management. These interrelated frameworks work as a backdrop for understanding the ways in which actual NBA marketers and business people understand and produce the NBA brand; it is this latter part of the essay that is the most grounded in interview data.

Racial Anxiety in the NBA

In critical work on Nike ads, the documentary film *Hoop Dreams*, the NBA, and iconic NBA players (for example, Magic Johnson, Charles Barkley, and Michael Jordan) scholars have noted a recurrent set of racist dichotomies that structure the commodified representation of Black male basketball players. In their analysis of *Hoop Dreams*, for example, Cheryl Cole and Samantha King (1998) discuss the dyad of the athlete/gang member, which constructs the dominant narrative of (athletic) Black male success against the taken-for-granted, negative environment of the inner city. Todd Boyd (1997) has historicized the dichotomy further by linking it to the field-slave/house-slave image. These dichotomies remain central to understanding the NBA brand. For, despite efforts by NBA brand managers to repress the gangsta by hyping the gentleman athlete, the repressed has returned again and again, and the NBA has responded with an escalation of image-management innovations.

Commissioner David Stern's business–marketing strategy was only part of the story of the league's rehabilitated image because his tenure coincided with the professional career of Michael Jordan, a man whose own business savvy, basketball skills, and commodified image have accounted for well over 10 billion dollars being pumped into the U.S. economy (Johnson, 1998b). In fact, for nearly twenty years, the highly managed image of Michael Jordan (MJ) has been the exemplary racialized "other" to Stern's "drug-sniffers": MJ, as his agent once argued, embodies an "All American image. . . Norman Rockwell values, but with a contemporary flair" (quoted in Andrews, 1996, p. 315). And here we already have insight into how this dichotomy works. In a rehabilitative, management move, the previously threatening specter of race was transformed into a "contemporary flair" that MJ contributed to a rather White sense of safety evoked by "All American" and "Norman Rockwell." Or, as Gitanjali Maharaj (1999) describes it, the White imaginary has updated the field and the big house with the institutional and discursive constructs of "the street" on the one hand and the athletic arena and the corporation on the other. Maharaj also notes that this dichotomous structure traces an arc from the ghetto to the ball court, a preferred (White) path of redemption from unproductive to productive subjectivity: a "passage from exteriority to interiority, from the 'street' world of economic dependency, hyperproductivity, crime, and drug addiction to the regulated, economically productive, patriarchal, and White world of corporate life" (1999, p. 230).[3] And, yes, NBA profits soared: "in ten seasons under Stern's leadership the league experienced 1600% growth in annual revenues" (Maharaj, 1999, p. 232).[4]

With this representational history in mind, my initial NBA interviews and site visits centered on how marketers were currently thinking about the racialized terms of the brand, and what links might be made between that thinking and David Stern's racialized project of image improvement. My first interview was with two White marketing researchers (September 20, 2000). When asked to describe their sense of the brand, they said it was a set of "urban thematics," by which they meant that NBA basketball fits into the fabric of what it means to have fun in the Big City, whichever NBA city that happens to be. In practice this has translated into NBA events that bring together an effervescence of lights, celebrities, and consumable accessories that create, for NBA fans, an experience of participating in an idealized vision of city life that is both exciting and safe. Presuming that they would share with me a sense that "urban" is often code for Black in today's consumer culture, I invoked David Stern's quote from years before. I then asked whether these "urban thematics" had anything to do with race because, it seemed to me, that for a lot of White people, NBA players (as mediated) constitute their primary relationships to Black men. The following exchange ensued:

Marketer #1: "Noting race isn't something that we really spend a whole lot of time looking at in terms of perceptions of the league. I think also what we do know is that, as generations pass, and you get new generations, they're less and less colorblind. Umm, we're seeing that with . . ."

Marketer #2: "More and more."

Me: "More and more or less and less?"

M1: "Less and less colorblind."

Me: "They see color *more*?"

M2: "More and more?!"

M1: [blushing] "You're right. I'm sorry."

M2: "You're on tape now." [laughs]

M1: "There's really no conscious effort [around race] in terms of us doing research or in marketing."

Stumbling for the first and only time during the interview, Marketer #1's response is a symptom of an aspect of the NBA brand and branding that recurred throughout my research. The symptom here signals a general anxiety in a White mindset that makes it difficult to talk directly about race, and it gives notice to the fact that, despite the explicit claims to the contrary, race remains both noticed and relevant.

Indeed, when I returned four months later for more interviews arranged by Marketer #2 (from the first interview), four of my seven interviews were with Black men. I have no idea how intentional or contrived this was, but it seemed designed to make visible—again, without speaking to the issue directly—that NBA corporate was indeed colorblind precisely because there are collaborating Black men among its ranks. When I asked those interviewees what they made of their overrepresentation in the second set of interviews, they responded with some reservation but also suggested a line of connection that was absent in other interviews. (Of course, as NBA employees, all of the people I interviewed were inclined toward some degree of solidarity with the NBA project.) One young African American NBA staffer simply said, "Yeah, it's a problem that 80% of the players are Black and only 20% of corporate is Black."[5] Far from being colorblind, all of these men saw their jobs as more or less racially relevant. Either they saw it as important to simply represent Black men on the corporate side of things, or they saw the NBA as an important focal point for Black men and so they wanted to be involved in the process, or they understood the mere fact of their own success, irrespective of the NBA context, as a contribution to racial equality. In the words of one senior manager,

> I feel comfortable that the organization is morally correct in a lot of their approaches to things, whether it's fines for players who speak out in the wrong way or whatever. My presence, alone, I think, assists in that, because with . . . people of color in the organization who can kind of in meetings share their opinions about athletes and positioning, I think it helps. (January 24, 2001)

Each of the two previous quotes makes important, interrelated points that were completely evaded by the White marketing researchers in the first interview. For all of the Black NBA employees I interviewed, race was an important part of their own NBA consciousness and experience, and their explanations of its relevance consistently established links to the more visible racial politics of the league itself. Despite this divergence over the relevance of race for recognizing connections between the public image of the league and the corporate side of the NBA, however, White and Black employees seemed to agree that abstract "social" forces led to the NBA being unfairly singled out for scrutiny.

According to these NBA employees, whatever problems the NBA faced in terms of race, they were best understood in terms of forces that were outside of the league's control. For example, although remarking that he felt "weird" and "uncomfortable" talking about race, a White senior media and marketing manager summarized the NBA's relation to the social this way:

> A lot of what goes on in all of our leagues is reflective of society. And that's something we've said for quite some time. . . . We're an easy target and so is everyone else in the entertainment world. (January 25, 2001)

Similarly, the Black senior manager quoted earlier wondered,

> do you think, in any organization or in any facet of society, there aren't people that do those types of things, you know what I mean? Because we're just, the players are a microcosm of society. And only the bad stuff comes to a head." (January 24, 2001)

With or without the patina of White anxiety, the overall assessment in the interviews was that the image trouble faced by the NBA stemmed from an externality—society—that the NBA should not be held accountable to fix. The question still remains: How does the NBA make sense of race, particularly given its anxious grasp of the relationship between the sphere of the NBA and the broader social stage? In order to more thoroughly explore that anxiety—including the details of its management and its social implications—the next section begins by situating the NBA in terms of the more general cultural relationship between sports and business that has developed over the same period.

Managing Race Inside and Out

> White men in suits don't *have* to jump.
>
> *–Public Enemy, "He Got Game," 1998.*

Over the last two to three decades, the profitable synergy between sports and business has been reengineered. In the interest of brevity, the new sports–business convergence centers on the notion of "flexibility." Whereas the term's usage is complex and flexible itself (see Martin, 1994), it conveys a central value in the globalized, post-Fordist business world. Corporate globalization, including new technologies that can transmit media content, financial data, and other business discourse around the globe instantaneously; intensified competition for global markets; and financial uncertainty has encouraged new corporate forms and practices that have combined to make the corporation more fleet-footed, more flexible, and more mobile in its dealings with these uncertainties. As corporations have become more geographically dispersed, technological advances, including the development of flexible, quick-delivery forms of manufacturing, have made possible a radical shift away from labor costs as the main determinant of profit in favor of increased emphases on marketing and design (see Appelbaum, 1996; Reich, 1991).

The result has been a "race to the bottom" for outsourced, cheap labor on the manufacturing front coupled with a renewed corporate sensitivity to the profit potential of "intellectual labor" and marketing in particular. Coinciding with the

new investment in intellectual labor, the early 1980s witnessed management's discovery of "corporate culture" (the corporate environment of patterned social relations), which became, in fact, the pivotal element in a proliferation of more flexible, antihierarchical management approaches designed to maximize productivity in the face of changing market demands. In this managerial core, flexibility entailed emphases on teamwork and rejections of hierarchy, albeit in a larger context of the "lean and mean" corporation. Old-school emphases on worker discipline and the scientific management of intellectual, creative productivity were superceded by new "softer" emphases on "corporate culture," which promoted "flexible hours, job enrichment, self-managed work teams," and other mechanisms intended to get more from employees by treating them as "whole" persons, eager to perform (Donzelot, 1991[1980], p. 251).[6]

It was in this general environment that companies such as Reebok and Nike aggressively insinuated themselves, through media and sports sponsorship, into the emergent fitness lifestyles of self-improvement associated with the "professional–managerial class" of the 1980s (Ehrenreich, 1989). The same period also witnessed the emergence of active, upwardly mobile lifestyles and a new ideology of sports fitness: a rhetorically empowered (and later dubbed) "Just Do It!" culture that ushered in enterprising approaches to bodily fitness, including a new fondness for healthy gourmet food and a literal and figurative "war on softness" (Ehrenreich, 1989, pp. 231–236). These changes in consumer culture were driven, of course, by the business processes described earlier, and, as such, they paralleled the duplicitous, top-down nature of the turn toward culture inside corporations. Scholars writing about this period have noted that the "empowering" fitness regimes of the 1980s and 1990s invested the bodies and lifestyles of consumer subjects with capitalist ideals about the "worker's body and a body of workers that are well-managed in the way a portfolio is well-managed" (Linda Singer, quoted in Cole, 1994, p. 17). The analogy was only amplified by corporate advertising campaigns, which, across the full range of industries, sought to associate their brands with sports as a way of competing in the cluttered new mediascape.[7]

Embedded in these convergent histories, the NBA should be understood as far more than a basketball league. As a company and a brand that is centered on a sports league in which the vast majority of its players are Black men, the NBA is bound up, in a racialized way, with the cultural nexus of sports and business. In this respect it is important to recognize that over the past few decades the corporate field, in general, has confronted changing workforce demographics and increased competition for diversifying global markets. Thus, in intimate conjunction with these developments, something known as "diversity management" emerged as a centerpiece of the new corporate cultures (Gordon, 1995, p. 3).[8] According to the American Management Association, for example, by 1997 over "half of all U.S. employers ha[d] established some kind of formal initiative to manage cultural diversity" (Caudron & Hayes, 1997, p. 121).[9] And this was the same year that "the Federal Glass Ceiling Commission reported that 95–97% of senior managers at Fortune 1000 companies were men and 97% were White" (Caudron & Hayes, 1997, p. 121).

Affirmative action, it seems, had proven too rigid and, ultimately, alienating to overrepresented groups for it to be compatible with the new cultures of flexibility and teamwork, and it was too much of a drag on the instrumental goals of

efficiency and profit. Therefore, the externally generated fact of affirmative action and the risk of bad publicity positioned race as an external obstacle for corporate America. In addition, whereas the social forces behind those facts also ensured that the impediment of race was no longer avoidable, the costs of failing to seem racially progressive had also increased. Diversity management offered a liberating new way to think about the problem, a way of internalizing control over it that was utterly compatible with the general turn toward management through culture. Thus, in its embrace of difference, diversity management allowed companies to be pro-active in ways that exceeded the expectations of the state; and, by publicizing their diversity management programs both internally and externally, companies were able to avoid social criticism by seeming to take the high moral ground.

In the diversity management project, as described by Avery Gordon, "corporate culture links a vision of racial and gender *diversity* to its existing relations of ruling to produce something that might be called multicultural corporatism" (1995, p. 3). Therefore, one way of understanding diversity management is as a movement to recuperate corporate America's presumed right of self-governance, because, above all, managing diversity promised to put management in general back in the driver's seat. It might be stating the obvious, given the foregoing discussion, that Gordon's critical framework for understanding corporate approaches to diversity makes possible an interpretation of the NBA as a diversity management project. There is a twist or two, however. The NBA certainly manages its most visible racialized subjects or workers (i.e., players) in the league, but, in a curious way, those disciplined workers are also the company's products. The NBA, in other words, makes its money from its ability to control the image (the representation) of its largely Black male stars. Therefore, the crucial question for my analysis here centers on how these two types of control are linked to one another: that is, what are the "relations of ruling" that unite, on the one hand, the NBA's strategy of disciplining racialized subjects, and, on the other hand, its disciplined representations of race?

To the extent that the logic informing representations of Black male basketballers in the NBA is consonant with the corporate logic of diversity management, it might assist in clarifying how the problematic status of those representations, as discussed in the critical sports literature, informs the relations of ruling now occurring in U.S. corporations. The NBA is an especially rich site for thinking about new configurations of representation and governance if we refer to both the cultural and political meanings of representation[10] and, similarly, if we assume a broad definition of governance as the relations of ruling that circumscribe "an influential feature of the larger project, currently underway, of rewriting our nation's basic social contract" (Gordon, 1995, p. 3) in which social legitimacy is pursued increasingly through a dialectic of cultural visibility and consumerist identity and practice. It has become, therefore, increasingly important for social analysts to map the interests and patterns of social governance operating through commercial culture, particularly because the targets of that governance are members of historically marginalized groups.

How, then, has the NBA learned to govern, and, ultimately, what is it teaching us? Thinking ahead of his diagnosis about the drug-sniffing, overpaid Black male image of the NBA at the beginning of his tenure, David Stern asserted his "conviction that if everything else went right, race would not be an abiding issue

to NBA fans, at least not as long as it was handled correctly" (Maharaj, 1999, p. 232). As I have already suggested, Stern's conviction intimates a sort of choreographed movement from the outside (the street) to the inside (the rule-bound court) that also suggests the existence of a guiding hand, a certain directional force—in a word, management. Consequently, the NBA itself—the company and also the brand—emerges as a character in the morality play that it also stages. The NBA, in other words, is not simply a showcase for Black celebrity athletes; it is itself a set of conventions that, in sometimes subtle and yet always present ways, calls attention to itself as a hero in relation to an "other" that comes from outside. This NBA-as-management narrative encodes a disciplinary framework around

> what Stuart Allen Clarke . . . calls the "Black men misbehaving" narrative—a narrative that simultaneously expresses, affirms, and authorizes popular fears, pleasures, and anxieties in ways that shape the experience of race in both personal and public spaces. (Cole & Andrews, 1996, p. 143)

Specific examples of unruliness by NBA players and their subsequent containment will help to illustrate some of the implications of these embedded frameworks.

David Stern's plans to ensure that race would not endure as an abiding issue for NBA fans suggested, in one respect, a kind of naïve desire for a "colorblind" society that might have seemed possible inside the NBA of the 1980s and early 1990s, when MJ's Norman Rockwell presence represented the league's vision of racial harmony. In another respect, many of the league's players, the objects of Stern's (image-) management strategy, refused to abide by his vision of colorblind harmony. An especially noteworthy and highly publicized turning point in this saga occurred in 1997, when, as *Newsweek* reported, Black NBA star Latrell Sprewell (then with the Golden State Warriors) "choked and tried to punch his [White] coach," P.J. Carlesimo (Starr & Samuels, 1997, p. 26). The article's headline wondered, "Are the game's bad boys, old-guard coaches or the hype-hungry endorsement industry to blame?" Whatever the cause or solution, the article goes on to suggest, the problem is player behavior, itself a theme that predated the Stern/MJ era, and one that would be echoed for years to come across sport media.[11] For example, a more recent *Sports Illustrated* survey of 874 avid NBA fans showed 41% saying that player behavior was a major factor in their deciding not to attend games (James, 2000).

According to some, Black players' attitudes in the mid- to late-1990s underwent a generational shift toward less patience for racism in the context of accelerated commercialization. "The post-Jordan era figures to be an anxious one for the league," the *Newsweek* article explained, because of the explosive tension between old-school team discipline and lucrative pressure from advertisers and endorsers that "prize the street cool that moves the merchandise" (Starr & Samuels, 1997, p. 28). Sociologist Elijah Anderson explains the effect: "Older players in the league, because of racism, know how to be more accommodating when situations aren't to their liking [but] this new generation has no patience for anything they think isn't fair. They won't take it" (Starr & Samuels, p. 28).[12] In its exploration of the problem, however, and without specifying it directly, *Newsweek* situated the problem in a triad of dynamics that nicely framed the managerial dilemma faced by the NBA: the need for discipline, the need to deal with racism, and the recognition of the formula that Black equals cool equals revenue.[13]

These conflicting challenges and opportunities faced by the NBA brought to the surface an anxiety confronted by a wide range of corporations feeling competitive pressure to become more diverse. A central aspect of diversity management not made explicit in the ebullient industry reporting on its benefits is that it values certain types of racial difference. Said differently, to value diversity in a business context necessarily means that race (and other forms of recognized difference) must be transformed from a threat to corporate hegemony into profitability. As a consequence, anxiety over the type of difference—the threat of uncooperative, unproductive subjects in the corporation itself—exists as a kind of absent presence in diversity-management discourse. For example, evidence for racism's presence in corporate America is discernible in its obsession with repeating, whenever there is an opportunity, that "valuing" a managed version of diversity is profitable, that it will not "drag your company down" into the red, suggesting, of course, an anxiety about the converse. Here is just a sampling of what I mean:

- "If diversity is to ever fully take hold in a corporate culture, its effect on the bottom line must be proven" (Caudron & Hayes, 1997, p. 124).
- An *HR Focus* article, titled "Why diversity matters," answers that "diversity is critical to an organization's bottom line success." (Gardenswartz & Rowe, 1998, p. S1).
- On the topic of diversity, an *Advertising Age* piece informs us that "The intangible edge is best classified under productivity, and the tangible benefit is profit" (Kim, 1997).
- The *Personnel Journal* singled out Hallmark, in 1996, as an exemplary corporation: "Hallmark recognizes employee individuality, encourages work–life balance, promotes open communication, enthuses over diversity, tosses in a healthy dose of benefits—and makes a profit because of it" (Flynn, 1996, p. 50).
- In his *HR Magazine* article, "Building a rainbow one stripe at a time," Marc Adams (1998, pp. 72–73) assures readers that "Many employees have long believed that a diverse workforce is the key to a well-rounded organization, not to mention bigger profit margins."
- In a *Fortune* article on "The 50 best companies for Asians, Blacks and Hispanics," author Roy Johnson (1998a) "wondered if companies that do good also do well by shareholders." He concluded by claiming that "No one can say that companies striving for—and in most cases, investing heavily in—ethnic inclusion at every level are doing so at the expense of profits."

Indeed, articles that argue or imply that pursuing diversity inherently cuts into profits are rare. The persistence of a reassuring tone regarding the counterintuitive profitability of diversity, however, implicates an audience of managers who remain anxious about diversity's threat to the bottom line. In their repeated promising of profits as a result, promoters of diversity management sell their new form of governance with tacit claims that managerialism in U.S. corporations can make racial difference profitable. Diversity management aims to make race neat and tidy and oriented toward common corporate goals. In addition, as with Jordanesque representations of Black men, diversity management stands in tacit contrast to the mess of race on the street and in the ghetto, implying that the more unruly race problems require a different sort of management, a point to which I will return momentarily.

If, at the beginning of the Stern era (and in ways analogous to corporate America generally), the NBA's challenge was to reframe race in the interest of profitability, then, by the 1990s, race in the NBA had come to occupy an abiding, yet ambivalent, status as both the key to corporate success and its major impediment. In other words, because many racialized product–players have refused to placate White expectations for the sake of the league's image, there remains in the league/brand a racialized turbulence that continues to threaten the bottom line. It was this recurrence that both frustrated Stern's colorblind hopes and prompted a new approach.

As a consequence, the NBA of the late 1990s became determined to manage the situation by reframing its product in order to break perceived equations between the NBA and the messiness of race—the threat of the street—and instead figuring those undesirable elements as both importations from outside and as the object of the NBA's rehab efforts. At the same time, it sought to showcase the more profitable, desirable elements. In the early part of our current decade, the NBA still appears to be committed to this strategy. In brief, the NBA has rebranded itself as both an institution of racial uplift and an entrepreneur of racial flair, a move that, in practice, has involved the NBA in a somewhat conflicted double role of discipliner and promoter of the race. On the one hand, the league made clear that, as a governing body, it would not "accept or condone behavior that would not be tolerated in any other segment of society" (David Stern as quoted in Starr & Samuels, 1997, pp. 26, 28). On the other hand, in its rethinking of the issue—much like corporate America's end run around affirmative action, whereby corporate culture "discovers a new racial ethnic diversity in society by excusing itself from any responsibility" for broader social patterns of racism (Gordon, 1995, p. 16)[14]—the NBA envisioned the race problem as one imported from outside its own boundaries, and, therefore, one that it could not affect so much as manage.

As I introduced in the previous section, NBA corporate subjects appear to understand the NBA as contradictorily undifferentiated from and exceptional to society. When it comes to bad behavior, it seems, NBA players are understood as simply part of a larger society in which that kind of thing happens all the time. In this construction, the NBA is affected by society because it has to deal with its mess; at the same time there is no indication here, or in any of my interviews, that the NBA image affects society, that the NBA is actually a producer of race. As one marketing director phrased it, "I think we're just looking for society to right itself. . . . But we can't create that" (September 20, 2000). In this way the NBA conveniently misunderstands its own agency and its effects. Flowing from these presumptions, the second part of the solution would involve wresting back control of both the players and the NBA brand. Curiously, the NBA's objective was not to affect the larger social field, replete with its contradictions of racism, unruly "gangsta" types, and salacious media. Rather, the objective was to distinguish the NBA brand or corporate entity as an exceptional force in that field.

One White NBA executive explained the problem and the solution this way:

Whether it be a commercial . . . a PSA [public service announcement], [or] an appearance, that's not us telling it but it's the sponsor. Then the media. We had to make sure they realized what these people were really like. . . . And so, the challenge is to get people to really know your product as more than just a basketball player. Know him as a person. . . . I mean, how can you

> sell something without . . . understanding what your product's really about?
> So we try to humanize these people. And I understand what these players are
> like, and who they are. And they are good people, OK? (January 25, 2001)

For me, the tone and content of this quote clearly evoke those reassuring business
literature passages about diversity management. If the league's "humanizing" ef-
forts effectively center the NBA as a heroic, managerial force, that centering suc-
ceeds by both catering to and signaling a certain dependency on a general (White)
anxiety over how Black masculinity can be controlled. In this regard, the NBA has
aligned itself with a broad range of disciplinary and punitive mechanisms. On this
point, we might consider again the observations Cheryl Cole and Samantha King
stated in their analysis of *Hoop Dreams*:

> The figure of the basketball player, defined over and against the criminal
> (the gang member that governs America's representation of African-American
> men in the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s), also functions as a means of dis-
> placement that reconciles middle-class America's sense of itself as compas-
> sionate as it calls for and endorses increasingly vengeful punitive programs.
> (1998, p. 78)

The NBA must be read as part of this representational structure, even as it appears
to update it by avoiding race-specific invocations in favor of a more inclusive
"humanity." Specifically, the NBA's invocations of the players' true humanity work
to conceal the will toward control (and profit) that inspires those invocations in the
first place.

   Seen in the light of the NBA's (unacknowledged) dependence on the crimi-
nal image in order to stage its own managerial heroism, the fact that some of the
stars have refused to fully accommodate themselves to brand imperatives is not so
much a problem as a recurrent opportunity to present the dramatic tension be-
tween management and racialized insubordinates. Consonant with the brand's image
as benevolent maker of responsible social beings, the NBA seems to have settled
on an approach that includes an internal orientation to the players in order to help
them "grow" as people, as well as a public amplification of the league's manage-
rial efforts. The brand/company is gentle, a supportive framework for moving and
celebrating the perpetual transition of unproductive, unruly subjects to productive
citizens (Kelley, 1998). This fact also helps to explain, as well, the ways that, as I
discussed earlier, the Black men at NBA corporate rationalize their participation in
the project.

   In order to understand the ways that this orientation manifests in the con-
sumable NBA product, we might consider the presentation of NBA coaches, who
are, after all, the embodiment of on-the-court management. According to the
Newsweek piece mentioned earlier, the NBA responded to the "rogue" player prob-
lem by investing in management, by turning "to higher-profile, higher-paid coaches
with more clout. The result [was] a culture clash between authoritarian, mostly
white coaches and their brash, young, mostly black talent" (Starr & Samuels, 1997,
p. 28). In response, many of these coaches changed their management styles. Former
Lakers coach Del Harris, for example, reflected on his transformation:

> "I used to yell, but I don't anymore. . . . I learned you have a much better
> success rate when you treat the players with respect." 76ers [and now Pistons]

coach Larry Brown . . . is trying a different—and gentler—approach too. (Starr & Samuels, 1997, p. 29)

The NBA also sought to move the relationship between the coach-as-manager and player-as-product-and-employee more toward the center of its televisual presence. Responding to a 14% ratings drop in 1999, the NBA pushed coaches to allow microphones and cameras in the locker rooms and sideline discussions during select broadcasts. Although many coaches resisted and resented the prying, the NBA thought that adding this element of management-in-action to the presentation would bring back the fans (Sheridan, 2000). Although I have no solid evidence one way or another about the success of these framings with fans as such, the celebritization of coaches as managers has had clear resonance outside of basketball circles and in curiously familiar ways, at that.

Consider Phil Jackson, the epitome of the NBA's kinder, gentler approach to coaching and management. Beginning in 1989 with the Chicago Bulls (during the MJ era) and now with the Los Angeles Lakers (in the Shaquille O'Neal and Kobe Bryant era), Jackson has won the NBA championship nine times. Known as the "Zen master" for his selective use of Native American and Buddhist mysticism and spirituality in his coaching practice, Jackson has become an enigmatic celebrity of broad appeal. In the wake of his NBA successes and two best-selling books, Jackson's wisdom has been repeatedly sought by business journals. In a clear parallel with the general literature on diversity management, the business articles suggest that Jackson's main impediment is the unruliness of his employees' egos, which, when managed correctly, are transformed into collective success.[15] Consider the following examples, particularly the way they celebrate Jackson's cultural approach to achieving discipline and focus in his workforce.

- The journal *Executive Excellence* explains that Jackson's leadership style helps "followers to achieve their goals and aspirations. Jackson is an 'invisible leader' who, by the example of his own selfless, thoughtful behavior, helped the Chicago Bulls' egotistical players 'embrace a vision in which the group imperative takes precedence over individual glory'" (O'Toole, 2000, p. 10).
- In a 1996 headnote, the journal *Sales & Marketing Management* offered this: "Wonder how to manage superstars with outsize egos? Just ask NBA champion Phil Jackson" (Cohen, p. 52).
- In a seeming follow-up to this point, *Inc.* magazine wanted to know how Jackson, as a "teacher" and "counselor," trained his players to avoid the "abuse of anger" in the interest of team goals and how that translates into the "handling of key employees" (Welles, 1996, p. 35). In the same article, Phil Jackson, speaking about a particularly violent playoff game, noted that his "players reverted to their primitive instinct. To use force" (p. 35).
- *Industry Week* describes Brian Moskal's profile of Jackson as uncovering "a managerial style that uses Native American prayer, Zen Buddhist awareness, and commonsense communication techniques to mold the diverse backgrounds and clashing egos of talented individuals into a selfless, high-performance team" (1996, p. 6).
- *Fortune* spoke with Jackson about the "art of making even superstars like Michael Jordan team players" (Lieber, 1995, p. 218).

I interpret these passages through a lens similar to that of Cheryl Cole and David Andrews, who have noted that mainstream media representations of Black NBA players are typically framed in such a way that "those images are never simply passively seen but are read through a racially inflected discourse that renders visible race through moral and characterological inadequacies" (1996, p. 150). We could certainly say a lot here about the ways that anxiety over indiscriminate, selfish, and unproductive Black irreverence is transcoded through sports and managerialism into seemingly laudable goals such as teamwork and winning. In Gordon's terms again, we might begin by noting that managing diversity often entails the maintenance of "systems that produce racializing effects, often in the name of some matter more urgent than redressing racial subordination, such as rewarding 'merit,' valuing diversity, or enhancing economic competitiveness" (Gordon, 1995, p. 17–18). Indeed, for the NBA of the late 1990s through the beginning of this century, concerns about Blackness have appeared mostly through a set of codes that perpetuate the old dichotomies. The positively valenced characteristics—that is, the diversity that the NBA celebrates—include "urban," politically neutral hip-hop, and coolness. These are counterbalanced by a series of threats to the inside: indecent rap music; unrestrained tempers—in Jackson's own words, "primitive impulses"; and, perhaps most of all, the team-destroying narcissism or egos of stars.

The dominant frame through which Jackson's managerial expertise is solicited and presented echoes both the internal NBA approach to "product" management and the diversity-management subtext in which racialized subjects in the business world are a potential threat to productivity, requiring new management approaches. There are, to be sure, numerous "identificatory possibilities created through the figure of the [Black] NBA superstar" (Cole & Andrews, 1996, p. 141). And yet, the language used in business texts to value Jackson's contributions makes clear a preferred reading of the NBA spectacle that parallels the way that diversity management works as a palliative to (White) anxieties about race. In that sense, I am arguing that management also transcodes Whiteness, making it parenthetical to, or even disappear into, more transcendent collectivities such as the team, the brand, or society.

The NBA exemplifies a broader phenomenon in which explicit talk of Blackness as the object of White control can be made to disappear into the language of management, and this phenomenon has a number of effects. For one, as the celebration of controlled diversity increases and as the equation between Whiteness and management becomes fainter, the perspective of management appears less and less biased by race and more and more democratic at its core. The brand, like society, comes to have a logic that encodes Whiteness although appearing transcendent of race. It follows, therefore, that Black coaches or executives might echo the Jacksonian sentiment discussed previously. One Black business manager at the NBA exemplified and illustrated these embedded effects in his description of how the NBA compassionately addresses player discipline:

> [We] give the players a little bit of space to be autonomous, to be their own person. You know, the league could have come down and said to Allen Iverson "You can't do a rap album." That's the wrong approach. He can do what he wants. "It's not something we like, it's not good for the brand, it's not good for yourself, and I don't know if that's how you want to position yourself,

but at the same time, it's not illegal; it's not something you cannot do. And it's not popular, it's not going to be popular among the people you work with and work for." And sometimes that's all the pressure that's needed for someone to back off and think twice. Next time he probably will do another album and he probably will use profanity, but he might think twice about yelling about women or gays or whatever it might be because he realizes, you know, "I have to be responsible to someone, and in this case maybe I should just hold back and do something else." And I think that's fair. You know there's some organizations that would have just come back and said "You're suspended. You can't do this or you can't do that." And that's not how our society works. (January 24, 2001)

In the example of the NBA as a project of diversity management, specifically racialized categories of White and Black are subsumed into a larger unity that attempts to erase antagonism. This is a familiar formula in results-oriented, competitive institutions (sport, the corporation), especially insofar as one accepts productivity and winning as unproblematic social values, and where management is the arbiter of good and bad behavior. Management is "colorblind," in a sense, because it assesses individual social value, not by anything so crass and retrograde as skin color, but by the productivity of actions and attitudes, by an individual's ability and willingness to line up behind the brand and its blurred synonymy with humanity, civilization, and the corporation. It is along these lines that management continues the history of comforting the unmarked majority through the policing of "others," while failing to reflect on—let alone challenge—the larger social and historical causes of racism from which dominant White interests continue to benefit tacitly.

Conclusion

Management, in all its glorified neutrality, is still what most people believe protects them from the street, from chaos, from unregulated decision making by the unwashed and the lowly.

–Avery Gordon, "The Work of Corporate Culture," (1995, p. 21)

Earlier in this article I posed a question about the relationship among management in general, managed cultural representations, and subjectivity. I asked, what are the relations of ruling that unite a strategy for disciplining racialized subjects with disciplined representations of race? And this question arose out of a discussion of business-driven cultural developments, inside and outside of corporations, that have occurred over the past quarter century and, also, in relation to the changing terms by which subjects in that blurred terrain are called into meaningful social action. As a case in point, the NBA illustrates how these sorts of strategic blurrings can work from the inside out to diffuse a reassuring logic of managerialism.

The admittedly partial discussion of the NBA offered here brings into focus a cluster of articulations—sets of practices "by which [a] particular structure of relationships" (Grossberg, 1992, p. 397), although malleable, is held on its particular course, or governed, we might say, by the force of management. I have shown, in particular, how the NBA brand—as an ideological, racialized cultural

logic, along with its attendant practices—articulates the inside of the corporation with the popular outside. The scope of this force, however, far exceeds the localized will to insulate itself against chaos shared by those who work in the interest of (NBA) management. White anxieties about race inside the NBA, to the extent that they find expression and resolution in the NBA brand, thereby become available as a logic that can be applied in other anxious registers of social life—that is, among fans, sponsors, and the general community of managers. The NBA's racial project stands as a solution, a disciplined representation that helps to produce our culture's current racial formation. My conclusion to this article and my answer to its central question, therefore, begin with the observation that the NBA is, in many ways, a management spectacle that continually redefines the potentially unruly and unproductive Black body as the problem that it perpetually solves. Whiteness, in the form of managerialism, is the dominant perspective from which these relations of ruling emerge. I want now to elaborate and generalize this observation by paying particular attention to the sports framework for this specific kind of diffusion of diversity management into everyday life.

In their assessment of how "sport leaks into everyday life," Toby Miller and Alec McHoul note, first of all, that sport in modernity

> is dedicated to "Merit, Justice, Desire, Will." For justice has a dialectical relationship with merit, and will with desire. These are central precepts of modernity: not merely its individualistic, accumulationist side . . . but also the more collective side of the modern, with the desiring subject's wishes considered alongside the needs of others: the "nice" part of teamwork and discipline. (1998, p. 83)

In other words, sport mobilizes and occupies a narrative structure that perpetually remakes itself as a technology for articulating certain modes of individual agency with disciplined social enterprises. And a particularly consistent theme of this linkage stems from the molding of individual desire into a will toward group victory, and then mistaking and promoting the result as justice—a theme that the previous passage's invocation of teamwork and discipline places firmly in the context of recent management developments.

As both metaphors about social life and literalizations of it, sports have a long history as vehicles for representing seemingly disparate social elements as natural unities. In Miller and McHoul's words, this capacity of sports hinges on the fact that "sports are both inside and outside the everyday" (1998, p. 85). The unique effectiveness of this peculiar double character is tied to the ways that sports (especially team sports) offer multiple and ambiguous possibilities for group identification and, thus, an ever-handy analogy for managerialist impulses. For example, consider the different implications of a) a basketball player exclaiming, "We won!" in a postgame celebration; b) a fan, phoning a friend after the same game, and shouting ecstatically into the phone, "We won! We won!"; and c) someone who knows little of basketball, who nonetheless, after reading in the paper that the U.S. basketball team won a match over the Iraqi team, thinks to himself, "Oh! Good, we won!"[16] The variable inclusiveness of the "we" in these statements, and sport's rather unique cultural capacity for enabling and constraining such identifications, explains, in particular, a great deal about why sports are so popular as media–marketing vehicles. For example, Jeremy Rifkin (2000) notes

a growing awareness among management and marketing experts alike that
establishing so-called communities of interest is the most effective way to
capture and hold customer attention and create lifetime relationships. . . .
The key to creating communities of interest is to plan events, gatherings and
other activities that bring customers together to share their common interest
in your company's brand.

Understood in this light, their signifying properties make sports one of the most
ideal interpellation devices for marketers trying to communicate with groups of
consumers as discrete markets, especially in the age of branding, in which the
notion of "'corporate citizenship' links consumption to good civic life by project-
ing an image of corporations as civil societies unto themselves" (Maharaj, p. 239n).
The corporation and I can constitute a we, as can the corporation, the nation, and
myself, but we can also be myself and the other members of the target market. This
sports-specific flexibility has serious social consequences.

In her examination of the power of Nike's brand, Celia Lury theorizes that
the device of the brand makes possible new relationships between producers and
consumers, a fact that should direct us toward new kinds of questions, namely,

what types of activity, what kinds of movement, which bodies, are coming
to be seen as fit for this space? . . . What relationships are possible between
the actualization of place in traces and the prescriptions of space in brands?"
(1999, p. 522)

There is, as Lury argues and as the example of the NBA illustrates, a politics to this
we, because every we is constituted by its exclusion of a they. Whereas the NBA
might be an extreme example in our current mediascape, its very prominence also
makes it a broadly resonant cultural force. From its vantage point, the NBA has
honed a representational strategy that exploits a distinction between the we of fan
identifications with teams or players (each with distinct brand identities) and a we
that unites those of us invested in a moral vision of productive citizenship and its
relation to modes of accumulation, winning, and profit.

The mass-mediated NBA brand, no doubt, makes possible myriad we's as it
is produced, distributed, and consumed across the globe. As evidenced by David
Stern and the NBA employees I interviewed, however, one we that is central, if
somewhat unconscious, to NBA corporate understandings of itself is the we of the
American White imaginary. Consequently, I want to combine a concern about the
relations of NBA players to their productive work with an additional concern about
the relations of viewers and fans to the representations of managed players. In one
respect, humanizing the product, as it were, seems intended to make possible a
(White) postracist identification with deracialized players. In so doing, however,
and much like diversity management more generally, it speaks to and capitalizes
on those aspects of the White imaginary—increasingly under erasure—that see
Blackness as warranting control. As my analysis has shown, the NBA brand seems
designed to make identifications with the management impulse in relation to the
problem possible, perhaps even more so than White identifications with Jordanesque
employees. That is, it solicits an audience gaze that can enjoy the product by iden-
tifying with management.

The NBA presents and thinks of itself as a kind of solution to racial discord
and to the problem of Black disenfranchisement in particular. It does so while

presuming as transcendent the values of winning and profit maximization, and it thereby fails in recognizing both that it is a producer of race and that its (White) anxiety is symptomatic of the problem. At a broad level, then, I think the NBA stands as a disturbing and prominent example of management becoming consumable as popular culture, popularizing, that is, a management perspective in relation to troublesome, unproductive subjects. In this presentation of managing Black men as dramatic popular culture, the NBA contributes to a subtle continuation of a presumed (and reassuring) link between Whiteness and management while conveniently, even strategically, avoiding altogether specific questions about race. By extension, the NBA example suggests not only that management leaks into everyday life but also that there is a flow back and forth: the corporate outside—here as cultural representation—exerts an identifiable influence over the experience of management (difference) inside. Thus, in conjunction with the mystifying discursive terrain of liberated workers and consumers, the bottom line remains taut because, after all and once again, it is management that has been liberated.

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Notes

[1]According to trends reported by the U.S. Department of Justice, Black men now have a 1 in 3 chance of spending time in prison during their lifetimes (Chaddock, 2003).

[2]In 2002, 78% of NBA players were African American, followed by the National Football League with 65%, and Major-League Baseball with 10% (Lapchick, 2003, p. 14).

[3]Robin D. G. Kelley (1998) also makes this point.

[4]The NBA faced a ratings and revenue slump after the 1998–99 season, largely because of the retirement of Michael Jordan. Nonetheless, as Hoover's Online (2003) reports in the lead paragraph of its NBA profile, "the NBA is shaking off its fiscal and image problems with a little magic from the Washington Wizards, which added superstar Michael Jordan to its roster after he came out of retirement for the second time in 2001." Of course, Jordan retired again after the 2002–03 season.

[5]These figures are roughly accurate. In 2000, 75% of the NBA's professional employees were White and 12% were African American. In 2002, those figures were, respectively, 72% and 17% (Lapchick, 2003, p. 18).

[6]These changes in corporate culture are most germane, of course, to the elite Western professional–managerial classes and to those aspiring to enter them. The global race to the bottom for cheap labor and resources has meant that the corporate culture revolution and "Just Do It!" attitude adjustments are only possible because so many people in the world still toil in industrial squalor or, less fortunate still, have been abandoned completely by the glistening global economy.

[7]This fact helps explain a general explosion of sports programming during the same period, that ESPN calculated this way: "In 1994, a family with cable TV had access to 21,000 hours of sports programming per year. [In 2000], that same family will have access to 86,000 hours of sports on TV, or more than 235 hours per day" (James, 2000).

[8]"In 1987, the Hudson Institute issued a report entitled *Workforce 2000: Work and Workers for the 21st Century* that has since become one of the most cited sources in popular business literature. *Workforce 2000* forecast that, by the year 2000, 85% of the labor force growth (new entrants) will be comprised of White women and people of color, including immigrants" (Gordon, 1995, p. 9).

[9]In its most cynical versions, diversity management consists of an isolated workshop or two focused on "tolerating difference"; at its most sincere, diversity management involves a holistic approach to ensuring that all aspects of corporate life are oriented toward a "valuing" of diversity.

[10]M.H. Abrams defines representations as textual

formations which are the 'ideological products' or 'cultural constructs' of a particular era. . . . These cultural and ideological representations . . . serve mainly to reproduce, confirm, and propagate the power structures of domination and subordination which characterize a given society. (1993, p. 249)

Indeed, cultural critics work from the often tacit notion that the politics of textual representation are revealed in their complex relations to realms of social existence in which actual bodies of persons representing various constituencies struggle to gain or preserve their relative interests.

[11] See Cole & Andrews (1996) for a good history of what they call "superstar trouble" in the NBA.

[12]Elsewhere, the *Newsweek* article (Starr & Samuels, 1997) seems to undermine the generation hypothesis, admitting that "bad behavior was not invented by Latrell Sprewell," who was 27 in 1997. In fact, at 22, Allen Iverson is the only one of the featured, bad-behaving players who is truly young. The other players in *Newsweek*'s "NBA Rogues' Gallery" are Charles Barkley (34), Derrick Coleman (30), Nick Van Exel (26), Isiah Rider (26), and Dennis Rodman (36).

[13]Theresa Walton (2001) contrasts the sustained media focus on the "public sphere" Sprewell/Carlesimo episode with the comparatively tolerant disinterest shown toward the rampant instances of "domestic" violence against women committed by athletes. My argument extends and elaborates Walton's observations that the Sprewell case garnered exceptional attention not only because it was a specifically "workplace incident," but also because it dramatized a "threat to (White male) authority" (2001, p. 352).

[14]According to Gordon, for example,

> diversity management rarely attributes increased rates of White female labor force participation to the economic crises of the mid-1970s, preferring the more idealistic explanation of heightened feminist consciousness. It rarely links the presence of a "rainbow" of Latino and Asian workers, domestic and immigrant, to global political-economic policies and struggles. And, of course, it spends an awful lot of energy, precisely through its relationship to affirmative action, rejecting the view that middle-class status is a highly *politically* dependent condition. (1995, p. 16)

[15]Davis and Harris identify the following general theme in mid-1990s scholarly literature: "media show sports participation, with the guidance of European-American coaches, as helping African American athletes to find salvation from themselves and thus from (their tendency toward) deviance" (1998, p. 166).

[16]This discussion (and my eventual appropriation) of sport's unique capacity to produce such a range of we's is a paraphrase of Miller and McHoul's (1998, pp. 85–86) summary of Harvey Sacks' (1995) work.