

## Athleticising young black lives

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# THE HARD FACE OF 'SOFT BIGOTRY': CONFUSING EDUCATION WITH COMMERCE IN HIGH SCHOOL SPORTS

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## **Abstract**

Informed by Critical Race Theory, this analysis uniquely exposes the deeply racist ideology of high school sports; an ideology that disproportionately and systematically channels young Black lives into high revenue generating sports on the promise of upward social mobility, increased scholastic opportunity, and respect. Utilising a mixed methodology, this chapter exposes: 1) How standardised testing agendas - as powerful state-mandated segregation systems - disproportionately exclude young Black lives from realising success through 'traditional' academic measures, 2) The institutionalised promotion of high-revenue sports as the most genuine means through which a young Black student can experience success, praise, hope and aspiration in schooling, and 3) The damaging and enduring pattern of institutional racism that is participation in high revenue school sports. The analysis concludes that the entrapment of young Black lives in the athletic department is *not* a result of Black persons seeking respect, expanded opportunities and social mobility, but the White institution's manufacturing of an athleticised Black identity that ultimately serves White interest.

*Key Words: Critical Race Theory; interest convergence; standardised testing; high school sports; high revenue sport; racism*

## Introduction

No other area in the last five decades has seen more sustained and visible growth for young Black<sup>[1]</sup> men and women than high-revenue generating sports (Beamon & Messer, 2013; Rhoden, 2007). Black players dominate the racial make up of several of the high-revenue major league sport and athletic teams on both sides of the Atlantic; constituting approximately 69 per cent of players in the National Football League, 74 per cent of the National Basketball Association (Lapchick, 2015: 2016), and 32% of the English Premier League (Harris, 2012). As a percentage of the total population, however, Black males represent approximately 6% of the U.S. population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010) and less than two per cent of the total British population (ONS, 2011).

Given the dominance of Black males in high revenue sports, it is perhaps unsurprising that two in every five of the world's 'top 100 highest paid athletes' are Black males; and *all* of the 'top ten' earners played in either the NFL or NBA (Forbes, 2016). The tennis player, Serena Williams, was the *only* female athlete of colour to make the 'top 100' list, and one-of-only-two women listed (Forbes, 2016). The commanding presence of Black players in high-revenue high-earning sports, supported by a 24/7 media bombardment of Black – and almost exclusively male – athletes, ensures that dangerous racially-loaded assumptions in sport remain firmly established; i.e. Black athletes have a 'natural' athleticism; a unique and powerful 'genetic' prowess; 'gifted' with a physical superiority that is unmatched and unchallenged by other races (Entine, 2000; Herrnstein & Murray, 1994). Equally dangerous however is the assumption that high revenue sports are an easier (or only) route to success and respect for young Black lives.

The media often mute, or ignore entirely, the accomplishments and successes of the Black middle class, which further serves to exacerbate the 'athleticising of Black lives' within societies on *both* sides of the Atlantic (Hoberman, 1997). The active muting of Black successes outside of high revenue-generating sports, teamed with the popular (but fallacious) white-dominated media portrayal of young Black lives as having a culture of crime and moral degeneracy, ensures that young Black children are encouraged to almost single-mindedly pursue sport as a realistic (often only) means of upwards mobility and societal respect. In a society that frequently neglects, degrades, and destroys the value of Black skin, young Black children find respect, self-worth, and prestige within their school's sports programs and athletic departments.

To the detriment of many young Black lives, the school system, like the media, not only *promote* participation in high-revenue sports, but also actively *recruit* children into sport as an 'alternate' means of achievement. Sport is utilised as a one-way cultural integration model for the Black child specifically, positioning the group within the athletic (rather than academic) culture of the education system.

This chapter utilises Critical Race Theory to reveal how standardised testing acts as an institutional primer to an athleticised identity and exposes how stakeholders within the education system manufacture and instill an athleticised identity on young Black lives. Set within one diverse Floridian city, this chapter uses both state level standardised testing data and participant narrative to illustrate how the school system: 1) embraces an ideology of supposed meritocracy as justification

for an alternative ‘success’ system specifically for Black children; 2) ignores the enduring patterning of institutional racism that is participation in ‘high-revenue’ sports; and 3) denies the systemic oppression that is young Black ‘athletic labour’ on the field, court and track.

### **Sunshine: Background and Sources**

The data presented in this chapter are derived from a year-long ethnography at ‘Sunshine High School’ in Florida<sup>[1]</sup> (hereafter ‘Sunshine’). The study sought to explore the manifestations of the enduring ‘achievement gap’ between Black and White (non-Hispanic/Latino[a]) high school students at one site. Like many areas in the ‘Deep South’, both Sunshine and the State of Florida have a troubled history of slavery and racist violence. Initially dubbed “*the White school*”, Sunshine was ordered to integrate in the 1960’s and has remained an economically and racially diverse city to this day.

In 2010-11, the year the data in this chapter was collated, Sunshine had approximately 1,800 students enrolled. Approximately 48% of the student body were classified as White, 37% Black, 8% Hispanic/Latino(a) and 6% as ‘other’. Some 40% of Sunshine’s student body was eligible for a free or reduced price lunch program.

The qualitative data presented in this chapter draw on participant observation, narrative interview, and informal dialogue; and pay specific attention to the counter-stories and experiences of Black participants. The state level quantitative attainment data are taken from the Florida Department of Education’s K-20 Information Portal (FLDOE, 2017), specifically utilising: 1) Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (‘FCAT’) data for ‘Reading’ (2009), and 2) Florida Standards Assessments (‘FSA’) data for ‘English Language Arts’ (2016).

### **Critical Race Theory and High School Sports**

Critical Race Theory (see also Introduction Chapter and Chapter 2 by Hylton in this volume) challenges institutional claims to “objectivity, meritocracy, color and gender blindness, race and gender neutrality, and equal opportunity” (Solórzano, 1998:122). With its origins in U.S. legal studies during the 1970s, CRT has developed to arguably become the *most* important perspective on racism within the field of education, making important contributions on both sides of the Atlantic (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005; Gillborn, 2005, 2006, 2008, 2014; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Ledesma & Calderón, 2015; Leonardo, 2009; Parker & Lynn, 2006; Parker & Stovall, 2004; Tate, 1997; Taylor, Gillborn & Ladson-Billings, 2016).

Specific to sport, scholars such as Hylton (2010, 2009, see also Chapter 2 in this volume) and Hartmann (2000) have comprehensively outlined CRT as an important and much needed theoretical tool; arguing that manifestations of racism within sport can reveal more about racial inequalities in society more broadly than many other arenas. Whilst there are commentators who would argue that sport *can* have a positive effect on racial equality (Novy-Williams, 2013; Ross, 2004), educational outcomes (Crosnoe, 2002; Farb & Matjasko, 2012; Hartmann, 2008; Veliz & Shakib 2012), and disaffected youths (see Leonard 2000), a CRT perspective

offers a critical interpretation of *whose* needs are served by a disproportionate *presence* of young Black lives in high-revenue sports.

'Interest Convergence,' one of the key principles of CRT, would contend that White institutions *only* tolerate and/or encourage the advancement of people of colour, when they *simultaneously* promote White interest (see Bell, 1980; Crenshaw et al., 1995; Donnor, 2005). A well-published example of interest convergence in the field of sport is that of the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday (Ladson-Billings, 1998). The State of Arizona was scheduled to host the 1993 Super Bowl, but, although an executive order was passed in 1986 establishing the Martin Luther King as a public holiday, the then Governor of Arizona claimed it was 'too costly' and refused to recognise the holiday for state workers and agencies. A number of civil rights groups, activists, and their supporters, began to boycott businesses and functions in the state, to include the NBA All-Star Game. The NFL even relocated the 1993 Super Bowl to California – a move that was said to have cost Arizona \$350 million in business revenue (Nadrich, 2010). When the Governor reversed his decision (and designated the King Holiday an 'official' state holiday in 1993), the NFL reversed theirs, permitting Arizona to host the 1996 Super Bowl.

Critical race theorists would argue that it was *not* the state's support of civil rights, or indeed the commitment to the advancement of people of colour, that changed the Arizona governor's mind, but that the State of Arizona's interests (to enhance and preserve revenue) converged with that of the Black community and its supporters (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Similarly, in the context of high school sports, CRT contends that schools will only accommodate and encourage the advancement of young Black lives, when the interests of those lives converge with, and reinforce, the interests of the (White) institution (e.g. revenue for the school's athletics programs, championship title wins, prestige of college athletic scholarships).

Whilst it is accepted that participation in school sports *can* be a positive driver for change, this chapter vehemently argues that the over-representation of Black athletes in high-revenue sports is *not* a misnomer, and should *not* be taken as evidence that racism no longer exists or that high-revenue sport's are now 'post-racial'.

With a critical understanding of *whose* needs could be served by the disproportionate *presence* of young Black lives in high-revenue sports, the remainder of this chapter will: 1) Illustrate how standardised testing regimes serve as an institutional primer to an athleticised Black identity; 2) Outline the powerful narratives and processes that disproportionately manufacture young Black athletes in schools; and 3) Expose the enduring pattern of institutional racism that is young Black labour on a field, court and track.

### **1) Standardised Testing and the Athleticising of Young Black Lives**

This section offers a critical discussion of how standardised testing agendas - as powerful state-mandated segregation systems - disproportionately exclude young Black lives from realising success through 'traditional' academic measures.

For many Black children in the U.S., success in high-revenue sports is perceived as the most realistic means of upward social mobility, increased

scholastic opportunity, and respect. The seemingly innocuous selection of children according to 'merit' in schools (i.e. 'setting/streaming' by ability, and/or identification of 'gifted'/academically 'talented' students), and the state mandated testing agendas often employed to confirm such 'merit,' are a common feature of a policy epidemic that has swept through nations on both sides of the Atlantic (Apple, 2001; Au, 2009; Lingard & Lewis, 2016). Words like 'accountability,' 'improvement,' 'progress,' and 'responsibility,' feature frequently in the discourses that accompany standardised testing agendas (i.e. 'No Child Left Behind', 'Every Student Succeeds', 'Pupil Attainment Measure', and 'Education Excellence Everywhere'). However, the street-level manifestations of such policies are often anything but accountable, or responsible.

'High-stake' standardised testing agendas in American schools disproportionately exclude young Black lives from realising success through traditional academic measures (Darling-Hammond 2004; Oakes 2005). Standardised testing serves to ensure that schools, at a very young age, encourage the focus of young Black children away from 'traditional academics', towards sport as an 'alternate' success system. When the education system designates children as academic 'failures' (i.e. failed to demonstrate proficiency), it is not unreasonable for a child to seek success through other (often non-academic) aspects of schooling, to include participation in sports. However, in addition to athleticising young lives, standardised testing agendas - as powerful state-mandated segregation systems - reinforce the dangerous binary that posits intellectual and athletic capacities as being incongruent.

In Florida, and across the U.S. more broadly, there is widespread use of *single* high-stake test in English and Math to determine whether a child is 'eligible' for promotion to the next grade, is to be 'retained' in grade, or even 'deny' high school graduation (section 1008.25[5], Florida Statutes). For example, should a student 'fail' to demonstrate proficiency, on the state's 'English Language Arts' test as administered in Grade 10 (age 16), they can be *denied* graduation with a standard high school diploma; irrespective of whether the student has demonstrated proficiency in other standardised test requirements *and* successfully passed a full complement of high school classes (usually a 24 credit program).

The raw reality of this high stake testing regime for current Floridian students – the graduating 'Class of 2018' – is that only 30% of Black high school students satisfied Florida's ELA testing requirement in 2016 (compared to 61% of White, and 46% of Hispanic 10<sup>th</sup> grade students). However, for those seven-in-ten young Black lives who failed to demonstrate proficiency on the state's standardised test measures, the awareness of standardised testing's powerful ability to deny graduation became a damaging reality many years earlier.

Florida like other states, mandate that standardised tests be administered in every grade from the third through tenth. The 'Class of 2018' sat their first standardised English (FCAT Reading) test in 2009, when they were in the third grade. For the Black third-grader (2009), the very harsh reality was that only one-in-two of their group were deemed to be 'meeting expectations' (56%) on the state-issued Reading test (compared to 83% of White, and 64% of Hispanic 3<sup>rd</sup> grade students). For the current Black Class of 2018, by the time they were just 8 to 9

years old, high school graduation was already in statistical doubt for half of their peer group. Whilst it is not to say there is *no* potential for a young Black third-grade child to challenge the trend and excel against the institutional odds, the quantitative reality is that the one-in-two success rate of Black third-graders became less than a one-in-three success rate; by the time the group reached the tenth grade.

Perhaps then, the dominance of Black athletes in the U.S. as outlined in the introduction to this chapter, has more to do with the closing down of alternatives than any spurious 'natural' sporting prowess. Perhaps also, the supposed "pledge of allegiance" to a Black athletic "clan pride" (Herrnstein & Murray, 1994) and the claimed "rejection" of academics as being a "White" activity (Ogbu, 1987), is more accurately a *rational* reaction to a White hegemonic system that damagingly affirms, at a *very* young age, that high school graduation via traditional academic measures of success would be an unrealistic goal, or credible method of upwards mobility.

## **2) Manufacturing Young Black Athleticised Lives**

This section outlines the damaging institutional narratives that promote high-revenue sports as the most genuine means through which a young Black student can experience success, praise, hope and aspiration.

Whilst there *are* some individuals that will grow up with the belief that they were 'born' with athletic talent and physical prowess, there are many more whose schoolteachers, administrators and other school-employed personnel *manufacture* and *instil* this belief into vulnerable young Black lives, whom the education system has designated academic failures.

At Sunshine, athletic staff, administrators and teachers alike were regularly found profiling Black students as *being* athletes: having a 'natural' ("*built for it*"), 'biological' ("*fast-twitch muscles*"), or 'God-given' aptitude ("*chosen*") for sport. One of the football coaches, a Black man himself, suggested that Black athletic prowess was a form of Darwinism; an evolutionary process based on a natural selection of the "*strongest*" and "*fittest*," serving to affirm Black physical supremacy over time:

*"When I think of what our ancestors had to endure to survive, it was survival of the fittest... I tell my kids (football team), they are ancestors of the strongest peoples on earth."*

Sunshine's athletic director, a White male, universally agreed with the "*fact*" that Black students have a physical dominance that is unrivalled at the school:

*"Black kids are just built in a way that allows them to succeed in sport... height, their muscle mass... Physical characteristics that allow them to jump higher lift heavier weights... run faster, for longer... The number of Black kids here (athletic program)... is testament to this fact."*

When educationalists affirm such views – despite an absence of credible scientific evidence and the dangerously stereotypical nature of the assertions (i.e. Carrington & McDonald, 2001; Hayes and Sugden, 1999) – they simultaneously discourage academic aspiration (Harrison & Lawrence, 2004), often inadvertently, through

silence. Within such stereotypes, young Black students are repeatedly encouraged and rewarded, for conforming to the stereotypes allocated to them by prominent and often well respected figures in the school system; giving priority to their roles as athletes as a means of upward social mobility, prestige, and future economic security.

The stereotyping starts early in a young Black child's school career, often coinciding with the introduction of standardised testing. According to one Black student athlete at Sunshine:

*"When I was 8, Mr [teacher] told me - I remember it clear - he say 'Son, how tall are you?' and I said 'tall'. He told me, right there, I'd shoot hoops.... I been playing ever since."*

Of note, no White student at the school described being 'encouraged to participate' based on their physical characteristics. Also troubling, was that no Black student athlete described being encouraged to pursue any sport outside of high revenue-generating sports (American football, basketball, or track); suggesting a very specific athletic integration for young Black lives in the county's schools.

The particular *need* for Black youth participation in sport was frequently discussed by school personnel, and was almost exclusively justified on the grounds of behaviour management and/or academic 'failure' of their group specifically. A White football coach at Sunshine suggested:

*"Kids need structure, discipline... role models (referring to Sunshine's majority-Black American football team). They need a reason to come to school... Many don't do well in their classes and so they get disruptive.... [They] need a positive influence... Football is a positive influence... Keep's em focused, outta trouble, keeps them coming to school... off the streets... We give them pride (athletic department).... celebrate in their wins... Many of our kids go on to many great things."*

The assumption that high revenue sports are an easier path to success was pervasive. It was a narrative that imprisoned the hearts and minds of many of the young Black lives at Sunshine. One student athlete bleakly suggested his only options were to *"play ball or flip burgers."* The student went on to explain that college was not an option without an athletic scholarship (both in terms of overall application success and affordability). One coach was noted suggesting that high school sports would *"open up that door to y'all"*; before questioning whether *"Y'all want the NBA to come and beat down your doors boys?"*

The misleading promise of an athletic scholarship was disproportionality sold to young Black athletes at Sunshine, and was promoted as the most genuine means through which a young Black student can experience success, praise, hope and aspiration in an education system. Equally concerning, is that high revenue sports were *also* sold as an opportunity to uplift an athlete's family from poverty. As one Black coach suggested, high revenue sports provided an opportunity to *"get yo momma outta the [Sunshine] hood."*



Almost without exception, Sunshine's young Black athletes - who had already experienced years of degradation through the 'failing' of standardised tests - were conditioned to believe they would have had "*no future*" if they did not develop and capitalise upon, their athletic talents at school. For the fifty per cent of the Black 'Class of 2018,' who saw their educational trajectory profoundly restricted at the age of 8 or 9, the promise of respect, acclamation and wealth through sport, both within and beyond the school years, is a powerful one that perpetuates the enduring patterning of institutional racism in high-revenue school sports.

### **3) Interest Convergence: Confusing Education with Commerce**

This section exposes the enduring pattern of institutional racism that result from the interests of the (White) institution converging with advancement of young Black lives.

There is a damaging institutional complacency surrounding the structural positioning of young Black athletes as the most prominent (often only) symbols of Black success within schools and society more broadly. The visual dominance of Black players in high-revenue sports across the county was undeniable. Despite the percentage of persons identifying as 'Black' in Sunshine's city limits being 19% (US Census reference omitted to preserve anonymity), Black players dominated the high revenue-generating sports teams at the school. Sunshine's biggest 'earners', in terms of revenue generated for the school's athletic program, were said to be football and basketball; both drew committed support in terms of fee-paying spectators and sponsorship from both within and beyond the school walls.

Approximately 85% of the athletes participating in high-revenue sports at Sunshine were Black. And yet, equally popular team sports (including softball, baseball and lacrosse) had a distinctly different ('Whiter') racial make-up. The vast majority of sports programs offered at high schools in the U.S. do not generate revenue (i.e. fee-paying audience and/or company or private sponsorship), to include Sunshine's softball, baseball and lacrosse programs. Approximately 11% of 'low/no-revenue' generating students were Black, with the majority playing high-school baseball. Baseball, whilst *not* lucrative for Sunshine State specifically, remains one of the top revenue generating major-league sports associations in the world. Like football and basketball, playing baseball at high school also holds the pervasive (albeit mostly fallacious) promise of a full athletic scholarship to 'play ball' at college as outlined in the previous section.

The racial patterning of participation in high-revenue and low/no-revenue sports as demonstrated at Sunshine is *not* a coincidence. The racialised participation in high school sports is evidence of accountability policies (high-stake standardised testing) that disproportionately fail Black students, severely limit educational outcomes (graduation), and affirm the presence of an athleticised integration model for young Black lives specifically. Despite claims to the contrary (i.e. how 'committed' the school system is to advancing its young Black lives through sport), each of these processes ultimately serve the interests and perpetuation of White hegemony, by: 1) reducing academic competition at school for White children (i.e. by classifying young Black students 'failures' in standardised tests), 2) reducing future competition in the workplace for young White adults (by utilising

standardised test instruments as a barrier to graduation that disproportionately affects young Black lives), and 3) affording the White child increased opportunities in school by utilising higher-revenue sports to fund lower/no-revenue sports – as discussed next.

During the Football season, the city's stadium can accommodate several thousand fee-paying spectators at approximately \$8-per-ticket per high school game. Each Friday evening, large numbers of spectators enter the stadium to 'support' their team. Adorned in the school's colours, many of the (majority White) spectators readily spend additional money once inside the stadium on school-branded merchandise, food, and drink. When Sunshine's (90% Black) football team take to the field, the school and community's interests converge. The communities are united in their support for the strong, athletic lives stood before them, and the majority-Black team is instructed to "*go to work boys*". The word 'work' is in itself symbolic of the labour expended by young athletes across the U.S. every week for the purposes of prestige, revenue generation and entertainment.

High-revenue generating athletes - such as Sunshine's football team - are often afforded a celebrity-like status within the school and broader community. As a group, Sunshine's footballers were not only hero-ised by their peers and community, but were highly sought-after by the institution itself. At an undetermined stage before high school places are allocated, young athletes become a commodity to be bartered for. In the U.S., student athletes can be allocated school places that are unavailable to others living in their community, who, with very few exceptions, are required to attend the 'zoned' school as determined by their address (known as 'zoning waivers' for athletic purposes). Sunshine's administration viewed the 'enrollment' (more so *recruitment*) of young Black athletes across school boundary lines as "*giving (athletically) talented kids a chance to attend a great (almost exclusively athletic) program.*" This convergence of interest is disturbingly ironic, in the sense that the racialised system that helped to manufacture a young Black athlete in the first instance (through academic failure and powerful stereotyping) is now perceived to be 'providing an opportunity' to that same, now 'talented' student.

One teacher at Sunshine was clear in his conviction that American schools are *not* acting in the best interest of Black students, suggesting the system confuses education with commerce. The teacher argued: "*kids are slam dunking their way into the end zone... but aint learning and aint graduating.*" The same teacher also claimed that school boards are 'aware' that Black children are driven to pursue sports to the detriment of their academic careers, but argued that there is a reluctance to act. For the health and stability of White hegemony, Sunshine needs talented Black athletes for prestige, revenue generation and entertainment - in addition to supporting the low/no revenue sports clubs or associations.

Florida state law is clear: In order to play competitive school sports, a student must maintain a cumulative grade point average of at least 2.0. Known colloquially as 'No Pass No Play', student athletes who are said to be 'failing' their high school classes (i.e. making less than a 2.0 GPA - equivalent to a 'C-' grade<sup>[3]</sup>) are not allowed to participate in competitive sports fixtures. This legislation is said to provide 'motivation' for the student to meet minimum requirements - or more so -

enough motivation for the institution to ensure its student athletes are 'eligible' to play each week. Unlike their non-athlete or low/no revenue athlete peers, high-revenue athletes were frequently offered additional support in the form of private one-to-one sessions with teachers or with peer mentors (who were almost exclusively White and collecting 'volunteer hours' for their college applications). High-revenue athletes were observed re-sitting tests at different times to their peers, and were given other such flexibilities to ensure their presence on the field each week. Some participants even claimed teachers were encouraged (by the athletic department) to manipulate test grades to ensure a player's eligibility for major games.

The impression of a 'trade' between the advancement of young Black lives and the White institution, is, however, no more than a veneer, offering very little currency beyond the school walls itself. Whilst the White institution can bolster (in real terms and/or artificially) the academic performance of their Black athletes to satisfy 'No Pass No Play' requirements, they do nothing to help the same athletes overcome the racialised societal filter that is standardised testing. For those Black athletes that do graduate, the reality of competing professionally is stark. In 2015-2016, there were 1,696 and 491 players on the NFL and NBA rosters respectively, compared to the 1,083,308 footballers and 546,428 basket ballers competing in U.S. high school sports (NCAA, 2016). According to research conducted by the National Collegiate Athletic Association, approximately 6.8 % of high school footballers are selected to play for college football teams; and only 1.5% of those make it to the NFL (NCAA, 2017). In basketball, approximately 3.4% of high-school basket ballers play at college level, and only 1.1% of those are drafted into the NBA (NCAA, 2017). Thus, despite the chances of becoming a professional major league athlete being roughly 0.001%, schools, like Sunshine, continue to promote the dangerous narrative that major league sport is 'the best (often only) chance' of upward mobility for young Black lives.

## **Conclusion**

There is a deeply racist ideology of high revenue-generating sports at school: an ideology that disproportionately and systematically channels young Black lives into sporting endeavours on the promise of upward mobility. The entrapment of young Black lives in the athletic department of an education system is not the result of Black persons seeking respect, expanded opportunities and social mobility, but more damagingly the result of the White institution pursuing revenues, acclamation, and gladiator-style entertainment, in the form of young Black labour.

This chapter highlights how limited academic options (due to the exclusionary presence of high stake standardised testing), teamed with educationalists that disproportionality encourage (often require) young Black children to become athletes, result in a damaging one-way integration into the school system, that ultimately only serves to exacerbate a sense of individual failure when there is no high school graduation or college athletic scholarship at the end of schooling. To date, Sunshine is yet to produce a single major-league professional athlete, and still it continues to sell this damaging promise to generations of young

Black lives. It is essential that the school system manufacture, instil and reward Black academic achievement in the same way that it creates, acknowledges, and celebrates, athletic performance. Black lives *have* to matter at *every* level of society, not just when Black labour is being expended on a field, court or track.

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<sup>1</sup> In accordance with common ethical practices, both 'Sunshine High School' and the 'City of Sunshine' are pseudonyms to preserve the anonymity of the study's participants and case study school.

<sup>2</sup> It is recognised that there are many debates about the use of the term 'Black', it is used here as an encompassing political term to represent those that would identify as Black/African/African American/Black African/Black Caribbean/Black British as per U.K. and U.S. Census data.

<sup>3</sup> Not to be confused with standardised testing requirements – many students across America 'pass' high school (Grade Point Average [GPA] of 2.0 or above on a 4.0 scale) but 'fail' standardised testing requirements.

## Biographical Statement

Dr. Claire Crawford is a BRIDGE Research Fellow based at the Center for Research in Race & Education (CRRE), University of Birmingham, U.K. in partnership with the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Claire's current research focuses on trans-Atlantic formations of race inequity in education and, in particular, the application of quantitative methods within Critical Race Theory. Claire is an experienced journal reviewer and is currently serving as an Associate Editor of the international peer-reviewed journal, *'Race Ethnicity and Education'*.

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