“I SEE HOW YOU GOT IN”: AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN ON RICE UNIVERSITY
WOMEN’S SPORTS TEAMS

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HIST 421: Race and Education in the American South
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Abstract

African American female athletes are a unique and often understudied group within the realm of intercollegiate athletics. Their race, gender, and athletic status interact to impact their academic and social experiences in ways that are different from both African American men and white women. African American women often face contradictory stereotypes both in the classroom and on the athletic field, and their experiences reflect larger historical and sociological trends surrounding race, gender, sports, and education. This paper uses interviews with early African American female athletes at Rice University, as well as archival data, to explore the factors affecting this group.
Perhaps the largest concentration of African American students at Rice University, a small private institution in Houston, Texas, can be found on the athletic field. African Americans are consistently overrepresented on Rice sports teams; in fact, in 2003-04, over half of African American males received athletic scholarships. African American athletes occupy a unique space within higher education, as the double stigma associated with their race and athletic status can lead to negative assumptions about their academic potential. This is particularly true at highly selective universities like Rice, even when athletes are equally academically qualified to their peers. The relationship between sports, race, and education is further complicated by a consideration of gender. Rice women’s sports teams have existed for less than 50 years, but have seen tremendous increases in funding, recruiting, scholarships, and competitive focus. The growing equality between the men’s and women’s programs has coincided with rising numbers of African Americans, both on varsity sports teams and in the student body as a whole. The presence of African American female athletes has impacted the perception of women’s sports at Rice both in the classroom and on the field. As a result, their experiences provide a valuable lens through which to view larger issues of race, gender, sports, and education.

Women’s college athletics existed as early as 1892, when the recently invented game of basketball was played at Smith College. Despite widespread enjoyment of the sport, the players were criticized for being “rough, loud-faced, and bold”, and athletic director Senda Berenstyn introduced rule changes that promoted conventional expressions of femininity. Despite some instances of intercollegiate competition, women’s sports remained largely recreational and

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1 Board of Trustees Athletics Subcommittee, “Intercollegiate Athletics at Rice University” (Houston, 2004), 5-9.
intramural until the 1960s. The women’s division of the National Amateur Athletic Federation (NAAF), while progressive in that it promoted women’s sports at all, contributed to the non-competitive nature by perpetuating gendered conceptions of health and the purpose of sport. Drawing on the medical elite’s enduring belief about the danger of exertion during menstruation and concerns about the effect of physical activity on childbearing potential, the NAAF focused on universal participation rather than varsity competition.⁴ Their motto, “a game for every girl and every girl in a game”, reflects priorities that encouraged involvement but also dismissed varsity competition as “contrary to the true spirit of athletics”.⁵ This recreational focus reduced gender inequality in access to sports for casual participants, but did little to increase opportunities for elite female athletes.

Rice University followed a similar pattern of athletic development to many higher education institutions. By 1973, it had varsity men’s teams competing in baseball, basketball, football, golf, swimming, tennis, track and field, and cross country, but women’s participation was far more limited.⁶ The first mention of women’s sports in The Rice Thresher, a weekly student-run newspaper, appears in 1916 with the brief announcement of the formation of a recreational women’s tennis club.⁷ Over the next decade, the growth of the university prompted discussions of establishing a university-sponsored athletic program accessible to all students. After a lengthy description of the various sports programs proposed for men, sports editor Edwin Neilan briefly mentioned that “[field] hockey is a very good game for girls” as it featured

⁴ Edward H. Clarke, Sex in Education: Or, a Fair Chance for Girls (Boston: James R. Osgood and Company, 1874), 100-102.
⁶ Board of Trustees Athletics Subcommittee, “Intercollegiate Athletics at Rice University” (Houston, 2004), 5-9.
⁷ “Girls’ Tennis Club”, The Rice Thresher (Houston, TX), 12 February 1916.
appropriately feminine apparel and would not necessitate the purchase of any new equipment. The condescending treatment of women’s sports continued for the next several decades; for example, an article covering the women’s intramural basketball championships of 1940 depicts the victors as “[spurning] etiquette” and “casting aside all lady-like manners”. Nevertheless, women’s intramural sports continued to grow in popularity, and by the 1970s included tennis, softball, and archery.

The 1960s saw the introduction of intercollegiate women’s sports to Rice. In the early 1960s, women’s tennis, volleyball, and fencing teams travelled to compete in tournaments, but they lacked the university sponsorship and funding associated with varsity teams. Extramural basketball also existed briefly, but was disbanded in 1973 due to lack of interest and humiliating losses. A Thresher editorial by spokesperson Shelley Edelen accused the Physical Education department of “blatant discrimination”, citing high participation rates and arguing that all Rice men’s athletic teams would be cut if winning percentage was a criterion for existence. The passing of Title IX in June 1972 added a new layer of complexity to Rice women’s athletics. The bill prohibits discrimination based on sex in institutions receiving federal funds, and mandates the equal provision of athletic opportunity and funding (including scholarships) to male and female students. The law’s 6-year compliance deadline prompted the creation of women’s varsity teams, which by 1974 included basketball, volleyball, swimming, track and field, and

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8 Edwin P. Neilan, “Supervised General Athletics,” The Rice Thresher (Houston, TX), 28 October 1927.
9 Bill Burns, “OWLS Spurn Etiquette to Capture Cage Duke,” The Rice Thresher (Houston, TX), 22 March 1940.
10 Mike Ross, “Intramural Netters Finish Up; All Kinds of Stuff Coming Up,” The Rice Thresher (Houston, TX) 02 March 1972.
golf. These teams initially competed in Division II of the Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (AIAW), a female-controlled organization that prioritized participation over competition. Rice coaches mimicked this attitude, justifying losses against scholarship-giving teams by portraying their sports as “just a game” for girls to “have fun”.

The AIAW folded in 1983 as the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) responded to Title IX by establishing women’s championships. Despite its previous indifference towards women’s sports, the NCAA’s financial and political resources ensured that it quickly became the primary governing body for female intercollegiate athletics. While this did result in more equitable funding and greater participation in women’s sports, it also pushed many female athletic administrators and coaches out of jobs. Carpenter and Acosta report that between 1972 and 1991, the proportion of female coaches for women’s intercollegiate teams fell from over 90% to 47%. The plight of female administrators over women’s sports programs was similar during that time period, falling from over 90% to just 16%. Concern about shifting control over women’s sports went beyond the welfare of individual employees, as many female physical educators feared that the highly commercial, male-dominated NCAA would fail to consider the unique needs of female athletes. At the same time, joining the NCAA’s Southwest Conference

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15 Dana Blankenhorn, “Women’s Sports to be Played Up,” The Rice Thresher (Houston, TX), 23 August 1974.
(SWC) in 1982 allowed Rice women’s sports teams to receive greater funding, recruit athletes, and provide scholarships, moving them towards equality with the men’s program.²⁰

During the same period as the expansion of women’s varsity sports programs, Rice saw an influx of African American students. The university’s charter, penned in 1891, specifically designates funds for “instruction for the white inhabitants of the City of Houston, and the State of Texas”.²¹ Just weeks before the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* case, and informal poll published in *The Rice Thresher* found that the majority of students surveyed (65%) favoured the admission of African Americans. At the same time, a significant proportion objected on grounds that African American applicants were “not qualified academically”, that campus life would be “too hard on them”, and that Houston already had an “excellent Negro college”.²²

The first administrative move towards desegregation came in 1961, when Kenneth Pitzer became university president. As a condition of his acceptance, he demanded that Rice consider African American applicants. Although this stipulation was unpopular with the faculty and board of trustees, Pitzer’s connections to the Atomic Energy Commission, a lucrative source of federal funding, were too attractive to refuse.²³ Early in his tenure as president, the board of trustees voted to desegregate, but they kept their decision secret out of fear of negative reactions from students, faculty, and alumni. Eventually, outside pressure to desegregate intensified, and several institutions that financially supported Rice threatened to withdraw their contributions. Foremost

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²¹ “Charter of the William M. Rice Institute for the Advancement of Literature, Science, and Art,” (Rice University, 1891), 3.
²² “Views on Athletics, Segregation ‘In Poll,’” *The Rice Thresher* (Houston, TX), 30 April 1954.
among these were the Navy ROTC, NASA’s Johnson Space Center (which had plans to establish a space science program), and various federal agencies that provided funding for science and technology research. The potential loss of federal funding was particularly hard-hitting, as it had been a driving force behind Rice’s rising prestige during the early Cold War years. Escalating financial pressure led to the announcement of a desegregation plan in 1963, after the board of trustees received approval to disregard the restrictive racial clause in the university’s charter. The first African American undergraduate students enrolled in the fall of 1965. 

During the first several years following integration, the majority of African American male students were football players. Since then, African Americans have continued to be overrepresented on varsity sports teams. The proportion of the student body that identifies as African American has risen steadily from around 4% in the early 1980s to around 6.5% today. At the same time, African Americans have made up roughly 19% of the athlete population within the past decade, and around 37% of all African American students during that period were varsity athletes (See Table 1). The first female African American athletes did not enrol until the late 1970s, and did not make up a significant portion of the sports teams until 1982 (See Table 2). Dr. Eva Lee, who was one of the primary forces behind the development of the women’s athletic program, linked the presence of African American athletes to scholarships. 

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24 Melissa Kean, “Reflections of the Past, Promises for the Future” (presentation, Celebrating 50 Years of Black Undergraduate Life at Rice, Houston, TX, 18 February 2016).
27 Interview with Jan West ’73 (African American alumna), 20 October 2017. All subsequent references to West are from the same interview.
28 Rice University Office of Institutional Research
29 Interview with Dr. Eva Lee (former professor of physical education and kinesiology, former coach of several women’s sports teams, and former Director of the Equal Opportunities Office), 24 October 2017.
Goya Qualls (Rice’s first full scholarship female basketball athlete),\(^{30}\) Wanna Hadnott (Rice’s first African American tennis player),\(^ {31}\) and Tanya McIntosh Justice\(^ {32}\) all cited athletic scholarships as a primary factor behind their decision to attend Rice. Thus, athletic scholarships increased both the visibility and the attractiveness of the university to potential African American student-athletes.

Table 1: Prevalence of African Americans on women’s sports teams

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>% of athletes who are visibly African American</th>
<th>% of visibly African American athletes who are in basketball or track and field</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Basketball</td>
<td>Track and Field (Cross Country)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977-78</td>
<td>0</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978-79</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>17 (0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980-81</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>6 (--)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1981-82</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>16 (0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983-84</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>44 (--)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1993-94</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>50 (0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000-01</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>64 (--)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017-18</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>28 (0)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: -- data missing, N/A indicates the team did not exist at the time.
Source: Rice Campanile (various years), Woodson Research Center. All figures are estimates based on team photographs.

Table 2: Demographics by athletic status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>% of female athletes who were visibly African American*</th>
<th>% of athletes who were African American**</th>
<th>% of the student body who were African American**</th>
<th>% of African American students who were athletes**</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1977-78</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>--</td>
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<td>1978-79</td>
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<tr>
<td>2010-11</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>32</td>
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\(^{30}\) Interview with Goya Qualls ’82 (basketball athlete), 03 November 2017. All subsequent references to Qualls are from the same interview.

\(^{31}\) Interview with Wanna Hadnott ’84 (tennis athlete), 16 November 2017. All subsequent references to Hadnott are from the same interview.

\(^{32}\) Interview with Tanya McIntosh Justice ’89 (track and field athlete, 27 October 2017. All subsequent references to Justice are from the same interview.
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<td>34</td>
<td>28</td>
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Notes: * data are estimates based on photographs in the Rice Campanile or on the Rice Athletics website.
** data provided by the Rice University Office of Institutional Research
--- data missing.
Sources: Rice Campanile (various years), Woodson Research Center; Rice Athletics (www.riceowls.com); Rice University Office for Institutional Research

At a time when Rice faced pressures to increase the number of African Americans and female athletes on campus, students like Qualls, Hadnott, and Justice were doubly useful. Title IX’s 1978 compliance deadline prompted the creation of women’s athletic scholarships, but as student Debbie Turner put it, “there [was] nothing to attract women athletes to Rice at [that] time”.33 Still, the promise of a full scholarship at an academically elite institution was enough to persuade some successful high school athletes to attend. Goya Qualls, for example, signed a letter of intent to play basketball at Rice before the team even had a coach, citing the university’s academic reputation and a scholarship offer as her primary reasons for attending. The pressure to equalize the men’s and women’s athletic programs coincided with a conscious effort to increase the racial diversity of the student body. Rice actively recruited African American students, sending professors out to schools across the state to encourage them to apply.34 The concurrence of these two phenomena made African American female athletes even more attractive to the university, as they could contribute to statistical measures of both gender and racial equality.

34 Interview with Dr. Ira Gruber (professor emeritus of history), 28 October 2017. All subsequent references to Gruber are from the same interview.
Title IX-mandated provision of scholarships for female athletes created an upward spiral of competitiveness, recruitment, and increasing numbers of African Americans on Rice women’s sports teams. Coaches had to actively recruit athletes in order to fill scholarship spots on teams, and the best high school athletes (especially in track and field and basketball) were often African American. There was also a two-way relationship between recruitment and competitiveness: winning records made Rice more attractive to potential recruits, and recruited athletes brought an increased work ethic and an expectation to win. Finally, racial stereotypes about African American female athletes increased the perception of their teams’ competitiveness. The biological superiority myth portrayed African Americans as “natural” athletes, linking their presence to competition rather than recreation. “Racialized notions of the virile or mannish black female athlete” also increased the likelihood that African American women could be viewed as serious athletes, as they were less subject to negative conceptions of women’s athletic abilities. Consequently, African American athletes were crucial to the transformation and masculinization of the Rice women’s athletic program. By the early 1980s, the presence of recruited scholarship athletes, many of whom were African Americans, meant that Rice women’s sports teams could no longer be “only a game” where “any girl who wants… can have fun”. Instead, they began to more closely resemble the men’s programs, leading to the intense competition and heavy recruitment seen today.

36 Interview with Goya Qualls.
While African Americans have been overrepresented in Rice athletics programs since the early 1980s, they tend to be concentrated in basketball and track and field. Beginning in 1981-82, the first year where there were at least five African American female athletes, the overwhelming majority participated in either basketball or track and field (see Table 1). Volleyball, tennis, and soccer tend to have a few African Americans on the roster at a time, featuring similar demographics to the student body as a whole. Swimming, on the other hand, had no African American athletes until 2009. The demographic patterns found in Rice’s women’s athletic department are similar to those found at other NCAA Division I universities. Track and field and basketball athletes represented 70% of the African American women on Division I teams in 2000, a figure that has remained approximately the same until the current school year.

The concentration of African American athletes within intercollegiate basketball and track and field teams mirrors racial patterns seen in youth sports. Along with track and field, basketball has become part of the collective racial identity that allows African Americans to “symbolically demonstrate their ‘blackness’ and their equality or superiority to Whites simultaneously”. The link between certain sports and African American racial identity is also reinforced by the “abundance of black role models” they provide. For example, the tremendous

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40 Interestingly, African American athletes tend to be segregated into specific event groups within track and field, as evidenced by their conspicuous absence from cross-country rosters. Instead, they typically compete in sprints or field events, such as throws and jumps.
42 “Diversity Research,” National Collegiate Athletic Association. Accessed 06 November 2017, http://www.ncaa.org/about/resources/research/diversity-research. To avoid double counting, this figure does not include cross-country or indoor track and field athletes. The vast majority of these athletes are already included in the outdoor track and field category.
overrepresentation of African Americans in the National Basketball Association (NBA) both inspires African American youth to play basketball and portrays the sport as a pathway to upward social mobility.46 For African American girls, track and field may be an even stronger draw, as elite female track and field athletes are often more visible than their basketball-playing counterparts.47 This was particularly true during the early years of Rice’s women’s athletic program, before the rise in popularity of the NCAA women’s basketball championship.

Several former Rice track and field athletes mentioned role models as an important factor in their path towards intercollegiate athletics. Tanya McIntosh Justice was inspired by Evelyn Ashford, and Funmi Jimoh idolized Marion Jones.48 Both saw the presence of African American female role models as important to their pursuit of track and field over other sports. Tennis athlete Wanna Hadnott, whose sport was predominantly white, also cited her experiences with African American players as central to her athletic development. Although her San Antonio neighbourhood and her school’s tennis team were almost exclusively white, she spent several summers training with Houston tennis legend John Wilkerson and his all-African American team. While she believes that her transition to Rice was easier because she was used to being in the racial minority, she also recognizes the importance of having “a base of African American tennis players to look to”. Consequently, the presence of African American role models played a role in the development of athletes both in track and field and in the predominantly white sport of tennis.

48 Interview with Funmi Jimoh ’07 (former Rice track and field athlete and current assistant coach for women’s track and field), 01 November 2017. All subsequent references to Jimoh are from the same interview.
Beyond the influence of cultural values, stereotypes and role models, structural factors also affect racial discrepancies in sports participation. Athletically gifted children tend to gravitate towards sports that are more accessible within their schools and communities, which excludes many low-income African Americans from participation in “elite” sports like field hockey, figure skating, and rowing.⁴⁹ At Rice, this can be seen most clearly in the racial and socioeconomic homogeneity of the varsity swim team, which has remained largely unchanged in its nearly 40-year history.⁵⁰ Of course, not all African Americans lack access to elite, traditionally white sports. Wanna Hadnott, for example, learned to play tennis through her private elementary school’s partnership with Trinity University, and had the resources to take lessons and enter tournaments. At the same time, the intertwined nature of race and class reduces the number of African Americans who are able to participate in elite sports, leading to their concentration in lower-resource sports like basketball and track and field.

African American youth are also disproportionately affected by the high financial costs associated with the “pay-to-play pipeline”. This “elitist and discriminatory” system capitalizes on cultural myths surrounding college sports, which portray athletic talent as a foolproof path to scholarships and admissions advantages.⁵¹ The pay-to-play pipeline for girls’ youth sports is uniquely education-oriented, as the opportunities for women to play professional sports (let alone make a fortune doing it) are still very limited. Even so, the youth to college sports pipeline actually increases racial and socioeconomic inequality within both sports and education, as it

⁵⁰ Interview with Ira Gruber.
excludes young athletes whose families cannot afford club fees. The trend towards high-cost youth sports programs is likely to lower the number of low-income and racial minority students who receive athletic scholarships in the future, thereby reducing the viability of athletics as a way of increasing access to higher education. The expansion of the pipeline into younger age groups further harms low-income athletes, as there is little incentive to subsidize costs for even the most gifted players. By the time athletes reach high school and college, when the “win at all costs” mentality makes financial aid worthwhile, low-income athletes have already missed out on years of elite training and competition. At the same time, the relative absence of a pay-to-play pipeline in track and field and (until recently) basketball has likely contributed to the high number of African American athletes in those sports.

Of course, sports are just one dimension of the experiences of Rice student-athletes. In addition to competing at a high level athletically, these individuals must hold their own in an academically rigorous setting that is often blatantly prejudiced against them. The late 1960s and early 1970s saw a relaxation of the academic admissions standards for athletically talented applicants, a situation that coincided with the growing presence of African American male athletes. Weakened academic standards were driven in part by the shift from one-platoon to two-platoon football, which greatly increased the size of football rosters. In order to keep up with less academically selective universities in the Southwest Conference, Rice resorted to recruiting some athletes whose academic credentials did not match those of the general student body. By

52 Ibid, 38-40.
53 Interview with Jim Bevan (head coach for women’s track and field, has worked with the track team since 1986), 12 October 2017. All subsequent references to Bevan are from the same interview.
54 Ibid.
1977, the combined SAT score of the lowest quartile of scholarship athletes was just 707, and the majority of those students left before their junior year.⁵⁵

The presence of academically unqualified athletes reflected poorly on the entire group, but was particularly detrimental to African Americans. Due to racial inequalities in primary and secondary education and to cultural biases in standardized tests, Rice set the minimum SAT score for minority athletes 100 points lower than the minimum score for white athletes.⁵⁶ Despite the legitimacy of the concerns addressed by this policy, the differential treatment reinforced negative stereotypes held by many professors and non-athlete students. While all of the athletes interviewed for this project cited Rice’s academic prestige as a primary factor behind their decision to attend, many also faced preconceived notions about their abilities inside the classroom. Darryl “Doc” King, the first African American track athlete, referenced the cumulative nature of racial and athletic stereotypes when characterizing his classmates’ perception of him: “The only reason he’s here is because he’s an athlete, and they have to have African American athletes represented.”⁵⁷ Goya Qualls reported similar experiences, saying, “You say to someone, oh you’re going to Rice? That’s great, that’s great. And then you’ll say, “I got an athletic scholarship.” It’s almost like your academics are wiped away. All they see is that’s why you got in, because you’re an athlete, not because you’re smart. And even today… if athletics comes up, it’s like oh, now I see how you got in.”

The academic stereotypes faced by African American female athletes are often contradictory. Like their male counterparts, they may be viewed as biologically superior athletes

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⁵⁶ Rice University, “1984 Self Study” (Houston, 1984), 207.
⁵⁷ Interview with Darryl “Doc” King ’79 (first African American track athlete), 02 November 2017. All subsequent references to King are from the same interview.
but intellectually inferior students, but this “athlete stigma” can also be mediated by gender. Because women are often perceived as less serious athletes than men, they may be protected from negative stereotypes about their academic potential. A large-scale study from an academically selective Division-1A university confirmed the complex patterns seen in academic stereotypes about athletes: Student-athletes who were male, African American, or competing in “revenue” sports (football and basketball) reported confronting more negative perceptions from their professors and teaching assistants.\(^{58}\) Julie Griswold, who has been an academic advisor for Rice student-athletes since 1986, believes that gender is a particularly important variable in this equation, especially at an academically selective institution like Rice. In her experience, female athletes tend to choose Rice “more for their academics”, perhaps because they are aware of the limited opportunities for women in post-collegiate sports.\(^{59}\) Together, these results suggest that the perceived seriousness of an athlete (a quality more frequently ascribed to African Americans, men, and revenue sport athletes) affects the degree to which they are affected by negative academic stereotypes.

The concept of revenue sports takes on a new dimension at Rice, where sports rarely turn a profit. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, football and men’s basketball were close to financially self-sustaining, but they certainly did not bring in the “big money” seen in other Southwest Conference schools.\(^{60}\) The dissolution of the conference in 1996 greatly increased the athletics budget deficit, with football and basketball contributing the greatest losses per participant.\(^{61}\) At

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\(^{59}\) Interview with Julie Griswold (Associate Director of Academic Advising for Athletes, has worked in the department since 1986), 20 October 2017. All subsequent references to Griswold are from the same interview.


\(^{61}\) Board of Trustees Athletics Subcommittee, “Intercollegiate Athletics at Rice University” (Houston, 2004).
the same time, both athletes and non-athletes who were at Rice during the 1970s and 1980s described negative academic stereotypes as primarily affecting football and basketball players. Several, including long-time history professor Dr. Ira Gruber and former track athlete Tanya McIntosh Justice, believe that this was due to the greater time commitment and travel required by these sports. Track and field coach Jim Bevan, on the other hand, pointed to the past association between revenue sports (especially football) and relaxed academic standards when accounting for sport-specific stereotypes. The concentration of African American athletes within these sports also suggests that racial assumptions about intelligence and academic potential play a role in the stigmatization of revenue sport athletes by faculty, students, and even other athletes.

According to Stahlé Vincent, one of the first African American football players at Rice, professors saw “race first and athletics second”. While prejudices against African American athletes became less overt as time passed, race remains an important variable in the relationship between athletic status and perceived academic abilities.

This issue is further complicated by the existence of SAT score gaps between athletes and the general student body and between athletes of different sports. While data on the academic qualifications and performance of athletes is difficult to obtain, reports from both 1984 and 1999-2003 show significant differences in SAT score based on athletic status (see tables 3 and 4). The 1984 data also reveal lower SAT scores for sports with more African Americans, compared to predominantly white, upper-class sports like swimming and tennis (see table 3). This pattern mirrors those found at other Division 1A private universities, where basketball tends

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62 Interview with Jan West.
63 Interview with Stahlé Vincent ’72 (one of the first African American football scholarship recipients, first African American quarterback in the Southwest Conference), 09 November 2017. All subsequent references to Vincent are from the same interview.
to have one of the highest SAT gaps of any sport. Moreover, as women’s athletic programs have become more aligned with men’s programs in terms of recruitment, scholarships, and competitiveness, SAT gaps have grown significantly. Nowhere has this effect been greater than at Division 1A private universities, such as Rice.

Table 3: SAT score by team, 1981

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Team</th>
<th>Average SAT score</th>
<th>% difference from student body average (approx. 1300)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Women’s basketball</td>
<td>920.8</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s swimming</td>
<td>1112.1</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s track and field</td>
<td>958.8</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s tennis</td>
<td>1056.6</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s volleyball</td>
<td>995</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Rice University, “1984 Self Study” (Houston, 1984).

Table 4: SAT score by athletic status, 1999-2003 (women only)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Average SAT score (non-athletes)</th>
<th>Average SAT Score (athletes)</th>
<th>% difference (athletes vs. non-athletes)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>1393</td>
<td>1209</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>1402</td>
<td>1232</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>1403</td>
<td>1193</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>1407</td>
<td>1161</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>1410</td>
<td>1187</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Board of Trustees Athletics Subcommittee, “Intercollegiate Athletics at Rice University” (Houston, 2004), 27.

In short, the academic experiences of African American female athletes are impacted by the interacting and often contradictory effects of race, gender, and sport. Actual gaps in SAT scores exacerbate negative stereotypes about athletes, which in turn can create stereotype threat-induced underperformance. Priming student-athletes with their athletic identity can result in poor performance on academic tasks, a situation that plays out when professors or other

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students make disparaging comments about athletes’ academic abilities. Other studies have shown that this effect is greatest for African Americans, while it is small or even nonexistent for Caucasians.⁶⁷ Consistent with these findings, William Bowen and Sarah Levin have observed that as a group, student-athletes underperform academically (measured by GPA and rank-in-class), even when controlling for SAT score, socioeconomic status, and time spent on extracurricular activities.⁶⁸ Bowen has also found that student-athletes tend to have lower levels of intellectual self-confidence than would be predicted by their SAT score.⁶⁹ Combined, these results suggest that African American female athletes’ academic success is threatened by negative stereotypes and low intellectual self-confidence, whether or not their academic qualifications match those of their classmates.

At the same time, Goya Qualls, Wanna Hadnott, Tanya McIntosh Justice, and Funmi Jimoh all indicated that they were able to successfully challenge professors’ negative expectations of them through hard work and academic success. Several former athletes also mentioned the importance of the athletic department’s academic advising services, which include mandatory study halls for freshmen, tutoring, and periodic check-ins with an advisor. In her role in the academic advising office, Julie Griswold recognized the positive role academic advisors could play in supporting African American student-athletes. Records from the academic advising office in the mid-1990s indicate that African Americans were more likely to use academic

⁶⁷ Jeff Stone, C. Keith Harrison, and JaVonte Mottley, “‘Don’t Call me a Student-Athlete’: The Effect of Identity Priming on Stereotype Threat for Academically Engaged African American College Athletes,” Basic and Applied Social Psychology 34 (2012), 103.
advising services than their white teammates,70 and notes from Griswold’s desk files from the same time period reveal plans to train advisors in cultural sensitivity. Specific priorities included teaching them to reject negative stereotypes about African Americans, view student-athletes holistically, and “do more than academic monitoring”.71 Consequently, while African American athletes are particularly vulnerable to negative academic stereotypes, many were able to disprove such assumptions through their own work ethics and through the support of their peers, coaches, and advisors.

In addition to academics and athletics, student-athletes social experiences are a vital part of their time at Rice. The social involvement of African American athletes varied greatly, with some receiving full acceptance from their non-athlete peers and some feeling like they lived in “different worlds”.72 Many of the social activities at Rice are organized around the residential college system, in which each college has its own government, housing, and faculty associates. With the exception of a handful of legacies, students are randomly assigned to their college, creating a group of individuals with diverse backgrounds and interests.73 Several former student-athletes felt that their residential college had a significant positive effect on their social experiences. Goya Qualls, for example, competed for Brown College in Rice’s two major intramural athletic competitions, Beer Bike and powderpuff football, and was also a freshman advisor during Orientation Week. Similarly, Tanya McIntosh Justice and Wanna Hadnott were heavily involved in the social activities sponsored by their residential colleges. All three women

70 “Academic Support Services, 1994-1997” (Box 20 Folder 4, Rice University Athletic Records, 1930s-2000s, Woodson Research Center, Houston, TX).
71 “Griswold, Julie, desk files, 1994-1996” (Box 20 Folder 21, Rice University Athletic Records, 1930s-2000s, Woodson Research Center, Houston, TX).
72 Interview with Stahle Vincent.
cited the residential college system as important in facilitating friendships between athletes and non-athletes. Despite their demanding schedules, they were able to build relationships with both their teammates and non-athletes in their classes and residential colleges, giving them the “rich” social experience that the college system promises.\(^{74}\)

At the same time, several athletes’ experiences with the residential college system were less positive. Although a recent editorial in *The Rice Thresher*, written by a varsity football player, laments the “prevalent schism” between athletes and non-athletes,\(^{75}\) many earlier African American athletes felt that this divide was more due to race than to athletic status. Football player Stahlé Vincent, track athlete Doc King, and cheerleader Regina Tippens,\(^{76}\) who all attended Rice during the first decade of integration, characterized the African American population as a tight-knit community that was largely separate from the rest of the student body. Vincent explained, “The blacks did their thing; the whites did their thing. That’s just how it was.” As a result, many African American students found their social circle in the Black Student Union (later the Black Student Association), which also functioned as a support system for the challenging experience of being a minority student at a predominantly white institution.

The social dynamics between racial groups changed as African Americans became a greater proportion of the student body. Although Goya Qualls, Wanna Hadnott, and Tanya McIntosh Justice, who all attended Rice in the 1980s, reported higher levels of social involvement with the general student body, Funmi Jimoh ’07 had similar experiences to early African American students. She participated “zero amount” in her residential college, which

\(^{74}\) Ibid.

\(^{75}\) Ellerbe, Nahshon, “Athletes and Nonathletes Stronger Together,” *The Rice Thresher* (Houston, TX), 01 December 2015.

\(^{76}\) Interview with Regina Tippens ’71 (first African American cheerleader), 23 October 2017.
“didn’t embrace [her] culturally”. Instead, like Doc King, she made friends with a number of students at the University of Houston, which has a much higher proportion of African Americans than Rice. As a result, while the amount to which athletes are included in the dominant group’s social activities has varied between individuals and across time, cultural and racial factors appear to be more influential than athletic status. Consequently, many African American athletes found a more welcoming environment among students with similar cultural backgrounds, whether that occurred through organized student groups, with teammates, or even at other universities.

In short, African American female athletes are a unique group of students that exists at the intersection of various historical and sociological forces. The relationship between African Americans, sports, and education has been studied extensively; for example, a nationally representative sample of high school students found that students with the least social capital (many of whom were African American) were the most likely to participate in football and basketball. Furthermore, participation in these sports had a negative impact on academic performance, even when controlling for prior achievement.77 African American students may see sports as a lucrative pathway to increased social capital, an aspiration that is strengthened by the abundance of African American role models within certain professional sports. Sociologist Harry Edwards contends that universities, coaches, parents, and other authority figures have perpetrated “the disparate exploitation of the black student-athlete” through their “blind belief in sport as an extraordinary route to social and economic salvation”.78 His words mirror those of former Penn

77 Tamela McNulty Eitle and David J. Eitle, “Race, Cultural Capital, and the Educational Effects of Participation in Sports,” Sociology of Education 75, no. 2 (2002). In this study, social capital was operationalized as access to household educational resources (i.e. books, computers, encyclopedias, study spaces) and extracurricular “high”-culture classes (i.e. art, music, dance).

State coach Joe Paterno: “We have raped a generation and a half of young black athletes. We have taken kids and sold them on bouncing a ball and running with a football and that being able to do things athletically was going to be an end in itself.”79

At the same time, nearly all of the research on race, sports, and education, has been conducted on men. African American women are often assumed to be similar to white women or to African American men, yet they differ from both groups in ways that significantly affect their collegiate experiences.80 For example, African American women are typically less likely than their male counterparts to buy into the cultural myth of sports as a pathway to financial and social prestige. Nevertheless, their race makes them more vulnerable to negative academic stereotypes and social exclusion than their white teammates. They interact with race, gender, sports, and education in unique ways, and their experiences shed light on larger historical and social issues. Consequently, while the experiences of early African American female athletes at Rice University provide a valuable glimpse into the impact of race and gender on collegiate athletic, academic, and social experiences, much more research is necessary. Listening to the stories of past African American female athletes not only increases understanding of the historical and social forces they faced, but will also benefit generations of women and girls who are just now discovering the magic of sports.

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80 Jennifer Bruening, “Gender and Racial Analysis in Sport: Are All the Women White and All the Blacks Men?” *Quest* 57, no. 3 (2005).
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