

I. Background & Object

My research seeks to find the levels of friction that exist within university and society spaces at large. That is, I want to trace our level of understanding between how a university prioritizes capitalist consumption over critical intellectualism and dialogues, reflective of local-national-global interactions. I would like to suggest here that the very “separation” between public spheres—that is the “Academic” spaces and that of “Society”—are non-existent. They seep through one another. They are porous. My study’s focus of minority students, university spaces, and contemporary capitalism hopes to make this case and point.

This project looks at the functions of the contemporary capitalist moment via university sports. My initial example here, of the “Fab Five”—a 1990s University of Michigan basketball team made up of five African-American bodies will remain crucial for this presentation and my project. I would like to evidence here as to how student minority bodies have not only transformed university spaces, but also “societal spaces”—in this case the U.S. based-corporate NBA, international corporate marketers such as Nike and Adidas, and their role in shaping intellectual property laws.

These visuals here snapshot a moment in time where academic institutions, racialized bodies, and corporate branding convoluted. Notice Chris Weber, at the time a minor, rising to the air to make a slam dunk to a crowd of hundreds of students and a nationwide television viewership. To the top right you see a set of colored calves, wearing long University of Michigan basketball shorts and pairs of Nike black socks. To the bottom right, there is a still-picture to what I will argue to be the wedding of corporate sponsorship and academic institutions of knowledge. The shoes first sported here by the “University Students” are the Nike Air Huaraches. (But more on that later)

II. Methodology & Questions

SLIDE TWO:

My methodological framework will historicize the development of capitalism with the evolution of student minority’s bodies via university spaces, specifically in relation to this student body’s participation in sports athleticism.

Looking at the Fab Five raises more significant issues to light since they deal with the very concepts and theories that we have looked at in the past few weeks. To briefly state my intent with our courses’ text and how they have guided my research questions:

I look forward to apply Tsing’s articulation of Scales—since it will help me understand how corporate university relations with racialized student athletes are not just “a neutral frame for viewing the world, [but rather] continue to have important role in cultural and political projects.”

This research paper will ask:

What might we see and gain by placing the overlap between university academic spaces and public spaces of sports into conversations with one another? Does there continue to be a process of commodification within an educational setting despite post Civil-Rights institutionalization of non-Eurocentric curriculum, departments, and resources?

Coombe's section on branding and trademarks, where she states that "trademarks represent an embodied otherness with imperialist precedents, social struggles over their circulation and contemporary relationships between mimesis (imitation) and alterity (otherness)" is also helpful to further understand the role of post-Civil Rights university institutionalization of "*othered*" bodies—in this case African American males.

Putting in conversation the monopolistic rise of college (national) sports entertainment and to what Roderick Ferguson theorizes to be the "hegemonic affirmation of minority difference", have there been new restrictions placed on minority bodies? If so, how do minority bodies navigate university policies? To what ends? And more importantly, what are their limitations?

Paige West's documentation of the "contemporary capitalist moment" and how neoliberalism holds both hegemonic and counterhegemonic tendencies will guide my project to evade notions of binaries constructs.

What do we see in the commodification of minority bodies in the post-Civil Rights institutionalization of minority bodies with the monopolistic rise of college and national sport entertainment? Have university-corporatized sports appropriated student bodies and/or movements, while at the same time, have student bodies and/or movement appropriated university corporate sports?

Lastly, Coleman and Boyle's critique to the evasive global intellectual property law shifts—founded in patents, trademarks, logs, etc—and how it pertains within the "contemporary capitalist moment" will further develop my research argument and stakes.

III. Argument & Stakes

SLIDE THREE:

This research project will interrogate the levels of friction between corporate commodification, universities policies, and minority raced student bodies. Rooted in the contemporary capitalist moment, and launching that indeed there has been a "hegemonic affirmation of Minority Difference", I will argue that universities have and continue to function to what Tsing says to be a "frontier of neoliberal capitalism". This "university frontier"—most perceptively found in the regulation of sports—further imagines and implements myths of American meritocracy and exceptionalism to which the erasure of student politics and resistance has been furthered.

At stake, then, is the generational mythology of American meritocracy. If the university is a frontier of neoliberal capitalism, and as such perpetuates a colonial/imperial fantasy, than what in particular, is the role of student athletes, specifically students of non-white racial-ethno affiliation, in this particular corporate-academic set-up?

I would like to argue that if we put into conversation university athleticism with the conjuring-projects of monopolistic corporate sport brands, then we can begin to understand the levels of appropriation, negotiation, and resistance minority student bodies navigate and experience.

Tracing the scales of hyper-capitalist commodification of “the other” in this contemporary capitalist moment, whereby universities are confined to the marketing, branding, and corporatization regulations of global monopolies like Nike, Adidas, or Starbucks, than what might putting these things in conversation help us learn about minority body athletes and intellectual property laws equate with Anglo-Saxon global imperialism?

Real short, I want to advance to student populations that if universities are governed by corporate brands, and since student bodies belong to university politics of enrollment and/or hire, than corporate monopolies own the student body as much as they own the university. This holds serious ramifications as to how intellectual property rights are administered, implemented, and further stabilized via the frontiers of a neoliberal university.