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### Un-Essay Project Statement

For this project, I decided to focus on the exploitation of black athletes by illustrating the vicious cycle that occurs in the lives of many black athletes. I illustrated four panels, each showing a different stage of the life of a black athlete. For each panel, I first sketched an outline, then used acrylic paint to lay down color, and ended by using ink to add details. In the first panel, I drew a little black boy sitting in his room to represent the young, black, impressionable youth. The room is clearly ragged and worn down, depicting a child living in an impoverished neighborhood, much like the children living in intercities described in "The Exploitation of Black Athletes" by Harry Edwards. The rundown neighborhood is further emphasized by the view out the window of a chain linked fence and smoke stacks. The little boy is sitting on his bed, watching a football game in admiration to show how "thanks to the mass media and long standing traditions of racial discrimination," the black role models that black children are exposed to growing up are not that of doctors or lawyers, but instead are athletes" (Edwards 38). Moreover, the child has posters hung up on his walls of athletes and sports, further emphasizing how "black children tend to model themselves after, or to admire as symbolically masculine, the black athlete - the one prevalent and positive black success figure they are exposed to regularly" (Edwards 38). The main problem shown in this panel is that black children are often not encouraged to pursue school, higher education, or other opportunities; rather, they are shown by

both their community and the media that the only way for them to “make it out” is through athletics.

The next panel typifies the fulfillment of the dreams illustrated in the previous panel. In this panel, the black athlete has made it big. Despite how this may look like success on a surface level, it is important to look at the small details. First, the posted lifting and practice schedules are rigorous, showing how the athletes are stretched thin on a physical sense once they reach these higher levels of competition. The white men on the sidelines represent the owners of the teams (faceless, as the players often don't even know who it is that is making so much money off of their labor). This shows how the number of blacks in decision making and authority positions is miniscule at best and that these owners benefit “as a result of the performance of gifted basketball and football players, of whom a disproportionate number of the most gifted and most exploited have been black” (Edwards 37). The missing assignments and low grades on the bottom right of the panel depict the empty promises made to these athletes - they are promised an education in return for their performance, yet they do not receive this promised education as all their time and efforts are spent on the field.

The next panel illustrates the undeniable and virtually unavoidable risk of injury that plagues athletes. When a student athlete or professional athlete sustains an injury from the non stop, rigorous training they endure, everything is on the line for them. A lot of athletes continue playing on despite these injuries, for they fear what will happen to them if they stop playing. An injury is more than just physical pain for these athletes - it is a lost season, a lost opportunity for scouting, a lost chance to get in the draft, and so much more. The athletes that keep playing risk further injuring themselves, and often leads to long term injuries that affect them later on in life.

Lastly, the final panel shows a few things. One, the wheelchair portrays the long term effects of the injuries that athletes sustain in their college and professional careers. This panel not only shows the long lasting injuries due to physical labor that athletes go through in their youth and have to pay for in their later years, but also how they are not even compensated for such injuries and how that affects their ability to keep going in life and providing for themselves. The man in this panel is back in the same rundown neighborhood as the first panel, demonstrating how, of those college athletes who graduate, “these blacks are unemployed more often, and earn less when they do have jobs, than their non-athletic college peers” (Edwards 39). While a small number of people make it out of the struggle and make it big like the athletes on the posters in the first panel, most do not and nothing changes, as Johnson describes in “Forty Million Dollar Slaves” (Rhoden 242-243). In this panel, the man is handing a football down to a young boy, possibly a son or grandson. This shows how the black family and black community tend to reward athletic achievement more than other achievements (Edwards 37), contributing to the never ending cycle of abuse and exploitation.

## Un-Essay Self-Assessment

From this assignment, I learned how to creatively express complex ideas. One of the main takeaways that I got from this project is that you do not need to write essays to communicate important topics covered in class - the same message can be conveyed through many different media, and oftentimes these alternative media convey a much deeper, impactful message. Apart from that, I learned a lot about the exploitation of black athletes in America. This population of black males in America are conditioned from essentially birth to seek athletic achievement as means of escaping their impoverished neighborhoods and garnering success. Their bodies are beaten down, exploited, and taken advantage of by predominantly white coaches, owners, and CEOs, for a pathetic excuse of an education in return. This is a problem in our society that needs to be addressed more, but is often overlooked because of what I believe is blind patriotism and nationalism, associating sport with the great country of America. The biggest challenge I faced while completing this assignment was trying to encapsulate such a complex issue in one piece. I usually do more abstract, representational art, but struggled to come up with an abstract concept that would effectively touch on all the points I wanted to hit. Therefore, I opted for a more infographic-like, cartoon image in order to make sure that my point was easily understood. I think that my final product was definitely successful in getting the point that I wanted to make across to the viewer. I am proud of myself for stepping outside of my comfort zone and doing a painting, as I am a very type A personality and find comfort in the simplicity and familiarity of essay writing. However, I wish that I had incorporated more of my abstract style into the piece, as I believe that would have also brought more emotion to the work.