Gods of the Gridiron: The Racial Characterization of Quarterbacks in *Sports Illustrated*

Senior Comprehensive Project
By: Sarah Mayer
The Quarterback

--In the game of football quarterbacks are the leaders of the offensive side
--They are responsible for overseeing the football field and for calling plays
--They have the most contact with the ball and are typically seen as the most visible and important member of the team
--Dominated by white players
--The Michael Vick Effect
Research Questions:

What are the different ways the media frames black and white quarterbacks?

Are white quarterbacks seen as better leaders of an National Football League (NFL) team?
Despite recent media attention focusing on the black quarterback, white quarterbacks are portrayed in *Sports Illustrated* as better leaders on and off the field.
Review of the Literature

Perception of Black NFL players: Dufur & Feinberg (2008) --‘walking the plank’ --Combine
Review of Past Literature

- Bigler & Jeffries (2008)
  - physically stronger
- Niven (2005)
  - ‘The Rush Limbaugh Effect’
- Buffington (1999)
  - silence
- Primm, DuBois & Regoli (2005)
  - ‘fraternity of white quarterbacks’
- Shermar (2000)
  - No heirarchy
Theory

- Dilemma of physical bondage; root of black athletes strength and aggression
- The Conveyor Belt; push into supporting roles
- Inclusion without power; no control over careers
- Alienation; the process consisted of buying and selling
Methodology

Content Analysis

- Date range: January 1st, 2007-December 31st, 2009
- Used ‘The Vault’ on www.si.com
  - Narrowed archives by sport, NFL football
  - Narrowed by ‘cover’
  - Narrowed by description in table of contents
  - Narrowed by writer
- Tim Layden, Paul Zimmerman, and Peter King are considered Senior writers and experts. (www.si.com)
- Could not be a part of commemorative or special issues nor could they be opinion columns, interviews or weekly columns.
Methodolgy

- Quantitative and Qualitative
- Listed quarterbacks and races
- Each article coded for ‘quarterback’ and labeled ‘black’, ‘white’, or ‘other’.
- Coded for:
  1. Leadership  
  2. Arm Strength  
  3. Accuracy
  4. Speed
  5. Intelligence
  6. Natural talent
  7. Family life
  8. Work Ethic
- Direction: positive or negative
Sample:
--35 issues
--85 articles

Sports Illustrated
Findings

- Table 1: Individual Quarterback Mentions Throughout the Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Individual Quarterbacks</th>
<th>Mentions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White Quarterbacks</td>
<td>33 (76.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Quarterbacks</td>
<td>10 (23.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N=</td>
<td>43 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Findings:

• Table 2: Physical Traits, Race, and Direction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Arm strength</th>
<th>Speed</th>
<th>Accuracy</th>
<th>Natural Talent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black-Positive</td>
<td>7 (14.89%)</td>
<td>10 (58.83%)</td>
<td>6 (3.31%)</td>
<td>9 (75.00%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black-Negative</td>
<td>0 (0.00%)</td>
<td>1 (5.88%)</td>
<td>8 (4.42%)</td>
<td>0 (0.00%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White-Positive</td>
<td>35 (74.47%)</td>
<td>6 (35.29%)</td>
<td>123 (67.96%)</td>
<td>3 (25.00%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White-Negative</td>
<td>5 (10.64%)</td>
<td>0 (0.00%)</td>
<td>44 (24.31%)</td>
<td>0 (0.00%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n=</td>
<td>47 (100.00%)</td>
<td>17 (100.00%)</td>
<td>181 (100.00%)</td>
<td>12 (100.00%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Findings

- Table 3: Personality Traits, Race, and Direction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Leadership</th>
<th>Intelligence</th>
<th>Family Life</th>
<th>Work Ethic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black-Positive</td>
<td>7 (5.6%)</td>
<td>1 (2.44%)</td>
<td>0 (0.00%)</td>
<td>8 (14.29%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black-Negative</td>
<td>13 (10.3%)</td>
<td>3 (7.32%)</td>
<td>1 (2.78%)</td>
<td>1 (1.79%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White-Positive</td>
<td>86 (68.3%)</td>
<td>30 (73.17%)</td>
<td>30 (83.33%)</td>
<td>43 (76.78%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White-Negative</td>
<td>20 (15.8%)</td>
<td>7 (17.07%)</td>
<td>5 (13.89%)</td>
<td>4 (7.14%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n=</td>
<td>126 (100.00%)</td>
<td>41 (100.0%)</td>
<td>36 (100.0%)</td>
<td>56 (100.0%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Discussion

• Black quarterbacks: 58.2% for speed and 75% for natural talent (positive)

• Intelligence and accuracy

• Natural Talent, work ethic, and leadership

• White intelligence and leadership
Discussion

- Importance of findings’
- Lack of black quarterbacks in sample
- Subjectivity and bias
- Strengths and weaknesses
- Further research
Questions? Comments?

Thanks for listening!