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# White privilege in the NFL

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**WHITE PRIVILEGE IN THE NFL**

**A Thesis**

**Presented to**

**The Faculty of the Department of Interdisciplinary Studies**

**San Jose State University**

**In Partial Fulfillment**

**of the Requirements for the Degree**

**Master of Arts**

**by**

**Shawn R. Thomas**

**December 2006**

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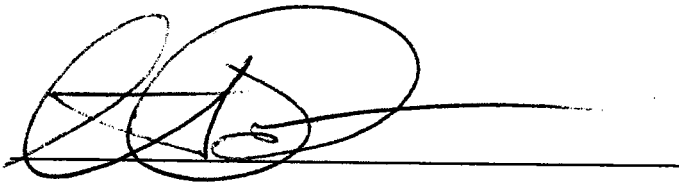
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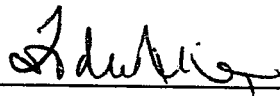
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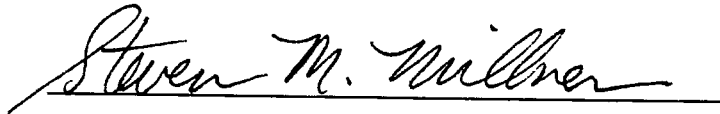
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## **ABSTRACT**

### **WHITE PRIVILEGE IN THE NFL**

by Shawn R. Thomas

In today's America, exclusive competition of the superior and inclusive competition of the inferior forms the basis of work place relationships and professional networking. Whites compete among themselves for the plentiful resources that offer power and wealth while African Americans compete among themselves for miniscule resources and opportunities. Consequently, our society appears to lack equitable functioning workplace relationships between Whites and African Americans. The reasons are complex and include the inability of African Americans to force their way into qualifying for the same resources afforded White people as well as the active (and passive) exclusion of African Americans from access to resources (Arboleda, 1992).

This thesis explores the socio-economic arena of the National Football League (NFL). Because of the overwhelming success of African American players (performance, monetary, and celebrity), it provides a laboratory for examining the roles played by race in the workplace and professional networks relative to key decision-making positions within professional football franchises.

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## **Part I**

### Introduction

The divergent experiences and perceptions of African Americans and Whites have resulted in the development of two different definitions of racism. This paradigm assumes an image of the subject matter that emphasizes the way in which people's actions are influenced by their subjective interpretations rather than being determined by external social facts (Duke, 1992). This approach also emphasizes that behavior is based on one's understanding of the situation and interaction with others. The overarching theme of this perspective is that man is an active creator of his own social reality (Ritzer, 1975).

Suffice it to say, African Americans define racism in terms of their personal experiences in past and present encounters. Whites, on the other hand, have not personally experienced the feeling of being discriminated against nor denied an opportunity because of their race (Hill, 1996). As a result, Whites tend to hold a narrow view of racism, often to the point of denying its existence--seeing it primarily as a matter of individual beliefs and actions, rather than as a system of racial privilege (Cose, 1993). Racism, however, goes beyond one's personal belief schema in which Whites can benefit even while attempting to dismantle that very system.

When individuals automatically award superior status to their own cultural group and inferior status to those outside it, they are acting racist. Most people, if they are truly being honest with themselves, can see that there are advantages and privileges to being White in the United States (Anderson & Collins, 1995). Despite the rhetoric about affirmative action and “reverse discrimination,” every social indicator-- from greater access to jobs, higher salaries, better housing and a longer life expectancy-- reveals the advantages of being White (Jones, 1993).

It is important to note that the system of racism is perpetuated when people do not acknowledge its existence. After exhaustive media coverage of events such as the Rodney King incident, the Charles Stuart and Susan Smith cases and the O.J. Simpson trial, it seems hard to imagine that anyone would still be unaware of the reality of racism in our society. But in fact, there is always someone who has not noticed the stereotypical images of people of color by the media or has not read the newspaper articles regarding the rising incidents of racially motivated hate crimes in America--in short, someone who has not been paying attention to issues of race (Tatum, 1997).

Whites share a common cultural heritage where skin color has played a significant role. Because of their experience, they inevitably share ideas, attitudes and beliefs that attach significance to an individual's race and induce negative feelings about non-Whites. To the

extent that their cultural experience has influenced them, the majority of White people are racists (Edwards, 1972).

Of course, people of all races hold hateful attitudes and behave in racially discriminatory ways. None of us is completely innocent or immune. Racial prejudice is an integral part of our socialization. Poor, middle class and upper class people of all cultural groups often demonstrate feelings of prejudice toward people of a different national, cultural, economic or racial background. They also may internalize the stereotypical categories about other groups to some degree. However, because African Americans and other people of color do not systematically benefit from racism, they cannot be “racists” per se. On the other hand, White people can be racists because intentionally or unintentionally, they do benefit from the systematic advantage known as White privilege (Tatum, 1997).

Systematic racism in America can begin early and often go undetected as it becomes internalized and integrated as part a person’s outlook on the world by custom, habit and tradition. Stereotypes, omissions and distortions all contribute to prejudice and racism. The distortion of historical information about people of color and exposure to misinformation leads Whites to make assumptions that may go unchallenged for a long time. In turn, the racist system perpetuates

itself quietly because White people grow up with a sense of racial superiority, whether conscious or unconscious (Tatum, 1997).

There seems to be an inherent myopia among Whites which causes them to be interested in others only in relation to themselves (Entine, 1991). This near-sightedness is hardly the exclusive property of Whites. However, when the majority of the researchers are White and the market for publications is predominantly White, myopia has a great deal to do with what gets published and what does not.

News coverage is explainable in terms of the interests of the majority group. The majority group wants to hear news about “White” events so the news reports are positioned so that “non-White” activities and events are juxtaposed to White interests. For example, minority gang violence generally receives press coverage when the location of the violence threatens White communities. Daily occurrence of minority-on-minority violence in the Black communities is often relegated to non-front page coverage (if it is covered at all). Thus, minority males get introduced to society as thugs and perpetrators of violence.

Another example comes from an analysis of what White television commentators say about White and African American players on televised professional games. Based on a content analysis of sports broadcasting, the White commentators showed a greater tendency to mention negative, off-the-field behaviors on the part of African American

athletes as compared to White athletes. Furthermore, the on-the-field actions of the African American players were more likely to be described in unfavorable terms than the actions of White players (Rainville & McCormick, 1977). These subtle forms of racial discrimination in the media suggest the need to further examine the theoretical relationship between racism and professional sports.

The business of professional sports provides a useful paradigm for studying racism in America. The analysis of sports in the U.S. can be worthwhile because it has the potential to expand our knowledge of a form of human behavior that spans the gap between the spontaneous, expressive, formal, institutionalized, bureaucratic and work-like dimensions of life (Snyder, 1983). The sociological lens reveals images of professional sports phenomena in the sense that it exposes for observation some previously unseen elements of sports and as a result our society (Hill, 1996).

Professional sports in America are integrated in the corporate world and as such are highly infected with racism. However, we are led to believe that professionals in the corporate world provide equal opportunities for everyone while acting indiscriminately of race. However, to believe that the color of one's skin does not influence employment-related decisions is both denial and neglect of the real

problems and issues associated with racial discrimination in our country.

“Anybody that wakes up in the morning and tries to act like this is a colorblind society--and a lot of people still do this--is fooling himself,” says Clifford Alexander Jr., former secretary of the U.S. Army and current consultant for Major League baseball (ESPN, 2002).

The combination of racism and power leads to the institutionalization of racist policies and practices (Tatum, 1997). For example, in 1994 top executives at Texaco were exposed as actively discriminating against African Americans for promotion to senior management positions (regardless of their performance or resume). Although it may have been a shocking revelation to the White community that was met with disbelief, the news produced neither shock nor disbelief in the Black community and provided affirmation of the life experience of African American individuals at all social class levels.

The Texaco case confirmed that America’s corporate elite maintain racist views that guide their hiring, promotion and firing practices. Thus, such decision-making power remains in the hands of those with similar views and the current leadership recreates itself through such decisions.

Legislative and judicial efforts to eliminate racial discrimination have found it easier to demonstrate workplace racial discrimination at the



lower levels of employment and social formation. The elite level hiring and promotion remains insulated from direct scrutiny due to subjectivity in assessing quality and need. Consequently, African Americans are rarely offered those elite decision and policy-making jobs. However, how people, White or Black, perceive a particular situation is typically reflected by how that individual was affected by the situation.

Cose (1993) revealed in a study that 90% of African Americans reported a racial climate worse than that of their White peers. That same study also indicated that the majority of White executives perceived their organization to be diverse, a provider of equal opportunity and free of racism--seemingly ignorant of the discontent shared by their African American employees.

Today, discriminatory workplace climate often operates in covert and/or passive ways. Although racism can find expression outwardly in racial slurs and crimes born out of racial hatred, it is most generally subtle and can be seen in the collusion of laughing when a racist joke is told, of failing to challenge such jokes, of letting exclusionary hiring practices go unchallenged, of accepting as appropriate the omissions of people of color in supervisor and management positions, of accepting unwritten policy of African American and other minority inferiority or the avoidance of addressing difficult race-related issues. Because the system of racism is so ingrained in the fabric of American institution, it

is easily self-perpetuating. All that is required to maintain it is business as usual (Tatum, 1997).

Snyder (1983) suggested that when members of a minority group are integrated into a predominantly White arena (i.e., Corporate America), they are particularly visible and their behavior takes on added symbolic significance. Under these circumstances they are subject to extra scrutiny, conversation, questioning, and gossip. Breaking the color-barrier may force the minority individual to restrict his or her behavior to a prescribed role that meets a particular image, stereotype, or behavior that is attached to minorities by the majority group.

This heightened visibility is illustrated by the example of Jackie Robinson when he was the first African American baseball player introduced into Major League Baseball. Branch Rickey, president of the Brooklyn Dodgers, took special care to select an African American that he thought would accept the taunts and indignities that would go with being the first Black in the league. However, Robinson's success in this highly visible position was based more on his outstanding ability to play the game as opposed to his ability to endure the taunts (Brooks, 1993).

Today's professional sports, specifically the hiring of head coaches and front office personnel (management), reflect societal and institutional racism. In reference to professional sports, racism finds itself in the form of unequal access to opportunity for upward mobility. Interestingly, there

are many Whites who feel that racism in professional sports--due to the success of the African American athlete on the field (and in contract negotiations) -- is a non-issue and a thing of the past. Although those people may indeed believe this, it hasn't gone away (Ousley, 1995).

While access for African American athletes has expanded since Jackie Robinson, leadership opportunities made available off of the field in coaching and management for them have not.

Leadership positions are among the last frontiers that remain inaccessible for African Americans. According to Anderson (1993), upward mobility of African Americans to a position of authority remains extremely restricted. Within professional sports, particularly in football, the use of authority is readily apparent. Football coaches are executives. They have vice presidents (offensive and defensive coordinators) and middle-management department heads (position coaches) in charge of the myriad positions (Deford, 2002). The functioning of teams is based on the authority of the coach over players. Furthermore, the socialization process whereby individuals learn their role is based upon head coaches exerting their authority over others (Snyder, 1983).

The issue of African American head coaches in the National Football League (NFL) has long been a staple of sports and sociology (Nordlinger, 1993). The question is both an important one and a vexing one. While African American players dominate the league, in 2004 there were only

three African American head coaches out of the 31 teams. In racial terms, this alone would seem to be a gross imbalance. However, since 1922, when the current National Football League was formed, only a total of six African Americans have ever been hired to be head coaches. Therefore, this study aimed to examine the sociological factors that restrict employment opportunities for African American coaches working at the professional level. The purpose was to provide a clear picture of the employment pattern of the 31 franchises and explore job-related experiences and perception barriers that are faced by African American coaches in the National Football League. After an extensive review of the literature, it was concluded that race is a determining factor for the disproportionate high presence of African Americans in the performance areas (i.e., players) and the utter exclusion of African Americans in the authoritative and decision-making positions (i.e., head coach).

The cruel counterpart to the superior performance of African American players in the NFL is the inferior head coaching hiring opportunities. Cochran (2002) described several manifestations for such limited opportunities, including the higher bar set for African American coaches before they are seriously considered for top coaching positions and the tendency to quickly terminate African American coaches. In case after case, it appeared NFL owners showed more interest in and

exercised more patience with White coaches who did not win consistently than African American coaches who did.

The data collected also revealed that perception and racial stereotyping hinders African American coaches' upward mobility and operates indiscriminately despite their experience, education, and age. The research also indicated that African American coaches feel compelled to work constantly to overcome the perception that they are not capable of leading a professional organization because they "lack the necessities" (Brooks, 1993). "It's baffling," says Tony Dungy, head coach of the Indianapolis Colts. "There still seems to be that perception out there clouding the owners' minds" (ESPN, 2002).

The media helps fuel the perception. For example, while broadcasting a game on *Monday Night Football*, Al Michaels and Dan Dierdorf were discussing Don Capers (the White former head coach of the Carolina Panthers) as being a "great prospect" for a head coaching job. Then, they said "Ray Rhodes would make someone a good defensive coordinator." Even though both coaches had earned "NFL Coach of the Year" in their career, the announcers felt that the African American Rhodes would be better suited as a coordinator than he would as a head coach. Viewers and team owners have no choice but to absorb this (ESPN.com, 2001).

Literature also revealed that the perception may be a result of one or more of the following conditions:

- (1) Overt discrimination on the part of team owners;
- (2) African American coaches not playing central (decision-making) positions during their playing careers;
- (3) African American coaches not having comparable professional pathways available to them as White coaches;
- (4) African American coaches not having existing head coach recruiting networks.

In regard to the shortage of African American coaches in the NFL, Graves (2002) suggested that there are two primary pipelines to tap for African American head coaching talent for the league. The first is the pool of offensive or defensive coordinators and assistant head coaches of professional teams. There are a growing number of African Americans who hold such positions in the league. Several of them, such as the Ted Cottrell and Sherman Lewis have excelled as coordinators in the profession for nearly two decades without landing a head coaching job.

The second source for potential African American head coaches in the NFL are the top coaches of college football programs. According to the Black Coaches Association (BCA), however, ethnic minorities represent only 2.7% (15 of 547) of head coaches at all National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) institutions (not including those coaching at historically Black colleges and universities). At the Division I-A level, ethnic minorities held just 4.3% (5 of 115) of the head coaching jobs. Despite the low number of Black head coaches at the college level, NFL team owners can no longer use “lack of qualified Black coaches” as an excuse. The BCA, the NCAA, and the Minority Opportunities Athletic

Association (MOAA) lists more than 50 candidates who are well-qualified as head coaching candidates.

It is no secret that excelling in football at the professional level requires a tremendous work ethic, leadership, intelligence, decisiveness, creativity, and a commitment to planning and performance. Although African Americans have demonstrated all of these characteristics, over the past twenty years the study of racial discrimination and “stacking” at the college and professional level has received considerable attention (Althouse, 1996). “Stacking” occurs when African Americans are excluded from occupying central positions because White coaches and executives hold the perception that African Americans do not have the “necessities” to occupy those positions (Eitzen, 1977). “Stacking” and leadership recruitment studies have all asked the same basic question: How are the positions and award structures allocated? Researchers have tried to integrate the two areas to better understand the relationship between position occupation and future career mobility in sports (Leonard, 1997).

Eitzen and Sanford (1975) initially reviewed the career patterns of African American athletes and found that as they move from high school, to college, to professional sports, they move from central to non-central positions (i.e., quarterbacks become receivers or running backs; linebackers become defensive backs). The researchers concluded that

racial segregation by position restricts African Americans' upward mobility. For example because non-central positions are not considered to be leadership or "thinking" positions, playing non-central positions is perceived by White executives to be inadequate training for a career in head coaching.

To stimulate the hiring of African Americans as head coaches, a group led by prominent attorney Johnnie Cochran, Jr. and Floyd Keith (director of the BCA) proposed that the league should offer incentives in terms of draft picks for team owners that interview diverse racial groups for candidates. Although Cochran insisted that he didn't want to "bully" the NFL or make money on the deal, he did threaten to take legal action against the league if it did not adhere to his suggestions to remedy the situation. "Our motives are driven not by financial gain, but to correct what we see as a great inequity in America's game," he said. The league, eager to avoid long-term litigation and negative press in the media, responded by admitting that there was room for improvement (Nordlinger, 2003).

Greg Aiello, a spokesman for the league, insists that the NFL has taken this issue "very seriously" and pointed to the initiation of several programs in recent years to ensure that "hiring practices are fair and that all coaches have equal opportunity to advance" (ESPN.com.2001).



In December 2002, league commissioner Paul Tagliabue set up a Workplace Diversity Committee to increase the coaching opportunities for minorities in the league. All 31 teams agreed to the implementation of the Rooney Rule, which was named after Dan Rooney, the owner of the Pittsburgh Steelers and chairman of the committee. The rule stipulates that all teams shall interview at least one minority candidate for each coaching vacancy. As a result, the Detroit Lions were slapped with a \$200,000 fine for failing to comply with the agreement. "If left to their own devices many (White team executives) would not do it," Cochran warned.

Although Commissioner Tagliabue deserves plaudits for his hiring of minorities to fill responsible positions in the league office, which included Gene Washington (executive director of football operations), Leo Miles (supervisor of officials), and Harold Henderson (executive vice-president of labor relations), the team owners have not followed his example. Moreover, in recent years the head coaching situation has gotten worse, not better. This season the number of Black head coaches in the league has dropped from three to two. During the 2002 hiring cycle, NFL fans watched African American coaching pioneers Tony Dungy and Dennis Green be terminated despite obtaining winning records. Meanwhile, Marvin Lewis, arguably one of the most dynamic and gifted head coaching candidates in the league, could not obtain a meaningful

opportunity to compete for a head coaching position (Marvin Lewis has since been hired as head coach of the Cincinnati Bengals, after the research of this thesis was complete).

Many of the African American coaches around the league believe that they will never be given equal treatment. The problem continues to be that most of the head coaching jobs in the NFL appear to be reserved for middle-aged White males. The door of opportunity for African American head coaches has only been cracked but by permitting a select few an opportunity, the league gives the illusion that equal opportunity does exist for African Americans. Furthermore, the league touts Tony Dungy and Herman Edwards as its “examples” but it still remains difficult for African American coaches to truly believe that they will indeed be granted equal access to head coaching and managerial opportunities because it happens so infrequently.

Many of the African American coaches have become so disillusioned and cynical that they are loath to seek interviews for head coaching jobs because they believe that team owners are using them to create the mere appearance of fairness and open-mindedness. After the “pro forma interview,” the African American coach gets rejected, supposedly on the grounds that he lacks experience as a head coach or a coordinator. “That’s one thing I can’t fight,” says Sherman Lewis, who has interviewed unsuccessfully for a head coaching job four times, “and that’s the one

thing that eliminates just about every African American coach, because none of us have it” (ESPN, 2002). Meanwhile, the three current African American NFL head coaches are sticking to their game plan. “Never lose that focus and your dream,” Dungy advises. “Attitude is too important.”

To get a broader picture of the inequalities faced by African American coaches in the NFL, the following chapters will detail the history of African American athletes, their involvement in the rise spectator sports, and similarities regarding the perception of African American athletes and African American professionals working in corporate America. This study will analyze the league’s coaching staffs in hopes of bringing light to the under-representation of African American head coaches in the NFL. According to the data, past and current hiring trends indicate a definite need to seek measures that will genuinely promote equal opportunities within the coaching profession.

## **Part II**

### **Background**

The integration and success of African Americans in sports were major turning points in our country's history. Not only did these events revolutionize sports, but also peoples' minds as well. The struggle of African American athletes helped people realize the truth in the notion that "all men are created equal." Pioneering African American athletes acknowledged and accepted their role as groundbreakers for their people both on the playing field and in life. Jesse Owens was inspirational for breaking three track and field records and tying one in the 1936 Olympics in Germany. Jackie Robinson exuded bravery when he integrated Major League Baseball. Joe Louis carried the weight of his people both inside and outside of the boxing ring. All of these athletes dominated their competition in spite of the existing racism that shadowed their careers. These athletes have come and gone. Racism, sadly, is still around. It is ingrained in sports culture and abundant at every level.

To fully understand the extent of racism in sports in the United States, we cannot perceive it apart from the larger societal context in which it is situated. That is to say, racism within the larger society spills over into sports, particularly where millions of dollars are at stake (i.e., collegiate and professional football).

Conflicts that occur in sports are symptomatic of wider social issues, which exist when different racial groups try to live together (Maguire, 1991). Race is a criterion used for social evaluation and for the determination of social status and prestige. Therefore, race is important to the observer because of how it is socially interpreted rather than for its biological characteristics or phenotype markers (Snyder, 1983).

A common assumption is that sports represent the one segment of our society where members of the minority group have an equal opportunity inasmuch as ability becomes evidence through performance. For example, although the proportion of African Americans in the United States population is approximately 13% (U.S. Census, 2002), in the last 40 years they have become heavily over-represented in such sports as football and basketball. Nevertheless, both empirical and anecdotal data suggest that subtle forms of racism continue to occur in the world of sports (Spreitzer, 1983).

Historically, racism has been a persistent thread running through the garment of the African American experience (Korgen, 1992). The oppression of African Americans is deeply rooted in American culture and continues to manifest itself in contemporary times. Whites subjected African Americans to an extended period of enslavement (approximately 1650-1865). Following the Civil War, African Americans continued to find themselves victimized by a variety of discriminatory

laws aimed at segregating them from Whites and curtailing their social, economic and political opportunities.

Throughout the South, where most African Americans lived, Jim Crow laws created structural legal barriers to integrated public accommodations, denied access and/or integration in educational institutions, denied job opportunities in professional positions, and denied electoral participation. These laws were fully sanctioned by the U.S. Supreme Court in a variety of landmark cases such as *Plessy v Ferguson* (1896) which established the legal doctrine of “separate but equal.” Despite the many challenges against discriminatory laws, policy, and practices, Jim Crow successfully and severely limited a stable economic base for African Americans.

African Americans remain disadvantaged by virtually every socio-economic category, including educational attainment, household and per capita income, and employment occupation in the skilled and professional positions (U.S. Census, 2002). Additionally, African Americans are also at greater health risks, are less likely to have medical insurance, own their own home or business, and have a retirement plan beyond social security.

Despite pervasive and systematic discrimination against them throughout their history in this country, African Americans have played a significant role in each era of professional sports. Their involvement in

professional sports can be divided into four stages: largely exclusion (pre-Civil War); breakthroughs (immediately following the Civil War); segregation (1880s- World War II); and integration (post-World War II).

Upon emancipation, there was turmoil within the White community in regards to the “appropriate” place for the newly freed slaves. Determined to maintain racial superiority, Southern politicians claimed that social and economic conditions dictated that full distinction of every kind ought to be made between the two races. Inevitably, society and sports remained segregated by custom and by law (Arboleda, 1992).

By the latter part of the nineteenth century, there were African American professional athletes, though not many. African Americans were contributing to the rise of spectator sports such as baseball, boxing and horseracing (Althouse, 1996). Unfortunately, these African Americans were the exception. Jim Crow was still the norm.

Apparently, the success of African American athletes threatened the notion of White superiority because by 1900, White athletes no longer wanted to compete with or against Black players. White players threatened to quit rather than share the field with Black players. Pressured, White team owners were forced to make “gentlemen’s agreements” not to sign any more Black players (West, 1994).

For more than four decades, African Americans playing team sports generally were either segregated into Negro leagues or had to take part in

individual sports (i.e., track and field and boxing). Rarely were there exceptions made. For instance, in the NFL, only the most sparkling of African Americans were admitted into the league. When these exceptional athletes were admitted, it was done grudgingly and it was understood that teams wanted to keep their number of “(N-word)” players to a minimum. As such, African Americans in the NFL were anomalies, and if they were not starters, they would not make the roster.

Not until Joe Louis hit the scene in the 1930s did the White public actually accept a Black athlete as an American hero. Although Jesse Owens had wowed the sports world with his phenomenal performance in Germany, White Americans never fully embraced the sprinter in the manner it did Louis. To Whites, Joe Louis was a novelty. He was far more interesting than any other Black athlete the White public could have ever imagined.

Louis’ acceptance by Whites was not immediate, however. For example, White sportswriters constantly wrote about his skin color and consistently used derogatory names to describe him. When Louis reached the top of the heavyweight ranking, the writers often commented on how bizarre it was for a Negro to reach such a position of prominence.

Because Louis was the most successful and visible Black in sports, it was inevitable that he would become the symbol of his race to both African Americans and White people. To African Americans, Joe Louis



was the greatest of a miniscule number of cultural heroes. His victories often evoked celebrations in the Black communities throughout the country.

Every time Louis stepped into the ring to fight a White opponent, he was also fighting against historical theories of White supremacy. As time went on, he won greater acceptance from the White sportswriters, and in turn, the White community. Louis seemed to have gained a more “human” image (Mead, 1968).

It should be noted that during his career, unlike his boxing predecessor Jack Johnson, Louis avoided offending Whites. With the help of his manager, Louis carefully constructed a well-behaved public image that would not provoke and antagonize Whites. For example, he downplayed all of his victories. He did not parade around with White women. He never humiliated his White opponents, nor did he make waves on racial issues.

To Whites, Louis was “a credit to his race” and a model for all African Americans to follow. He eagerly entered the U.S. Army during World War II and was used as a “poster boy” for patriotic wartime propaganda. Subsequently, the same people who had labeled him “the Sepia Slugger,” “the Dark Destroyer,” “the Ethiopian Terror,” and “the Brown Bomber” were now labeling him a “fine American.” Ironically, Louis’ acceptance by

Whites would become a challenge to segregation, a challenge that would begin to crack the entire system as a whole (Mead, 1968).

World War II and Nazism presented the toughest challenge for White Americans who wanted to think of themselves as different from their enemy. Many shamelessly criticized Adolf Hitler and his treatment of the Jews while ignoring, justifying or downplaying their own racism. African American writers were never short on emphasizing the contradiction and used it to appeal for racial justice (Takaki, 1990).

Had it not been for Owens' Olympic feats and Louis' victory against Germany's Max Schmelling, Nazism would not have posed such a challenge to White Americans' definition of themselves. Those two athletic events contradicted Hitler's theories of Aryan superiority, leaving many White Americans staring at an awkwardly revealing mirror (Mead, 1968).

The United States government and its army also used the victories by Owens and Louis to sell the war to African Americans. Major effort was made to encourage African American enlistment and persuade African Americans that they had a stake in the war. Meanwhile, the U.S. War Department remained actively racist. Franklin Roosevelt maintained that winning the war was first priority and that justice for African Americans would have to wait until Germany and Japan surrendered.

Although African Americans fought heroically in the war, won medals, and were recognized for their splendid efforts in France and North Africa, they returned home and were relegated once more to second-class citizenship. However, their efforts did create some opportunities for desegregation.

In 1946 Harry Truman created the President's Committee on Civil Rights that issued a report: "To Secure These Rights", which laid out a program aimed at ending racial inequality. In that same year, Major League Baseball demonstrated a similar symbolic and substantial shift in practice when the Brooklyn Dodgers signed Jackie Robinson. Along with their coaches, team owners abandoned their tradition of racial discrimination in favor of winning more games and making more money.

By 1970, there was a sense by the White public that racism in professional sports was a thing of the past (Edwards, 1972). This notion was based primarily on the large number of African Americans playing collegiate and professional football, baseball, basketball. It was assumed that African Americans were over-represented in sports because of their dominance in the three major sports but researchers suggest that if all sports were considered (i.e., tennis, golf, bowling, auto racing), the overall proportion of professional African American athletes would come close to the proportion of African Americans in the U.S. population (Hill, 1996).

The large numbers of African American athletes in high profile professional and collegiate sports (i.e., baseball, basketball, football) relative to their percentage in the general population and the prominence of African Americans support the image of sports as the “land of equal opportunity”. However, the requirement that African Americans be far better than the majority has given rise to a subtle form of discrimination: equal opportunity for superior ability (Snyder, 1983).

Edwards (1986) offered an explanation for the high presence and success of African Americans in sports. He stated that African Americans, like Whites, are taught to strive for that which is defined as the most desirable among potentially achievable goals. However, because the avenues of achievement in many occupational areas are limited for African Americans and because sport is one area that has been available for them in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, they have devoted a disproportionate amount of their talent and energy to sports.

Edwards refers to the single-minded pursuit of fame and fortune through sports as the *Triple Tragedy*: *One*, the tragedy of thousands upon thousands of African American youths in obsessive pursuit of sports goals that the overwhelming majority of them will never attain. *Two*, the tragedy of personal and cultural underdevelopment that afflicts so many successful and unsuccessful African American sports aspirants. *Three*, the tragedy of cultural and institutional underdevelopment

throughout the African American community which serves as the consequence for the drain in talent potential toward sports and away from other vital areas of occupational and career emphasis, such as medicine, law, economics, politics, education, and technical fields.

These three factors connect to the systematic channeling of African American males by American institutions. There remains consistent perpetuation of African Americans' athletic superiority and intellectual deficiency. Mass media propaganda continues to imply that sport is "the promised land" and the most accessible route to social and economic mobility. Absent, however, is the visibility of African American role models in occupations outside the sports participation arena, not to mention leadership occupations within it (Edwards, 1986). Contrarily, Whites have many avenues of opportunity and a variety of role models available to them.

Edwards' work over the past few decades affirms the conditions of African American life in urban communities. It is articulated by William Julius Wilson in *When Work Disappears* (1996):

The struggle of urban youth for survival and pleasure inside capitalism has become both their greatest friend and greatest foe. It has the capacity to create spaces for their entrepreneurial imaginations and their symbolic work and allows them to turn something in for a profit, and to permit them to hone their skills and imagine getting paid. At the same time, it is also responsible for a shrinking labor market, the militarization of urban space, and the circulation of the very representations of race that generate

terror in all of us at the sight of young African Americans who want to wear their shoes.

Sports today remain as activities in which many young African Americans commit much of their time and energy. Sports become a part of their ethnic subculture. The dream of making it to the professional level and getting paid millions of dollars is held by many youngsters in the Black ghettos. Furthermore, the few African Americans that do actually make it professionally provide ample fuel for these dreams. Although the number of African Americans who succeed is miniscule in relation to those who don't make it, those who make it present an optimistic picture of opportunities for young African Americans who have no other career aspirations.

Many Black educators have tried to discourage Black youths from committing themselves entirely to sports. However, the perception of African American professional athletes provides misleading role models. Consequently, it is almost impossible to find a kid in the ghetto who doesn't want to "be like Mike."

Without question, there are scores of young African Americans who are outstanding athletes. Yet all but a very small number are sorted out of the athletic stream and make it big. Many of them will be left with an education that is inadequate for gaining meaningful employment. Over time, they may become frustrated, confused and bitter. Many will turn

to drugs. Many will turn to crime. Many will die. Too often, the youth who once dreamed of filling up the “stat” sheet ends up becoming just another statistic.

### Part III

#### Rationale

In our society, many Whites hold the perception that African Americans are genetically bad people. They feel it is not a matter of choice, or upbringing, but rather simply a racial or genetic attribute. Additionally, African Americans are perceived more likely to be poor (and stay poor) because they do not like to work hard. They are “street-wise” and have to be tough so that they can fight and defend themselves from other African Americans (Lichtenberg, 1992). When asked to comment on “what it means to be Black in America,” a sixth grade class consisting mostly of White students, commonly agreed that being Black in America meant:

- (a) not wanting to work hard because it wouldn't matter anyway;
- (b) having lots of kids;
- (c) living off of welfare;
- (d) belonging to a gang;
- (e) going to jail;
- (f) expecting to die young

The students of the class also felt that the few Blacks who did do well in school and were successful in life did so because those particular Blacks “wanted to be like White people” (Lichtenberg, 1992). The perceptions that the children had about African Americans may have come not only from what they had seen on television and what they had been told, but rather what they had *not* been told.



Social scientists describe perception as a fixed tendency to interpret information in a particular way. The differences in culture and past experiences influence the cognitive process by which people give meaning to their surroundings. As a result, what people perceive to be real is often what people believe to be real (Mondy & Premeaux, 1993). In reference to race, when comparisons are made between African Americans and Whites, stereotypical perceptions are revealed (West, 1994). For example, in a 1998 survey conducted by *USA Today*, nearly 400 Whites held the perceptions that African Americans were naturally gifted physically but insufficient mentally.

In response to the dominance of African Americans in sports, the Whites felt that African Americans excel on the playing fields but are lacking in other areas that require intellectual thought (Althouse, 1996).

Ironically, in most countries athletic prowess is regarded as a mark of privilege, esteem and intrigue. Superior athletes are looked upon as patriotic leaders and anointed the mystique of strength and intelligence--displaying a positive relationship between the physical and intellectual fitness. In America, however, successful African American athletes are sometimes regarded as "natural athletes," which often leads to the questioning of their intelligence and competence.

Unfortunately, the African American's "natural" superiority in sports has long been a two-edged sword. Success in sports came with a price,

both for the African American individual and the African American community as well. Some have argued that the accomplishments of African Americans in sports may have unwittingly devalued the achievements made by African American scholars such as W.E.B. Dubois, Booker T. Washington, and George Washington Carver (Brooks, 1993).

Despite their intellectual and scientific contributions, African Americans fought long to erase the perception of being “as strong as an ox but as dumb as a mule,” the same stereotypical perception White slave masters held about their Black field hands. Sadly, perceptions as these are still held by White executives both inside and outside of sports.

At times, perceptions associated with African American athletes have overwhelmed reason, which is cause for concern. For example, at an NFL banquet for league executives in 1987, long-time sports analyst Jimmy “the Greek” Snyder enlightened the audience with his perception that the African American male, like an animal, was “*bred* to be the physical specimen that he is.” In the same interview, he claimed that the African American’s physical advantage over the White man was a result of “the White slave master *breeding* his big mama slave with his black buck slave” (CBS Sports, 1987).

Whites’ perception of the “natural” physical superiority and genetic mental inferiority of Blacks can also be demeaning to the entire African

American race (Shropshire, 1996). The continued use of the “genetic explanation” could be construed as an attempt to keep African Americans from pursuing those avenues that inherently have been reserved for Whites only. It also suggests that because of their perceived intellectual disadvantage, African Americans are better off not setting unrealistic goals beyond the playing field (Edwards, 1986).

Consequently, White executives’ perceptions of African Americans can play a major role in African American coaches being passed over for leadership assignments or being pigeonholed in staff positions with no potential for professional growth (Hill, 1996). Although CBS Sports terminated its relationship with Snyder in view of his statements, White executives continue to make public statements that reveal unconscious bigotry that permeates professional sports.

In a nationally televised interview, in regard to African Americans being overlooked as head coaches or general managers at the professional level, Los Angeles Dodger executive Al Campanis stated, “I truly believe that African Americans do not have the necessities to be field managers or general managers” (*Nightline*, 1992). Despite being given several chances to retract his statement, Campanis stood steadfastly by his words. He was subsequently fired by the Dodgers organization.

Such statements made by Snyder and Campanis are examples of perception barriers African Americans must overcome when contemplating a coaching and/or management career in professional sports, because it is highly unlikely that such views are isolated personal opinions.

To improve access to equal employment opportunities, NFL officials must first admit that structural and process inequality exists within the current system used to select and hire its head coaches. Moreover, for equal opportunity to exist for African American coaches, the NFL must continue to address the negative perceptions of African Americans that are shared by numerous people in power.

Studies have also shown that the upward mobility problems faced by African American coaches may be an extension of racial discrimination that occurs on the playing field. Steve Weiberg (2001) claimed that perception is the source of racial discrimination by playing position. Positions normally played by African Americans are not considered to be leadership or thinking positions (*USA Today*, 2001).

Decision-makers in the professional football world believe that various playing positions require certain types of physically and intellectually endowed athletes. When these perceptions are combined with the stereotype of African Americans and Whites, African Americans are excluded from certain positions (Althouse, 1993).

Over the past 30 years, the study of “stacking” has received considerable attention. “Stacking” and leadership recruitment studies have all asked the same basic question: How are playing positions and reward structures allocated? Researchers have tried to integrate the two areas to better understand the relationship between the position occupation and the future career mobility of individuals in professional sports (Eitzen&Yetman, 1977).

Loy and McElvogue (1970) first studied the “stacking” phenomenon by synthesizing two theoretical perspectives--the concept of centrality developed by Grusky and Blalock’s (1962) propositions on discrimination. Loy and McElvogue hypothesized that racial segregation (“stacking”) in professional sports is positively related to centrality. Thus, we should expect to find few African Americans playing the central positions.

In their analysis of professional football, Loy and McElvogue defined the most central positions as quarterback and middle linebacker. The rationale for defining these positions as “central” is based on the spatial centrality of the position on the playing field or formation, and the high degree of interdependency of these positions with other team positions (i.e., handling the ball, leading the play). According to their hypothesis, African Americans will be underrepresented in these positions. Or, in other words, African Americans will be “stacked” in the non-central or

peripheral positions. This pattern of exclusion from the central positions could represent a form of discrimination (Snyder, 1983).

Edwards (1972) believed that spatial centrality is incidental to more important factors, that is, the relative importance of the position to controlling the outcome of the game and leadership responsibilities. It is his opinion that the factor of centrality itself is significant only insofar as greater outcome control and leadership responsibilities are typically vested in centrally located positions.

Accordingly, Edwards' explanation rests on the perception that White coaches feel African Americans lack the capability to meet the demands of the central positions in terms of fulfilling the responsibilities and leadership requirements that are directly related to the success of the team (Spreitzer, 1999).

Both the leadership and the stereotype explanations seem to be applicable to the under representation of African American head coaches in professional football. Moreover, "Black" positions (non-central) are considered less crucial in terms of decision-making, assuming responsibility, and providing leadership. Underlying these explanations is that White coaches and owners have a negative perception of African Americans' intellectual ability; in short, they are discriminatory toward African Americans by tending to place them in non-central playing positions with less demand for leadership and responsibility.

Unfortunately for African Americans, playing non-central positions is perceived to be inadequate training for a head coach (Snyder, 1983).

The continuity of the “stacking” phenomenon in professional football was substantiated by the findings of Eitzen and Yetman (1972) and statistically it can be argued that it continues today. Despite the emergence of the “athletic” quarterback, which has increased the number of African American quarterbacks, over 90% of the signal callers were White (NFL Media Guide, 2001-2002). Casual observers of the NFL may be able to point to only two African American quarterbacks of any note-- Doug Williams and Warren Moon-- before the year 2000.

Indeed, the most rare and precious commodity in the NFL may be the Black quarterback. Despite their small numbers (only six are starters for their teams), Black quarterbacks have managed to carve a niche, and some have even become superstars in the league. Thanks to current NFL players such as Donovan McNabb of the Philadelphia Eagles, Dante Culpepper of the Minnesota Vikings, Michael Vick of the Atlanta Falcons, Steve McNair of the Tennessee Titans, Jeff Blake of the New Orleans Saints and Quincy Carter of the Dallas Cowboys, African American quarterbacks are slowly pushing the envelope of racial intolerance. They are succeeding in what many call the most challenging position in professional sports. “I knew I could play in the NFL. I just wondered if I would ever get the opportunity,” Blake said (nfl.com 2002). A number of

Black quarterbacks had to wait years before finally getting their opportunity.

Warren Moon, who was the first quarterback (of any race) to pass for more than 60,000 yards, was able to break into the NFL only after leading the Edmonton Eskimos of the Canadian Football League to six consecutive Grey Cup Championships. Despite being one of the top passers in college football while attending the University of Washington, he was overlooked by NFL coaches, scouts, and general managers on Draft Day. However, Moon was offered several free-agent try-outs as a running back, wide receiver and defensive back. He declined.

From the time he entered the NFL in 1984 with the Houston Oilers, Moon was consistently one of the league's highest rated passers but was rarely mentioned by sportscasters as one of the league's best quarterbacks. After 18 years in professional football, Moon feels that his success did not provide equal opportunities for aspiring African American quarterbacks in the NFL or in college. "I think we need more opportunities," he said. "There should be more opportunities for Black quarterbacks. That's my biggest criticism of the league."

Blake, who played at a predominantly Black college (East Carolina), also avoided playing running back, wide receiver and defensive back at a larger Division I college for the sole purpose of playing quarterback. His determination and hard work have paid off. "It's the only position I've



ever played,” Blake stated. “If you were a contractor who built swimming pools, how would you feel if someone hired you to do stucco all of a sudden?”

In 1987, Doug Williams became the first Black quarterback to lead a team to a Super Bowl victory. A year later, Randall Cunningham of the Philadelphia Eagles became the first Black quarterback ever to be voted to start the NFL Pro Bowl. Since then, Black quarterbacks have been named to the Pro Bowl six times, shattering the longstanding taboo against Black quarterbacks (NFL.com, 2002).

One reason Black quarterbacks were virtually non-existent in college was that many White college coaches believed that Blacks lacked the intelligence and leadership necessary for the job. However, a lot of those coaches have since changed their thinking.

In many instances, the principal change has not been in the White coaches’ racist attitudes but rather in their perception of what a quarterback is supposed to do. Asked to explain why Blacks are finally being employed as quarterbacks, coaches have explained that today’s quarterback must deal with the unprecedented speed and size of the defensive linemen and linebackers, which requires “natural” athletic ability. Implicit in this response is that if intelligence were still what mattered most, Blacks would not be getting the call.

The media are culpable, too. Sportscasters and sportswriters today almost invariably describe Black quarterbacks as great “natural athletes” and refer to White quarterback as being “brainy field generals” or “students of the game.” These unconscious interpretations can feed the perceptions of White executives who may already believe Blacks to be inferior to the Whites in the decision-making process. This will in turn affect the African American who may seek a job as a head coach in the league.

Another recently formulated prerequisite for consideration as an NFL head coach appears to be prior experience as an NFL head coach-- a criterion that just about eliminates every African American assistant coach. For African American coaches, the previous experience requirement is a “catch-22”.

If lack of previous head coaching experience is the real reason why African Americans are not being hired as head coaches, how does that explain why Art Shell, former head coach of the Los Angeles Raiders and Ray Rhodes, former head coach of the Green Bay Packers and Philadelphia Eagles are still awaiting an offer to lead a team? Despite Shell’s 57 percent winning record, team owner Al Davis fired Shell in 1994. Since then Shell, the first African American head coach in the NFL’s modern era, has yet to be interviewed for a second NFL head

coaching job (Art Shell has since been hired as head coach for the Oakland Raiders, after the research of this thesis was completed).

Unfortunately, it appears that the failure of one African American coach can directly or indirectly affect job opportunities for other African American coaches (Hill, 1996). As Cochran suggests, “Black coaches are held to a higher standard than White coaches” (ESPN, 2002). Unlike White coaches, it seems to take only one “goof up” for an African American coach to be dismissed, labeled “unqualified,” or “not up to the task” for which they were hired to do.

Nevertheless, even when there is no perceived hope for advancement, African American coaches must work relentlessly and wait for the opportunity to show their coaching potential. These coaches also must face the fact that some of their White colleagues will assume that the only reason the African American can get a head coaching job is directly related to the color of his skin (i.e., “tokenism”). The African American coaches must ignore this fact and stay focused on getting the job done.

The bottom line should always be about production. African American coaches on the rise could use this as a motivational tool. While working on predominantly White coaching staffs, African Americans can erase negative stereotypes and perceptions by seeking professional development and increasing their knowledge regarding the X’s and O’s of the game (Hill, 1996).

According to former San Francisco 49ers head coach Bill Walsh, “Black football coaches should prepare themselves. It is highly critical that they cast off defeatist feelings, because you have to produce when you get the chance” (Smith, 1994). Sadly, it seems that producing is still not enough for most African American head coaches.

## **Part IV**

### Literature Review

On Friday, November 15, 1996, in the glare of scandal, Texaco signed what may be the largest settlement for a racial discrimination lawsuit, agreeing to pay an immediate \$115 million in damages plus pay raises of at least 10% to about 1,400 African American employees.

After 2 ½ years, the case was settled in 10 days of urgent negotiations that began the day after disclosure of secret recordings of senior Texaco executives denigrating African American employees and plotting to destroy incriminating evidence in the lawsuit. Texaco officials did not attend news conferences in Washington and New York to announce the settlement, but Texaco Chairman of the Board Peter I. Bijur said in a statement, "With this litigation behind us, we can now move forward on our broader, urgent mission to make Texaco a model of workplace opportunity for all men and women" (New York Times, Nov. 1996).

The kind of behavior that was captured on the Texaco tape "goes on every day in America, and the corporate stance is to deny it until someone is smart enough to have a tape recorder," said Texaco employee Dorinda Henderson. The uproar resulting from the tapes forced Texaco to the negotiating table and led to threats by civil rights groups of a national boycott of Texaco products and a stock-divestiture movement. "In light of Proposition 209 (the measure passed by California voters to

end state affirmative action programs), this tape has a lot more meaning than just to Texaco. It's America's problem" (New York Times, 1996).

From business to politics to professional sports and in virtually every institutional sector in the United States, African Americans experience grave injustices (Edwards, 1972). The tendency to measure African Americans' progress by access to entry-level positions tends to detract attention from the continuing prejudicial practices that have denied African Americans the upper-level positions they are qualified to fill. Bari-Ellen Roberts, one of the original plaintiffs in the Texaco discrimination case said, "Glued to the bottom of the bag was exactly how I felt." Roberts was obviously alluding to a taped remark by one of her Texaco superiors who joked that "all of the 'Black jelly beans' seem to be glued to the bottom of the bag" (New York Times, 1996).

Those associated with professional sports often underestimate the extent to which employment opportunities are limited for African American coaches. This occurs because people continue to think of racial discrimination only in terms of overt and purposeful bigotry (Hill, 1996). Racism remains an unspoken impediment despite the accolades professional sports receives for its high-flying, hard-hitting superstars.

In the past 25 years, African Americans have gone from zero to square two as coaches, but are still stuck in square one in the front office and the owner's circle (Lyons, 2002). Things have gotten so bad in sports that

some players have publicly raised the question of a player boycott or “sit-out” to bring pressure upon the leagues for additional African American coaches. “What must be done, will be done” (Cochran, 2002).

In the normal course of professional sports, those who play the games today are the prime source for the head coaches and executives of tomorrow (Leo, 2001). However, in a league in which the majority of players are Black, Black coaches in the NFL feel that their skin color puts them at a disadvantage in terms of upward mobility. Because of their race, they believe they are not given the same opportunities afforded to White coaches.

“I don’t think it’s overt racism,” says Colts coach Tony Dungy. “Has racism in the game changed in the last 25 years? No. Not in as much as we are still talking about similar issues today. We don’t have the same racist chants from the terraces because society has realized that kind of behavior is not acceptable but there is strong argument that we still do not have equal opportunities for everybody. Unfortunately, that’s an issue we have got to come to grips with” (ESPN, 2001). True, the system of racial discrimination today is not as blatant as it was in year’s past but it can be implemented through subtle and covert tactics that may not appear to be racially motivated (Hill, 1996).

Although the color barrier has been broken down on the playing field, on the sidelines and in the front offices the color issue is still an ever-

present obstacle for African Americans. In 2002, only three of the 31 head coaching jobs in the NFL were held by African American coaches. On top of that, in the previous five years, only five of the 103 African American assistants and coordinators in the league have even been given an *interview* for a head coaching job (NFL.com, 2002). Hypothetically, if we were to replace the African American players with the African American assistant coaches, the NFL in 2002 would look almost like it did at its inception nearly a century ago.

It would be near-sighted to regard discriminatory hiring practices in the NFL as simply an issue of Black and White. The fight against racial discrimination in the NFL is more than a struggle between Blacks and Whites; it also is a fight between management and employees. Lapchick (1998) noted "The hiring practices in the NFL mirror the racial hiring practice of corporate America."

In most working situations, African American employees view White employers as perpetrators of discreet racism. Exacerbating the problem is the fact that most employers, particularly White males, do not intentionally attempt to treat African Americans any differently than their White employees. However, employers fail to realize how their biased attitudes and stereotypical perceptions can create invisible, yet impenetrable, barriers to equal opportunity (Hill, 1996).



To avoid outright accusing White executives as being racists while still implying that many do practice racism, diversity advocates simply point to the league's paucity of African American head coaches as well as relying on people drawing their implication based on their all-purpose premise: racism is an ingrained, inescapable part of the White American mentality. According to this rationality, White executives, whether they know it or not, hold racial prejudices that make them unwilling or reluctant to hire African Americans as head coaches (Kellard, 2001).

The lack of mutual understanding and open and honest dialogue regarding equal opportunity between African Americans and Whites may contribute to the disparity of perceptions within particular professions (Farrell, 1997). Cose (1993) identified major perception barriers that can affect employment opportunities for African Americans. These barriers include but are not limited to:

Low expectations. African Americans frequently perceive their careers blocked because of their race. As a result, African American employees report a tendency to lower career expectations.

Identity troubles. To further advance careers, African Americans may perceive it necessary to deny their race, heritage and culture. Other members of their race may label this type of behavior as "Uncle Tom".

Inability to fit in. African Americans share the common perception that White employers believe that they do not fit within the organizational structure.

Faint praise. For their outstanding job performance, African American employees may be the recipients of praise at the expense of degrading the rest of the African American race.

Lack of respect. For African American employees, race can potentially undermine the status that comes with a certain title or position. White employers and peers tend not to respect the professional opinion or competence of their African American co-workers.

Exclusion from the club. Informal networks among White employees are not open to African Americans, although every effort on the part of the African American employee has been made to do the things necessary to fit in.

Pigeonholing. African Americans have a tendency to be over-represented in positions where their only relevant expertise concerns African Americans and other minorities.

Mendacity. African American employees believe many job interviews they receive are only token gestures because no genuine intent of employment ever existed.

Shattered hopes. African Americans often witness White co-workers with the same or lesser qualifications advancing within the

organization and assume that skin color is the only reason they have been denied the same opportunities.

Collective guilt. If an African American employee fails at a job assignment, other African Americans may also be deemed unfit or denied the opportunity to prove their capability.

Coping fatigue. The stress can be overwhelming for African Americans that are required to work with Whites who have a hard time acknowledging the competence of African American professionals.

Additionally, African American coaches in the NFL feel that their race not only restricts their coaching opportunities but also operates indiscriminately despite their experience and potential (Hill, 1996).

African American coaches have also complained about being left out of the informal communications network and feel less likely to be promoted than their White peers. African American coaches usually get stuck in non-central staff jobs and progress significantly slower than Whites coaches. Moreover, unlike their White colleagues, African Americans have to demonstrate time and time again that they are worthy of a promotion (Ibid).

Despite the barriers that plague African American coaches, many continue to maintain the determination and resiliency that inspires other African Americans to overcome adversity. However, claims of racial discrimination have provoked defensive posturing on the part of many

White team owners and executives. Outwardly, they refute any biased hiring practices occurring within their own organization. But who could ignore the data? There have been 377 head coaching vacancies in the history of the NFL yet African Americans have been chosen only 8 times (NFLArchives.com, 2002).

Charles Harris, athletic director at Arizona State University, does not believe the lack of African American head coaches is due solely to racial discrimination. His theory holds that employment opportunities are tied to previous coaching success and the ability to establish career paths that currently do not exist for African Americans. Rudy Washington, the first executive director of the Black Coaches Association reiterated Harris' point, stating that the problem is "getting to the mainstream."

In the NFL, private personal networks--networks in which African Americans are generally excluded-- control the hiring of upper-level positions. Along with their uneasiness with African Americans, White team owners and executives are likely to hire candidates who are similar to coaches who have already achieved success or are similar to coaches they have known personally and admired. These coaches invariably are older, conservative White men who have reputations as strong leaders and strict disciplinarians (Shropshire, 1996). In short, African American coaches are usually passed over for White coaches with whom the owner or general manager feels more "comfortable" with.

In an attempt to analyze their coaching mobility, Brooks and Althouse (1993) identified several factors that may help explain the absence of African American head coaches at the professional level. Not surprisingly, race was a significant factor. Other factors included previous athletic participation, the impact of structural barriers and the success of the organization. It was also apparent that persistent “good ol’ boy” networks can have a negative affect on the upward mobility of African American coaches.

In the early 1980s, the creation of a minority coaching fellowship enabled African American college assistant coaches to gain experience on NFL coaching staffs. Since the inception of the program, nearly three dozen graduates have held or currently hold coaching positions in the NFL. Today, there are more opportunities open to African American coaches, but access to the top of the profession is still restricted to Whites (Kim, 1998).

Recognizing flaws in the original fellowship, Bill Walsh introduced plans for a renovated career development program. Although Walsh began helping former players such as Ray Rhodes make the transition into coaching, Walsh designed an internship program to recruit top African American assistants and prepare them for head-coaching positions. The comprehensive seminars Walsh sponsored included receptions and dinners at which African American candidates would

have the opportunity to meet and socialize with team owners. Many agreed that Walsh had designed a system for African American recruitment as thorough and effective as the “West Coast Offense” he designed and earned him four Super Bowl victories. Yet how successful has Walsh’s program been? How many graduates have become head coaches? Zero.

The NFL criticized Walsh’s program, insisting that like other affirmative action programs it shows too much preferential treatment. But who’s asking for preferential treatment? It’s definitely not African American coaches. When an obviously qualified African American coach is passed over in favor of a White candidate who has less experience, a lower winning percentage and/or fewer division championships to his credit, it can be construed as preferential treatment. Besides, any program adopted to help African Americans would only be an attempt to level a playing field that has historically tilted against African Americans.

The NFL could learn from other sports organizations that have shown that innovative leadership can institutionalize new ways of identifying and developing talent from diverse ranks (Kim, 1998). Moreover, if a successful solution to the under-representation of African American coaches in the NFL is achieved, it will more than likely be through a combination of league-sponsored programs, strong performances from

African American coaches, and most importantly, White team owners and general managers assessing their prejudices and personal choices.

The owners and general managers have nothing to lose by giving proven African American coaches the opportunity to succeed at the next level. When head coaches become winning head coaches, no one benefits more than the owners and their franchises. Hiring a head coach based on qualifications, irrespective of race, may not only be the morally correct decision, but it could be the most rewarding business decision as well.

According to Walsh, however, the owners will not be shamed into hiring African American coaches and they will not feel guilty for not hiring them. However, it is imperative that the NFL and its executives support race-conscious measures to create and promote a genuinely integrated workplace or suffer legal consequence. Only when this occurs will equal access to employment be granted to all coaches (Hill, 1996).

“We’re just asking for a fair opportunity to compete,” Johnnie Cochran said. “We can litigate this. We can bring about a lawsuit. I think the NFL is reasonable. They understand that this can end up in the courts and they’d rather not see that happen. But let’s see if we can have dialogue. You only litigate after you’ve done everything you possibly can to negotiate.” To avoid a Texaco-like debacle, the league should move

forward on an urgent mission to make the NFL a model of workplace opportunity for all people.



## Part V

### Methodology

This study focused on past and current head coaching hiring of the National Football League. The intent was to show the unequal employment opportunities of African American coaches in comparison to the league's White coaches. The target population for this study consisted of all coaches who were employed full-time by their perspective NFL teams during the 2001-2002 seasons. Data were analyzed using frequencies and percentages to examine differences in hiring pattern by individual team, while descriptive statistics were collected to analyze demographic findings. The percentage of African American employment across racial lines served as the independent variable while the various NFL teams and the population rates for African American coaches served as the dependent variable for this study.

After an extensive review of literature identifying employment barriers faced by African American coaches within the NFL, data was collected from the 2002 U.S. Census Bureau, the 2001-2002 National Football League Media Guide, NFLarchives.com and NFL.com. The items included background information of former NFL coaches as well as the current 31 head coaches and 372 assistant coaches in the league.

There are numerous theories and opinions as to the importance of statistics. One such theory is the *Key Functionaries Theory*, where key

functionaries are positions within a social system that are capable of influencing and performing crucial activities (Evans, 1986). The key functionary roles in professional sports include leadership positions such as but not limited to head coach. Statistics demonstrate that on the field professional sports represent as much equal opportunity as anything America has to offer. Off the field, however, professional sports are very segregated (Greenlee, 1998).

Perception of racial discrimination arises when one considers the vast discrepancy between the number of African Americans who participate as players to those who help organize and/or run professional organizations at the team or league levels (Ibid).

In 2002, African Americans represented nearly 75% of NFL rosters, 80% of NBA rosters, and 40% of MLB rosters (ESPN.com, 2002). However, the low number of African American head coaches demonstrates a great disparity relative to the number of African American athletes who play the games.

African Americans constitute only 6% of all head coaches in the NFL, 24% in the NBA and 11% in MLB respectively (ESPN.com). The scarcity of African Americans in leadership roles indicate that discriminatory barriers have not been abolished. Rather than overt racist practices, the discrimination is rooted in barriers in institutional vetting and hiring practices that involve key functionary positions (Muster, 2001).

## **Part VI**

### **Results and Research Analysis**

Statistical analysis of data used in this study focused on (a) staffs with 2 or more African American coaches, (b) coaching positions, (c) staff leadership positions, (d) age, (e) length of employment, (f) total number of years in coaching, (g) education, and (h) playing experience to see if a significant difference existed between teams in the hiring of African American head coaches throughout the NFL. The statistical data intended to show that the NFL's hiring (and firing) of its head coaches has been significantly biased against African Americans and in favor of Whites. However, because of the small sample group, significant differences among teams' hiring patterns are inconclusive.

Of particular note is past playing experience, long noted a major asset in coaching professional athletes. At every level, from head coach, to coordinator and to position coach, African Americans out distanced their White counterparts in NFL player experience, with the greatest disparity (30 percentage points) occurring at the position coach level. This pattern repeats itself in assessing Division I college playing experience, with African American NFL coaches again exceeding participation of White NFL coaches at each coaching level. Winning percentages favor African American head coaches, though here the smaller number (3) may be

misleading and/or over-estimating their success. Only time (and increased numbers) will tell if this success level will be maintained.

Table 1 shows that all NFL teams employ 2 or more Black coaches. Staff assignments, however, vary by individual team.

**Table 1: 2002 Content Analysis of NFL Black Coaches by Team**

<b>NFL Team Employing 2 Black Coaches</b>	<b>NFL Team Employing 3 Black Coaches</b>	<b>NFL Team Employing 4 Black Coaches</b>	<b>NFL Team Employing 5+ Black Coaches</b>
New England Patriots	Atlanta Falcons	Arizona Cardinals	Carolina Panthers
	Buffalo Bills	Baltimore Ravens	Dallas Cowboys
	Chicago Bears	Cincinnati Bengals	Denver Broncos
	Cleveland Browns	Detroit Lions	Green Bay Packers
	Jacksonville Jaguars	Minnesota Vikings	Kansas City Chiefs
	Oakland Raiders	New York Giants	Miami Dolphins
	Philadelphia Eagles	New York Jets	New Orleans Saints
	Seattle Seahawks	San Francisco 49ers	Pittsburgh Steelers
	Washington Redskins	Tampa Bay Buccaneers	San Diego Chargers
	Indianapolis Colts	Tennessee Titans	St. Louis Rams

Table 2 shows that the low number of Black NFL head coaches (3) makes a comparative statistical analysis with White NFL coaches (28) difficult. The coordinator and position coach level comparisons hold greater promise for statistical significance. However, despite statistical

significance merit, the descriptive comparisons remain interesting and supportive of larger societal trends relative to African Americans' performance versus achieved rewards.

**Table 2: 2002 Content Analysis of NFL Black Coaches by Staff Leadership Assignments**

<b>Leadership Assignment</b>	<b>Positions Available</b>	<b>Black Coaches Employed</b>	<b>% of NFL Population</b>
<b>Head Coach</b>	31	3	9.6%
<b>Assistant Head Coach</b>	13	3	23%
<b>Offensive Coordinator</b>	27	1	3.7%
<b>Defensive Coordinator</b>	29	5	17.2%
<b>Total</b>	106	12	11.3%

Table 3 shows the results for the independent samples measuring the Black coaches' assignment in regards to specific positioning shows that there is a higher likelihood of a Black coach to be assigned to the "athletic" positions (i.e., WR, DB, or RB) as opposed to the "cerebral" positions (i.e., QB, OL, or Strength Coach).

**Table 3: 2002 Content Analysis of NFL Black Coaches by Coaching Position Assignments**

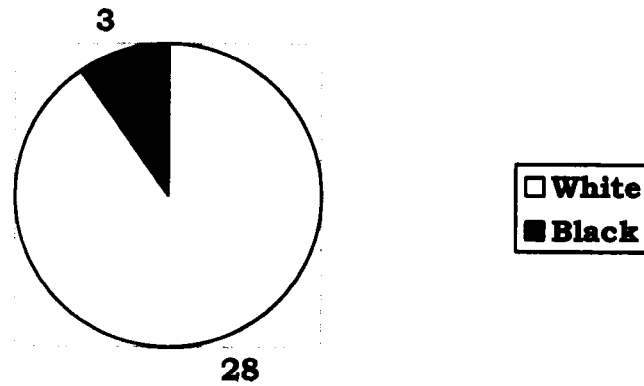
<b>Coaching Position</b>	<b>Positions Available</b>	<b>Black Position Coaches</b>	<b>% of NFL Population</b>
<b>QB</b>	31	0	0%
<b>RB</b>	31	20	64.5%
<b>WR</b>	31	19	61.2%
<b>TE</b>	31	2	6.4%
<b>OL</b>	31	0	0%
<b>DL</b>	31	18	58%
<b>LB</b>	31	5	16.1%
<b>DB</b>	31	10	32.2%
<b>Sp. Teams</b>	31	2	6.4%
<b>Strength Coach</b>	31	1	3.2%
<b>Quality Control</b>	62	9	14.5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>372</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>26.3%</b>

Table 4 shows the results for the independent sample measuring the relationship of Black coaches employed by their perspective team in relation to the Black coaches' age revealed no significant difference. Black coaches who were 35 years or older showed similar employment patterns as Black coaches who were younger than 35. That is to say, Black coaches who were older than 35 years were as likely as those younger than 35 to be outside the head coaching hiring networks in the NFL.

**Table 4: 2002 Content Analysis of NFL Black Coaches by Age**

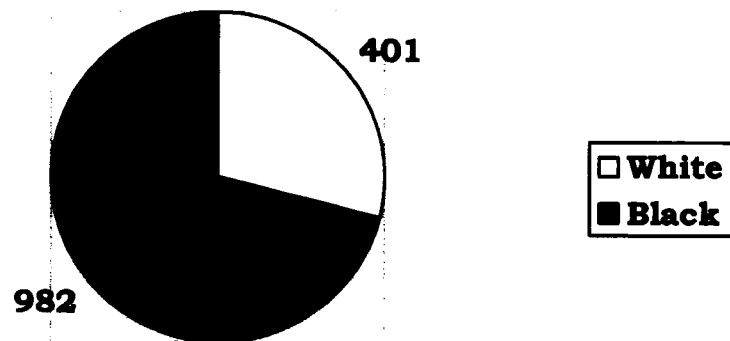
<b>Age</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>% of Black Coaches</b>
<b>30-34</b>	6	6.1%
<b>35-39</b>	17	17.3%
<b>40-44</b>	21	21.4%
<b>45-49</b>	21	21.4%
<b>50-54</b>	16	16.3%
<b>54-59</b>	11	11.2%
<b>60+</b>	7	7.1%

Figure 1 shows that the National Football League employs 31 head coaches; 28 (90.3%) are White while only 3 (9.7%) are Black even though Blacks make up over 70% of the player population (see Table 2). The league has stated that they are looking to increase minority hiring by implementing the “Rooney Rule” (Chapter IV).



**Figure 1: Head Coach Make-Up in the NFL**

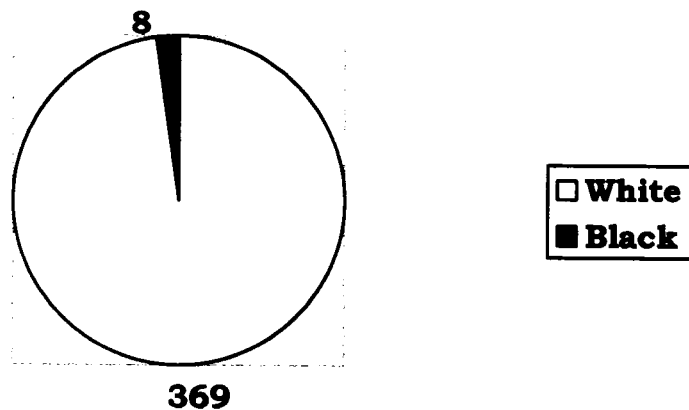
Figure 2 shows that of the 1395 players on NFL team rosters, 982 (70.3%) are Black while 401 (28.7%) are White. The percentage represents the second-highest in professional sports behind the National Basketball Association, where Blacks make up 83% of the league.



**Figure 2: Player Make-Up in the NFL**

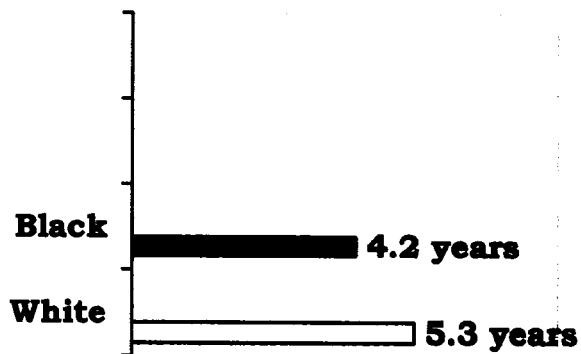


Figure 3 shows that there have been 377 official head coaching vacancies in the history of the National Football League. Whites have been hired 369 (98%) times while Blacks have been hired only 8 (2%) times. Fritz Pollard became the first Black coach in the league in 1921 and Art Shell was the first Black coach in the modern era. There were no Black head coaches from 1937-1989.



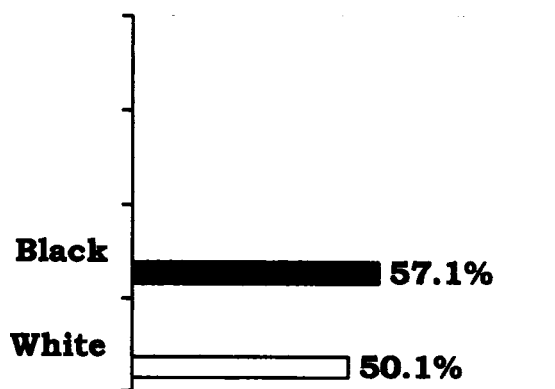
**Figure 3: Head Coaching Vacancies**

Figure 4 shows that White head coaches average over a year longer than Black head coaches in their tenure despite Black head coaches having a higher overall winning percentage (see table 5). Blacks feel that they are held to a different standard than Whites (Chapter VII).



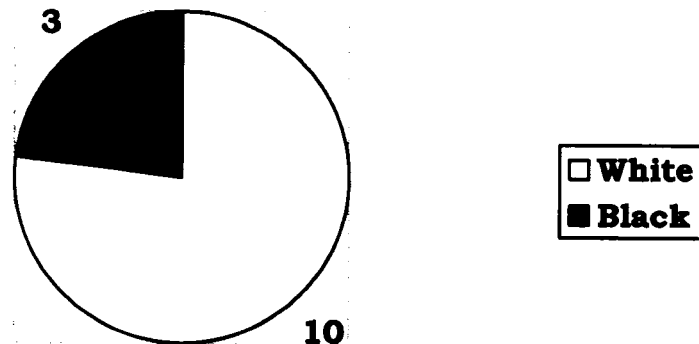
**Figure 4: Average Tenure of NFL Head Coaches**

Figure 5 shows that as of the 2002 season, White NFL head coaches have compiled a win/loss record of 8531-8487 (50.1%) while Black head coaches compiled a 279-209 (57.1%) record. These figures include playoff games and championship games.



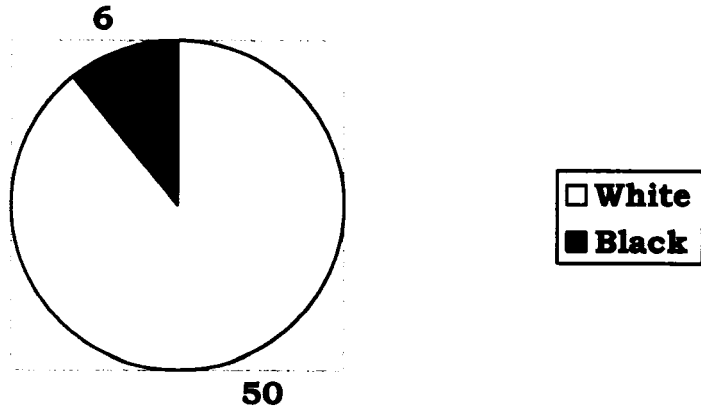
**Figure 5: All-Time Winning Percentage of NFL Coaches**

Figure 6 indicates that 13 teams employ an Assistant Head Coach. 10 (76.9%) are White while 3 (23.1%) are Black.



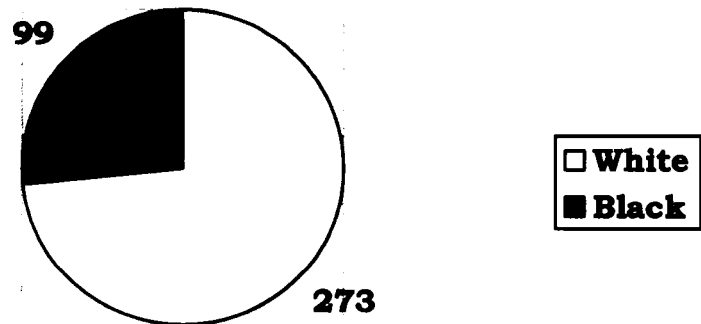
**Figure 6: Assistant Head Coaches in the NFL**

Figure 7 shows that the National Football League employs 56 offensive/defensive coordinators. Whites are employed in 50 (89.3%) of the jobs while Blacks own only 6 (10.7%) of the jobs. Five of the six Black coordinators are defensive coordinators, which has been perceived as the more “physical” side of the ball as opposed to the “cerebral” offensive side of the ball.



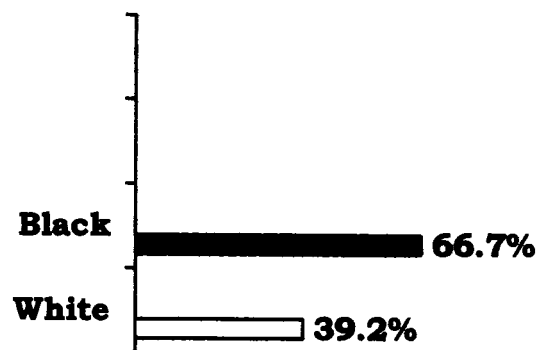
**Figure 7: Coordinators in the NFL**

Figure 8 shows that out of 372 position coaches in the NFL, 273 (73.3%) are White while 99 (26.6%) are Black. The coaches' jobs include anyone who coaches wide receivers, quarterbacks, running backs, offensive line, tight ends, linebackers, defensive backs, defensive line, special teams, strength and conditioning, and quality control.



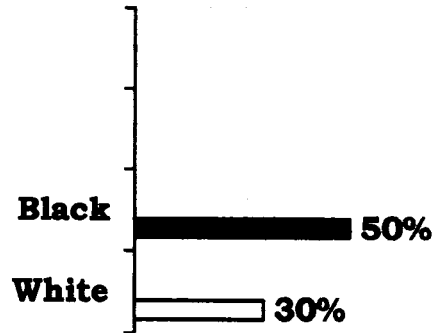
**Figure 8: Position Coaches in the NFL**

Figure 9 shows that of the 28 White head coaches in the NFL, only 11 (39.2%) played in the league while out of the 3 Black head coaches in the NFL, 2 (66.7%) made an NFL team roster. Many believe that playing in the NFL is beneficial for NFL head coaches (Chapter VIII).



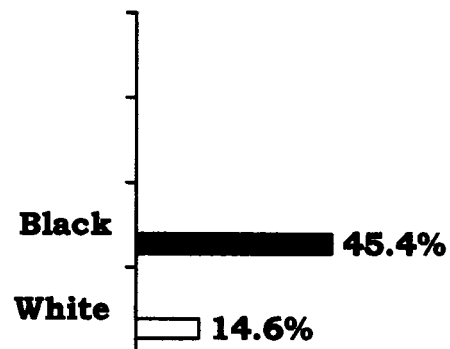
**Figure 9: Head Coaches Who Played in the NFL**

Figure 10 shows that of the 56 coordinators in the NFL, 15 of 50 (30%) White coordinators played in the NFL while 3 of the 6 (50%) Black coordinators have NFL experience.



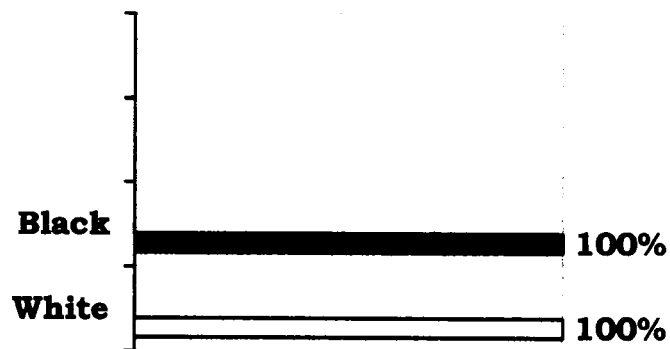
**Figure 10: Coordinators Who Played in the NFL**

Figure 11 shows that of the 372 position coaches in the league, only 40 out of 273 (14.6%) White position coaches made an NFL roster while 45 out of 99 (45.4%) Black position coaches were on NFL rosters as players.



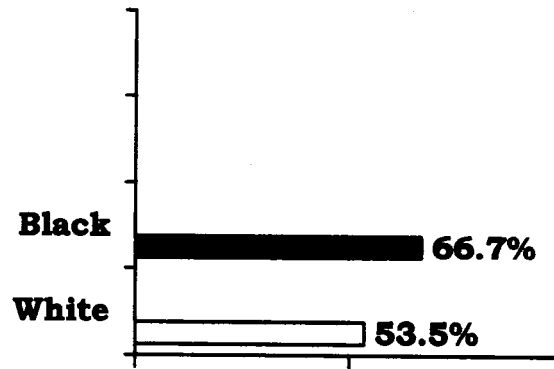
**Figure 11: Position Coaches Who Played in the NFL**

Figure 12 indicates that 28 out of the 28 (100%) White head coaches have college playing experience as well as 3 of the 3 (100%) Black head coaches also have college playing experience.



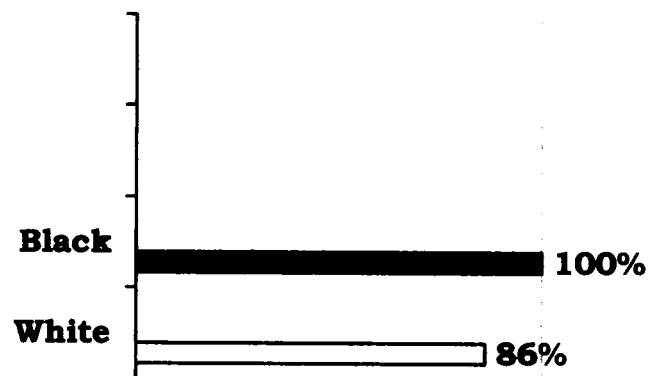
**Figure 12: Head Coaches Who Played College Football**

Figure 13 shows that although 28 White head coaches have college playing experience (see Table 12), only 15 of the 28 (53.5%) played at the Division-I level while 2 out of the 3 (66.7%) Black head coaches played Division-I level football.



**Figure 13: Head Coaches Who Played Division I Football**

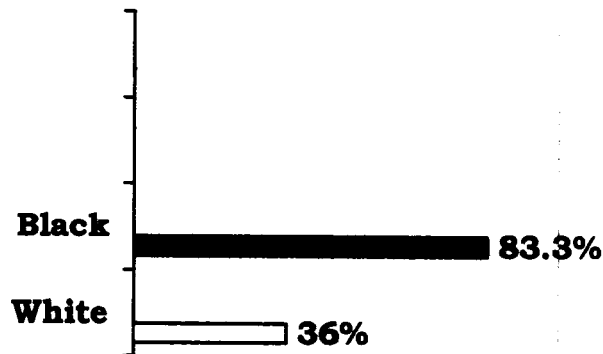
Figure 14 shows that of the 56 coordinators in the NFL, 43 out of 50 (86%) White coordinators have college football playing experience while 6 of the 6 (100%) Black coordinators in the NFL played college football.



**Figure 14: Coordinators Who Played College Football**

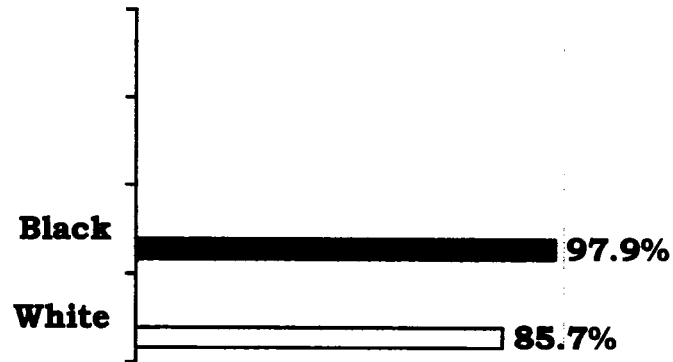


Figure 15 shows that only 18 of the 50 (36%) White coordinators in the NFL played Division-I level football while 5 of the 6 (83.3%) Black coordinators played Division-I level football.



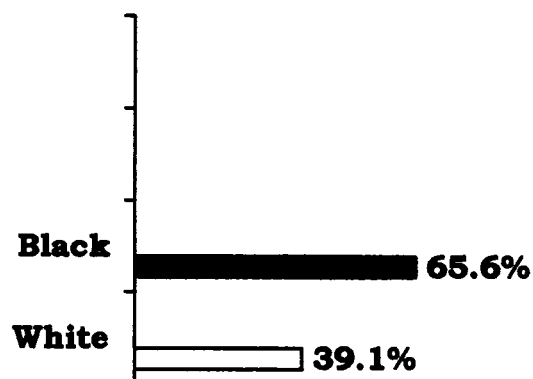
**Figure 15: Coordinators Who Played Division I Football**

Figure 16 indicates that 234 out of 273 (85.7%) White position coaches played football in college while 97 out of 99 (97.9%) Black position coaches also played college football.



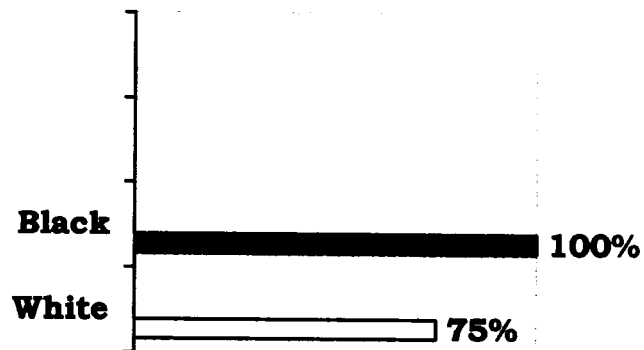
**Figure 16: Position Coaches Who Played College Football**

Figure 17 indicates that only 107 out of 273 (39.1%) White position coaches played college football at the Division-I level whereas 65 out of 99 (65.6%) Black position coaches played at the Division-I level in college.



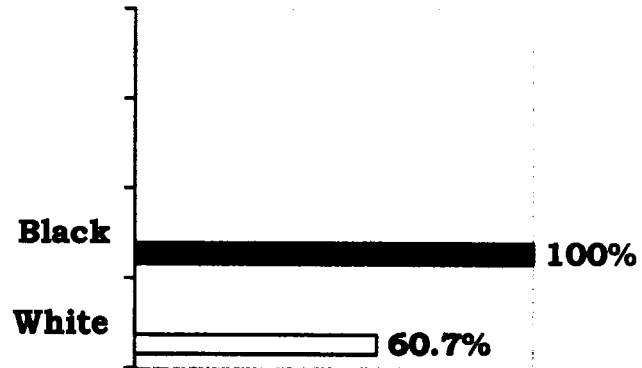
**Figure 17: Position Coaches Who Played Division I Football**

Figure 18 shows that 21 out of 28 (75%) White head coaches had previous college coaching experience while 3 out of 3 (100%) Black head coaches have also coached in college.



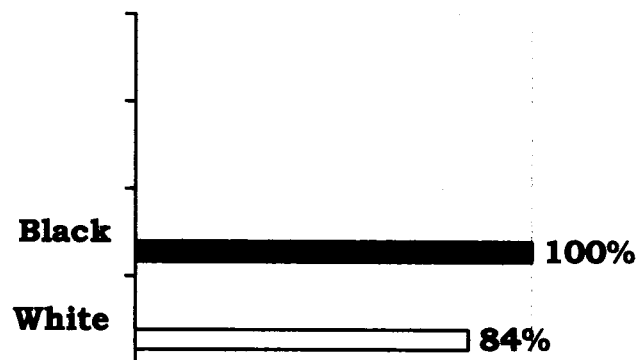
**Figure 18: Head Coaches Who Coached College Football**

Figure 19 shows that 17 of the 28 (60.7%) White head coaches have previous college coaching experience at the Division-I level compared to 3 out of 3 (100%) for Black head coaches with previous college coaching experience.



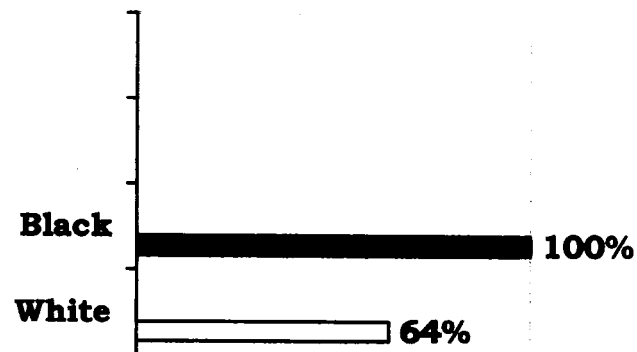
**Figure 19: Head Coaches Who Coached Division I Football**

Figure 20 shows that 42 out of 50 (84%) White coordinators in the league have previous college coaching experience while 6 out of 6 (100%) Black coordinators coached in college.



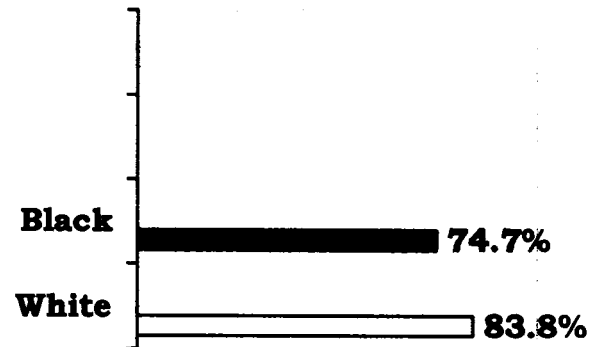
**Figure 20: Coordinators Who Coached College Football**

Figure 21 indicates only 32 of the 50 (64%) White coordinators in the league coached at the Division-I level while 6 of the 6 (100%) Black coordinators had Division-I experience.



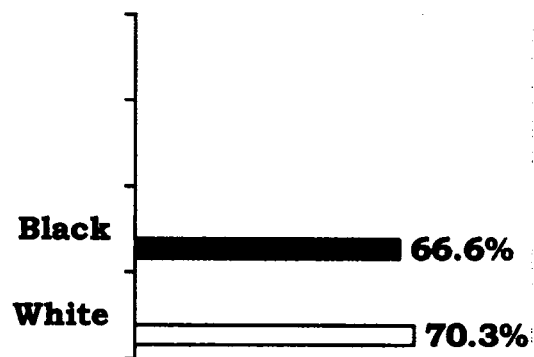
**Figure 21: Coordinators Who Coached Division I Football**

Figure 22 shows that 229 of the 273 (83.8%) White position coaches have college coaching experience while 74 of the 99 (74.7%) Black position coaches in the league have coached in college.



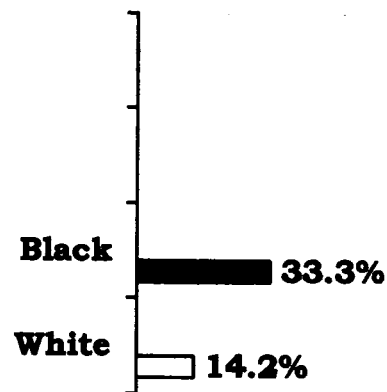
**Figure 22: Position Coaches Who Coached College Football**

Figure 23 shows that 192 out of 273 (70.3%) White position coaches coached at the Division-I level in college while 66 out of 99 (66.6%) Black position coaches have Division-I experience.



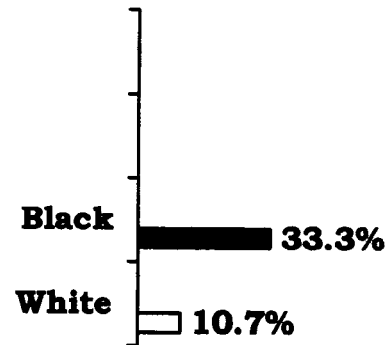
**Figure 23: Position Coaches Who Coached Division I Football**

Figure 24 shows that 4 of the 28 (14.2%) White head coaches in the league have previous head coaching experience at the college level while 1 of 3 (33.3%) Black head coaches in the NFL were head coaches at the college level.



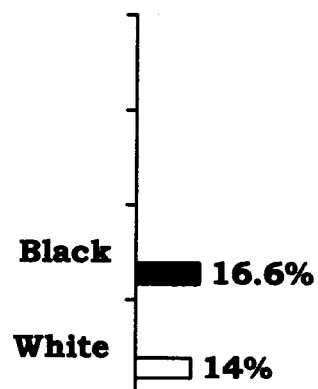
**Figure 24: Head Coaches Who Were Head Coaches in College**

Figure 25 shows that only 3 out of 28 (10.7%) White head coaches in the league were head coaches at the Division-I level while 1 out of 3 (33.3%) Black head coaches in the league coached at the Division-I level.



**Figure 25: Head Coaches Who Were Division I Head Coaches**

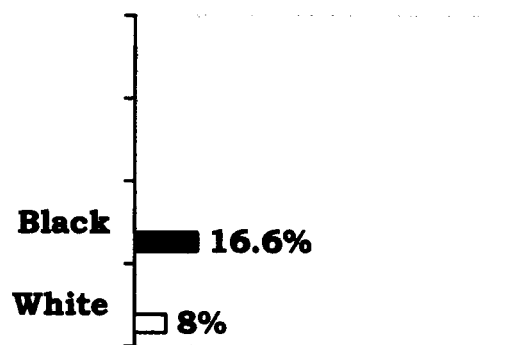
Figure 26 shows that 7 out of 50 (14%) White coordinators in the league were head coaches in college while 1 out of 6 (16.6%) Black coordinators in the league had previous head coaching experience at the college level.



**Figure 26: Coordinators Who Were Head Coaches in College**

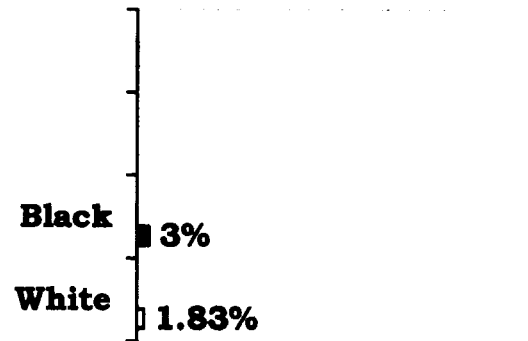


Figure 27 shows that 4 of the 50 (8%) White coordinators in the league have previous head coaching experience at the Division-I level in college while 1 of the 6 (16.6%) Black coordinators in the league have experience as a Division- I head coach.



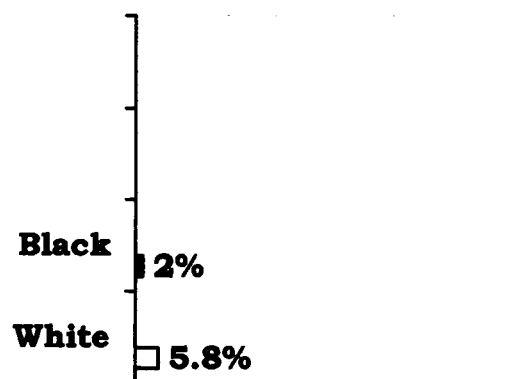
**Figure 27: Coordinators Who Were Division I Head Coaches**

Figure 28 shows that only 5 of the 273 (1.83%) White position coaches have head coaching experience at the Division-I level while 3 of the 99 (3%) Black position coaches have previous experience at the Division-I level.



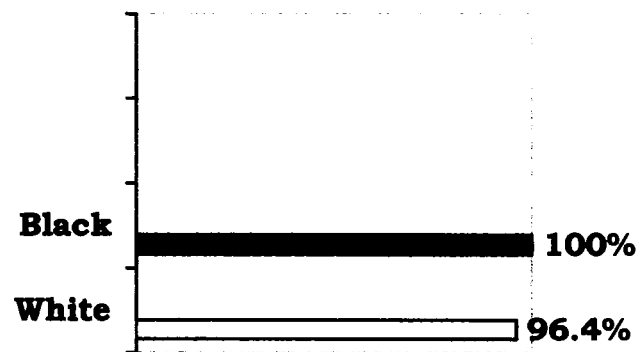
**Figure 28: Position Coaches Who Were Head Coaches in College**

Figure 29 shows that 16 of the 273 (5.8%) White position coaches in the NFL have served as a head coach at the college level while 2 of the 99 (2%) Black position coaches in the league have head coaching experience at the college level.



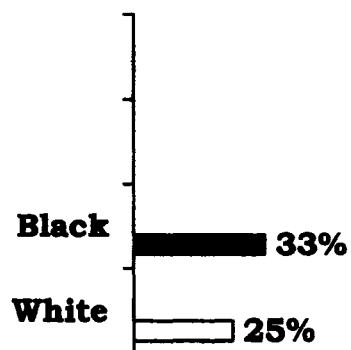
**Figure 29: Position Coaches Who Were Division I Head Coaches**

Figure 30 shows that 27 out of 28 (96.4%) White head coaches in the NFL earned a Bachelor's degree in college while 6 out of 6 (100%) Black head coaches in the league received their college degree.



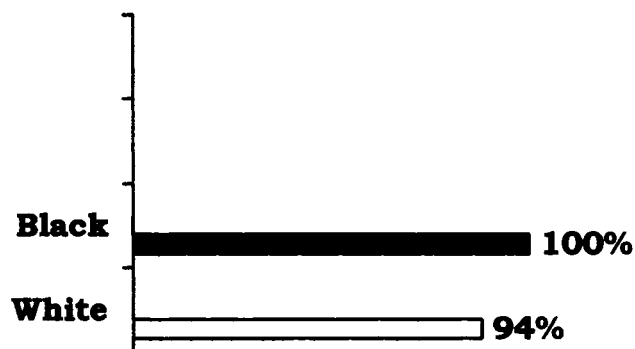
**Figure 30: Head Coaches With Bachelor's Degree**

Figure 31 shows that 7 of the 28 (25%) White head coaches have a Master's degree while 1 out of the 3 (33%) Black head coaches have a Master's degree.



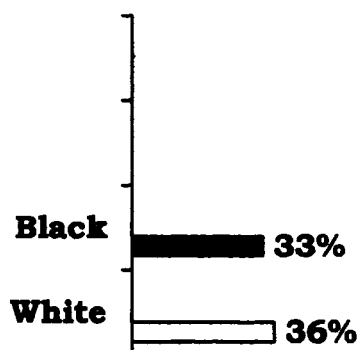
**Figure 31: Head Coaches With Master's Degree**

Figure 32 shows that all of the Black coordinators (6) possess a Bachelor's Degree while 47 of the 50 White coordinators have a Bachelor's Degree.



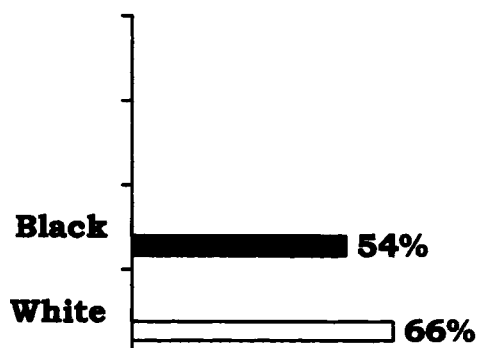
**Figure 32: Coordinators With Bachelor's Degree**

Figure 33 shows that 2 of the 6 Black coordinators have a Master's Degree while 18 of the 50 White coordinators have a Master's Degree.



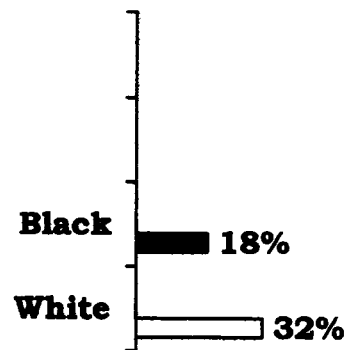
**Figure 33: Coordinators With Master's Degree**

Figure 34 shows that 54 of 99 Black position coaches have a Bachelor's while 182 of 273 White position coaches have a Bachelor's.



**Figure 34: Position Coaches With Bachelor's Degree**

Figure 35 shows that 18 of the 99 Black coaches have a Master's Degree while 88 of the 273 White position coaches have a Master's Degree.



**Figure 35: Position Coaches With Master's Degree**

## **Part VII**

### **Discussion**

As noted, in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, African Americans were notably absent from virtually all professional sectors of society, and football was no exception (Kim, 98). The more one views old NFL highlights, the more one can see that many players of yesteryear benefited from the league's racist policies. As a result, some have questioned the accomplishments and feats of the White players of old because they simply were not playing against the highest level of competition (Guest, 2002).

The prototypical White athlete who dominated the gridiron before true integration began has vanished from stadiums across the country, for the most part. Over the past forty years, African American players have unquestionably ruled a league that once sought to keep them out (or at least keep the number of them to an extreme minimum). They also have come to dominate the early rounds of the NFL Draft because athletes are now chosen for their potential rather than the color of their skin.

Motivated by their desire to win at all cost, executives of professional franchises recruit and reward players in conjunction with their abilities, irrespective of race. Team executives have heavily pursue African American because of their size, speed and potential which executives believe will give their team the best chance to compete for a Super Bowl

title. Accordingly, when athletic ability and potential are the most important factors in determining the success of professional teams, African Americans have found many doors of opportunity open to them (Hill, 1996).

By contrast, African American head coaches are not sought after in the same fashion. They continue to be leadership positions at the professional (as well as collegiate) level and have found access to jobs that possess power blocked. The research shows that African American coaches have been stratified into non-central coaching positions, which in turn limits their possibility for future advancement. For example, in the NFL, serving as an offensive or defensive coordinator is usually a prerequisite for becoming a head coach. However, because so few African Americans are ever given the opportunity to be coordinators, they are not perceived by management to possess the necessary qualifications to even be considered for a head coaching position.

The few African Americans who have been interviewed for head coaching jobs have consistently been rejected, many times in favor of White coaches who are far less qualified. Meanwhile, African American coaches have been asked to remain patient. Understandably, they are growing weary. How many second-place finishes does a qualified candidate have to endure before he says, "All right, enough is enough?"



With every head coaching vacancy comes more anticipation and frustration. For example, prior to the 2002 season, the owner of the Jacksonville Jaguars gave ammunition to minority-hiring advocates when he boasted about the interview he had with Jack Del Rio, the team's defensive coordinator. At the news conference introducing Del Rio (who is White) as his new head coach, the owner said he was "wowed" by his energetic prospect and "knew in an hour" that he had found the right guy for the job. For African American coaches, just getting the chance to "wow" has been the problem.

Indianapolis Colts head coach Tony Dungy and many of the league's Black coaches were upset that not one of the Black offensive or defensive coordinators in the league was interviewed for the job. Del Rio was an NFL assistant coach for just six seasons, with only one being at the coordinator level. "To me, that was very telling, very insightful," said Dungy (ESPN, 2002).

The hiring pattern found in the NFL helps explain why African American coaches feel that a diversity plan to increase the number of African American coaches is necessary. In 1987, the Black Coaches Association (BCA) was created to address issues pertaining to African Americans (and other minorities) in sports and seek satisfactory resolution to employment inequities. The BCA recognized that African Americans at both the professional and collegiate level encounter

obstacles and barriers that raise concerns among the responsible individuals within the professional and collegiate sports communities as well as within the general framework of American society (Wilson, 1987). The BCA has not had the impact African American coaches had hoped for, unfortunately.

Prominent African American attorney Cyrus Mehri, who represented one of the plaintiffs in the Texaco case along with Johnnie Cochran, issued to NFL executives a scathing report on the lack of African American head coaches, general managers, and top assistants. In *Black Coaches in the National Football League: Superior Performance, Inferior Opportunities* (October 2001), Mehri and Cochran addressed the league's hiring and firing of minority coaches, using statistical information compiled over the last 15 years. Within two months, league owners announced the formation of a diversity committee to monitor the hiring practices of the league's franchises. The committee will continue to brief the league on its progress. However, mere discussion is not what the minority-hiring advocates are seeking. They want action.

Publicly, league officials vehemently proclaim their support for the hiring of African American coaches (and executives). For example, NFL commissioner Paul Tagliabue, in his state-of-the-2002 season address, told team owners, "It is not enough to have diversity as a goal and assume that it can be obtained through good intentions." He added, "We

are going to have affirmative outreach efforts to identify, train and produce new talent in coaching and front office positions. In doing so, we must use color-blind employment practices.”

Ironically, “color-blindness” was one of the fundamental goals of American civil rights law. Legal scholars point to the Civil Rights Acts of 1964 and 1968 as the normative principals of color-blindness. However, the NFL’s hiring pattern of its head coaches and front office personnel provides evidence that many people within the league are not abiding by this policy.

White executives should identify the African American coach’s potential to get the job done and not assume that skin color will impede the his ability to accomplish the task (Hill, 1996). In other words, White executives must begin to perceive African American coaches in the same light as they do themselves.

Herman Edwards, who led the New York Jets to the playoffs in his first year as head coach, says that the NFL’s current hiring practices are “societal issues”. He also feels that management is well aware that hiring a “high-level” African American coach with no head coaching experience over the “safer” White candidate means management will get credit for the success but also get the blame for the failure. “When you go out of the boxes, the onus is on the owner and general manager, but

when there is a coach who has been in it and done it, guess what? It's on the coach. But no one wants to talk about that" (ESPN, 2002).

At the *National Football Coaches of America* convention in 2000, San Diego Chargers head coach Marty Schottenheimer was asked about the diversity issue in the NFL and recalled what he termed "one of the great regrets" of his career. When he was the Kansas City Chiefs' head coach, he promised his young, Black defensive back coach that he would get the team's defensive coordinator job if and when it opened up. Eventually, the job opened up. But Schottenheimer reneged on his promise and instead chose to hire Dave Adolph, who is White. Not surprisingly, the Black coach chose to leave the Chiefs and take a job coaching the defensive backs for the Minnesota Vikings. That young defensive back coach was Tony Dungy.

"I look back, in retrospect, and know now I never gave Tony the opportunity he was entitled to," Schottenheimer explained. "Sure, I've heard it said before: 'don't give me a job; give me an opportunity to do the job. However, no one knows when you hire a Black guy if he's going to succeed or not.'" This may be true. But, if he's never hired, we'll never know.

A number of owners have had the opportunity to hire qualified African American head coaches but chose not to. Only a few owners, who were interested in doing whatever it took to win, pulled the trigger.

Could it be that the White owners' and general managers' uneasiness with African Americans outweighs their desire to win? Perhaps the issue is far more complicated. Maybe the issue is whether or not the White masses will ever be able to perceive African Americans as being capable of carrying an organization forward and representing professionalism to the NFL and to its football fans in the same manner as a White person could.

Team owners argue that the practice of hiring a head coach is not a racial issue but one based on objective criteria. They believe that when more African American coaches become "qualified" and gain more experience the doors to head coaching positions will subsequently open with the same frequency as they do for their White counterparts. Statistics of those who hold leadership roles in the NFL reveal that subjectivity based on race is a primary factor in the NFL hiring process (Althouse, 1996).

Explanations for the shortage of Black coaches offered by team executives include "quality comes before quantity" and that the "lack of college and professional head coaching experience severely cripples African American candidates" (Kim, 1998). Other explanations offered for the scarcity of African American head coaches in the NFL tend to be inaccurate and/or do not explain the disparities at all. The criterion seems to be flexibly generous in favor of White assistants and

coordinators and lends credence to the suspicion that race is an underlying factor in NFL hiring practices.

If we look at the resumes of the three current African American head coaches, there is little, if anything, that shows that they are unqualified for their job. Considering the records of the teams coached by Dungy and Edwards, there is no reason to doubt their abilities. Dungy has led his team to four double-digit victory seasons and became only the 2<sup>nd</sup> head coach in Colts' history to record a 10-win season in his first year. Edwards, who became the first African American head coach of a New York professional team, led the Jets to a 10-6 record and a playoff berth in his rookie season.

While it is true that Dungy and Edwards both lacked collegiate head coaching experience, it is a common misconception that all the current White NFL head coaches formerly held collegiate head coaching positions. In fact, only about one-third of the White head coaches have held head coaching positions at the collegiate level. Furthermore, of those coaches who were previous college head coaches, several of them only held that position for a minimal of two years or less (NFL.com, 2002).

In regards to the new hires around the league, a comparison between any one of the top African American candidates and the new head coaches calls into question the standards that African American

assistants are being measured by. Sherman Lewis, Ted Cotrell, Lovie Smith and Marvin Lewis, among the more notable African American candidates, have nearly twice the cumulative experience as the newly hired White head coaches, such as Jack Del Rio, Jon Gruden and Gregg Williams and Bill Callahan (Lewis, Cotrell and Smith have since been hired as head coaches after the research of this study was completed).

Offensive coordinator Sherman Lewis, a 19-year NFL veteran, has directed the Green Bay Packers and the San Francisco 49ers to a combined four Super Bowl championships. Yet Gruden, an assistant coach whom Lewis *mentored*, was hired as head coach of the Oakland Raiders and three years later for the Tampa Bay Buccaneers. Lewis, meanwhile, has continued to remain a “hot prospect” in waiting. Even more glaring is that neither the Raiders nor the Buccaneers requested an interview with Lewis.

Several African American assistant coaches have seriously considered a class-action discrimination lawsuit against the NFL. However, the fear of losing their jobs and facing retaliation by owners is too much to risk. As one assistant said, “The lawsuit could be more detrimental than helpful and any Black assistant coach who becomes part of it could end up like Curt Flood” (New York Times, 1998).

Ironically, White football fans and the White public at large may not be fully aware of the inner dynamics of the NFL and might not be aware

of the racist background of the league. Professional football originated basically as a “Whites-only” game. Today’s Black players need to comprehend that the benefits they reap as sports heroes are due in large part to the racist obstacles their predecessors endured.

Although most players support full integration in principle, their advocacy for the issue is less than impressive, considering that they have the leverage necessary to change things (Shropshire, 1996). These athletes can play a significant role in change because they have inside access which was not available in the past.



## **Part VIII**

### **Conclusion**

At first glance, it would appear that African Americans in the NFL have come a long way since the Marion Motley and Paul Robeson days of the 1940s and 1950s. With today's intense pressure to win at the professional level, opportunities for African Americans seem to have improved significantly. For instance, there have been numerous African American "Most Valuable Players" in the league. African Americans hold many of the league's records. Most of the first-round picks in the NFL Draft are African American. As a result, African Americans have made millions upon millions for their playing skills.

On the surface, it may seem that the league has fully embraced the African American. Television commercials promote the NFL by using highlights of its African American players. The number of African American athletes participating in football at the Pop Warner, high school and collegiate level continues to grow. However, the number of African Americans who serve as head coaches, general managers and other decision-making positions in the NFL has remained quite the same (Cochran and Mehri, 2001). Racial inequality remains a constant in the front offices.

One of the NFL's stated goals of the 1990s was to step up the hiring of minority head coaches (Ibid). However, by studying the current hiring

trend in the NFL, we can see that increasing minority head coaches is not really at the top of the league's priorities. It appears that the league is more intent on keeping a predominantly White hierarchy without regard to who is most qualified.

When the San Francisco 49ers hired Steve Marriucci, he had no previous head coaching experience at the professional level and didn't even have a winning record in college. When the Oakland Raiders hired Jon Gruden, he had no head coaching experience at any level.

Other teams have continued to hire "retreads" (i.e., Marty Schottenheimer, Dan Reeves and Jim Mora, Sr.) who have been shuttled around the league for years. Meanwhile, Art Shell, the first African American head coach in the modern-era, was fired by the Los Angeles Raiders after only three years of service even though he led his team to a division title, an appearance in the American Conference title game, and had a winning record. Denny Green was fired by the Minnesota Vikings despite once posting a 15-1 record (best in team history), being named the National Football Conference Coach of the Year (1992), Sports Illustrated Coach of the Year (1992) and consistently leading his team to the playoffs. Tony Dungy was also let go by the Tampa Bay Buccaneers after turning a franchise that was at one time the "laughing-stock" of the league into a perennial playoff contender. Other African American

coaches haven't been lucky enough to have had the opportunity to be fired.

In the past, there was concern for the scarcity of qualified African American coaches for various decision-making positions, whether it is head coach, general manager or some other position of authority (ESPN, 1993). However, there is an abundance of qualified African American coaches who have proven that there is no truth to the scarcity phenomenon.

If the qualification is an advanced degree, years of experience, or some other defined measure of merit, these elements are rarely lacking in the community of African American football coaches. Some of the top offensive and defensive coordinators in the league are African American. However, instead of their careers taking off, African American coaches' careers are being stymied.

Are African American coaches getting a fair shot? Not according to the numbers. Although the number of African Americans on the playing field does not have to equal that of African Americans head coaches and front office personnel, the disparity between African Americans that play/played the games compared to the number that serve/served as head coaches and front office personnel is quite embarrassing. The data tells us that African American coaches have not gained much ground. Statistics support the premise that race continues to have a dramatic

influence on the disparity of employment opportunities between Black and White coaches.

The plight of the African American coach is rather symbolic of the plight of the African American experience. Historically determined access to power and prestige has been stressed as the ultimate benefit derived and sustained by the dominant White group. Because of subtle exclusionary practices by empowered Whites, African Americans' access to the social benefits of power and prestige has been limited (Baker, 1995). Examinations of institutional racism have focused on the combination of prejudicial attitudes, perceptions and actions. Also, examinations of racial bias have focused on philosophical attitudes and ethnocentrism (Tatum, 1997). Researchers have emphasized that the historical structure of education, economic, and political inequality are reflected in the privileged position of Whites (Ibid).

While racial inequality cannot be attributed solely to philosophical attitudes, perceptions, ethnocentrism, or other behavior motivated by prejudice, the notion of African Americans' physical superiority is commonly related to the stereotype of an "animalistic" nature, which subsequently implies that African Americans are intellectually inferior. Moreover, the White Americans' fascination with the enslavement of the Black man and the persistent misuses of racial science has served notice of what can happen when intellectual interest in human differences

grows into an obsession based on class, ethnicity, and race (Edwards, 1986). Conflict inevitably arises, even though people may not be fully aware of the problem.

Racism can occur without conscious bigotry and may have little or no direct reference to attitudinal factors or the prejudices of the dominant group members. However, if people continue to be unaware of their racism, strategies cannot be devised to help solve the problem.

Therefore, to enlighten the unconscious, there needs to be a collective effort to change those structures that inherently promote and reinforce White supremacy (Edwards, 1986).

Providing equal opportunities for African Americans and other minorities and rewarding those who qualify upward mobility is the most fundamental means to fight against generations of oppression. If Whites executives are ready to hire qualified African Americans to the decision-making positions, it will be necessary for those empowered to be truly committed to rectifying the problem--keeping in mind that trying to put an end to racial inequality would be an attempt to transform the system.

As we have witnessed in the past, perception may have invidious consequences, the least of which are evidenced by individuals such as Jimmy "the Greek" Snyder and Al Campanis. Exacerbating the problem is that when people begin to believe that African Americans are advantaged physically but limited intellectually, an individual's behavior

may change to reflect and reinforce such thinking (Herstein, & Murray, 1996). In the end, it makes little difference whether or not the genetic hypotheses are correct because people will behave as if they were correct, which adds further circumstantial evidence to sustain invalid and unsupportable contentions (Hoberman, 1997).

Indeed, the phenomenon of “stacking” can be explained by such a mechanism. If one ascribes to the perception that African Americans are superior at playing positions that require speed, power, and reactive capacity, those in control will position African Americans in such positions. On the other hand, if Whites believe that they are incapable of competing with African Americans in activities requiring speed, power and reactive capacity, they will stop doing so (Price, 1997). Furthermore, if Whites believe that African Americans do not have the “necessities” to lead teams and/or play in central positions, they will not place them there. Contrarily, if African Americans believe that they are superior to Whites in these activities, they will have a greater sense of self-efficacy and excel in competition (Price, 1997).

In the end, however, the biological theory would become a self-fulfilling prophecy despite its failure to be corroborated scientifically. Once perceptions and stereotypes are established in one’s collective unconscious, the pattern is difficult to break. In turn, the demographics of control in professional football and other sports may never become

equitable because people will continue to perceive that what has existed for such a long period of time is “normal.”

Another important issue is that many White executives refuse to accept the fact that leadership and competence traits can be associated with African Americans. Therefore, in order for African American coaches to receive equal employment opportunities in the NFL, the following recommendations are offered:

Address the problem. The first step to improving access to equal employment opportunities for African American coaches is for the league to admit there is a problem with the current system used to hire head coaches. It is not enough to merely discuss the issues in regard to past and current hiring practices. Specific goals to addressing the core problems and effective leadership are required to see to it that solutions are implemented and evaluated in each organization (Hill, 1996).

Specific hiring criteria needed. The informal nature of hiring practices in the league denies African American football coaches opportunities to lead programs. Most teams do not have specific hiring criteria and qualifications from which they select head coaches. Defining the term qualification for African American coaches is first place to start. Without clear criteria, African coaches are often confused and placed at a disadvantage regarding what is needed to become qualified.

Identify and address racial barriers. This study addressed racial barriers that are faced by African Americans employed in professional sports and African Americans employed in the corporate world. Employment barriers can be placed into two broad categories: (a) structural barriers that are considered objective and (b) subjective barriers that consist of personal perception, stereotyping, and labeling. Identification and education regarding restricting employment barriers is a positive step to creating employment equity among Black and White coaches.

Apply “color-blind” hiring practices. White team owners must begin to perceive Black football coaches in the same light as themselves. They must look at Black coaches’ potential to get the job done and not assume that skin color will impede their ability to accomplish the task.

Manage perceptions. How NFL owners perceive Black football coaches plays a significant role in African Americans being pigeonholed in staff positions with no potential for professional growth or being passed over for staff leadership assignments.

Moral obligation. League officials and team owners have a moral and ethical responsibility to act in ways that create access to equal opportunity for all qualified individuals. For this to occur, league officials and team owners must admit that problems exist in the coaching profession and actively address them. Only then can the professional



coaching profession openly confront the barriers facing African American coaches (Ibid).

Professional football provides a source of entertainment for millions of people. Players and games are seen as diversions from everyday life. But to the coaches, athletes, and those who work behind the scenes in the front offices, professional football is a job. Franchises can impact the lives of not only those whom they employ, but entire cities as well. Running and managing a professional football team or league is not only entertainment, but it is also big business. From the construction and operation of stadiums to the local merchants who take care of the fans, sports teams greatly affect a city's economy.

Professional sports teams and leagues should reflect society as a whole. As a business, teams and leagues should concern themselves with dominant public issues, such as the hiring practices of minority head coaches and executives. As such, hiring practices of these institutions should be of societal concern (Muster, 2001).

Before focusing on the private sector of professional sports, progress can and should be made in the public sector, namely college athletics. At these mostly publicly funded institutions of higher learning, experience can be gained by African Americans and other minorities in all areas, from playing to coaching to management.

Increased minority opportunities at the collegiate level would enable professional sports teams to identify successful candidates to fill similar positions in their organizations (Muster, 2001). According to Northeastern University Report Card (2001), professional sports have outperformed colleges in terms of minority (as well as gender) hiring. But the numbers aren't anything to brag about. Comparisons between the two only reinforce the need for professional sports leagues to continue its internship programs for minorities and continual expansion.

A quick glance at the rosters clearly shows what the player's demographics are, but a closer look is needed to see the racial make-up of these various teams and leagues (Northeastern University Report Card, 2001). A number of front office positions of authority exists in professional sports and include persons holding such titles as Vice President, Senior Administrators, Director of Public Relations, Director of Community Relations, and Chief Financial Officer.

The front office personnel are reflective of front offices in corporate American rather than that of the workers on the plant floor. The only exception appears to be that of Director of Community Relations (Powell, 1998). Lapchick and Mathews attribute the higher percentage of African Americans in this position to the fact that most professional teams operate in communities in which a high percentage of African Americans live, so consequently it is advantageous to have an African American

serving in this capacity (Ibid). On the other hand, minority-hiring advocates feel it would be advantageous to see more African American owners in the NFL.

In professional football, those who own their own franchises have the ultimate power in decision-making. Major decisions about a head coach's plight are made by team owners. Within league constraints (i.e., salary cap guidelines) they determine contracts, salaries, who gets hired and fired and whether a franchise stays or remains in a specific location.

If African Americans want to see more African American head coaches and executives, perhaps they will have to purchase their own teams. But one must realize that African American ownership is not just a matter of distributing franchises in proportion to national demographics. It takes money (and lots of it) to buy a team.

Wealth is not distributed according to demographics. An examination of Fortune 500 individuals in America shows only one African American on the list (Oprah Winfrey). Consequently, the racial imbalance in ownership seemingly is part of a wider issue relating to distribution of wealth (Smith, 2002).

Undoubtedly, there are a number of African American athletes who have the capital to purchase a team. Regularly we see African American athletes sign multi-million dollar contracts and other mega-endorsement deals. Some of these individuals need to step up. In an analysis

Lapchick and Mathews (1998) reported that there were no African American majority owners in the NFL, NBA or MLB. Instead, there were several African Americans who were “limited partners”.

In the NFL, William Simms is a “limited partner” with the Carolina Panthers, and Deron Cherry is a partner with the Jacksonville Jaguars. In the NBA, Magic Johnson has “limited partnership” with the Los Angeles Lakers, while Edward and Bettiann Garder have part ownership of the Chicago Bulls. In the MBL, Henry Aaron and Rubye Lucas hold stock in the Atlanta Braves, Louis Smith is a “limited partner” with the Kansas City Royals and P.J. Benton is a part owner of the Tampa Bay Devil Rays (Smith, 2002).

Considering the large number of African American players in professional football and basketball, it does seem rather peculiar that so few African Americans hold significant ownership shares in franchises and that no African Americans serve as Chief Executive Officer (CEO). Ironically, this parallels the situation in corporate America in which none of the one hundred largest corporations in America has an African American CEO (Chenault, 2001). Consequently, the racial imbalance on the ownership end may better reflect the larger demographic imbalance in corporate America than it does any unique aspect of the sports world (Powell, 1998).

As conveyed by Lapchick and Mathews (1998), normally a corporation is owned by a group of investors rather than by a single individual. The group then designates a chief executive for running the business on a day to day basis. In the NFL, most teams are owned by wealthy White men who make their money in other endeavors and ultimately pass them down to their progeny, who sell them to other wealthy individuals or corporations. That virtually all of the individuals engaged in these transactions over the years just happen to be White is magnified somewhat because of the visibility of professional football and to the dominance of the Black athlete today (Wideman, 2001).

We need to continue to discuss the matter seriously, for the lack of genuine and open dialogue regarding equal employment opportunity contributes to a stale and stagnant employment situation (Hill, 1996). Therefore, African American coaches and players need to speak up. If meaningful changes in hiring practices and career opportunities are to occur, the coaches and players must join together and voice their opinions.

Unfortunately, few openly express their true feelings concerning race - related issues. The reluctance of African American coaches and players that choose not to discuss their bitterness should not be confused with complacency, however. Better yet, it would be best understood as a painful adaptation to a society that does not want to hear that members

of a generally underprivileged group still harbor serious complaints (Edwards, 1998). But how can we solve something if we don't talk about it?

As we move further into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, one can assume that the NFL will continue to be a lucrative business that exploits the talents of African American players. Inevitably, the disparity between African American players and African American decision-makers will increase unless immediate steps are made in bringing about change.

If the role of professional football retains its high level of importance in our society while racial prejudice continues to manifest, we can also assume that this long-fought battle may never be won. But before surrendering the fight, we must keep in mind that opportunity will only come to those who keep knocking.

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## **Appendix**

### Biographies

#### Tony Dungy

Born Anthony Kevin Dungy on October 6, 1955 in Jackson, Michigan, Dungy graduated from Parkside High School in Jackson. After starring in football, basketball and track, he earned a football scholarship from the University of Minnesota.

While at the University of Minnesota, Dungy played quarterback (1973-1976). He finished his collegiate career as the school's leader in pass attempts, completions, passing yards and touchdown passes. He also rushed for over 1,300 yards and 16 touchdowns, earning the team's Most Valuable Player Award two times. As a senior, he played in the East-West Shrine Game, the Hula Bowl, and the Japan Bowl. Upon completion of his career, Dungy ranked fourth in Big Ten history in total offense behind Mike Phipps, Archie Griffin and Bob Griese. As a freshman, he played for the Golden Gophers basketball team, averaging 2.6 points per game before concentrating solely on football. Dungy graduated with a bachelor's degree in business administration.

In May of 1977, he was signed as a free agent by the Pittsburgh Steelers. He was converted from quarterback to wide receiver to defensive back. When he made the team's final roster, he was the first free agent to make the Steelers' roster in two seasons. Dungy played in

14 games as a rookie, intercepting three passes. In a game against Houston that season, Dungy was called upon to play quarterback due to injuries to Terry Bradshaw and Mike Kruczek. He completed 3 of 8 passes for 43 yards and rushed three times for eight yards. In that game, he intercepted a pass and threw an interception. His playing career lasted three years, including stints with the San Francisco 49ers and the New York Giants.

Dungy began his coaching career with his alma mater, the University of Minnesota, serving as defensive backs coach. His first NFL coaching job came with the Steelers, where he worked from 1981-1988, developing into one of the league's top young defensive assistants. He was promoted to defensive backs coach in 1982 and held that job for two seasons until he became the NFL's youngest defensive coordinator in 1984. In five seasons as their defensive coordinator, the Steelers defense averaged 24 interceptions and 37 takeaways, scoring 20 touchdowns over that span.

From 1989-1991, Dungy served as defensive backs coach for the Kansas City Chiefs, helping them to the playoff in 1990 and 1991. In 1989, the Chiefs finished first in the AFC and second in the NFL in pass defense. From 1989-1991, the Chiefs allowed the second-fewest completions in the league and the second-lowest completion percentage.

Key to Dungy's ascension to the head coaching level was his tenure as defensive coordinator for the Minnesota Vikings (1992-1995). In 1995,

the Vikings finished second in the NFL with 40 takeaways and second with 25 interceptions. In 1994, despite having just one first-round draft choice on the defense, the unit ranked first in the league with seven defensive touchdowns, first in the NFL run defense, fifth in NFL overall defense, tied for first with 16 fumble recoveries, fourth in takeaways and tied for fifth in sacks. The team's league-best 68.1 yards-per-game rushing average was the fourth-best total in NFL history and the best in 30 years.

Dungy was hired as the head coach of the Tampa Bay Buccaneers in 1996. By compiling a 54-42 regular season record and earning four playoff appearances in six seasons, he became the most successful coach in team history. In the 10 seasons before Dungy's arrival, the Buccaneers were 43-111 with nine double-digit loss seasons. In 1997, after guiding the Buccaneers to a 10-6 record and a wild card playoff victory over the Detroit Lions, he was named Professional Coach of the Year by the Maxwell Football Club. Under Dungy, the Buccaneers won the NFC Central in 1999, their first division championship in 18 seasons.

### Herman Edwards

On January 28, 2001, Edwards was named head coach of the New York Jets, the thirteenth full-time head coach and the first African American head coach of a New York professional football team. He previously served as the assistant head coach for the Tampa Bay

Buccaneers (1996-2000). Edwards helped the secondary become one of the NFL's top-ranked units while steering them to the 1999 NFC Championship Game. In four of his five seasons with the club, the defense finished in the NFL's top 10 in passes defended.

Before joining Tampa Bay, Edwards worked for the Kansas City Chiefs for six seasons (1990-95) in several different roles. His first coaching job was at San Jose State University where he served as defensive back coach (1986-1989). He began his professional coaching career as a participant of the NFL's Minority Coaching fellowship program with the Kansas City Chiefs in the summer of 1989.

In the 2001 season, Edwards led the Jets to a first place finish in the AFC East and posted the biggest postseason victory (41-0) in club history. With a 10-6 regular season record, Edwards became the first head coach in team history to make the playoffs in his first season.

Born on April 27, 1954 in Monmouth, New Jersey, Edwards played in college for the University of California (1972, 1974) and San Diego State (1975-76). While playing for California, he set a Pacific 8 for interceptions in one game with four. His professional playing career included nine seasons with the Philadelphia Eagles (1977-1985) and one season with the Los Angeles Rams and the Atlanta Falcons (1986).

During his twelve-year career, Edwards was a two-time All-Pro selection and is best known for recovering a fumble by Giants

quarterback Joe Pisarcik and returning it 26 yards for a score with 31 seconds remaining in Philadelphia's 19-17 "Miracle in the Meadowlands" in 1978. He also was on the Philadelphia team that won conference title in 1980.

### Denny Green

Born February 17, 1949, Dennis Green was a running back at Iowa from 1968-1970, where he received a degree in recreation. After college, he played briefly for the British Columbia Lions in the Canadian Football League (CFL). Green began his coaching career as a graduate assistant for Iowa in 1972. In 1973, Green moved on to Dayton University and coached the running backs. He returned to Iowa and worked with the running backs from 1974-1976. In 1977, Green was hired as running backs coach for Stanford University. He held that capacity for two seasons.

Green earned his first job as a coordinator in 1980 when Stanford promoted him to run the offense. One year later, Green was offered and accepted a head coaching job at Northwestern, where he worked until 1985. In 1982, he was recognized as the Big Ten Coach of the Year.

Green moved on to the National Football League in 1986, working under Bill Walsh and the San Francisco 49ers (he had previously worked under Bill Walsh at Stanford). He served as special teams' coordinator before coaching the running backs. Green's contributions to the success

of the 49ers earned him the head coaching job at Stanford in 1989. During his three-year tenure, he led the Cardinal to the Aloha Bowl, which was the school's first appearance in a bowl game since 1986.

In 1992, Green was hired as the head coach for the Minnesota Vikings. He became the most successful coach in team history. He led the Vikings to the playoffs in eight of his 10 seasons, including four division titles. He is one of only seven people in the history of the NFL to lead his team to the playoffs in each of his first three seasons as head coach. Green guided his 2000 team to the NFC Central Division title, posting an 11-5 record, as well as leading them to the conference championship game. In 1998, he led the Vikings to their best regular-season record (15-1) in franchise history and a trip to the NFC Championship Game. Green also was named Maxwell Club and Sports Illustrated Coach of the Year following the 1998 season.

### Fritz Pollard

Fritz Pollard was born Frederick Douglas Pollard on January 27, 1894 in Chicago Illinois. He would become the first African American head coach in the National Football League.

By the time Pollard graduated from high school, he was a talented running back baseball player and a three-time Cook County track champion. He briefly played football for Northwestern, Harvard and

Dartmouth before receiving a scholarship from the Rockefeller family to attend Brown University in 1915.

It was at Brown where Pollard led his team to an appearance in the 1916 Rose Bowl game. He was the first African American to play in the Rose Bowl, and the second African American to be named to the All-America Football team. After leaving Brown, Pollard briefly pursued a degree in dentistry, worked as director of an army YMCA, and coached football at Lincoln University. In 1919 he signed to play for the Akron Pros in the American Professional Football League (APFA).

Pollard led Akron to a championship in 1920 and was named head coach a year later. He continued to play for the Pros as well. The APFA was renamed the National Football League (NFL) in 1922, making Fritz Pollard the first African American coach in League history. Pollard coached Akron until 1926, and went on to coach NFL teams in Milwaukee and Indiana. He would retire from football in 1937 to pursue a career in business. Pollard remained the only African American head coach until the hiring of Art Shell in 1989 (AA Registry, 2002).

### Ray Rhodes

Born October 20, 1950 in Mexia, Texas, Ray Earl Rhodes graduated from Mexia High School where he earned all-state honors in football as a running back and defensive back. He also lettered in track and field and helped guide his basketball team to the state finals.

As a collegian, Rhodes spent two years as a running back at Texas Christian University (1969-70) before transferring to the University of Tulsa (1972-73).

Selected by the New York Giants in the 10<sup>th</sup> round of the 1974 NFL Draft, he played wide receiver in his first three NFL seasons, including 1975 when he led all NFC receivers with a 20.7 yards-per catch average. Two years later, however, Rhodes was switched to defensive back by the Giants and won a starting job at cornerback. In 1979, he was sent to the San Francisco 49ers in a four-player deal that ironically included Tony Dungy, the present head coach of the Indianapolis Colts.

Rhodes' coaching career began in 1981, spending two seasons as assistant secondary coach for the 49ers before being promoted to defensive backs coach for the 1983-91 seasons. In his first season as an assistant, he helped the team win Super Bowl XVI despite three rookies starting in the defensive backfield.

Rhodes went on to become one of only four men to serve on the 49ers' coaching staff for all five of their Super Bowl winning teams. In Rhodes' 12 seasons as a 49er assistant, the team earned post-season berths 10 times and advanced to the conference title game on seven occasions.

In 1992, Rhodes left San Francisco to become the defensive coordinator for the Green Bay Packers. After two seasons, he returned to the 49ers to serve in the same capacity. With the arrival of Rhodes, San



Francisco saw their defense elevate from being ranked 15<sup>th</sup> in the league to 8<sup>th</sup>. He orchestrated a stellar defense with new faces. In fact, of that unit's 11 starters, six were new to the team in 1994. With a defensive team led by 4 Pro Bowlers, the 49ers shut down the San Diego Chargers in the Super Bowl. His efforts did not go unnoticed, as he earned his first chance to become a head coach.

In his initial season as head coach for the Philadelphia Eagles, Rhodes earned NFL Coach of the Year honors. He guided his team to a 10-6 record as they advanced to the NFC Divisional Playoff round. It was the first of two consecutive post-season trips for Rhodes' Philadelphia club, making him the only head coach in the Eagles' 67-year history to qualify for the playoffs in each of his first two seasons.

In 1999, Rhodes returned to Green Bay as head coach but was let go after posting an 8-8 record.

In 2000, he served as defensive coordinator for the Washington Redskins and improved their defensive ranking to fourth in the NFL after inheriting a unit that ranked 30<sup>th</sup> the previous year. His defense allowed the fewest first downs, total net yards and points.

In 2001, Rhodes was hired to lead the Denver Broncos' defense. The defense went from being the league's 24<sup>th</sup> ranked team to the 8<sup>th</sup> ranked team.

### Art Shell

Art Shell was born in Charleston, South Carolina in 1946. The son of a mill worker, he was 15 years old when his mother died. He assumed many of the responsibilities of raising four younger siblings. Shell was all-state in both football and basketball at Bonds-Wilson High School in North Charleston but it was his football skills that enabled him to get into Maryland State University, which is now the University of Maryland-Eastern Shore. Shell starred on both offense and defense in college. He earned a bachelor's degree in Industrial Arts Education in 1968 and also earned a chance to play professional football.

Drafted in the third round of the college draft, Shell punished defensive linemen for 15 years while playing offensive tackle for the Oakland Raiders. Near the end of his playing career, he volunteered his time at the University of California in order to learn how to coach. When Shell retired as a player in 1982, he was signed as an assistant line coach for the Raiders.

Shell's physical size, athletic skill, and intensity helped earn him the respect of his coaches, peers and opponents. He would become third on the all-time list for games played for the Raiders while being named to the Pro Bowl eight times. In 1989, Shell was voted to the National Football League Hall of Fame and also was named the head coach of the

Oakland Raiders. He is recognized as the first African American head coach in the modern era.

Shell's other accomplishments include being a member of the All-Conference teams from 1973-1978, All-Pro in 1973, 1974, 1977 and playing in 23 post-season games, including eight conference championships and two Super Bowls.

Three decades of service in the Raider organization are ample testimony to Art Shell's work ethic, high standard, and communication skills. In his first two full seasons as head coach, Shell led the Raiders to the playoffs, winning the American Football Conference Western Division Championship in 1990.