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Living Within Opaque Worlds: The Balkanized Experiences of Collegiate Minority Student-Athletes

Dr. Franklin Ojeda Smith

The Richard Stockton College of New Jersey

G. Larry James, Co-Author

The Richard Stockton College of New Jersey

A long-term study yielded recommendations for college-wide policies to enhance mainstreaming and ameliorate against institutional balkanization of minority student-athletes.

This study utilizes the thematic analysis approach to collect the experiences of student-athletes at a Division III college. A ten-year window of participation was used to capture the mainstream and balkanized institutional experiences of male and female student-athletes. The study transcended race and included an array of the different sports played. Those institutional experiences specific to the sport played, to race and gender were isolated. The study included recommendations useful to specific athletic programs, and to the development of college-wide policies that serve to enhance mainstreaming and that ameliorate against institutional balkanization.

PRESENTERS

Franklin Ojeda Smith was born on the South Carolina Sea Islands. His parents were farm workers and he took his early schooling in the classic "one room" schoolhouse setting. After migrating in 1954 to the "Fort Apache" section of the South Bronx, New York City, he became the adopted son of a Puerto Rican family (the Ojedas). After high school, he pursued higher education over a professional career in his first love, baseball. During his undergraduate career at Hampton Institute, Hampton, Virginia, he discovered his propensity for intellectual life, won national athletic recognition along with a national batting championship. He received his master's from Springfield College, Springfield, Massachusetts.

After his tenure with an international "think tank," the American Institute for Research, Dr. Smith returned to graduate school and took his doctorate in educational sociology at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst. It was during his doctoral work that he found academic grounding for his profound interest in the study of Gullah Family systems and the survival of African cultural traditions and customs among his Sea Island people.

Franklin Ojeda Smith is a self-described Gullah African in his use of ancient oral tradition as he constructs, embellishes and weaves across complex societal issues to spin his informative and entertaining lectures which are laden with anecdotes and humorous cultural poignancy. Dr. Smith notes: "I was fortunate to have been born in the purest African community in America. I have lived and worked on plantations, in the inner city, in Jewish and in Hispanic communities. I've been an athlete and am a scholar. I started my formal education in a plantation school; I've had academic training in the black Ivy

league and in other prestigious majority institutions; these are among the experiences I bring, which frame my philosophy and oratory."

After listening to a presentation by Dr. Smith, the legendary tennis and golf player, Althea Gibson was inspired to exclaim: "Your words were absolutely uplifting!" His dramatic reading of *Lincoln's Last Days* has been the featured performance promoting New Jersey Television Network's Emmy Award-winning Reading Literacy Program.

Among his publications, Dr. Smith, a prolific writer, is the author of *A Comparative Cross-Generation Study of the Parental Practices and Beliefs of Gullah Sea Islanders*, which addresses the process of de-Africanization.

A native of Greenburgh-White Plains, New York, **G. Larry James** received his Bachelor of Science degree at Villanova University in 1970 and a Master's in Public Policy from Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey in 1987. He served in the United States Marine Corps Reserves, achieving the rank of Major.

James is Assistant Dean of Students/Director of Athletics and Recreation at The Richard Stockton College of New Jersey. He is credited with helping to shape the identity and positive reputation of Stockton, the newest member institution of the New Jersey System of Higher Education. He also helped to secure training camps at Stockton for the Women's United States Olympic Basketball Team in 1992 and the World Cup Soccer Team from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in 1994.

Perhaps best known as a member of the 1968 United States Olympic 1600 meter relay team which won a gold medal and held the oldest world running record in the sport of Track and Field, James was nicknamed "The Might Burner." He won an individual silver medal in those same Olympics in Mexico City in the 400 meters. James still holds several records at Villanova University, where he is enshrined in the Varsity Club Hall of Fame. His finish in the 1968 mile relay Championship of America was ranked by the *Philadelphia Daily News* among the Top Ten moments in the 100-year history of the world's largest relay carnival. James was inducted in 1995 to Penn Relay's Wall of Fame.

Since his retirement as a participant, James remains active in athletics and the Olympic movement. He is currently a member of the NCAA Olympic Sports Liaison Committee; USA Track and Field Budget Committee; financial secretary of the Mid-Atlantic USA Track and Field Association; and was selected to manage the USA Track and Field Team for the 1997 World Champions in Athens, Greece. He previously served on the coaching staff of the 1994 U.S. Olympic Festival, as manager for the 1995 USA versus Great Britain Track and Field Meet, and as a member of the NCAA Men's Committee on Committees.