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Ko-be or Not To-be

Dear Basketball, you have provided many Black athletes with the opportunity to make the most of their beginnings, chase their dreams, make millions and win championships. You have also created a dynamic in which there are too many mouths to feed, too many dreams to be made, and too few opportunities. The social construct of what it means to be black goes hand in hand with sports itself and is simply accentuated through the perpetual stereotypes and athleticizing of black life. The languages of media, positions of enunciation, semiotics, and discourse found within the Ferber and Hoberman articles, Kobe's goodbye to basketball, and William Rhoden's Forty Million Dollar Slaves provide a first-hand look into the current state of what it means to be a Black athlete in the United States.

The farewell to basketball constructed by Kobe may be the most thorough goodbye to a sport by any American athlete ever. Kobe's farewell video includes a brief look into his childhood, his growth into an NBA star and champion, and his glory of gold at the Olympics. The five-minute video, narrated by Kobe, sets up a mythical dialogue between Kobe and the game of basketball. With the continual personification of the game of basketball and the reference to basketball as "you," the significance with which basketball perceivably holds in Kobe Bryant's life is exaggerated. This exaggeration of significance of basketball in Kobe's life is exceptionally threatening to the futures of many children and teens who look up to Kobe as a means to chase their dreams in the sport of basketball. In the beginning of his farewell there is a

loud build-up of reactions to Kobe's game winning shots and big plays, followed by silence... calmly Kobe's voice appears. With Kobe's voice comes a black and white graphic of Kobe as a child gripping a basketball as if it were his means to living. Then comes a visual of that little boy shooting balled up tube socks into a mini hoop dreaming of a last second shot to win the NBA Championship. Kobe narrates the scene and identifies that he never saw the end of the tunnel, only saw himself running out of one. Kobe Bryant was lucky enough to enjoy an illustrious career and even he states he did not see the end of the tunnel, which was the day that playing basketball was no longer in the picture. Kobe experienced what nearly all Black athletes experience in this day and age, putting all your eggs in one basket (Athlete Darwinism Lecture). However, the backlashes of putting all his eggs in one basket do not impact Kobe negatively because he made it to the big stage with the big contracts, but this is not the case for many striving athletes. This farewell speech puts Kobe's accomplishments and path to success on a pedestal available for all aspiring athletes to absorb.

The diversity of colors and at times lack of diversity of colors within Kobe's farewell video portrays emphasis on interesting aspects of Kobe's life. While Kobe is speaking about his childhood the animations strictly stay in black and white, a typical animation technique to indicate the past. Along with the rather bland coloring while Kobe is depicted as a child, there is a dull sound of an orchestra in the background that is continuously growing in noise and beauty. As Kobe meticulously touches upon all aspects of his growth in basketball the orchestra begins to come to the forefront and colors begin to flash before the viewers eyes as Kobe is seen maneuvering up and down the court through defenders in the bright gold and purple that so seamlessly coincides with the Lakers. Whilst all the action surmounts to various climaxes that correlate with the most influential parts of Kobe's basketball career the camera shot remains

consistent at a third person view with Kobe at the center of each shot (What is Media Literacy? Lecture). The inclusion of a third person point of view on the video while we get a first-person farewell speech creates a unique dynamic in which Kobe is talking about his own career yet witnessing it again in the animation. This dynamic helps relate the speaker to the audience, just as Ferber (2007), no connection to professional sports, does with her audience of sports fanatics. Ferber analyzed a scholastic article on media portrayal of Black Athletes as compared to White Athletes and gave her personal results to show her vulnerability to connect with the readers right off the bat rather than through market research and reputation in the world of sports.

Within Kobe's farewell speech to basketball, the positions of enunciations are clearly evident. The farewell at its heart is Kobe letting go of a part of his life that has blessed him with endless opportunities. Kobe is narrating the story as a result of his recent decree of retirement and is putting all he has left for basketball in his farewell to this "love". Kobe's consistent personification of basketball through the reference as "you" indicates that to Kobe, basketball was more than a game... a life partner. As a result, the "athleticizing of Black life" is perpetuated through the video's sole focus on basketball, as if there is no other part to Kobe Bryant than basketball (Hoberman 1997). Throughout Kobe's farewell there is zero acknowledgement of the relationship between "black talent and white ownership" which creates a false lifestyle of the NBA within the animation (Rhoden 2006). Being that Kobe Bryant is the concentration of the farewell, there is an exclusion of the racial dynamic in the NBA and the racial stereotypes of the past that are perpetuated today (White Men Can't Jump). The National Basketball Association is a league dominated by Black players (the talent) and White head coaches and general managers (the ownership), the lack of focus on the harsh origins on such dynamic creates a false utopia of

the NBA in the video, which further enhances many young kids urges to participate in professional athletics while ignoring other career opportunities.

Towards the beginning of Kobe's farewell video, there is an image of a young Kobe rolling up tube socks in place of a basketball. This image is perpetuated throughout the video as the clock runs down and young Kobe "shoots" the game winning shot and rejoices on his bed. Those scenes connect to many young kids with an interest in sport because at some point in their lives they were impersonating their best players and shooting buzzer beaters in their driveway and to see one of the greatest basketball players of all time doing the same, it makes it seem as if their dreams are possible. The semiotics with which the farewell video contains has the ability to connect generations and connect the audience to the speaker himself. This growth of Kobe's dream reaches to all communities of all ages, genders, and races creating a platform for Kobe to be a driving factor in the cause for social change. In a time period where love is overtaking the world and the encouragement to love who you want is at a record high, it is absolute that Kobe is now pronouncing his love for basketball through his five-minute farewell speech. Kobe is taking the meaning of love for the game of basketball to the record books with the inclusion of "Love so deep" and "Love you always" when prescribing his farewell to basketball. Kobe is setting the precedent of what it means to 'Love what you do' for the rest of the world to witness and hopefully follow in his footsteps.

Kobe Bryant's farewell speech and video to basketball carries a wide variety of languages of media through its coloring, music, and camera angle while consisting of distinct positions of enunciation, dynamic semiotics perpetuated throughout the speech, impactful cultural discourses that create a standard to live by, and relating to alternative scholastic articles to accentuate the meanings behind Kobe's farewell to the game he loves. Dear Kobe, without

your farewell speech to basketball your love for the game would not have been in question, your accolades not doubted, your journey not questioned, so why say goodbye?

References:

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