According to the Higher Education Act of 1966, a Historically Black College and University (HBCU) is defined as: "any historically black college or university that was established prior to 1964, whose principal mission was, and is, the education of black Americans, and that is accredited by a nationally recognized accrediting agency or association determined by the Secretary [of Education] to be a reliable authority as to the quality of training offered or is, according to such an agency or association, making reasonable progress toward accreditation" (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). HBCUs have a strong and storied tradition with over 130 years of educational service to African-American students. There are more than 100 institutions (both two year and four year schools) that are considered HBCUs and these schools account for 19% of the bachelor’s degrees earned by African-Americans. In addition to academics, HBCUs have strong tradition in athletics and an unexplored fan base. The Southwestern Athletic Conference (SWAC) and Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference (MEAC) are two Division I conferences that govern HBCU athletics. The conferences pride themselves on their schools' traditions and have created "classic" football matchups that are unique in college sports. These “classics” showcase historic rivals playing each other at a neutral site, usually located in a large city. For these events, tradition has resulted in large scale culturally based events surrounding the football game. The 2009 football season features 15 annual classic football games between HBCU schools. Six classic games are played in NFL stadiums (i.e., Atlanta, New Orleans, New York, Chicago, Houston, and Nashville), while others are played in historic college football stadiums (i.e., Liberty Bowl, Cotton Bowl, Florida Citrus Bowl, and Legion Field). The neutral sites for these contests host many culturally based events that act in conjunction with the football game, making for an event-filled weekend that is an increased tourist destination. For example, in addition to the football game, the Atlanta Football Classic has a band jamboree, step showdown, parade, drumline style halftime show, job and college fairs, and collegiate debate. Similarly, the Southern Heritage Classic held in Memphis has an official tailgate, community health fair, coaches' luncheon, R&B concert, mixer, golf classic, parade, fashion show and brunch, and battle of the bands (Southern Heritage Classic, 2008).

While the HBCU classics are eventful and historically unique, the games and their fans often go unrecognized by national media and ignored by sport researchers. It would be helpful to change this situation if the classic event managers understood their target market. One approach to understand spectators is through market segmentations (Shank, 2009). Segmentation is often a critical start in the consumer information process that sport organizations utilize to explore consumption patterns of consumers (Pitts & Stotlar, 2002). Segmentations are typically done based on one or more of the following approaches: (a) consumption, (b) sociodemographics, (c) psychographics (e.g., Mullin et al, 2007; Zhang et al, 1995). In addition to meeting consumer needs of various segments, information obtained from market segmentations can help sport managers craft marketing plans and sponsorship proposals. Previous segmentation studies have assessed various levels of collegiate and professional sports (e.g., Mullin et al., 2007; Simmons Market Research Bureau, 2005); however, one area that has lacked substantial research is HBCU events. Recently, Li and Burdon (2009) studied marketing practices of HBCU football programs, Cunningham and Singer (2009) compared sport management students at Primarily White Institutions (PWIs) with HBCU students. Black consumers have been studied in relation to their sport participation and marketing (Armstrong, 2001, 2002a, 2002b). Pitts et al. (2007) explored consumption variables of HBCU football game attendees. Armstrong (2002) utilized Wann's (1995) Sport Fan Motivation Scale with a cultural subscale to determine motives of Black consumers of an HBCU basketball game. However, unique events like the HBCU classic football games have not been examined. Because the surrounding events and cultural and historical significance of HBCU classic football games differ significantly from a tradition college football game, there is a need to study the factors that affect attendance and market demand variables of HBCU football games. As an area that has rarely been examined, market segmentation needs to be conducted as an initial step to understand this unique sport market. Thus, the purpose of the study was...
to segment an HBCU classic football event through studying spectator demographics, game consumption, and their relationships.

A total of 586 HBCU classic game spectators completed a questionnaire that assessed their classic consumption patterns (i.e., number of times the individual attended this “classic”) and demographics. Descriptive statistics revealed that the HBCU classic attendees’ demographic profiles were as follows: average age was 35.6 years old (SD = 12.55), predominantly African-American (72%), and well educated (i.e., 77% with a college or post college degree). There were slightly more females (i.e., 59%). Spectators had attended this classic game an average of 3.63 (SD = 4.52) times. Chi-square (χ2) and Kruskal-Wallis analyses revealed that spectator demographic variables were not significantly (p > .05) related to attendance frequencies of HBCU classic events.

The overwhelmingly majority of HBCU game attendees were well educated black consumers, who were often ignored in the marketplace despite their large spending power. Black households had $656 billion in earned income, spending $900 million on sports and recreation equipments and $2.6 billion on entertainment and leisure (The Buying Power of Black America, 2003). The spectators were much older than typical college students, implying more discretionary income for expenditure. The finding that spectators attended this classic football game on average of nearly four times indicated a group of loyal consumers. The findings that demographic variables of spectators were not related to their attendance level simply indicated that their behavioral loyalties were not based on their demographic background, suggesting the formulation and adoption of generalized marketing schemes. Additionally, information obtained in this study is useful for increasing and maintaining corporate sponsors of the classic events. Current classic sponsors need to be fully aware of the characteristics of event consumers in order to achieve their corporate objectives. For instance, the Southern Heritage Classic is presented by FedEx, and includes major sponsors such as AutoZone, Allstate, Nike, Carrier, Tyson, Coors Light, Army and Navy, among others. Bank of American and Ford formed their relationship with the Atlanta Football Classic game through 100 Black Men of Atlanta indicating that knowledge of the demographics had a direct tie to sponsorship of the event (AFC.com, 2009). The host organizing body may utilize the findings to leverage more corporate sponsors. It is also necessary to note that on an individual school basis, athletic programs in HBCUs typically do not generate adequate resources and rely on student fees for funding (Li & Burdon, 2009). Findings of this study would be beneficial for these athletic departments to promote the event to current and potential consumers and sponsors. Finally, in addition to demographic and game consumption variables, other factors may also influence the attendance of HBCU classic games and they should be included in future studies. These may include, but are not limited to, market demand, service quality, motivations, and economic impact.