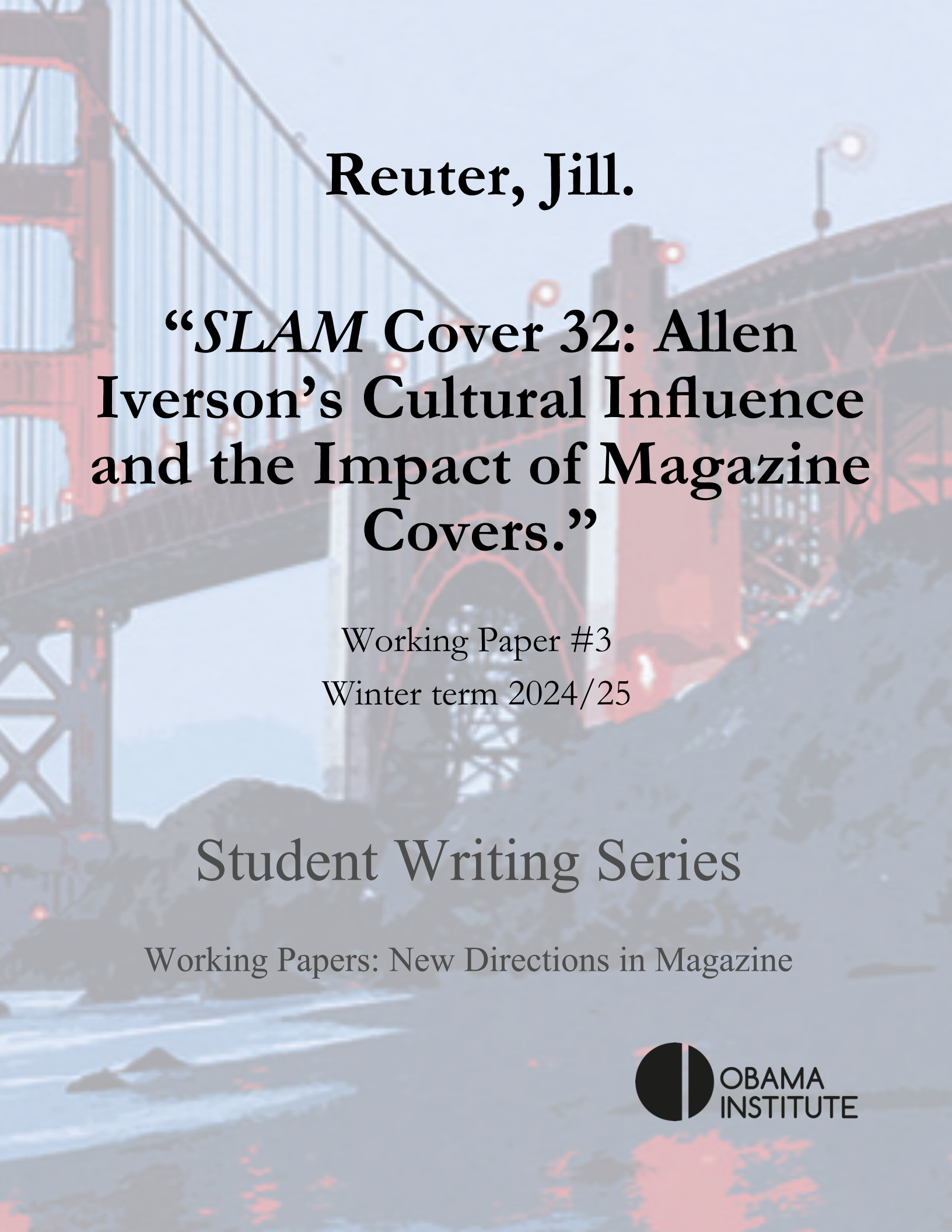




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“*SLAM* Cover 32: Allen Iverson’s Cultural Influence and the Impact of Magazine Covers.”

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SLAM Cover 32: Allen Iverson's Cultural Influence and the Impact of Magazine Covers

Introduction

Basketball and the NBA have, over the course of their histories, evolved into something more than just a spectator sport. By now, both are an established part of popular culture not only in the United States but across the world. Influential players and the Olympic “Dream Team” of 1992 have transported the National Basketball Association and its most famous players onto a world stage. However, the culture of basketball in the 1980 and early 1990s and the culture of the sport today are noticeably different. The hip hop culture was already starting to penetrate the cultural and racial categories of basketball in the 1990s. At the turn of the century, a new generation of basketball players did not only revolutionize the style of playing basketball but also the culture surrounding the sport by combining “hooping” with everything hip hop. One player who was most impactful in combining basketball and hip hop is Allen Iverson (1975-). He retired in 2013 from professional basketball but his influence on its culture remains until today. His fashion, hairstyles, jewelry, etc. have shaped much of how we think about the sport. In addition to being one of the top players in the NBA, Iverson, also known as “The Answer,” has been the face that represents the affiliation of basketball and hip hop. As such, he was frequently featured on the cover of the basketball magazine *SLAM* which has recently been added to the NBA Hall of Fame. One of the magazine's main pillars is its covers. The online website of *SLAM* even provides the complete Cover Gallery in which all past covers of the magazine are displayed. One cover that stands out in this gallery is that of issue number 32 (see figure 3). It is the third issue with Allen Iverson on the front page and represents the blend of basketball with hip hop culture.

Adam Figman, the current CEO of *SLAM*, claims that “[e]veryone wants to be on a cover, because anyone can post a photo of themselves,” only to add: “Any basketball player can say ‘Here’s what I look like. Here’s a cool photo of me.’ But a cover is a special moment. It’s a stamp, and a *SLAM* stamp, to me, is validation. We only do so many covers, so it means something special” (Jones, “How *SLAM* Magazine Went from NBA ‘Outcast’ to a Hall of Fame Publication in 30 Years”). The fact that Allen Iverson had already been on the *SLAM* cover two times before issue 32 dropped in 1999 shows that fans wanted to see him in the spotlight. Whether this was because they liked his way of playing basketball, his style and fashion, or simply because he was such a controversial character, basketball and *SLAM* fans wanted to see Allen Iverson on the front page. I will demonstrate that with Adam Figman's editorship magazine covers become a special space. They offer something that is hard to replicate on social media, a newer and non-print based medium. Covers imprint those who are featured with a quality that can only be conveyed via the medium of the magazine cover. David Abrahamson calls this “magazine exceptionalism” (146). While his argument is concerned with the magazine as a whole, I argue that this is especially true for magazine covers. As exceptional forms of media, magazine covers not only represent cultural

shifts and movements but can also incite them. The cover of *SLAM* issue 32 is such an inciteful front page.

On the following pages I want to shortly introduce the magazine *SLAM* and what is particularly interesting about this basketball magazine mixing sport with hip hop culture. In the subsequent chapter, I will discuss the magazine, its affiliation with hip hop and what role race plays in the context of basketball and hip hop. The third chapter will deal with the exceptionalism of magazine covers. Here, I will elaborate on which criteria make a magazine cover memorable and why the magazine cover is a special place for both the editors and the ones featured on the front pages. The last chapter will analyze the cover of *SLAM* issue number 32 in detail; it examines why this particular front page has become so iconic. Finally, in the concluding section, I will suggest further research questions.

***SLAM*, Hip Hop, and Race**

The magazine *SLAM* has sold over 300 million print copies since its founding in 1994. The print issues are published on a bi-monthly basis and have since been popular among basketball fans. In the early 1990s, the NBA was undergoing some major changes, both in terms of the sport itself and the culture surrounding it. Young players introduced new ways of playing basketball and new ways of presenting themselves as public figures off the court. A major influence in this shift was the hip hop culture that permeated the professional style of the NBA. In contrast to other publications, *SLAM* approached this change differently. In 1994, Dennis Page launched the magazine as a combination of the basketball and hip hop culture. The magazine proudly presents itself as “a hip-hop magazine for basketball” (*SLAM Online*). On the magazine’s website it says that, at the time, “the foundations that both art forms stand on today had been undergoing heavy construction thanks to the work of icons like Michael Jordan, Tupac Shakur and The Notorious B.I.G.” (*SLAM Online*). This foundational combination of basketball with hip hop can be seen on the cover of the issue of



Figure 1. “6 Gods.” *SLAM Magazine* 198, June 2016, <https://covers.slamonline.com/>.

June 2016. On the cover of issue 198, Kyle Lowry and DeMar DeRozan share the front page with hip hop star Drake (see figure 1).

As such an intersectional medium, *SLAM* approaches reporting on the NBA, the WNBA (since 1998), college basketball, and international basketball differently than other basketball publications. In his 2024 article in the *New York Times*, Jason Jones quotes Robert Jackson, a former writer for *SLAM*, who says: “Part of the foundation of our responsibility was telling the cultural side of basketball first, and then can it connect to the NBA second” (“How *SLAM Magazine*”). The front pages of the magazine reflect this attitude. On the cover of *SLAM*, players are pictured not only as athletes but as individuals with backgrounds and personalities. In the case of many players, this background is often connected to what is colloquially called the ‘street’ or ‘hood.’ The social and economic background of many players, especially Black players, has been one of the driving

forces that built the connection between the sport and the hip hop music. It is this combination that has been influential in basketball’s ascendancy to one of sports fans’ favorites. As Jeffery Lane writes in his introduction: “[b]asketball is America’s most exciting sport not because of its dynastic teams, sublimely talented players, or most thrilling buzzer-beaters, but because of a transcendent culture of the game, complete with values and symbols; aesthetics and styles; and economic, political, and racial dynamics” (xvi-xvii). The racial categories Lane talks of have been ever-present in the history of the NBA. Black players have been and are treated differently than their White counterparts. For Lane, “[r]ace in basketball, still basically a black and white category, is a particularly rich and revelatory subject, encompassing (among other things) tensions between black players and white owners and managers; the peculiarity of white minds – commentators and writers – thinking and talking about black bodies, the definitions and self-fulfilling expectations of black and white masculinity, and the overt and latent prejudices and fetishes of fired-up fans” (xvii).

Black basketball players are oftentimes judged on different grounds than White players. Stereotypes play a huge role in how sports journalists report on what happens on and off the court. In the early 1980s, many fans and reporters deemed that the league had become a stage for mainly

Black players. It was at the time when Earvin ‘Magic’ Johnson started his ascendancy in the NBA that some spectators seemed to long for another great player, a White basketball star. This player was supposed to be Larry Bird. As Todd Boyd writes, “the notion of a ‘great White hope’ is of the utmost significance in understanding the image of Larry Bird and the way that fans and the media reacted to him” (46). However, racial categories did not only influence the way in which Black and White players were seen on the court. It also affected the way in which players of color were judged when criminal charges were concerned. Like in many other areas, Black players who are charged with criminal offenses are often deemed guilty without trial. Boyd argues that “[t]he individuals in question are guilty by birth; their skin is their sin” (6). Again, a connection to hip hop culture can be drawn. Black rappers, especially those deemed ‘gangster’ rappers, use their social backgrounds and ‘street credibility’ to market their image and music. At the same time, they are often considered guilty of criminal offenses just because of their affiliation with hip hop. Black basketball players who fuse basketball and hip hop culture are therefore not seldomly judged on account of their appearance and behavior off the court.

Allen Iverson is one of the most prominent examples of this. Before the start of his basketball career, Iverson had gotten arrested for participating in a racially motivated brawl. While the conviction was overturned the stamp of being a criminal stuck with him even during his NBA career. Later, he was accused of domestic violence for which no evidence was ever found. However, Jeffery Lane recounts that “[i]n two additional New York Times pieces, Iverson’s arrest specifically and his character in general are treated in two vastly different ways by a white writer and a black writer” (48). Because of his background, Iverson was guilty without trial. His hip hop style and his disinterest in certain rules and etiquettes branded him both as a controversy and criminal and a hip hop and basketball icon.

Magazine Covers

David Abrahamson coined the term “magazine exceptionalism” (146). His argument that the magazine is an exceptional media form is based on the magazine’s “unique and powerful role both as a product of its social and cultural moment and as a catalyst for social change” (Abrahamson 146). While Abrahamson builds his argument on the magazine form as a whole, Ted Spiker centers his attention on the magazine cover. He presents the front page as the element that is essential in convincing potential readership to buy the issue. Spiker states that “[o]f all the verbs a magazine cover can incite, perhaps the most important one is to *sell*” (377). The front page of a magazine, however, does not only serve the purpose of enticing readers to buy the issue, it also serves as a conveyor of the magazine’s brand. The brand of the magazine, in this case, is not the name, like the *Der Spiegel* or *The New Yorker*. The brand is the “personality and voice of the magazine” (Spiker 377). The magazine cover is exceptional in its own right. On little space, it serves numerous purposes and can make, even if not purchased, “a lasting impression on readers no matter their perspective” (Spiker 377). Besides being the number one selling point of the issue, the magazine’s front page also teases the content within. At the same time, it holds space for marketing and

advertising and highlights the cover story of the issue. However, I contend with Ted Spiker who notes that the cover is first and foremost a “piece of content itself” (381). As such, the cover can be culturally significant in its own right. Spiker elaborates that magazine covers can visualize historical processes as well as serve as mirrors of current changes and movements in culture and society (381). *SLAM*, for example, visualizes players’ careers, and trends, and can therefore serve as a chronology of the NBA since the magazine’s first publication. In the introduction, it has already been argued that magazine covers do not only reflect cultural shifts but that they can also incite them. For this to be the case, a cover has to be memorable. Memorability can be achieved through various methods. The first factor that plays into a magazine cover’s recognizability is its design. In the print format, the cover is the first page a potential reader sees. Ian Birch argues that the “newsstand cover . . . [is] the most important marketing tool” (6). He notes that there are several criteria that make the typical cover “instantly recognizable” (6):

[The cover] should have an attractive and accessible photograph with strong eye contact (we read the picture before the text and we prefer photography to illustration or pure type because it takes less time and effort to decode); it should have an easily digestible and relatable mix of cover lines that pepper the expected with the odd surprise . . . and one of the dominant colours should be ‘buy-me’ red. (Birch 6)

He calls this the “5/5 rule” which stands for the choice potential readers make “within five seconds from five feet away” (6). However, in recent years, magazines have, as almost all media, gone through a digital turn. Most magazines are, in some form or another, also digitally available. Some brands have abandoned the print version of their magazine, even, and focus solely on the digital version. Though, no matter the format, the magazine cover is the flagship of every issue. For digital versions of magazines, the cover is usually posted on the brand’s social media as an eyecatcher and teaser. Birch’s “5/5 rule” may not be applicable to the digital versions in its original sense but the digital cover still needs to draw attention to itself and the issue it teases. No matter if digitally or in print, there are some factors that tend to be selling points for a magazine cover.

First, there is the factor of controversy. Covers that spike interest often have a new and provocative take on a person or a topic. Ted Spiker notes that “[c]ontroversial covers are important not only for the issues about which they might provoke thought and discussion, but also because of the economics of magazine sales in a digital age” (385). According to the author, celebrity is another one of these factors (381). In a way, celebrity and Abrahamson’s “magazine exceptionalism” fit well together. Elizabeth Crisp Crawford suggests that a celebrity, be that in sports, music, or other entertainment, also embodies a certain exceptionalism (285). For many magazine brands, *Vogue*, for example, it is traditional for a celebrity to be featured on the issues’ covers. The front page of the magazines is, according to Crisp Crawford, for celebrities of all areas the most attractive place to be promoted. The cover can give the celebrities “more enduring visual prominence than television, the Internet or newspapers” (Crisp Crawford 286). For many celebrities, being on the cover of a prestigious magazine of their industry can be a milestone in their careers. In the case of sports, for instance, an athlete who has shown their talent on the field

or court can move into the spotlight of reporters, fans, sponsors, and brands by being featured on a magazine cover. On the website of the Cover Gallery of *SLAM*, for example, it reads: “With over 250 issues and a few hundred covers, *SLAM*’s front page has been the Holy Grail for basketball players since ’94” (*SLAM Online*). To the readers of the respective magazines, the celebrity on the cover is presented as someone to be desired, celebrated, aspired to, or at least as someone worth talking about.

***SLAM* Cover 32: Allen Iverson**

Allen Iverson graces the 32nd cover of *SLAM* (see figure 4). Todd Boyd notes that Allen Iverson is not simply an NBA player but “a hip hop icon” (4). His appearance, his tattoos, hairstyles, clothes, his whole look is influenced by hip hop. On the cover, he wears an afro, jewelry, his tattoos are visible, and he wears a ‘wife-beater’ underneath the retro jersey. Iverson’s style on this front page of the magazine is provocative. Not necessarily for the fans but for the league and the owners who just settled with the NBPA, the National Basketball Players Association, about the 1998-1999

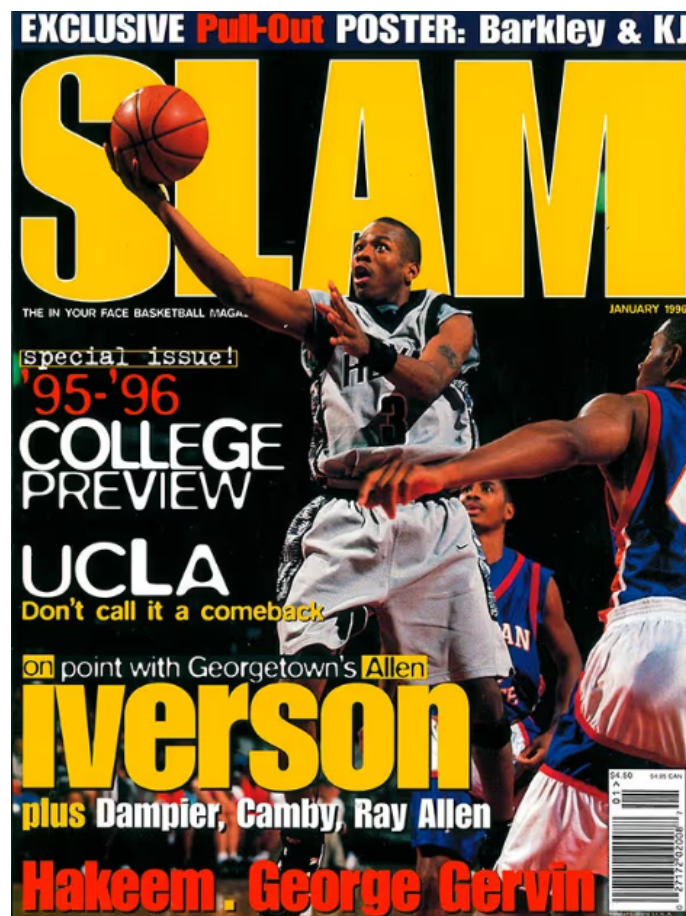


Figure 2. “On Point with Georgetown’s Allen Iverson.” *SLAM Magazine* 9, January 1996, <https://covers.slamonline.com/>.

lockout. Paul D. Staudohar explains that “a lockout is management’s counterpart to a strike” (4). Failing negotiations between the league and union led to a 202-day-long lockout of the NBA. Only in January 1999, two months before *SLAM* issue 32 was published, a settlement was reached and the season could commence. In light of these events, the cover with Allen Iverson is also a form of protest. One of the issues that the league and union could not agree on was players’ “aberrant behavior” (Staudohar 6). For the league and the owners, aberrant behavior was players’ misconducts such as drug use, drug possession, misdemeanor, or gun-possession (Staudohar 6). According to Paul D. Staudohar, the settlement included that “players will be tested for drugs once per season, with marijuana and illegal steroids added to the list of banned substances” (8). Additionally, “[l]onger suspensions and higher fines were established for misconduct” (8). These regulations targeted Black players in particular. A study from *The New York*

Times of 1997 reports that 60 to 70% of players in the NBA use marijuana and/or drink alcohol in high amounts. The report by Selena Roberts names several players, Allen Iverson among them, who have had legal troubles and been suspended for their drug use. It is no surprise that every single one of the named players is Black. When analyzing the cover and its iconic impact on the basketball scene these events and regulations should be kept in mind.

Since the issue of March 1999 was published shortly after the end of the lockout the process of finding a cover star had been made increasingly difficult by the preceding events, remembers Ryan Jones in his article about the history of the cover (“An Oral History of the Iconic Allen Iverson *SLAM* Cover”). The lockout may also have been the motivation for creating the cover as a

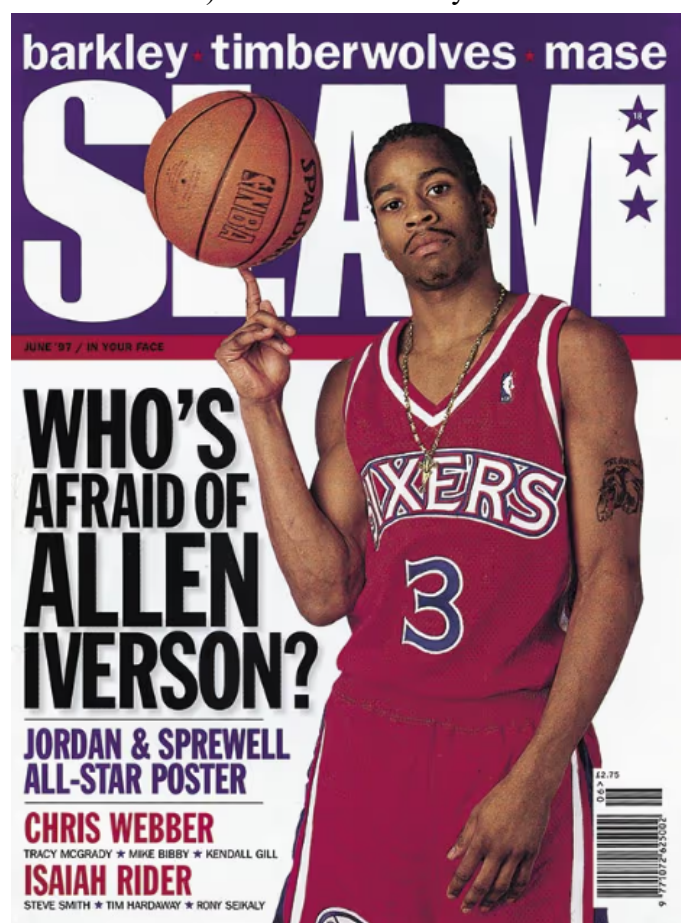


Figure 3. “Who’s Afraid of Allen Iverson?” *SLAM* Magazine 18, June 1997, <https://covers.slamonline.com/>.

retrospective. Allen Iverson had been on the cover of *SLAM* two times before. The first time when he was still a college player (see figure 2) and again in 1997 when he was already wearing his iconic cornrows (see figure 3). The third cover, the 32nd issue, however, was even more special than the first two. While Iverson’s first cover is unconventional because it was published when he was still in college and not yet in the NBA, the second cover is special because it is one of the first photos on a front page of a basketball magazine on which the player wears jewelry and cornrows. According to Scoop Jackson, the editor at the time, other players also asked to wear their jewelry after seeing the cover in 1997 (Jones, “An Oral History”). In 1997, Iverson and his hip hop style, were already famous in the basketball scene. Todd Boyd notes that “Iverson’s cornrows would soon be as influential as Jordan’s bald dome” (153). He further writes that the controversy surrounding Iverson was partially due to “the combination of

cornrows and tattoos [that] made for a particularly interesting visual statement when he hit the floor” (153). Iverson’s style represented his affiliation with the hip hop culture and his background. At the time, the league, the owners, and many reporters and fans did not support this combination of basketball with hip hop. The people working at *SLAM* had a different opinion. Ryan Jones quotes Tony Gervino who says: “Hip-hop was the underdog, you know? We were all about the underdog.

This was the part of SLAM the NBA hated” (“An Oral History”). This was still the case in 1999 when Allen Iverson was on the cover for the third time.

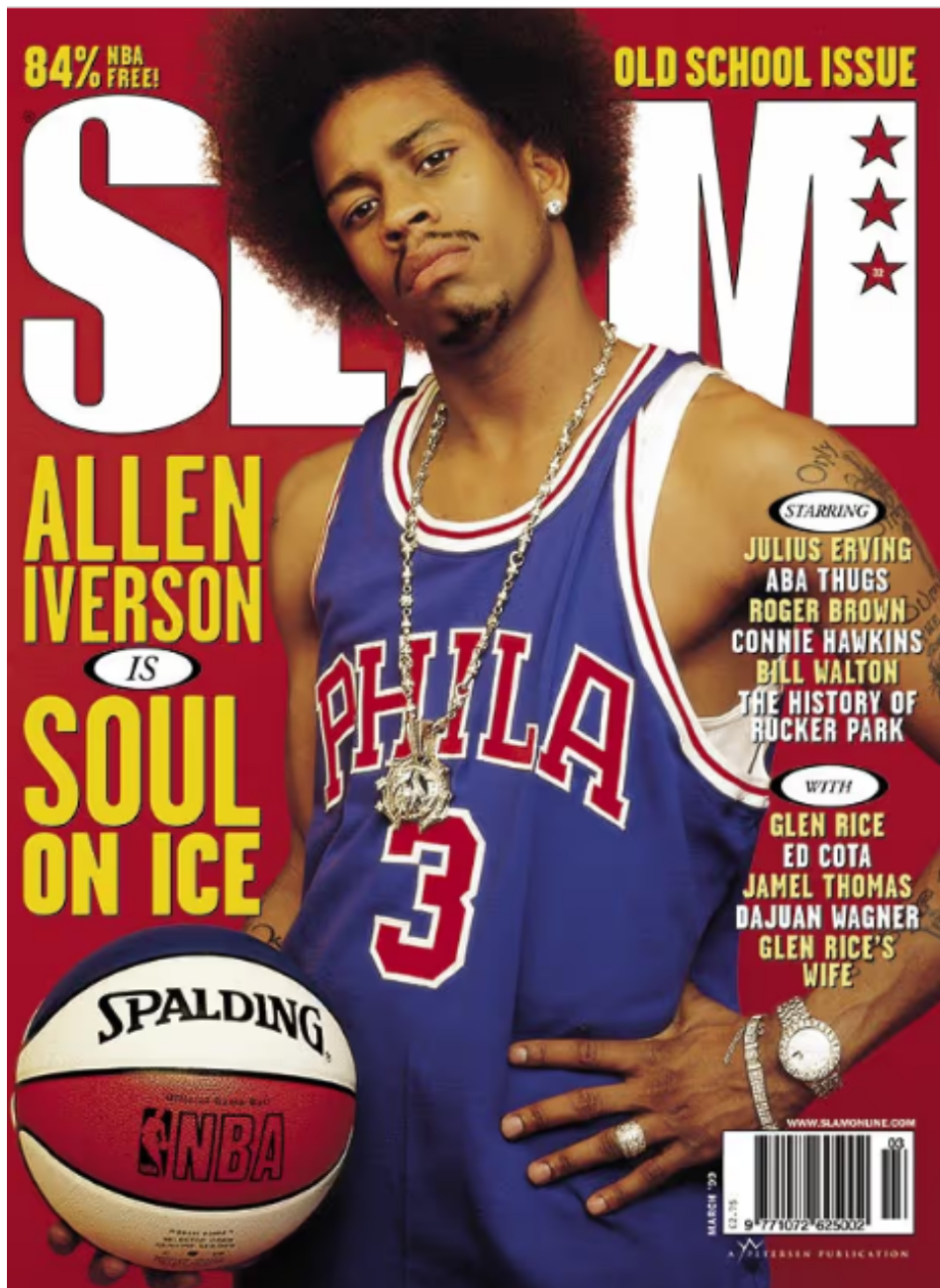


Figure 4. “Allen Iverson is Soul on Ice.” *SLAM Magazine* 32, March 1999, <https://covers.slamonline.com>.

As mentioned before, Birch formulated several criteria that a magazine cover should fulfill to be recognizable and memorable. The first criterion is that the cover includes an “attractive and accessible photograph with eye contact” (6). This has been realized with the photograph of Allen Iverson. The photograph is at the center of the page and therefore accessible. The photograph is

appealing and Iverson appears to hold eye contact with the reader/viewer. Next, Birch argues that the cover should have an “easily digestible and relatable mix of cover lines” (6). This is also the case on the *SLAM* cover. The cover line reads “ALLEN IVERSON IS SOUL ON ICE” and is easy to absorb. The mix of cover lines which should “pepper the expected with the odd surprise” (Birch 6) is not necessarily realized. For one, there is only one cover line. Secondly, whether this cover line mixes what is to be expected with surprising elements remains unclear. It is to be expected that the cover line refers in some way to the photograph and the person portrayed there. Whether the characterization of Iverson as soul on ice is surprising depends on the reader’s perspective. Lastly, Birch’s last criterion is that “one of the dominant colours [is] ‘buy-me’ red” (6). Since the background of the cover is red, this criterion is also fulfilled. Overall, the cover applies almost all of Birch’s criteria and can therefore be described as recognizable and memorable. The memorability of the cover, however, is not only because of these design choices. The player photographed for the cover plays a huge role in the marketing of the magazine and this issue in particular.

No player had worn an afro on a *SLAM* cover before. Many Black players had been featured on the front page of the magazine before, but Iverson was the first to wear his hair in this particular style. On this cover, Allen Iverson, who is actually known for his cornrows, broke with the tradition that Black players mostly wore their hair very short. Players like Micheal Jordan or Earvin “Magic” Johnson sported the buzz cut or bald heads for most of their careers. Though, there were some players who sported the afro before Iverson. Julius Erving, better known as “Dr. J.,” is one of the most famous examples. For some, the hairstyle is a cultural code for “black authenticity” (Lane 44).¹ The afro hairstyle was celebrated in the 1960s as part of the Black Power Movement. As a hairstyle that complemented the ‘natural’ texture of curly African hair, the afro was seen as a form

¹ Black authenticity, in this instance, is positively connotated. In other contexts, however, defining authentic Blackness can also be problematic, especially when the concept derives from stereotypes about Black people. Research exists that explicitly deals with the conceptualization of Black authenticity; see Nguyen and Anthony’s 2014 essay on “Black Authenticity: Defining the Ideals and Expectations in the Construction of ‘Real’ Blackness.”

of Black pride (Dash 32). As such, Iverson's afro on the cover can also be interpreted as a celebration of Black beauty and as a challenge to those who wanted Black players to adapt to the dominant culture. In Iverson's case, the afro also represents a certain coolness and being "street." The cornrow hairstyle he was known for is a marker for the influence hip hop culture had on his personal style. Timothy J. Brown notes that the cornrows, "represent a sign of racial difference" (77). Iverson's cornrows, however, were already iconic and had already proved to be provocative. Now, the afro hairstyle was a sign of racial difference as well. In the same manner as the cornrows, wearing the afro meant "ignoring the dominant culture's value system and elevating the worth of black hair and thus, blackness" (Brown 77). The combination of Iverson and his personal hip hop style with the afro hairstyle demonstrated to the public that Black hair did not have to be worn short to be cool. Ahmir Thompson, also known as Questlove, is quoted in Jones' *SLAM* article in saying: "Before, when I wore my afro around the neighborhood, cats who didn't know no better were just raggin' on me. So that was definitely a form of validation. I was like, *Oh, man, that's the coolest thing ever*" ("An Oral History"). This shows that the hairstyle was (and still is) iconic and influential for Black basketball players and Black people in general. The fact that Iverson only wore the afro on the front pages of *SLAM* magazine and never on the court makes this cover even more significant. He wore the afro on three covers in total: on cover of issue 32, 150, and the 30th anniversary issue 248 which is depicted in figure 5.

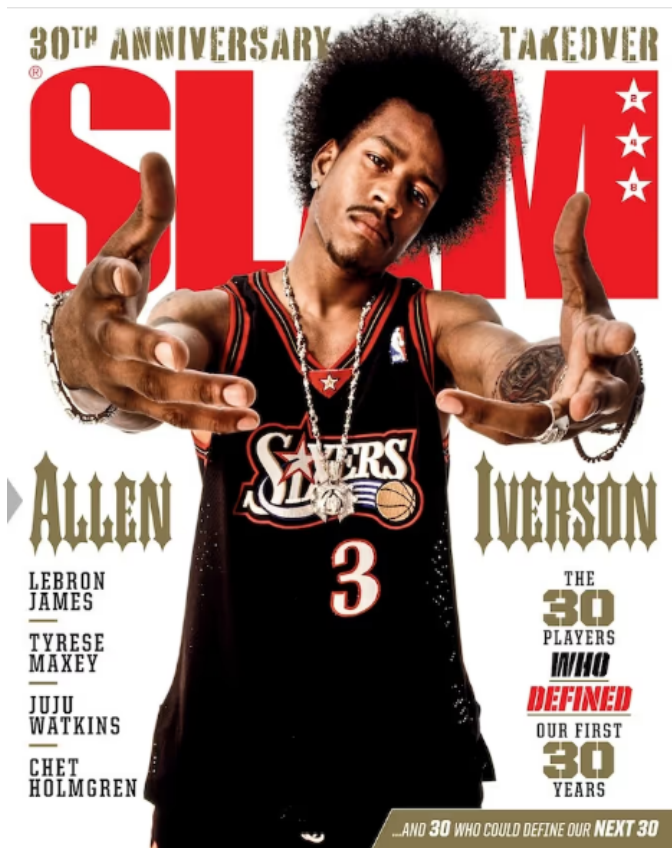
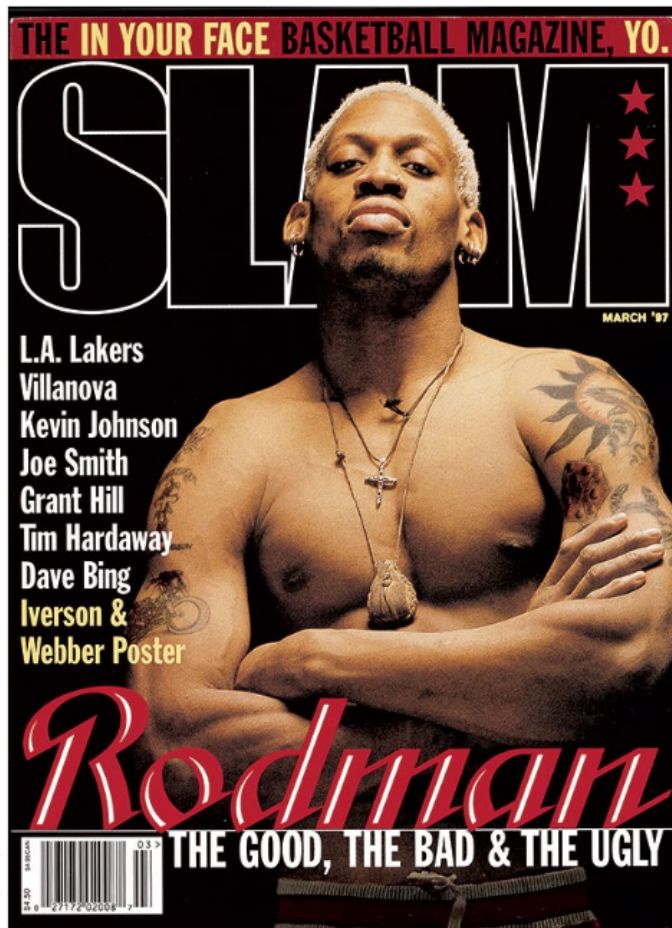


Figure 5. "30th Anniversary Takeover: Allen Iverson." *SLAM Magazine* 248, 2024, <https://covers.slamonline.com>.

Another important aspect of the cover is that Iverson's tattoos are visible and have not been edited out. Other magazines, *HOOP*, the official publication of the NBA among them, edited photos in which his tattoos were showing. As Jeffrey Lane writes:

The most overt editing of Iverson was a print censoring during the 1999-2000 season . . . the NBA released an issue of *Hoop*, the league's official publication, in which Iverson's diamond earring and some of his tattoos were digitally removed from the cover. Other tattoos were obscured

by the strategic layering of text over them. This was not the first photo alteration of Iverson's physical appearance. (51)



Neither his tattoos nor his jewelry are removed from the *SLAM* cover. Since *SLAM* combines basketball and hip hop, it is only sensible that Iverson's appearance which is influenced by the hip hop culture could not be censored as it was in other publications. However, Iverson is not the only basketball player who favored wearing jewelry. Dennis Rodman (see figure 6), Paul Pierce, and Kevin Garnett are only a few examples of players who displayed their jewelry on the front page.

Probably one of the most controversial elements of this cover is the so-called 'wife-beater' Iverson wears underneath the jersey. The *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*) defines the 'wife-beater,' in its colloquial use, as "[a] sleeveless (white) cotton undershirt or vest; a vest top" and cites its first use in print in 1993. The *OED* also provides a quote of 2006 in which it says: "The newly

minted rapper can usually be found smoking a blunt in a banquette crawling with strippers and making endless Starbucks runs in a wife-beater." The white undershirt is associated with hip hop and rap. For Iverson and his peers, the hip hop style and fashion item of the "wife-beater" represent their background. Iverson comes from a neighborhood in which crime and violence were a common occurrence. Wearing the undershirt on this cover is a way of demonstrating that one can be proud of one's background.

These elements of the cover are part of a "new black aesthetics" (Brown 66) which Iverson's generation of basketball players represented. This new aesthetics placed the individual in the center of cultural and societal struggle. Stars like Allen Iverson who embody the Black hip hop identity have the financial as well as cultural capital to belong to the middle class² while at the same time being excluded on the basis of their affiliation with hip hop and their "mentality of *the hood*" (Brown 69). At the center of this aesthetics is a "sense of social mobility" (Boyd 15). Black celebrities who represent this aesthetics, whether they are NBA players or rappers, "redefine the

² As a successful NBA player Iverson probably does no longer belong to the middle class.

American dream from the perspective of the young, Black, and famous” (Boyd 15). Controversial or not, this new aesthetics appealed not only to Iverson’s peers but to more and more people belonging to the general public. The high sale numbers of issue 32 of *SLAM* and the sale of Iverson’s jersey demonstrates this. Both have become pop cultural and signature pieces. Moreover, athletes have always been role models for others. That is no different for basketball players. According to Bob Batchelor, “[b]asketball does more than shape the public’s thought on celebrity culture” (299). He notes that the sport “influences the way people dress, talk, and represent themselves to the larger world” (299). In the late 1990s, Allen Iverson was one of the players who influenced the public in this way. With his playing style, appearance, and statements about authenticity he was “a conscious social statement” (Boyd 160). The cover of *SLAM* issue 32 shows this. For Que Gaskins, quoted by Ryan Jones, the cover “had all the right cultural codes for what was cool, what was authentic, what was relevant” (“An Oral History”). For the people working on this cover project Iverson’s persona represented “going against the grain” and doing something different that could inspire other players and fans alike.

Abrahamson asserts that magazines can serve as “singularly useful markers of the sociocultural reality” (146). This is not only the case for whole magazines but for individual magazine covers as well. The *SLAM* cover of issue 32 can be such a marker of sociocultural reality. The retro design of the cover suggests that there was a longing for the past while at the same time the celebration of the hip hop culture and one of its most popular and controversial advocates implies that a new generation of basketball players is taking over. In all its iconic glory, the cover is unique because of its cover star but also because of editorial choices that were made. Choosing Iverson in light of the preceding events is sending the message that those at *SLAM* who made the decision recognized that Iverson’s notoriety can be a huge selling point. Crisp Crawford asserts that “[n]otoriety is a sub-category of celebrity culture that is becoming increasingly important” (289). Notoriety combines the celebrity factor with the controversy factor. Another editorial choice, one which was common at *SLAM*, was not to hire sports or basketball photographers but photographers who had experience in other areas like music. As stated above, the photograph of Allen Iverson is the ‘soul’ of the cover. Via the photograph, *SLAM* communicates a cultural and even political message. Hudson and Lance contend that photography in magazines “can carry a bias and point of view [and that] [p]hotographers and editors who want their images to convey strong messages help to set the public and private agenda, bringing social and political issues to the fore” (419). This particular photograph conveys a message by choosing to feature the controversial Allen Iverson.

Conclusion

The jersey sale of Iverson’s number 3 shows just how influential the player and person Allen Iverson was for the sport and league. With his hip hop style, he was a trendsetter and provocateur, but mostly an iconic figure for the NBA and basketball in general. The *SLAM* cover of issue 32 mirrors this. The case study of this cover has also shown that magazine covers do more than just

tease the content of the magazine. They are pieces of content by themselves and can convey cultural and social messages to the readers. The preceding chapter has established how the different elements of the cover contribute to its iconic status. Birch's criteria are not the only components that make magazine front pages significant. Editorial choices are important but should be considered in the context of current events. The choices made for the cover of issue 32 integrated the zeitgeist of basketball. Therefore, Iverson's third *SLAM* cover serves as a marker for the culture of basketball at the time. Further and future research could analyze other covers of *SLAM* and other publications. As mentioned above, some photographs of Iverson were edited. A detailed comparison of how he is portrayed in *SLAM* and in magazines like *HOOP*, e.g., would help understand the merit of *SLAM*'s approach. It would also be interesting to examine how WNBA players are portrayed on the covers of *SLAM* and contrast it with the portrayal of their male counterparts.

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