The real reason that it's so difficult to hold athletes accountable for their bad behavior is that they have too many enablers ready and willing to give them a pass, like Jesse Jackson.

When you read and then re-read Cleveland Cavaliers owner Dan Gilbert's Decision-night rant about LeBrand James, his main point was the lack of accountability by today's athletes. It was personalized to James, certainly, but he also generalized about today's professional athletes and he wasn't wrong.

Whether Gilbert's words were ill-advised from a business perspective is a healthy debate. But Jackson, never shy to play the race card when it suits his political purposes, likened Gilbert's statements to a slave-owner bemoaning the loss of his best slave. As if.

Rather than see the situation for what it is, Jackson, in his usual knee-jerk fashion, sees it in only black/white terms and then comes down on the side, predictably, of the one that will paint someone like Gilbert as a racist when his only real experience with him are words on a sheet of paper. I guess Jackson doesn't embrace that whole content of character thing that his mentor espoused.

The history of slavery in this country alone remains a stain that can never be fully be eradicated.

It rendered an entire class of people to second class status and even today the racist sting of that former status too often remains. It is shocking, actually, the amount of racism that still exists to this day.

And while the teaching moments from that unfortunate part of this country's past are numerous, it's not helpful when it's trotted out willy-nilly by opportunists like Jackson because, ultimately, it merely cheapens the actual pain of the real victims of racism.

Whatever else James may be, he's hardly anyone's slave. Stated differently, if James is a slave, then so too is the rest of the NBA, including players like Steve Nash and Zydrunas Ilgauskas, not to mention every athlete playing professionally anywhere in the world for a sports franchise.

Let's start with the obvious distinctions.

Anyone with enough talent to play professional sports does so voluntarily and in full recognition that his or her employment will be governed by certain rules, just like anyone who enters the workforce generally.

Those rules put limitations and restrictions on both parties to what is certainly a bi-lateral contract. Owners in the NBA, for example, aren't free to do whatever they please with their franchise or its players and players, similarly, aren't free to do whatever they'd like whenever they want.

Let's not forget, too, that players like James have all sorts of protective measures in place, like the agents that shill for them and the union that collectively bargains for them. Anyone who stood up to actual slavery like, say Abraham Lincoln, put his life in jeopardy. The last I looked, nobody's marching on Washington D.C. over the the exploitation of professional athletes. The players themselves aren't currently on strike so it's safe to presume that they are satisfied with the bargain their freely elected union representatives struck.

All of which takes it completely out of the whole plantation scenario that Jackson infers. Let’s underscore again that James is under no compulsion to even play professional sports. He’s free to leave the NBA at any time he wants and get on with whatever his life’s work may be.

That James doesn’t do that is attributable solely to the fact that doing so would cost him millions upon millions of dollars, money, by the way, that he’s free to spend any way he’d like. To suggest he’s somehow shackled to an owner is ridiculous and inflammatory rhetoric designed not to necessarily blunt the enormous backlash that James so rightly deserves, although that’s part of it. Let’s face it; grandstanders like Jackson are always looking for the next controversy to make themselves look relevant again and if he can draft off of James to do it, well, let's just say that more than a few will think that Jackson is just as guilty of the exploitation he claims Gilbert engaged in.

But even beyond the mere bit of theatrics and opportunism of opportunists like Jackson is the more detrimental impact those words have on trying to hold these athletes accountable.

Professional athletes have always been a bit of a pain in the ass anyway. Far too many have an entitlement mentality borne out of far too much catering to them from an early age merely because they can throw harder, shoot better or run faster than the other kids. They already tend to think they can do no wrong so it's not exactly helpful to the dialogue when Jackson makes an athlete who just signed a $100 million contract feels like he’s the one being exploited.

My guess is that if you actually could document the thoughts that ran through the collective heads of the millions that watched James on Thursday night, I doubt that anyone outside of Jackson saw this as the emancipation of a runaway slave.

But if it was as Jackson suggests then isn't it likewise fair to suggest that all James really did was once again become enslaved to yet another white owner?

See, that’s the problem with this whole slave analogy that Jackson has now foisted upon the collective consciousness. I no more look at James or Dwyane Wade or Chris Bosh or any of the hundred or so other NBA basketball players or the hundreds of pro football or baseball players

as slaves. I don't consider the team owners as plantation lords treating their human resources as chattel, either.

These are all just businessmen striking obscenely rich deals over the games kids play. Every once in awhile someone or other is going to get a little testy over the outcome of one of these deals and spout off.

Maybe it's all childish in that sense but for most rational thinking individuals they can at least keep it in perspective. They recognize that James is the one who made his free agency into a circus. Whatever criticism he gets he deserves and it matters little if it comes from the talking heads at rival networks or the owners of sports team or little Johnny whose dad wasted $100 last year on a James fathead.

There's a societal impact to all of this that is worthy of discussion and maybe some good can prevail out of this mess. But the one thing you can be sure of is that the Jesse Jacksons of this world have no interest in that actually happening. For them to exist they need controversy, they need provocation to keep themselves in the public eye. Which means, of course, that the last thing they really want is an actual solution.

Jackson can change the subject all he wants but the bottom line is that if James were his kid, I'd like to think he'd have raised him with far more class than James exhibited throughout this so-called sham of a free agency process. Good manners and class never go out of style.