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IDEOLOGICAL ENDZONES: NFL FILMS AND THE COUNTERSUBVERSIVE TRADITION IN AMERICAN POLITICS

A Dissertation Presented

by

NICHOLAS R. ARCHER

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

May 2010

Political Science

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IDEOLOGICAL ENDZONES: NFL FILMS AND THE COUNTERSUBVERSIVE TRADITION IN AMERICAN POLITICS

A Dissertation Presented

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Approved as to style and content by:

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Dean E. Robinson, Chair

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Sheldon Goldman, Member

_____
Jenny Spencer, Member

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John Hird, Department Chair
Political Science

DEDICATION

To Mom, Dad, Sarah, and Kevin for their love.
To Mike and Melissa for being kindred souls.
And to those who believed. Thank You.

ABSTRACT

IDEOLOGICAL ENDZONES: NFL FILMS AND THE COUNTERSUBVERSIVE TRADITION IN AMERICAN POLITICS

MAY 2010

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This study examines the role of propaganda and popular culture in constituting the American political tradition through the study of NFL films by employing a decidedly overlooked theoretical conception of the American political tradition—the countersubversive tradition thesis. Originally put forth by Michael Rogin, the countersubversive tradition is defined as "the creation of monsters as a continuing feature of American politics by the inflation, stigmatization, and dehumanization of political foes." It is my belief that in looking at what constitutes the individual characteristics of the countersubversive tradition in a text like a sports film it is easier to see how it fits into similar theories offered by political scientists and others about the intersections of pop culture, sport, propaganda, and political tradition.

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INTRODUCTION

MASS TEXTS, THE NFL, AND THE COUNTERSUBVERSIVE TRADITION IN AMERICAN POLITICS

"The NFL is America's passion; pure and simple…the grip of an NFL team on its fans and community is special. It brings families and communities together in a unique way."
- "This is the NFL 2008-09"[1]

"The public must be reduced to passivity in the political realm, but for submissiveness to become a reliable trait, it must be entrenched in the realm of belief as well."
- Noam Chomsky[2]

After stunning the heavily-favored St. Louis Rams in Super Bowl XXXVI in 2002 (the first Super Bowl held after 9/11), New England Patriots owner Robert Kraft said "We are all Patriots, and tonight the Patriots are world champions." Commentary on the NFL Films-produced documentary of the victory said "like their country, they were brothers in arms—proud to be called Patriots."[3] Both Kraft's comments and the NFL's own commentary equated the victory of a sports franchise with a collective national identity at a particularly nationalistic moment in American history. The victory of a sports brotherhood became symbolic of an armed national brotherhood, defying odds after a psychologically damaging national tragedy and marching to war against an enemy that had penetrated American shores.

It would perhaps be easy to see the not-so-latent evocations of patriotism and national armed unity as entertainment merely imitating politics—a calculating owner and

[1] "This is the NFL 2008-2009" National Football League (2008).

[2] Noam Chomsky, "Containing the Threat of Democracy," (paper presented at the Glasgow Conference on Self-Determination and Power: Life Task, Political Task, January 1990).

[3] *Patriots: Superbowl XXXVI Champions*, directed by Dave Petreilius (New York, NY: NFL Films/USA Home Entertainment, 2002).

league merely responding to a national event in a way that would help their product grow by capitalizing on existing political sentiment. In this study, I turn the causality arrow in the other direction. Rather than seeing mass entertainment as ancillary to questions of political belief, I argue that both today and historically, mass entertainment, in this particular case professional football filmography, is *a central yet overlooked* constitutive element which produces and defines the boundaries of permissible political discourse and subsequently a significant part of the political tradition in America—a tradition whose meaning has been disputed rigorously in American politics.

The Question of the American Political Tradition in Scholarship

Commenting on the persisting power of Louis Hartz' *The Liberal Tradition in America* nearly 50 years after it was published, James Morone noted that contemporary Political Science generally and American political tradition scholarship specifically seems to be stuck in a "Hartzian amber" of liberalism which argues the American political tradition in terms of a few narrow concepts: commitment to equality, rights, limited government and economic markets, while simultaneously ignoring the importance of popular culture in the shaping of American political belief.[4] The hue of the Hartzian amber is evident in Seymour Martin Lipset's description of America as the "most religious, optimistic, patriotic, rights-oriented, and individualistic" nation in the world.[5] Of course, scholars of the liberal tradition were and are not necessarily fetishists of liberalism as such—Lipset argues that the valuation of liberal individualism is directly

[4] James Morone, "Storybook Truths about America," *Studies in American Political Development* 19, Fall 2005: 225.

[5] Seymour Martin Lipset, *American Exceptionalism: A Double-Edged Sword* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1995), 26.

responsible for everything from high crime rates to teen pregnancy[6]—and as Morone has pointed out, Hartz, wrote his book as a polemic against what he saw as an "irrational obsession with market capitalism that, at times, subverted private rights and personal liberty."[7] Still, whatever problems they may see with unbridled liberalism, liberal tradition scholars are quick to point out the futility of trying to suggest alternatives to it, in part arguing that to do so is antithetical to a democratic culture since individuals need to keep their ideological engagements to make sense of social existence even as the world around them changes.[8]

Nonetheless, challenges to the liberal tradition thesis have sprung up periodically. Of these, perhaps the most noteworthy has been Rogers Smith's multiple traditions thesis. In his criticism of American political tradition scholarship, Smith notes that even scholars critical of the liberal tradition, be they advocates of "synthetic republicanism" such as James Pocock and Bernard Bailyn or "Protestantism" such as John Diggins all concede that their own conceptions of the political tradition are welded to liberalism in some shape or form. Hence, as Smith notes, while these debates represent interesting work within political tradition scholarship, they are not challenging the idea that American political culture is fundamentally or most enduringly liberal.[9]

Smith's own contribution, the multiple traditions thesis, argues that attachments to liberalism and republicanism must also be seen in light of a third tradition of

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[6] Ibid.

[7] Morone, 220.

[8] Lipset, 276.

[9] Rogers Smith, "Beyond Tocqueville, Myrdal and Hartz: Multiple Traditions in America," *The American Political Science Review* 87, no.3 (Fall 2003): 549.

ascriptivism—the attachment of characteristics to certain groups largely on the basis of race, which promotes decidedly illiberal ideologies that have defined the political status of minorities and women through most of American history. In his work Smith primarily focuses on the intellectual codification of ascriptive ideology and its dissemination through law. Using post-Reconstruction history from 1870 to 1920 as his period of study, Smith argues that intellectual and political elites "worked out the most elaborate theories of racial and gender hierarchy in the U.S., as evidenced by laws governing everything from immigration, deportation, voting rights, electoral institutions, judicial procedures, and economic rights.[10] Exemplary of this is his discussion of the anthropological work of Daniel G. Brinton and its impact on Chinese exclusion policy. As Smith notes, Brinton's contention that each race had a "peculiar mental temperament which has become hereditary," leaving them "constitutionally recreant to codes of civilization," became part and parcel of the justification for anti-immigration acts.[11] And he notes that ascriptive tensions—be they racial, nativist, or religious—are still powerful today as evidenced by the existence of organizations like the Christian Coalition, patterns of de facto racial segregation and right-wing populist electoral campaigns like those run by David Duke and Pat Buchanan.[12]

To Smith, liberalism is a constitutive, though not always dominant, part of the larger political tradition, and in all eras of American political development Americans have combined liberal rhetoric with frequently inegalitarian practice.[13] Smith's

[10] Ibid. 559.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid. 563.

[13] Ibid. 559.

examination is important in acknowledging a complexity of ideas in the political tradition as well as acknowledging that aspirants to power must make a population see itself "as a people" by creating "myths of civic identity" that foster the "requisite sense of people hood."[14] Similarly, writing about slavery and ideology, Barbra Jeanne Fields notes that while ideology is not the same as propaganda, "the most successful propagandist is one who thoroughly understands the ideology of those to be propagandized." In the context of slavery and the Civil War, it would make little sense for white southern planters to try to rally poor white yeoman to support the war under the banner of, "We must never let them take our slaves" but rather to state, "We will never be slaves." [15] The relationship between ideology and propaganda, as Fields sees it, is one where propaganda reinforces the ideology that comes out of people's everyday existence. Propaganda cannot create ideology. It cannot "hand [ideology] down like an old garment,"[16] but as a mechanism built on repetition and mass appeal, it can reinforce dominant strands of thought in everyday life, providing reassurance that the ideology practiced is in fact correct and necessary. It is this *propaganda function of popular culture* in relationship to the reinforcement of belief that is missing in American political tradition scholarship and is addressed in this study.

In pursuing the role of propaganda and popular culture in constituting the American political tradition, I employ an overlooked theoretical conception of the American political tradition—the countersubversive tradition thesis. Originally put forth

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[14] Rogers Smith, *Civic Ideals: Conflicting Views of Citizenship in the Liberal State* (Yale University Press, 1997), 6.

[15] Barbra Jeanne Fields, "Slavery, Race and Ideology," in *New Left Review* (181, 1990) 111.

[16] Ibid. 113.

by Michael Rogin in 1987 in his work *Ronald Reagan: the Movie and other Episodes in Political Demonology*, the countersubversive tradition is defined as "the creation of monsters as a continuing feature of American politics by the inflation, stigmatization, and dehumanization of political foes."[17] This type of "political demonology" has both a recurring form and content. The practitioner of demonology, *through mass propaganda*, creates a binary division of the world, attributing magical and pervasive power to a "conspiratorial center of evil." Fearing alien penetration, the countersubversive interprets grassroots or popular initiatives as signs of alien invasion and subsequently sees individuals and select groups as members of this conspiratorial alien evil, now a single political body directed by a head. The creation of these monsters is essential for the countersubversive in order to give a shape to his anxieties and allow him to indulge in his own dangerous desires. In short, demonization allows the countersubversive, in the name of battling subversion, to imitate his enemy.[18] Consequently, countersubversive politics (and the popular texts created by political actors and mass media producers who practice them) tends to have a very distinct set of characteristics: a war on local and partial loyalties, attachment to secrecy, valuation of hierarchical order, invasiveness and fear of boundary invasion, fascination with violence, and a desire to subordinate political variety to a dominant authority. Thus practices attributed to subversive groups actually are depictions of countersubversive aspirations—from a president who accuses Communists of overthrowing free governments so he may do so himself to blaming budget deficits on

[17] Michael Rogin, *Ronald Reagan: the Movie and other Episodes in Political Demonology*, (University of California Press, 1987), xiii.

[18] Ibid.

profligate spending and an invasive State while acting as if the administrative apparatus of that State had no part in these decisions.[19]

The ideological substance of the countersubversive tradition—with its emphasis on the creation of monsters (from the Indian cannibal to the bomb-throwing anarchist[20]) bares a remarkable resemblance to the ascriptive tradition in the multiple traditions thesis put forward by Smith six years later. Rogin himself argues that both republicanism and Puritanism have played important, though comparatively smaller, roles in constituting the American regime than the countersubversive tradition.[21] The two theses—while similar in substantive critique of liberal traditionalists—differ as to where liberal values fit within the development of American political thought. Smith sees a distinct liberal current running concurrently with other independent traditions. Additionally, Smith heralds what he sees as times when the liberal tradition has been dominant such as in the post-World War II Civil Rights and feminist struggles.[22] The countersubversive tradition, by contrast, accepts the hegemony of liberalism as the dominant ideology in shaping the American regime but sees it as a value system which is constituted by a tenuous welding of two strands of political values—individualism and community. The demon becomes the proxy for this tension—a manifestation of difference that unites people against it.[23] Thus, the countersubversive tradition, in slight juxtaposition to Smith's multiple traditions

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[19] Ibid. 284-285.

[20] Ibid. xiii.

[21] Ibid. 283.

[22] Smith, "Multiple Traditions," 559.

[23] Rogin, 280-281.

thesis, is willing to accept the centrality of liberalism to American politics but explores, through a semiotic lens, what exactly liberalism looks like and what its actual practice entails in terms of making liberal States function. Seen this way, ascriptivism or demonology is not separate from liberalism but is in fact *a necessary constitutive part* of it. The imperialistic and nationalistic necessities that come from an ideology which simultaneously emphasizes material acquisition as the highest moral value requires justification for the acts that allow the perpetuation of liberal states, such as wars, expansion of domestic repression apparatuses, etc., acts that become easier to justify when fear of difference is reinforced in popular culture.

The second difference between the theses regards the point of study and breadth in the two conceptions. Smith's study, which is in many ways the master work on American political culture, examines a dynamic and voluminous amount of intellectual opinion and law and its consequences to legislation and social policy in a myriad of ways. Analysts of the countersubversive tradition take a narrower view, studying the use of symbols embedded in cultural documents, particularly mass entertainment, to suggest how countersubversive belief penetrates the mass psyche and creates political quiescence by transposing its values onto lived experience. The countersubversive thesis also suggests, though does not assert definitively, that mass texts are able to reach individuals in different and more intimate ways than elite texts such as legal opinions or pieces of legislation because they have the ability to some degree mask the social hierarchies from which they appear through a perception of independence and sheer ubiquity.[24]

[24] It should be noted that when I refer to "elite" versus "mass" texts I am referring to audiences rather than the constructors of a text. In the latter case, all the examples in this study could be considered "elitist" in that they are composed by individuals with political and economic clout—namely the business community and conservative politicians— in the American power structure. However, the audiences are decidedly

As Michel de Certeau pointed out, textual reading becomes "overprinted by a relationship of forces (between teachers and pupils or producers and consumers), whose instrument it becomes." The text can become a cultural weapon, the "pretext for a law that legitimizes as 'literal' the interpretation given by socially authorized professionals and intellectuals."[25] Insofar as hierarchical positions are visible in formal institutions (churches, governments, etc.), the acceptance of the literal (or desired) interpretation of texts hinges on the legitimacy of these formal institutions in mass society. DeCerteau argues that when an institution loses its legitimacy, the text becomes more subject to the individual reader's silent, "poetic activity" in their private space.[26] In a liberal society where antipathy to formal government institutions and valuation of the private is part of the ideological base of organization, stakeholders in the political economy must find ways to try to ensure literal meanings get through to the multitude of private psyches while masking their connections to formal hierarchical structures. DeCerteau suggests this is done by creating ubiquitous private mechanisms like mass media who, rather than attempting to speak through institutional authority, attempt to speak "in the name of reality" itself.

> Captured by the radio (the voice is the law) as soon as he awakens, the listener walks all day long through the forest of narratives from journalism, advertising, and television, narratives that still find time as he is getting ready for bed, to slip a few final messages under the portals of sleep. Even more than the God told about by the theologians of earlier days, these stories have a providential and predestining function: they organize in advance our work, our celebrations, and

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different in terms of whom the text is geared toward—with legal doctrine and scholarship fixated on people in government and knowledge production vs. ordinary citizens and, in the specific case study here, average NFL fans.

[25] Michel deCerteau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984), 171.

[26] Ibid. 172

> even our dreams. Social life multiplies the gestures and modes of behavior imprinted by narrative models; it ceasely reproduces and accumulates 'copies' of our stories.[27]

Mass texts are thus perceived as an effective vehicle for the reinforcement of countersubversive values through their perceived utility as an independent reference for an individuals' everyday reality. Their simultaneous inundation of the audience with repetitive symbols function to assure individuals reproduce the social hierarchies and "literal" interpretations of society.[28] The more the stories and symbols are reproduced, the more their frame of reality becomes the only genuine alternative reference point by which people can understand their social and political worlds. The suggestion of a connection between the power of symbols to shape reality and consequently political behavior was perhaps best enunciated by Murray Edelman, who noted that American politics is permeated with "condensation symbols." The power of these symbols lies in their ability to "condense into one symbolic event, sign, or patriotic act concepts of pride, anxieties, remembrances of past glories or humiliations, promises of future greatness" either exclusively or concurrently. By externalizing inner unresolved problems of everyday life, these symbols can give emotion to political acts that are far removed from an individuals' everyday experience and which they have no control over by calling for conformity to promote social harmony. In essence, they can "create a dramatic symbolic life among

[27] Ibid. 172-173.

[28] DeCerteau refers to this as the power of citation, which he calls the "ultimate weapon for making people believe… By replacing doctrines that have become unbelievable, citation allows the technocratic mechanisms to make themselves believable in the name of others." See *Practice of Everyday Life*, 189.

abstractions" which becomes "a substitute gratification for the pleasure of remolding the concrete environment."[29]

Countersubversive values are enveloped in a sophisticated form of mass propaganda predicated on condensation symbols. They arouse personal anxiety for repressive political purposes. Images of the black rapist or the Indian cannibal play upon sexual desire and fear as threats to bodily integrity. The propagandist employing the countersubversive tradition expropriates personal experience, speaking for it and not to it and in doing so creating what Rogin calls a "false personal."[30] The precise vehicle of dissemination of countersubversive symbols is mass media, with newspapers being the first vehicle to textually construct images of the childlike Indian[31] or imagine vast conspiracies of the Illuminati to destroy newly-won independence.[32] Yet, according to Rogin, it was not until the birth of film as mass entertainment in the early 20th Century that countersubversives found their most effective means for dissemination of symbols.

Rogin points to D.W. Griffith's early epic commercial film *Birth of a Nation* as the turning point in the power of countersubversive dissemination. Griffith's *Birth* joined aesthetic invention to mass appeal[33] in a way that cut across class, ethnic, and sectional lines in ways Progressive cultural reformers could only earlier dream of.[34] Moreover, the fact that Griffith (a friend of President Woodrow Wilson) presented the movie as

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[29] Murray Edelman, *The Symbolic Uses of Politics* (second edition), (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1985), 7-9.

[30] Rogin, 287.

[31] Ibid. 144.

[32] Ibid. 56.

[33] Ibid. 190.

[34] Ibid. 197.

historical fact—despite the fact it was based on the racist novel *The Clansmen*—allowed mass entertainment to function as a narrative of historical reality and in doing so, redefined history in a way conducive to countersubversive values and State stakeholder interests. As with other condensation symbols, movie images—seen from afar—allowed audiences to be voyeurs rather than participants. It broke down defenses and opened roads to the unconscious. The size of the image, its reproducibility, the close-up and film-cut, the magical transformations on screen and the film's documentary pretense dissolved the boundaries that separated audiences in darkened theaters from the screen, pulling viewers to an originary condition of illusory unity with an ordinary sense of being. It did not render reality. It was reality.[35]

As it concerns the question of American political tradition, analysts of Rogin's thesis argue the countersubversive value system is exceptional in its ability to take cultural documents, particularly visual ones such as film and now television, and link the personal to the political and the illusory to the real. The ability of the image to reach into cognitive and emotional sources of being means it has tremendous power. Political spectacle and the surveillance state that has grown alongside the proliferation of film and television starting during the Cold War period and continuing through to the Bush and Obama administrations, uses the power of image in service of deception, rigid and deceptive forms of mobilization, and terror. This process makes political events "a personalized affair." Tyrants become humanly likeable as the social realities of their tyranny are ignored.[36]

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[35] Ibid. 228-229.

[36] Michael Parenti, *Make Believe Media: The Politics of Entertainment*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), 68.

This study seeks to examine the countersubversive tradition by examining a more contemporary manifestation than the ones provided by Rogin of Progressive Era and Cold War cinema. Whereas Rogin concentrated on the countersubversive potential of the visual through made-for-cinema film, I argue that the film visual through programming made for *private* video and television consumption has given the countersubversive practitioner even more power to disseminate propaganda—if only for the simple reason that television's reach and capacity to captivate the individual is greater. After all, the act of going to the cinema and taking in the theatrical experience, even in a darkened theatre, is one that requires some entrance and interaction with a public space. With television (and home video), we receive the images in the privacy of our living rooms, making any potential public response and discourse difficult.[37]

The analytic approach I take also differs from the one Rogin originally used. Rogin takes a holistic (if not scattered) approach to examining the countersubversive tradition in earlier American epochs and filmography—loosely and often implicitly tying the previously aforementioned characteristics of countersubversion into a larger Freudian narrative American political culture. In my study, I analyze the characteristics of countersubversion elementally, referring to a variety of scholars to strengthen my arguments. It is my belief that in looking at what constitutes the individual characteristics of the countersubversive tradition in a text it is easier to see how they fit into similar theories offered by political scientists and others about the intersections of pop culture, propaganda, and political tradition. Lastly, in contrast to Rogin who views the countersubversive tradition as a master narrative, I argue that countersubversion is often

[37] Todd Gitlin, "Television's Screens: Hegemony in Transition," in *American Media and Mass Culture: Left Perspectives*, ed. Donald Lazere, (University of California Press, 1987), 247.

augmented and, perhaps more importantly, contested in other political settings that can also been seen in the workings of the case study of the NFL.

Understanding the Power of Pro Football

Sport in Scholarly Perspective

Just as political science has generally overlooked to a large extent the power of popular culture in reinforcing ideological value systems, so too has much of the scholarly work on Sport and Society veered away from examining how sport operates as a cohesive propaganda tool in the American political tradition. Rooted in Cultural Studies and Sociology, most contemporary scholarship on sports in the United States focuses primarily on identity issues related to sport (e.g. the construction of racial archetypes) and society without offering a distinct *political* thesis as to why certain issues and values are salient in sport. For example, in 2007, the *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* published a special issue on "White Power and Sport in America" which examined how sport discourse shapes White supremacist thinking. Of particular note in the issue was Doug Hartmann's analysis of Rush Limbaugh's firing from ESPN's NFL pregame show after making critical comments regarding Philadelphia Eagles' African American quarterback Donovan McNabb.

Hartmann's analysis of the sports establishment media's reaction to the Limbaugh affair, in which the commentator argued that McNabb was receiving special treatment from the media due to his race, found that most of the discourse and dismissal of Limbaugh was based less on his conception of "white normative vision and privilege" but more so on his transgression of the current dominant perception of sporting as a "Mecca

of racial purity and justice."[38] The net result of the study according to the author is that "the ideologies and discourses of the sports world cause its adherents to misunderstand the problems of race in the United States" and how structural White dominance contributes to them.[39]

Hartmann's work is provocative in that it suggests there is a link between the reassurances of ideological systems and sports, yet like work typical of Sport and Society scholarship, it finds both the question and the answer in sport itself rather than seeing it as an extension of a broader system of propaganda and political economy that attempts to reinforce certain base values in mass society. This was not always the case. Writing in 1979, John Hargreaves argued that sport—State relations must be looked at through the lens of "class accommodation." Just as labor pursued economism to land policy gains while conceding influence to dominant groups, so did sport create pathways to new material benefits for workers as fans and players while throwing the *ideological* substance of sport to beliefs in capitalism and State prerogatives.[40] Today, sport is seen a near-exclusive place where these values are promulgated, reinforced, and where they may ultimately be challenged (if they are). Exemplary of this is argument is the work of George H. Sage in *Power and Ideology in American Sport: a Critical Perspective*. Sage argues that sport is the epicenter for hegemony in American culture, while simultaneously arguing that by constructing a "progressive" sport system, one can

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[38] Doug Hartmann "Rush Limbaugh, Donovan McNabb, and A Little Social Concern ," *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 31, no.1, 2007: 43-54.

[39] Ibid.

[40] John Hargreaves, "Sport and Hegemony: Some Theoretical Problems," in *Sport, Culture, and the Modern State*, Hart Cantelon and Richard Gruneau, eds. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979), 133.

transform the inequalities of American life and advance "the democratic imperative" which he sees at the heart of American society.[41]

Hartmann, perhaps channeling Hargreaves, keenly acknowledges the limits of this type of analysis, arguing that there must be an examination of the messages in sport in a larger context of other social organizational structures, including a capitalist society and by consequence a sporting world *driven by market obsession and political dynamics*.[42] Fortunately, scholars in other disciplines are starting to engage with this type of analysis. In early 2010 political scientist and legal scholar Robert Elias published *The Empire Strikes Out: How Baseball Sold U.S. Foreign Policy and Promoted the American Way Abroad*. In the book Elias argues that since the Revolutionary War, baseball—major league baseball (MLB) in particular—has "tried to associate itself with values of the American Dream. It has "also sought to equate itself with American masculinity and patriotism and with U.S. military endeavors in particular."[43] Using a combination of political and historical analysis, Elias traces this association between American imperialism and baseball through most of America's major conflicts up until the Iraq War of 2004. Talking about the early American imperium in Latin America following the Spanish-American War, Elias notes how baseball players and business owners like Albert Spalding were eager to use the sport as another means of civilizing the conquered territories of places like Puerto Rico and Cuba.

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[41] George H. Sage, *Power and Ideology in American Sport: A Critical Perspective* (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 1998) 291.

[42] Ibid., 57.

[43] Robert Elias, *The Empire Strikes Out: How Baseball Sold U.S. Foreign Policy and Promoted the American Way Abroad*, (New York: the New Press, 2010) 1.

> To make baseball not just originally American but also currently American, Albert Spalding defined it as a part of the U.S. imperialist pageant, proclaiming that "wherever a ship floating the Stars and Stripes finds anchorage day to day, somewhere on a nearby shore the American National Game is in progress." The expansion of America was confirmed by the expansion of the game.[44]

What Elias' work demonstrates is that many of the issues that will be examined in this study—the synergy between sport and State prerogatives, fascination with violence and militarism, and a fetishism of paternal governance are not unique to the NFL but seem to be indicative of larger trends of countersubversion, sport, and the American political tradition. Clearly, more work on this subject must be done so the extent of sport-State synergy in terms of ideology and propaganda can be fully appreciated. Deeper and multifaceted approaches, such as a content analysis of sports media coverage as well as comparative studies of the role of sport in other countries would undoubtedly help in creating a better understanding of countersubversive phenomena in sporting more generally. It is my sincere hope that this brief study of NFL filmography gets the scholastic ball rolling further on this subject. But before taking on questions of such deeper analysis, it is necessary to situate the NFL more generally in American popular culture.

[44] Ibid. 55.

NFL Television as Economic and Cultural Powerhouse

Since its first nationally-televised game—the 1958 NFL Championship game between the New York Giants and the Baltimore Colts, the NFL[45] has grown into an economic and cultural powerhouse that surpasses nearly any other televised sport and most scripted prime-time television in terms of mass popularity. As sports journalist Mark Yost noted in his book *Tailgating, Sacks and Salary Caps: How the NFL Became the Most Successful Sports League in History*, the NFL commands far and away the most revenue in terms of television deals and the most ratings in relation to all of the professional sports and television programming in general. According to Yost's compilations, the NFL contracts renewed by ESPN, NBC, CBS, and DirectTV were for $1.1 billion, $600 million, 712.5 million, $622.5 million and $700 million respectively.[46] The reason for these huge contract has to do with the sheer ratings power (and thus advertising dollars) NFL broadcasts command. Super Bowl XLIV, which featured the upstart New Orleans Saints against League powerhouse Indianapolis, received 106.5 million viewers, one million more than the final episode of the acclaimed series M*A*S*H*.[47] An annual Harris Poll measuring the popularity of televised sports found 30 percent of viewers saying the NFL was their favorite sport in 2007—double that of the alleged Great American Pastime of Major League Baseball. It was the 43rd year the NFL

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[45] References to the NFL or The League are understood to be the National Football League as represented by the 32 teams, their ownership, and the collective Administrative offices as well as corporate subsidiaries (NFL Properties, NFL Network, NFL Films, NFL Charities, etc.) under the direction of the Commissioner of the NFL in New York, NY. Not included in this definition are the players, who are represented by The National Football League Players Association (NFLPA).

[46] Mark Yost, *Tailgating, Sacks, and Salary Caps: How the NFL Became the Most Successful Sports League in History* (Chicago: Kaplan Publishing, 2006), 78.

[47] "Super Bowl XLIV dethrones M*A*S*H*, sets all-time record" The Hollywood Reporter, February 8, 2010.

has held the number one spot in that poll.[48] What is most remarkable about this popularity is that it cuts across racial and gender lines—a finding that would seem counterintuitive given what scholarship exists on the subject. A 2007 ESPN Sports poll showed 26 percent of Hispanics choosing pro football as their favorite spectator sport, 12 percentage points higher than Major League Baseball. According to Nielson ratings results, the NFL received a 12.8 share among African American viewers, with the NBA coming in a distant second (7.1).[49]

But perhaps the most surprising finding of demographic research done on the NFL is the popularity the sport enjoys with women. Results of the 2004 Harris sports poll had women respondents rank the NFL first in popularity at 30 percent—nearly a 2-1 margin over second ranked Major League Baseball. Moreover, the NFL estimates that approximately 375,000 women attend NFL games each weekend, and females constitute about 50 percent of the NFL's overall viewership. Nielson ratings showed that in 2007, more women watched Super Bowl XLII (69.7 million) than watched the 2007 Academy Awards (64.2 million). What makes these findings surprising is that they contradict generally held assumptions among media analysts and scholars alike about the NFL as a decidedly anti-female vehicle for the reaffirmation of masculinity and male dominance over female empowerment.[50] While there is undoubtedly some truth to the notion of the NFL as a predominantly male-oriented product (the first demographic the NFL touts in its promotional literature is its high performance in the 18-45 male viewing

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[48] "NFL Kickoff 2008", The National Football League (2008), 12.

[49] Ibid. 13

[50] This is the central thesis of the oft-cited work by journalist Mariah Burton Nelson, *The Stronger Women Get, the More Men Love Football: Sexism and the American Culture of Sports*, (Harcourt-Brace 1994).

demographic), the overall viewing patterns of female viewers seem to suggest that they are more than willing spectators and enthusiasts of the sport. Moreover, this scholarship seems to discount the very concerted efforts on the part of the League to boost female interest in the sport. More than 1 million girls participate in the Pepsi sponsored NFL Punt, Pass, and Kick annual competition. In addition, some 10,000 women attend the League's annual "NFL 101 Workshops for Women" which cover nearly every facet of the game from life in the NFL to officiating.[51]

Second is the close relationship the NFL enjoys with persons and institutions within the American State. From John F. Kennedy's signing of the Sports Broadcasting Bill, which exempted the NFL from anti-trust laws, to the use of Washington Redskins home games as a key site for lobbyists to entertain members of Congress[52], the NFL has had an intimate connection with the people and institutions of American power. Such a connection is important as it concerns the countersubversive tradition because it shows why the NFL would have an interest in promoting ideology which is concurrent with the goals of countersubversives within the American National Security State apparatus, just as D.W. Griffith's relationship with many Progressive reformers played a part in the construction of his narratives nearly a century earlier. A slightly more contemporary notion of this idea is evident in Carl Boggs' study of Pearl Harbor. As Boggs notes, although Pearl Harbor was a strategic failure for the United States, it is repeatedly celebrated in countless cultural texts like parades, books, television, and film, as "the

[51] "NFL Kickoff 2008," 19.

[52] Yost, 75.

defining memory of the good war legacy" of the United States.[53] Boggs specifically points out how the symbolism of Pearl Harbor and World War II was played up by the Bush Administration and television news outlets such as Fox News in advocating the invasion of Iraq, particularly when talking about a revival of the "Normandy spirit" on the eve of D-Day in 2003.[54] Such programming is highly conducive to countersubversive ideology, with its emphasis on condensation symbols and desire to make the personal political.

Methodology

This study is primarily a content-analysis of NFL-films productions—commercial videos sold for fan consumption. The selection of this media is based on the fact that NFL films and its founder, Ed Sabol, who for nearly three decades has held the monopoly on NFL archival footage, have become the definitive lens through which the game, its history, and its values are portrayed—including in television broadcasts. As Sabol's son has noted, the mission of NFL films is to show football through their made for broadcast programming "the way Hollywood portrays fiction with dramatic flair in a way that portrays the "beauty" of the game. [55] Additionally, as Michael Oriard notes in *Brand NFL: Making and Selling America's Favorite Sport*, the cinematic techniques spawned by the Sabols for private home video consumption (multiple camera angles, an emphasis on close-ups, microphones on coaches and players, melodramatic narration) have become the standard routines for telecasts of all network games, making live football more

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[53] Carl Boggs, "Pearl Harbor: How Film Conquers History," *New Political Science*, 28 no. 4(December 2006) 451.

[54] Ibid. 453.

[55]Charlie Rose, "NFL Films Inc: Father-Son Team establishes Gold Standard for Sports Photography" CBS News Online, August 25, 2004.

comprehensible to television viewers.[56] The way we as audiences experience the "live" viewing of NFL televised broadcasts and videos cannot be understood without examining the source which created them and continues to frame them. Perhaps most importantly, NFL films are the only televised media that is produced exclusively by the League itself, meaning the images and representations of the sport represent the League and its cultural significance as seen by those who own it see it—free from any potential transgressive interpretations or the real experiences of the sport by fans as spectators and consumers. They are, in short, the official for-profit propaganda arm of the NFL.

Questions examined within this content analysis are a) what specific characteristics of countersubversion are evident in an NFL Films production? b) What are the specific condensation symbols used to promote a given countersubversive value? and c) What are the specific theoretical qualities of these symbols that help make countersubversive political values retain a sense of intimacy to a viewer? My study is broken into three chapters divided along countersubversive themes. The first chapter examines fascination with violence and the use of militaristic imagery in NFL-films recaps of Super Bowls played during military conflicts. More specifically, I examine how these recaps utilize a set of militaristic condensation symbols which normalize violence and fear of boundary invasion by transforming the fictional battlefields of football into "real" battlefields and thus ready the public for actual military aggression. The second chapter examines the use of NFL programming as a surveillance tool which reaffirms traditional paternal hierarchies in society through the ascription of particular characteristics to executives, coaches, and players. By fixating on ideological aspects of

[56] Michael Oriard, *Brand NFL: Making and Selling America's Favorite Sport*, (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007) 18.

these individuals, NFL programming is able to bring the viewer vicariously into the lives of the NFL's actors while affixing hierarchies to them representative of a particular American political nostalgia which affirms a paternalistic world. My third chapter moves away from the visual slightly to examine other strategies used by the League in its policy appeals to achieve goals, as well as looking at points of contestation the League faces—namely in stadium financing and labor policy. My conclusion includes a reaffirmation of my thesis as well as a brief investigation into the other potential points of contestation that exist within the NFL which could directly undermine the countersubversive propaganda the League pushes.

CHAPTER 1

THE NFL'S MILTARIST PERSUASION

I was hostile to people who were attacking my body, and I still am. When all else fails and it is obvious that it is going to come down to a direct physical confrontation, I always thought it reflected a higher degree of intelligence to do the inflicting first.
- Larry Csonka. Former Dolphins RB[57]

We must adapt the concept of imminent threat to the capabilities and objectives of today's adversaries. Rogue states and terrorists do not seek to attack us using conventional means.
- 2002 National Security Strategy of the United States[58]

That the National Football League employs the use of violent, militaristic symbolism and discourse in the dissemination of its product has been recognized by many within the journalistic and academic community for some time. Journalist Ron Powers noted that it was the spectacle of violence disseminated through televised broadcast that gave the League its major foothold in American culture by presenting an "epic pageant of violence and grace with real fortunes hanging in the balance" that burned itself into the imaginations of an audience that had been accustomed to the "prepackaged neutralities" of early television.[59] Powers' comment is instructive in that it suggests the NFL's burgeoning cultural power came from its ability to eschew representations of safety and consensus on television and replace them with images of

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[57] *Autumn Ritual*, specially-produced DVD, directed by Phil Tuckett (1986; New York: NFL Films 2008).

[58] The White House, *National Security Strategy of the United States*, September 2002.

[59] Ron Powers, quoted in Mark Yost, *Tailgating, Sacks, and Salary Caps: How the NFL Became the Most Successful Sports League in History* (Chicago: Kaplan Publishing, 2006), 69.

warfare complete with violent imagery and a narrative that emphasized the legitimate stakes of the outcome of the broadcast.[60]

In his work on the use of the male body in *Monday Night Football* broadcasts during the 1994 season, Trujillo notes that the discourse used to describe the players and their actions on the field often referred to the players as weapons and their actions as military maneuvers.

> During the season, players were described as "weapons," "missiles," "shields," "rockets," "hitting machines," and other instruments of violence. And these "weapons" engaged in an impressive array of offensive and defensive maneuvers. For example, among the terms used by *MNF* commentators to describe what these offensive and defensive weapons (bodies) did on the football field were attack, blow away, break through, burst, catapult, club, crash, cripple, crunch, decapitate, decimate, destroy, dislodge, dislocate, dismantle, drill, explode, fire, fly, hammer, hit, hurdle, jackhammer, kill, launch, mortar, mug, penetrate, plug, pop, pound, push, ram, rifle, rip, shoot, shred, slam, slash, smash, smoke, snap, shred, spin, stearnroll, tattoo, tomahawk, toss, twist, unload, upend, whack, whip, wound, and wreck.[61]

Similar findings were evident in a later study by Messner, Dunbar, and Hunt on what they called they called "the Televised Sports Manhood Formula." Surveying a variety of sports broadcasts, the authors found that references to martial metaphors for an action were used nearly five times per every hour of sports broadcast they analyzed, with "Monday Night Football" being second only to NBA broadcasts in amount of martial

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[60] As Oriard points out, the welding of football and State prerogatives into what he deems 'Superpatriotism' began with the halftime of the third Super Bowl in 1969 during the height of anxieties over the Vietnam War. Entitled 'America Thanks,' the show featured a tribute to the various parts of the armed forces engaged in that conflict. The following two Super Bowls reinforced this 'patriotic note,' even including recitations of the Pledge of Allegiance in the broadcast. While growing unpopularity with Vietnam policy and corruption in national politics (particularly related to arch-football fan Richard Nixon) dampened super-patriotic displays during the late 1970s and 1980s, there was a resurgence of Superpatriotism following the onset of the 1991 Gulf War that has continued to remain in Super Bowl broadcasts. Oriard argues this is an element of self-conscious calculation to tie the profit motive of the NFL to the presentation of the Superbowl as 'the winter version of the Fourth of July'. See *Brand NFL*, 22-23.

[61] Nick Trujillo, "Machines, Missiles, and Men: Images of the Male Body on ABC's Monday Night Football" *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 12 (1995) 411.

metaphors used. Moreover, their analysis reinforces the frame of warfare or pageant of violence that Powers argues made the League the success it is, noting that the "Monday Night Football" broadcasts were introduced with exploding graphics and a theme song that included lyrics "Like a rocket burning through time and space, The NFL's best star will rock this place…the battle lines are drawn."[62]

While such findings are important in showing the specific ways NFL broadcasts use militaristic imagery, they do little to tell us what precise political utility these symbols have relative to the larger puzzle of countersubversive elements in the American political tradition. While Trujillo does argue in part that the valuation of militarism the NFL promotes may relate to changes of gender relations and female boundary invasion into male occupations in the 1990s[63], such analyses seem insufficient, especially in light of aforementioned demographic findings that females constitute 50 percent of the NFL broadcast audience. What then, does the purpose of pushing militaristic symbolism in NFL broadcasts serve?

The use of militaristic condensation symbols in NFL videography serves the countersubversive agenda by normalizing militarism as a constitutive part of the American experience. In doing so, it prepares the audience for mobilization in times of actual military conflict to more readily accept the binary divisions and fears of alien invasion created by the countersubversive and the appropriateness of military action against them. It may also, in times of actual alien penetration, serve to recharge the legitimacy of the National Security State when its capacity to protect people is brought

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[62] Michael A. Messner, Michelle Dunbar and Darnell Hunt, "The Televised Sports Manhood Formula, "*Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 24, no. 4 (2000) 388-389.

[63] Trujillo, 419.

into question. In essence, the NFL's use of militaristic symbols helps to personalize military conflicts by allowing viewers to experience the nationalistic fervor of real warfare vicariously by linking it to the viewing of the fictional warfare of pro football.

For evidence of this linkage I employ content-analysis based case studies of two NFL-Films recaps of Super Bowls XXV, XXXVI played during the military conflicts of the Gulf War, and the post-9/11 invasion and occupation of Afghanistan, respectively. I then tie my analysis of these events to the NFL-Films-produced documentary *Autumn Ritual* and other work in the subject and conclude by examining the multiple roles violent NFL events play in upholding the countersubversive agenda vis-à-vis the National Security State, noting how these roles comport with theoretical ideas on the utility of military spectacle as put forth by Foucault, Rousseau, and Hobbes.

Super Bowl XXV: the Gulf War as a "Struggle of Wills"

The film of 1991 Super Bowl XXV commercial home video begins with a shot of Eagles Quarterback Randall Cunnigham walking out to the field for the opening day of the 1990 season as a the music of a church choir is heard in the background. The shot is followed with a cut to New York Giants players marching out to a vacant stadium as the sun glares down on their uniforms. As the choir music reaches a crescendo an NFL football comes into focus. There is then an immediate cut to Bengals coach Sam Wyche screaming "Bury them! You attack them right in their face!" What follows is three minutes of clips of various violent plays, with the resultant grunts of pain amplified. Interwoven between these shots are clips of female fans screaming, "Get him!" as well as various players and coaches making remarks like, "you can see the fear in his eyes," and,

"you have to finish him." The parade of violent imagery ends with the title "The Road to the Super Bowl."[64]

The introduction to the film is instructive as to how the NFL constructs a warfare narrative in its product that normalizes the value of combat to its audience. These images are important because they provide the political setting which is necessary for the value of war to be internalized and accepted as appropriate. As Edelman notes, political settings have a contrived character. They are unabashedly built up to emphasize a departure from daily routine. Massiveness, ornateness and formality are presented on a scale that focuses on the heroic quality of what is taking place. The creation of this space heightens sensitivity and conviction among the audience, as the framed actions are no longer contested but taken on their own terms. Inconsistencies in fact or normal value structure become irrelevant and thus the stage is set for a concentration of suggestions of emotion and authority.[65]

"The Road to the Super Bowl" opening montage demonstrates how the NFL operates as a political setting where the heroism of the player/soldier is posed against the backdrop of ultra-violent, visceral action with spectators of both genders gleefully encouraging the combat. Such a presentation masks the very real contradictions of gender conflict and the valuations of hierarchy in a liberal regime by obfuscating them in a visceral, collectivist spectacle. The shots of the marching Randall Cunnigham and Giants players can be seen to represent the march of soldiers onto the battle field, the sunlight and choir music are an indication of the moral righteousness of their cause in the

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[64] "Super Bowl XXV" in *Super Bowl XXI-XXX Collector's Set*. Executive Producer: Steve Sabol (New York: NFL Films, 2004).

[65] Edelman, 96.

upcoming battle. The subsequent three-minute visual onslaught of violent plays interwoven with bloodthirsty cries for more punishment—coming from spectator to player to coach, from both male and female, helps solidify the normalization of combat by obscuring hierarchical boundary divisions of participant vs. spectator, masculine vs. feminine, and commander vs. soldier, folding them into one united mass committed to the righteous cause of combat displayed before them.

Yet the normalization of combat values is only half the story. For the countersubversive is not merely employing these values for the sake of maintaining existing ideological conditions (though that is certainly important) but also to justify real political action. The illusory warfare of the NFL can thus serve the purpose of justifying real warfare during times of perceived external threats. This is particularly evident in the part of the Super Bowl XXV film, "Struggle of Wills" that covers the game itself which was played during the first Gulf War.[66]

The game recap opens with the shot of a military helicopter flying overhead with ominous church bells heard in the background. The narrator remarks, "In a stadium with tightest security of any NFL game ever played, Super Bowl XXV began under the shadow of war in the Mideast." A side shot of the stadium with the NFL logo pans to a close-up of an American Flag entwined with a yellow ribbon as horns begin to play. The next three shots show a police officer in a riot mask riding on horseback, fans being meticulously searched by security guards and a widescreen shot of another Army helicopter. Concurrent with these shots is a snippet of the radio broadcast of the event with the announcers saying "We're about to say a special hello to the men and women of our armed forces in the Persian Gulf, and we respectfully dedicate our broadcast to you

wherever you may be over there and may God be with you." There is a cut to an interview with a soldier saying "We want to be here because this is our country, we want to fight for it. Our country is taking care of us making sure we get to watch the Super Bowl. This is a part of America for us, this is why we're here." Underneath him on-screen text reads "Eastern Saudi Arabia, Super Bowl Sunday -0300 hours."[67]

This opening scene is illuminating in its depictions of the Super Bowl as a countersubversive political setting. The first few shots, fixated on the actual agents of the National Security State apparatus and the "shadow of war" serve to conjure up the fear of potential boundary invasion by a foreign threat. The radio broadcast snippet, with its wish that "God be with" the American soldiers overseas solidifies this fear and crates a binary division between the God-fearing American warrior and the foreign foe who seeks to penetrate the homeland. The interview with the solider in the war zone seeks to close the distance between the fictional and real battlefields by making the Super Bowl "part of" the National Security State itself as something to be protected. In less than three minutes of film, the Super Bowl is transposed from a game to a part of a larger battlefield against an ominous alien threat.

When the actual game recap begins, there is roughly two minutes of violent tackles with the grunts of pain and screams for more punishment from coaches similar to the opening "Road to the Super Bowl" segment. The narrator remarks, "The silver anniversary Super Bowl was the most primal of contests, a classic struggle of wills with each team trying to impose its will on the other." The subsequent narration of the game plays upon the theme of struggle and warfare by emphasizing the tactical changes each

[67] "Super Bowl XXV".

team made in trying to win the game. In describing the Giants' turnaround in the second quarter, the narrator notes it was "power football" with "massive blockers whose intention was to physically wear down the defense" that helped the Giants gain momentum, as well as the play fake which was turned into one of New York's "many lethal weapons." When Buffalo later scores on a Thurman Thomas run, the narrator calls it a "crushing blow." Interwoven between these tactical narrations with allusions to artillery fire and punishment are scenes of fans wearing small American flags and yellow ribbons in their hats. The second to last scene ends with the Giants' celebration and the narrator saying "it was a game for the ages, but it was played in an atmosphere where more important events of the day were not forgotten." The film ends with a freeze frame of the back of a Giants player holding his child, an American flag in his hand.

If the footage of the event prior to the game serves to transform the Super Bowl from a fictional to real battle front, the game recap serves to reinforce the superiority of the American people in their attempt to eliminate the alien threat. The "struggle of wills" is not simply the struggle of two football teams to win a game, but also is the struggle of the American will to defeat the will of its enemy on the domestic battlefront. The military-tactical discourse, as well as the adjectives used to describe players and their actions (the "Old Stallion" O.J. Anderson, the "methodical" drive of Jeff Hostettler) denote the martial superiority of the player/soldier in the quest to will their (and the nation's) way to victory. This "will" is also reinforced by the shots of spectators waving flags and ribbons displaying their allegiance to the National Security State and their refusal to give in to the alien threat that has cast a shadow over the game. That the actual outcome of the game does not factor into the frame at first would seem contradictory.

One would assume the victor would be perceived as the personification of the American will rather than both teams being equally celebrated. This apparent contradiction can be rectified by the fact that the intent of the football as battlefield symbolism is to raise the specter of alien penetration by bringing the remote but real battlefield home. The binary division in this case is not between the squadrons of warriors on the field but between the Super Bowl and its viewers as collective entity fighting a foreign foe. As will be shown, this changes somewhat when actual alien penetration does occur within the American homefront as happened on 9/11.

Super Bowl XXXVI: Creating an Armed Brotherhood

The film begins with a black screen with the words "September 11, 2001." The screen fades out to a clip of Giants linebacker Michael Strahan recounting watching the Twin Towers burn from his balcony, not being able to "conceive the fact they could be gone."[68] The screen fades to black again before going to a shot of a New York City firefighter carrying a banner saying "never forget our brothers" marching towards the viewer somberly. Behind him are a goal post and an American flag. Three more successive sequences follow with fade-outs and fade-ins of mourning police and other personnel carrying flags, with one shot of a female officer wiping a tear away. After the last fade out, there is a shot of Eagles players marching towards a nearly field-long American flag held by fire-fighters and police officers. The camera pans out to show New York Giants players also marching towards the flag. The players, now blended in with the State employees, grasp the flag and begin to make it wave.

[68] "Super Bowl XXXVI" *in Super Bowl XXI-XXX Collector's Set*. Executive Producer Steve Sabol (New York: NFL Films, 2004).

What follows is a minute of shots showing players embracing these same National Security State employees, a Boy Scout passing out “United We Stand” flyers and American flags to spectators, close-ups of players on the verge of tears, and players charging out of their locker rooms holding American flags, screaming loudly. Interwoven with these shots is audio of President Bush’s speech following the attack “We will not tire, we will not falter, and we will not fail. In all that lies before us, may God grant us wisdom, and may he watch over the United States of America.” There is then a rapid fire sequence of shots of spectators carrying patriotic signs and flags as voluminous chants of “USA! USA! USA! are heard. The montage ends with the 49ers breaking huddle saying “God Bless America” as the title credits “Road to the Super Bowl” appear on screen.

The “Road to the Super Bowl” montage from the Super Bowl XXXVI recap provides somewhat of a deviation from its counterpart in Super Bowl X XV. The Super Bowl XXV “Road to the Super Bowl” opening montage seeks to merely normalize militarism as a mass cultural value without context—that is, it celebrates violence as a cultural norm without juxtaposing it against a real particular object or event—only an imagined one. By contrast, the Super Bowl XXXVI season montage emphasizes the specific consequences of alien penetration and the need to reconstitute the damaged body politic. The black opening screen and Michael Strahan’s recount of his inability to conceive of the absence of the Twin Towers can be seen as a moment where alien penetration has led to the absence of authority within the polity. The National Security State has failed in its function to protect its territory and people. Such moments are problematic because they attack the very foundations of the unimodal value system of a regime and encourage the now real threat that outsiders may come in and disrupt the

general consensus of how the authority of the National Security State is understood and respected.[69]

What is needed to repair this damage is a militant spectacle which can reassure the mass of the regime's legitimacy. Foucault noted how this phenomenon played out during public executions of the 18th century, calling it a certain mechanism of power "that asserted itself as an armed power whose functions of maintaining order were not entirely unconnected with the functions of war; of a power that presented rules and obligations as personal bonds, a breach of which constituted an offence and called for vengeance." In these spectacles, State power is recharged in the ritual display of its reality as superpower.[70] The "Road to the Super Bowl" montage serves this recharging purpose by intertwining the player-soldiers of the NFL with the citizen-spectators and the agents of the National Security State into one united display of militant unity. Understood this way, the sequence of shots in the opening montage takes on new meaning. The shots of the mourning firefighters and police officers seek to demonstrate the pain of the sovereign at its failure while not allowing it to forget its purpose. The Eagles and Giants players marching forward toward and then dispersing into the flag-holding crowd of firefighters, police officers, and other State officials represents a blending of the fictional warriors into a constitutive part of the security apparatus. The shots of the Boy Scout passing out flyers to spectators and the players embracing National Security State workers represents the renewal of personal bonds and obligations the fictional warriors have in preserving the legitimacy of the national security apparatus and its workers as well as the duty of the

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[69] Edelman, 177.

[70] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison* (New York: Random House, 1977), 57.

citizens to obey and make the State's pain its own. The spectacle reaches its violent crescendo with the shots of players charging out of their locker rooms waving flags like a cavalry riding into battle as spectators chant feverishly. Much like the scaffold executions of the 18th Century, these acts and images following the political attack on the American State on 9/11 allow for the vengeance of the people to be become an unobtrusive part of the vengeance of the Sovereign[71] during the real military conflict that is to follow, fighting the demon vicariously through a show of unity.

This point is illustrated again quite explicitly in the part of the program entitled "Perspectives."The program begins with shots of head coaches marching off fields with somber looks on their faces. The narrator states "On the road to the Super Bowl, the loneliest figure is often the coach—the man who shoulders the expectations of a season and bears responsibility when promise turns to disappointment. This season, the challenge was far greater because suddenly even the winning coaches had to deal with events beyond their control." The next scene shows Steelers' coach Bill Cowher being informed by a referee that halftime is going to be extended to 14 minutes due to the beginning of the initiation of the bombing of Afghanistan. The next shot shows Cowher looking up at President Bush's address to the nation which is being broadcast on the scoreboard at Heinz Field, with the president saying, "You have my full confidence and you will have every tool you need to carry out your duty." The next shot shows Cowher addressing his team, huddled around him, saying, "That puts a lot in perspective. But I'm gonna tell you right now, it's a great country we live in. And that's about being together.

[71] Foucault, 59.

It's about fighting for a cause. And right now we're a family, and we're in our house, and right now no one's gonna take it away from us. Let's go men!"[72]

This scene shows how the vengeance of the sovereign is projected onto the vengeance of the people by showing the sovereign (embodied in the president) delegating authority to the fictional generals and soldiers of the football team. The narrative remark that "even the winning coaches having to deal with events beyond their control" can be read as an acknowledgement of the failure of leadership to live up to its duty while blaming it on unforeseen and alien causes both in the fictional world of football and the real world of the Security State. That the shot of the president's address on the scoreboard pans to Cowher viewing it is of particular importance because it gives the connotation that the President is giving orders to Cowher, a fictional general, rather than the actual armed forces. Cowher's address to his team following Bush's speech is analogous to a commander addressing his troops as well as the viewer about the need to come together as a familial unit to fight for a cause, and to not let the alien penetration take away "our house."In transposing the vengeance of the sovereign onto the vengeance of the people through the coach of a football team, the scene serves two purposes. It not only recharges the power of the sovereign by reassuring the viewer of the capacity of leadership to cope with crisis,[73] but it also makes the fictional battlefield a part of the real battlefield in the larger conflict, much like the imagery of the police and army did in the Super Bowl XXV

[72] "Super Bowl XXXVI".

[73] As Edelman notes, the perception of the willingness to cope is central in the dramaturgy of effective political leadership. Particularly when the means of coping with the emergency are unknown, belief in the leader's magical ability is enhanced because it is intensely sought to the point where uncritical acquiescence becomes the main response. See *Symbolic Uses*, 79-80.

program. And, much like that program, it is the game narrative itself that represents the culmination of this transformation.

The 2002 Super Bowl XXXVI game recap, entitled “Patriots Day,” begins with a slow pan down to the Super Bowl logo cut-out of the continental United States draped in red, white and blue. As a somber piano solo plays in the background, the narrator states, “played before a backdrop of war, Super Bowl XXXVI was a red, white and blue celebration of a nation’s heritage.” A stadium shot of screaming spectators blends into a close-up of Paul McCartney onstage shouting “everybody clap your hands for freedom.” The narration continues “it was also a tribute to the Americans who in 2001 paid the ultimate price for freedom.” What follows is nearly a minute-long of a shot of a black banner with the names of 9/11 casualties interwoven with close-ups of players’ tearful faces. The narrator resumes, “framed against the traumatic events of 9/11, Super Bowl XXXVI reflected the hope of a nation.” On screen a mosaic picture of the Statue of Liberty blends into a shot of a re-creation of the raising of the American Flag at Iwo Jima. The next two scenes show the respective teams coming out of their locker rooms as the narrator describes the Rams as the “Greatest Show on Turf” while noting the Patriots were double-digit underdogs. He then adds, “but this team would band together and make pro-football’s biggest Sunday their own.” The scene ends with the Patriots charging out of their locker room as a large red, white and blue logo entitled “Patriots Day” morphs into the Super Bowl XXXVI logo.

Like the Super Bowl XXV “Struggle of Wills,” the opening scene in “Patriots Day” explicitly notes the game is being played under the backdrop of war, implying the battlefield of the game is also a battlefield in the actual conflict. However, unlike the

beginning of the 1991"Struggle of Wills", which emphasized the omnipresence of the National Security State in the face of potential alien attack, "Patriots Day" emphasizes military triumphalism and a celebration of the presumably shared value of freedom. The difference in imagery has to do with the real political context under which the fictional battle is taking place. In 1991, the contrived threat of alien penetration is necessary as a uniting force where real threat is absent and the State is in a superior military position on the real battlefield. To bring the battlefield home in any convincing terms, the narrative must emphasize the serious linkage between the distant war and the site of the game. By contrast, the 2002 narrative need not pay as much attention to the specter of alien penetration because it has actually occurred. The task of the audio and visual narrative is to unite the mass after the sovereign has been shown to be weak; to demonstrate a renewal of commitment to the values of the National Security State by emphasizing common symbols of past triumph. This framing is important because it compels attention, emotional release and compliance by addressing the deep and common anxiety of the alien attack. As Edelman notes, if there is a profound shared faith in a symbol (e.g. the Statue of Liberty, the Iwo Jima photo) it allows that symbol to become an individual instrument of the common interest rather than a cognitive and empirical manipulator of reality.[74]

Another marked contrast, as alluded to earlier, is the framing of the two teams relative to the battle narrative. In the case of Super Bowl XXV, both teams are portrayed equally as embodiments of the American "will" against a foreign agitator. In "Patriots Day," the teams are framed in a way that showcases a differential in power and values

[74] Edelman, 98.

between them. The Rams, previous Super Bowl Champions, are framed as "The Greatest Show on Turf". Careful attention is paid to the superior offensive firepower of the team (they scored 500 points in three consecutive seasons), while the shots of them coming out of their locker room for the game focus on their individual superstars, and one of the players' statements that they are "the best." The Patriots, by contrast, are branded as underdogs who needed to "band together" to make Super Bowl Sunday "their own." The film makes a careful point to show how the Patriots came out of the locker room "as a team" and devotes nearly 20 seconds more to their entrance than that of the Rams. The framing is important because it seeks to add a new binary division in the narrative. Whereas in Super Bowl XXV the division was between the collective Super Bowl entity against the foreign threat, the frame in Super Bowl XXXVI is between the teams as personifications of the real combatants in the actual military conflict. Understood this way, the offensively powered Rams are a personification of the alien threat with its haughtiness and capability to strike anywhere. The description of the Rams as the "Greatest Show on Turf" and the emphasis on their boasts and "explosive multiformation attack" comports nicely with George W. Bush's State of the Union Address in January of 2002 when he talked about the "depth of our enemies' hatred in videos, where they laugh about the loss of innocent life. And the depth of their hatred is equaled by the madness of *the destruction they design*." Emph. added).[75]

By contrast, the emphasis of the Patriots as a team which would band together echoes the President's language in that same speech about America meeting in its "hour of suffering" and going on to "rebuild New York and the Pentagon, rallied a great

[75] "Super Bowl XXXVI".

coalition, captured, arrested, and rid the world of thousands of terrorists, destroyed Afghanistan's terrorist training camps, saved a people from starvation, and freed a country from brutal oppression."[76] The binary division for the narrative is thus the same as the narrative of the real war where America (embodied in the Patriots) must overcome the adversity and odds to defeat the arrogant and armed enemy and claim their improbable yet righteous victory. The narrative of the remainder of the game recap reflects this division, emphasizing the superiority in both tactic and physicality of the Patriots over the Rams. Over shots of Patriots players violently hitting their opponents (complete with amplified pain grunts), the narrator remarks how the Patriots, "jammed, muscled, then blasted the Ram fleet receivers." By comparison, the Rams' first scoring drive is characterized as "dinky" and the narrator notes that the Patriots defense was a "puzzle the Rams hadn't anticipated." In between shots of violent tackles and tactical narration are scenes of Patriots coaches admonishing players to turn up the physical punishment ("pressure in somebody's face means bad passes"). As the Patriots scoring play at the end of the first half is replayed five times from five different angles in slow motion, the narrator remarks "In a Super Bowl steeped in passion and patriotism, the team flying highest was wearing red, white, and blue."[77]

The second half narrative notes how Marshall Faulk, the Rams star running back, was "buried beneath a wave of red, white, and blue defenders. Even when the Rams began to mount a comeback in the 4th quarter, the narration refers to their drives as "stumbling." Following the Rams' score to bring the game within a touchdown, Patriots

[76] President George W. Bush, *State of the Union Address*, January 28, 2002.

[77] Super Bowl XXXVI.

defensive coordinator Romeo Crennel is shown screaming, “I need rushers, rushers, rushers!” The narrator remarks, “New England focused this painful pressure on the League’s MVP as four consecutive shots of Patriots players hitting Kurt Warner are shown, the last one a close-up of a Patriots rusher smashing Warner in the face. When the Rams tie the game with less than two minutes to play, there is a sideline cut to a Rams player saying the Patriots are “weak” and “overrated.” Following the Patriots’ game winning field goal, the narrator states that if “dreams are what your heart makes; the Patriots had the biggest heart in America.” The next scene shows a Patriots’ helmet being held against a background of red, white, and blue confetti as Patriots owner Robert Kraft is heard saying “spirituality, faith, and democracy are the cornerstones of our country. We are all patriots and tonight the Patriots are world champions.” As shots of crying players are shown, the narrator states “It seemed fitting that in a season of grieving, the symbol of our nation’s very beginning would be holding the Vince Lombardi trophy at the end. And like their country, they were proud to be brothers in arms and proud to be Patriots.” The film ends with the Patriots logo on the Super Dome Scoreboard dimly visible in a swirl of red, white, and blue.[78]

The game recap of Super Bowl XXXVI represents the culmination of the recharging of American superpower seen throughout the 2001 season recap. The intertwining of the fictional warriors and the National Security State begun on the “Road to the Super Bowl” and reinforced in “Perspectives” reaches its violent climax on the fictional battlefield with the victory of a team which is imbued with the condensation symbols (the minute man logo, red, white and blue uniforms) and values (strength in the

[78] Ibid.

collective) needed to recharge the body politic following tremendous damage to the sovereign's legitimacy. Like public executions, which emphasized the atrocity committed against the sovereign within the carrying out of justice, the extreme emphasis on the punishment of the Rams vicariously serves the necessary purpose of allowing the spectator to experience the punishment of the real enemy in a way that takes responsibility for the atrocity and all the negative values it embodies such as arrogance and calculated violence. Like the execution, the emphasis on the pain and impotence of the Rams provides the spectacle of the game with both truth and power—it is a culmination of the ritual of the investigation and ceremony in which the sovereign triumphs.[79] No less important is the focus of Robert Kraft's remarks upon receiving the Lombardi trophy. While invocations of faith, spirituality and democracy may seem like tired clichés, even by Super Bowl standards, they hold powerful political importance because a society's vocabulary reflects past beliefs and values. Thus the magical associations that permeate this language are critical for political behavior because they lend authority to conventional perceptions and values, thus dulling critical faculties regarding the actual events that precipitated the alien penetration. [80] The legitimacy and the superpower of the National Security State are recharged through spectacle while the capacity to conceive of the crisis in any critical light is diminished.

Of course, it could be argued that the documentaries of these Super Bowls and the warfare framing are more based on market calculations—that is, the NFL is capitalizing on crisis conditions and cashing in on patriotic sentiment to make a buck rather than

[79] Foucault, 56.

[80] Edelman, 120.

acting as a deliberate vehicle for countersubversive State war propaganda. While not denying this as a probability, the NFL's own commissioned material on its history and other scholarship suggest that the League takes its goal of promoting American values seriously somewhat independent of profit as well.[81]

Autumn Rituals and the NFL's National Security State Connections

In 1986, NFL Films commissioned what was an allegedly "outsider's" view of pro-football in its production of the documentary "Autumn Ritual" that brought together what it termed a diverse group of "anthropologists, theologians, philosophers, coaches and players," to explain the game's significance in American society.[82] In fact, the film relied heavily on commentary from right-wing speakers, from George Will to Jerry Falwell to convicted criminal G. Gordon Liddy. Nevertheless, the film is provocative in demonstrating how conscious the League (or at least its players, coaches, and high-profile fans) is of its role in creating a normalization of warfare within society and in many ways how it openly embraces its role as a proponent for the National Security State in times of crisis. One segment of the film begins with a clip of soldiers drilling in Vietnam that cuts to Vikings' players lined up in a similar military formation on the sidelines before a game. The scene then cuts to an interview with former player Alex Karras saying "you are playing the game of war, and it isn't with guns, but everything else is the same." The film then cuts to more stock footage of soldiers running through the Vietnamese jungle

[81] Indeed, in making the argument that the NFL provides justification for war, I am not discounting at all that war also sells the NFL. Rather, the two have, particularly since the Gulf War, become inextricably intertwined. This is in keeping in line with the goals of late Commissioner Pete Rozelle who argued that in tying the game to State policy, the League was not only selling itself but investing in "traditional American values." See *Brand NFL*, 22.

[82] *Autumn Ritual.*

shouting, “Everybody move out-get out there,” before cutting back to Buccaneers players marching on the field. The next 10 minutes of the film feature the same pattern with shots of Vietnam combat mixed with violent game footage and commentary by various experts woven in between. Of the more noteworthy comments are the ones offered by G. Gordon Liddy and former player and assistant coach Bill Curry. Liddy, in explaining the appeal of football as a war game says, “If you look at the history of man, the history of man is warfare—most men wish they could do things like that…it is an aggressive intelligence. It is competitiveness. It is combativeness…the operating principle is Social Darwinism, we are all in competition.” Later, Curry says “Something goes on in the huddle that’s magic. You take a huddle on a football field and it’s made up of black children and white children, northerners and southerners, and liberals and conservatives and they are forced not only to get along but to help each other…so you’re not just tolerated, you’re accepted. Here we are in the same colored jerseys, same colored helmets, this crazy coach is screaming at us and driving us up and down the field and we become brothers…all those racial, religious and ethnic differences that kept people apart before are beginning to come apart and a great thing happens—men become brothers in huddles. And when you leave that huddle, you never quite find it the same again.”[83]

The framing of the similarity between football and warfare—of the transformation of the fictional battlefield to the real battlefield is, as has been demonstrated by previous examples, part and parcel of NFL films videography of the League. Yet it takes on a remarkable self-consciousness here. Karras’ comment that with exception of guns (and lethality) that war and football are “the same” shows how the players in the spectacle

[83] Ibid.

understand their role as fictional soldiers and conveys the "reality" of NFL combat to the audience. But it is Liddy's and Curry's comments that strike at the theoretical heart of why the NFL is so important as an instrument of countersubversive ideology—its ability to mask real conflicts of a society in spectacle. Liddy's remarks on the history of man being warfare and competition is a not so subtle reiteration of the view of the problem of human nature most famously put forth by Hobbes. If men are inherently driven to quarrel by "first competition, secondly difference, and thirdly glory" and if such a predisposition leads to" war of every man against every man,"[84] where no action is unjust and right and wrong are irrelevant, there needs to be a common power to keep them in awe.[85] To Hobbes, this awe-inspiring power was to be given to the sovereign of the commonwealth, whose power and strength and the terror thereof would keep people in line out of fear.[86] Of course, the Hobbesian prescription works only so far as the sovereign is able to command the terror and respect of the citizens without having to pay deference to concepts of individualism and the concurrent inequalities and value differences the liberal polity creates. Moreover, if the sovereign fails in its duty (as happened on 9/11 in the United States) it allows for the dangerous proposition that people may question the very legitimacy of the sovereign's right to rule. What is then needed is a power that can inspire awe as well as mediate value conflicts while still upholding, if not celebrating, the legitimacy of the sovereign—in this case the American National Security State.

The "magic" that Bill Curry talks about is the mechanisms by which the NFL is able to complete this task. The identical uniforms eliminate the conflicts of racism and

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[84] Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. C.B. McPherson (London: Penguin Classics 1985), 188.

[85] Ibid. 187.

[86] Ibid. 228.

sectionalism otherwise apparent in American political life. The "crazy coach" leading players up and down the sideline becomes a proxy for the actual sovereign as an awe inspiring figure who can command the terror of his subjects (and by association the audience) into obedience. The results of this are the acceptance of all rather than merely the toleration of difference. Individuals, their differences in equality and station, are rendered indifferent in the envelopment of the violent spectacle of the game. That the NFL explains and celebrates this in its own productions is a powerful statement of how the League views its function within contemporary American political life—and indeed its relationship with the National Security State itself. As Samantha King has noted, following the 9/11 attacks and the declaration of the War on Terror (and then the war in Iraq), the NFL began incorporating Bush administration foreign policy into its own business promotion. Following the attacks and prior to the previously analyzed Super Bowl XXXVI, the NFL made a multimillion dollar commitment to increasing tourism in New York City as well as setting up its own disaster relief fund. These events culminated in the League's first Kickoff Weekend extravaganza, featuring several popular music acts and celebrities. The event was billed as a "tribute to the American Spirit, the resiliency of New Yorkers, and the fact the post-9/11 New York City remains one of the premier tourist destinations in the world." King notes the NFL's efforts fit the dominant domestic national response advocated by the Bush administration following the attacks, encouraging people to do good for others while at the same time going about their everyday practices of consumption.[87]

[87] Samantha King, "Offensive Lines: Sport-State Synergy in an Era of Perpetual War," *Cultural Studies, Critical Methodologies* 10, no. 10 (2008) 9-10.

The League's connection with the National Security State was sharpened even further in 2003 following the invasion of Iraq when the League collaborated with Bush Administration officials to present what was called, "Operation Tribute to Freedom," a program designed to "reinforce the bond between the citizen and the military" and "help Americans express their support for the troops who are returning from operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, and who continue to fight in the ongoing effort toward victory in the global war on terrorism." The event, which was the brainchild of then-NFL Commissioner Paul Tagliabue and Gen. Richard Meyers, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, began with a ceremony at the Oval Office where NFL Executives met with George W. Bush, Dick Cheney, Condoleezza Rice, and Colin Powell and presented the President with a football which bared the inscription "the first football of the 2003 season, presented to President George W. Bush with appreciation." The program culminated with a large-scale celebration on the National Mall co-sponsored by Pepsi, and included performances by Britney Spears, Aerosmith, Mary J. Blige, and Aretha Franklin, who sang the national anthem. The 300,000-strong crowd included 25,000 troops and their families shipped in for the event by the Department of Defense with the promise of a free t-shirt and prime concert viewing. Publicity material produced by the League stated the purpose of this "new tradition" was to "celebrate the resilient and indomitable spirit of America."[88]

King's examination of League press releases suggests the NFL demonstrably recognizes its role as a supercharger for the sovereign's power in times of crisis. And as King notes, that it has a "new capacity as something akin to a for-profit marketing arm of

[88] Ibid. 10-12.

the government, immersed in ongoing relationships with a variety of departments and offices [so that] we might think of the NFL as a Department of Propaganda, neoliberal style[89]. Indeed, its own films reflect that purpose.

Conclusion: NFL Military Spectacle for the National Security State

Writing in 1758, Rousseau noted the utility of military spectacle in creating a united polity:

> Why should we not found, on the model of military prizes, other prizes for gymnastics, wrestling, running, discus, and the various bodily exercises…all of the festivals of this sort are expensive only insofar as one wishes them to be, and the gathering alone renders them quite significant…the people are lively, gay, tender; their hearts are then in their eyes as they are always on their lips…all societies constitute but one, all become common to all.[90]

Rousseau keenly understood the stabilizing effect military spectacle-like games could have in masking the true identity conflicts one finds in a political State with little to no real political or economic equality.[91] The NFL performs this function today in the National Security State by creating a fictional battle-complete with its own warriors, that normalizes violence into liberal culture, while simultaneously masking the real effects of it by enveloping its citizens into one mass audience united in celebration of militarist spectacle. The NFL aids the countersubversive in the National Security State by providing a site where the practitioner of demonology can raise the specter of alien

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[89] Ibid. 12.

[90] J.J. Rousseau, *Politics and the Arts: Letter to M. D'Alermbert on the Theatre*, trans. Alan Bloom (Cornell University Press, 1960), 127.

[91] In a footnote in his letter he notes that one ought to give the ruled "the festivals, offer them the amusements which will make them like their stations and prevent them from craving a sweeter one." See *Politics and the Arts*, 126.

penetration—fictional or real—and mobilize the public into a defiant mass, as well as recharge the State's superpower in crises of legitimacy. It is conscious of this role and embraces it openly in its own videography and in its open relationship with members of the Security State. It is war, and it isn't with guns, but everything else is the same.

CHAPTER 2

VALUATION OF HIEARCHICAL ORDER: THE NFL'S PASTORAL IDEAL

"The NFL has…stability commensurate with its unparalleled success. Each NFL team that fortifies the league rim has a personality as distinctive as its uniform. Yet there is an unwavering commitment to preserving the integrity of the whole."
—"This is the NFL 2008-2009" [92]

"On this day, we gather because we have chosen hope over fear, unity of purpose over conflict and discord."—Barack Obama, Inaugural Address[93]

In *Autumn Ritual*, George Will argues the appeal of the NFL comes from its ability to reintroduce the "heroic dimension" back to the "dreadful tranquility" of modern ordered life by offering a product that combines violence punctuated by committee meetings."[94] Will's observation is important as it concerns the NFL's relation to the countersubversive tradition because it articulates the task the countersubversive faces in affirming hierarchical relations of power by constructing myths that appeal to liberal sensibilities of individuality, while simultaneously assuring the audience remains passive and subject to the paternal orderings by which they are governed. As Rogin states, the power of film and mass media more generally as a surveillance tool comes from its power to absorb a viewer into the fictional world while also acknowledging to some extent the reality of the ideal figures it presents.

> The split between the star's life on-and off-screen is joined to another division within film itself. The moviegoer not only sees an ideal self; he or she also observes forbidden acts that can be enjoyed at a distance, protecting the ideal self

[92] "This is the NFL 2008-2009" National Football League (2008).

[93] President Barack Obama, *Inaugural Address* January 21, 2009.

[94] *Autumn Ritual.*

> from contamination. In that mode the motion picture viewer resembles the surveillant. Voyeurism protects the self from both participation and observation.[95]

In simpler terms, media's surveillance power, that is, *its power to act as a sort of overseer of general opinion on political issues*, is derived from its ability to allow the average viewer to experience the lives of those in higher stations without having to give them the real spaces of participation in which to achieve them. It ensures the continued maintenance of the hierarchies of society by allowing people to experience their mythic power vicariously. NFL films serve as an agent of surveillance for the countersubversive practitioner in this capacity by creating programming with narratives about owners, executives, and coaches that emphasizes particular personality traits representative of a type of nostalgia which depicts them as leaders in a protective, paternal world, what Rogin refers to as the pastoral hero characterization.[96] The need for the idyllic political pastoral hero comes from the desire to tame the wilderness of uncertainty that comes from political modernization. While in past literature this was emphasized through iconography such as the West and the childlike, cannibalistic Indian incapable of self-governance, in the case of NFL filmography, the dangers of the wilderness are represented by the players, who in their own on-and-off the field depictions are shown as childlike, violent, and incapable of great performance absent the paternal surveillance provided by the pastoral leader embodied in the coaches, owners and executives in the League hierarchy. The power of NFL programming as a surveillance mechanism operates by first bringing the viewer into the lives of the NFL's actors while affixing

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[95] Rogin, 297.

[96] Rogin, 181.

characteristics to them that represent a particular American political nostalgia which affirms a paternalistic world.

In examining these facets of the NFL as a hierarchy-affirming surveillance tool, I look at the NFL-films produced *NFL's Greatest Players and Coaches*, noting how the characteristics that define the "greatness" of owners and executives—chiefly paternal surveillance and leadership, align with the qualities inherent in pastoral heroism. I then examine clips of NFL players from *Autumn Ritual* as well the Super Bowl XXIX and XXXI, paying attention to how the players are ascribed characteristics that necessitate a pastoral figure's authority over them. I then examine how the pastoral ideal is portrayed in head coaches, paying particular attention to how the Foucualdian concept of normalization, which creates systems of evaluation that induce conformity through discipline of the body, are lauded as evidence of a coach's greatness as a pastoral figure. I conclude by demonstrating how these characterizations affect the viewer's larger perception and acquiescence to paternal ordering hierarchy in actual political presentation.

The Greatest: Owners and Executives as Pastoral Heroes

The segment of "The Greatest Players and Coaches" film which examines coaches and executives begins with a brief scene of a faded locker room and the title logo "The Men Behind the Men." The scene cuts to a close-up of a flag of the NFL shield flying in the wind. The shot pans out to show the NFL flag parallel to the American flag at Soldier Field in Chicago as the narrator states, "The NFL flag flies highest over Chicago, Illinois." The shot fades to the lone figure of late Chicago Bears owner and founder George Halas, whom the narrator calls "one of the most important men in the

history of pro football." The next minute of film contains footage of Halas' accomplishments as an owner and coach, mixing decades-old footage with commentary by Halas on his founding of the franchise. Over footage of Hall of Fame players like Dick Butkus, the narrator notes that it was Halas' ability to "produce" players and defenses that could "strangle and mangle opponents" which made him a successful coach and the "father of pro-football." The scene ends with an interview with the late Hall of Fame running back Red Grange discussing Halas' numerous roles within the Bears organization, concluding, "he was a one man gang."[97]

The next scene begins with a close-up of late Pittsburgh Steelers founder and owner Art Rooney. The narrator states "Art Rooney was the patriarch of the Pittsburgh Steelers and one of pro football's most revered owners." After a successive sequence of shots detailing Rooney's management of the Steelers from one of the worst franchises in the game to "one of the greatest," the film cuts to footage of the Steelers' victory in Super Bowl IX and an interview with former Steelers' linebacker Andy Russell relating how after the Steelers' first Super Bowl victory he realized he had to give the game ball to "The Chief." The narrator then states, "He won four Super Bowls, but it was his generosity and love for his players that set him apart from other owners….he was a man as great outside of the game as he was inside of it, a true man of the people." The scene cuts to an interview with Hall of Fame Defensive Tackle Joe Greene who remarks that Rooney "knew every player…he didn't talk to you and look away, not look you in the eye, and he did that when he walked through the community. His community."

[97] *The Greatest Players and Coaches* DVD, produced by Todd Schmidt (2006; Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video).

These opening scenes of the "Men Behind the Men" segment are important in that they suggest to the audience the importance of pastoral qualities and how deeply they are intertwined with surveillance and order. The title of the segment establishes that the "greatness" of men is overseen by other men—individuals operating behind the scenes who, through their surveillance of those lower than them, mold a chaotic mass into something functional. As Rogin notes, one of the characteristics of the pastoral hero archetype in American politics is his ability to "create domestic national order and purpose" in the same vein as earlier leaders conquered nature in the nineteenth century. The modern model of technological liberal reform reflects pastoral childhood dreams of patriarchal control over uncertain frontiers.[98]

In the case of the scene on George Halas, the close-up of the NFL flag running parallel to the American flag that "flies highest" over the home of the "father of pro-football" not only creates the perception of the equivalency of the NFL to the American State (much as the militaristic and nationalistic imagery did in the previously studied Super Bowl films), but also locates the power of the NFL's founding in a lone patriarchal figure, analogous to the 19th Century frontiersmen entering and sanctifying the wilderness or the Progressive Era reformer instilling discipline on a burgeoning empire and the new domestic corporate-capitalist system.[99] The interview with Red Grange in which Halas is described as a "one man gang" who oversees and "takes care of" every aspect of the franchise from the ticket sales to the police at Wrigley Field, combine with the shots of a solitary Halas walking on Soldier Field to complete the transformation of the owner into

[98] Rogin, 187-188.

[99] See Rogin, 184 for a more complete discussion of the transition from frontier pastoralism to Progressive Era pastoralism.

the idyllic hero by creating a dramaturgical impression based on popular characterisitcs associated with effective authority.[100]

Linguist George Lakoff notes that the moral authority of the patriarchal figure is derived in part from the authority figure's ability to know what is best for the community and the person subject to authority as well as the social recognition that the authority figure has responsibility for the well-being of the community and the person subject to authority.[101] The scene on Art Rooney shows how his success as an owner and his moral authority are derived from his ability to purportedly "know" every player and to walk through "his community." It is through this knowing, achieved through the surveillance of the team (which in the narrative becomes his community), that the "patriarch" of the Steelers is able to achieve success. Of course, as the narrator's statement about Rooney being "set apart" from other owners implies, his surveillance needs to be perceived as a virtue that works for a greater community. It must not only be equated with the success of victory but also have a moral quality that demonstrates an overall unity of form that makes an entity strong and resistant to uncertain pressure—what Lakoff refers to as "Moral Wholeness."[102] This particular characteristic, while not particularly elaborated on in the film, is a fixture of media coverage of the Rooney family, coverage of the Steelers'

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[100] As Edelman points out, these traits are contrived, stylistic orientations that mask the "intolerable" reality of "accident, of ignorance, and of unplanned processes in their [people's] affairs"—essentially all the traits the pastoral tradition tries to downplay. See *Symbolic Uses*, 78-81.

[101] George Lakoff, *Moral Politics: How Liberals and Conservatives Think* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 78.

[102] Ibid., 90.

prior to their Super Bowl XLIII appearance noting "The Rooney name is synonymous with stability, which is rare in the era of the quick fix."[103]

If NFL owners are depicted as having moral authority primarily through their ability to survey and order the nascent communities that their football teams represent, executives are shown as deriving their moral authority from the capacity to take these communities and become leaders who innovate while maintaining the traditions of surveillance first established by patriarchs like Halas and Rooney. In the case of NFL executives, this is evidenced in the scene focusing on the first two commissioners of the League, Bert Bell and Pete Rozelle. The segment on Burt Bell opens with a wide shot of a crowd gathered in Narbeth, Pennsylvania where against the backdrop of red, white and blue bunting, a plaque is unveiled honoring his historic accomplishments. The scene cuts to a close-up of former Eagles president Harry Gamble noting how Bert Bell "did it all. He sold the tickets. He coached the team. And he brought the gate receipts home in a cigar box." There is then a cut to former Eagles center Chuck Bednarik, a close-up of Bell's face behind him saying "the old-timers know and I hope these guys playing today remember a guy by the name of Bert Bell. If it wasn't for him you wouldn't be a millionaire." The next five shots are of various executives and journalists as well as Bell's daughter, all commenting on Bell's personal characteristics as they related to establishing the League. Of particular note are comments made by a former executive and one sports journalist. Former Raider's executive Al LoCasale states "Bert Bell was a guy

[103] This particular article is illuminating in how the Rooney family itself uses language that comports nicely with the concept of moral authority. For example, Rita Rooney notes how her father, Dan Rooney (Art Rooney's son) instilled "many solid values in his family about hard work, perseverance, and faith." The article also notes how Dan Rooney still "circles the locker room" at the end of each game to interact with all the players, again reaffirming the power of surveillance as a necessary quality of moral authority. See Mike Reiss, "Family Ties: Rooneys, Steelers are United" Boston Globe January 29, 2009.

who, for the first time, people could point to in football, as they had in baseball with [former Baseball Commissioner] Landis and they knew who was in charge." Journalist Larry Merchant, when discussing Bell's draft system,[104] notes that "it led us to a future where New York was not the center of the universe anymore…that you could play in Green Bay or anywhere else and become a national figure." His daughter Jane says, "He dearly loved the football players. He would always conclude his talks with the teams with, 'this is my home phone number. If you have any problems at all, you can call me at anytime of the day or night.'" The scene on Bell ends with a return to the speech by Gamble, stating "he targeted all his hopes and ambitions, his dreams and his struggles to professional football. He took a game and made it America's passion." Interwoven with speech are shots of players from the 1950s to the late 1990s running onto the football field. The segment ends with a shot of an anonymous fan holding a large American flag as the shot pans down to the football field.[105]

The segment immediately following the profile on Bell begins with a marching procession of banners of each NFL team's logo. The narrator states, "While Bert Bell made the NFL a popular sport, Commissioner Pete Rozelle made it number one, replacing baseball as America's favorite pastime." The next shot shows an upward angle of a flagpole with the United States', State of California's, and the NFL's flags all flying in the wind. Over stills of Rozelle shaking hands with various owners, Hall of Fame Cowboys President Tex Schramm says "He [Rozelle] was able to accomplish things because he was able to bring diverse groups of egotistical, strong-minded owners and

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[104] Ironically, the draft Bell is praised for was also seen as an attack on players' rights to the freedom of their labor. See Oriard, 62.

[105] *The Greatest Players and Coaches.*

managers together and do things that were necessary for the betterment of the League—not necessarily the individual clubs and he was the glue—he made it work." As Schramm talks about Rozelle's creation of the Super Bowl and his ability to turn it into an "international event," a wide stadium shot cuts to close-ups of telecasters from around the world touting the game. As shots of Rozelle conferring with various players, owners and coaches such as Vince Lombardi roll, former Giants' General Manager George Young states, "If you think in terms of egos of coaches and egos of players, egos of player union and egos of owners, and having to massage all the different people he's had to massage and then to have some policies that move you in the same direction that's a great accomplishment." As a still of Rozelle meeting with Lyndon Johnson is shown, Young states, "I mean politicians don't last that long—who lasts in office 30 years having to do that kind of massaging and manipulating? The scene ends with an interview with late 49ers coach Bill Walsh stating" I think he's brought a serenity, a calmness to a sport that obviously has violence and is so competitive that sometimes the worst side of people show. He's brought grace and style to that and if the public has been more responsive to the National Football League it's because of Pete Rozelle."

The scenes on the NFL's first two commissioners demonstrate at once the political necessity and paradoxes of leadership as a political symbol. As Edelman notes the central connotation of leadership is innovation: leaders point the way so that others can emulate their initiatives. At the same time, political leaders must conform to widely held ideology in order to succeed and maintain their higher office. Yet it is these apparent contradictions that give the symbol of the leader its great political utility. Leaders win their acclaim (and thus their authority) and their followers gain their reassurance and

hope through courses of action that reaffirm accepted ideologies while connoting boldness, intelligence, change, and paternal protection. Leaders, in essence, become symbolic representations which make a complex and largely unknowable world understandable by becoming objectifications of whatever pleases or worries observers because it is easy to identify with them, support or oppose them, love or hate them.[106]

This concept is played out in the scene on Bert Bell first through the framing of the commissioner as a political hero, as evidenced by the public honoring of the man complete with the requisite red, white, and blue décor, and then through the rhetorical emphasis on Bell as a paternal surveillance figure who, much like the one-man gang Halas, "did it all" when it came to running the League. Moreover, his "love" for the football players and his willingness to give his phone number out can be seen as analogous to Art Rooney's ability to "know" every player in "his community." In this way, the tradition of surveillance established by the patriarchs Halas and Rooney is carried on by Bell while at the same time he is praised for leading the NFL into the future by creating a system where players could become national figures and the League could become more profitable.

The leadership frame is completed by the comments from Bednarik and LoCasale, who speak of Bell as an objectification of the leadership traits of change and accountability respectively. Bednarik's admonishment to younger players about their wealthy status being owed to Bell can be seen as a projection of the change characteristic of leadership put onto Bell even if such a frame does not align with actual history.[107]

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[106] Edelman, 37-39.

[107] As Michael Oriard's detailed documentation of NFL labor history in *Brand NFL* makes clear, the rise in players' salaries had much more to do with outside competition from startup leagues (the AFL, WFL,

LoCasale's comments about Bell being a figure people could point to and know was in charge are important in that the assumption of responsibility is key. In a world where general uncertainty is the rule, people who feel burdened by the responsibility of making difficult choices about their own lives and the lives of others can transfer that onus on to the leader.[108] Understood this way, Gamble's concluding remark that Bell "targeted all his hopes and ambitions, his dreams and his struggles" to the NFL is, in fact, a projection of the collective struggles of a burgeoning sports league onto one man who becomes the symbol of effective leadership for his organization.

If the qualities of the executive as leader frame are established in the Bell scene, they are solidified if not reified in the scene on Pete Rozelle. The opening shots of the marching NFL banners and waving flags can be seen to represent the League's cultural power as a fictional military arm of the American State as well as the visual placement of the NFL as America's pastime. Like the scene on Bell, these shots (along with the still of Rozelle with President Johnson) also depict Rozelle as not only a sports figure but a political figure as well. What reifies Rozelle as a model political leader for the League is the imagery and language used in regard to how he managed the League hierarchy. As Edelman notes, it is expected that the top executive in every large-scale organization will periodically proclaim his willingness, even eagerness to take personal responsibility for the acts of subordinates. Such an approach helps strengthen the leader's authority by

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USFL), and bitter League-NFLPA struggles that involved three strikes (1974, 1982, and 1987) as well as several court decisions.

[108] Edelman, *Constructing the Political Spectacle* (1988: Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press), 39.

ascribing the ability to cope to the leader while protecting subordinates from accountability or blame for incompetence or inability to perform their functions.[109]

As the comments by Schramm, Young, and Walsh indicate it was precisely Rozelle's ability to assume (or at least project) responsibility that made him an effective leader for the NFL. Schramm's comments about Rozelle's ability to be "the glue" which bonded diverse "strong minded" owners and managers together for the betterment of the League is an acknowledgment of Rozelle's ability to assume responsibility for the inability of subordinate pieces of the League and to overcome conflicts of narrow self-interest in order to better its standing in the public mind and consumer market. Young's comments and the shots of Rozelle conversing with coaches, in boardrooms and on the sidelines, articulate the specifics of how Rozelle was able to assuage the subordinate parts of the NFL (owners, coaches, players) by "manipulating and massaging" their egos through his administrative responsibilities as the NFL's chief executive. Using the power of the administrative agency allows adversary groups to oppose each other in a forum which replaces tension with a measure of clarity, meaning confidence, and security.[110] By assuming the responsibility of being an iconic administrative figurehead for the League, Rozelle was able to allow conflicts to be resolved by injecting his personal characteristics into the administrative process, thus manipulating disparate subordinate parts into some semblance of unity of purpose.[111] As Young's comments infer, his success in doing so, and in turn his success as a political leader as opposed to failed political leaders like

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[109] Edelman, *Symbolic Uses* 79.

[110] Ibid., 61.

[111] As Oriard notes, Rozelle had a public relations background prior to his assumption of the role of commissioner and was obsessed with the appearance of "integrity" within the game throughout his tenure, *Brand NFL*, 11-15.

Johnson), is measured by the length of his incumbency, which connotes an ability to act when others are bewildered.[112]

Bill Walsh's comments complete the frame of Rozelle as a reified leader by throwing them against the Hobbesian backdrop the NFL operates under. Like G. Gordon Liddy beforehand, Walsh reaffirms the view that the NFL is a dramaturgical representation of Hobbes' state of war, punctuated by violence and competition, in need of some force to inspire awe in order to bring together its anarchic parts. However, in an organizational form which rests to some degree on consent of its membership (be it an association like the NFL or a liberal State), the Hobbesian prescription of direct terror becomes unfeasible, therefore a leader must find other means by which to gain the acquiescence of those who would be subordinated to him. As the comments from Schramm, Young, and Walsh indicate, the perception of Rozelle was that he was able to overcome the egos of disparate parts of the League by transposing his personality onto the organization. In doing so he was assuming responsibility for the public face of the League which, in turn, allowed him to manipulate potentially antagonistic subordinates with assurances that, in accepting his policies, they were assuaging themselves of responsibility for any of their individual actions, which would otherwise have damaged the perceived integrity of the game.

What is particularly noteworthy about the efficacy of this type of leadership is that its uses passivity rather than aggression to accomplish its goals. As previously noted, Hobbesian understanding of unity implies the direct use of force in order to keep individuals together through fear. The passive leadership style as exemplified by Rozelle,

[112] Edelman, *Symbolic Uses*, 76.

by contrast, relies largely on appearance and downplaying of controversy to achieve consensus. As stated by Edelman, this style consists of the avoidance of firm positions on controversial subjects while at the same time posturing as a protagonist against an evanescent enemy, thereby retaining or increasing political support from large numbers of antagonists on both sides of controversies. Edelman sees Eisenhower and Kennedy as exemplars of this style in the modern presidency.

> Such a leader may declare he will support the law of the land while refusing to endorse the morality of the Supreme Court desegregation decision. He may, like Kennedy, firmly and frequently declare that government has a responsibility to support prosperity and quicken economic growth while refraining from embarking on controversial economic policies to increase productivity or cut unemployment. The chief executive may maintain his 'symbolic leadership' through ascriptions of his ability to cope, through publicized action on noncontroversial policies or on trivia, and through a dramaturgical performance emphasizing traits popularly associated with leadership…[113]

In the case of Rozelle, much of his ability to manage egos came from his ability to present himself as a guardian against the evanescent threats to the integrity of the game (gambling, labor unrest, drug abuse), while essentially doing very little to address the substance of the perceived threats, leaving such tasks to subordinates or producing comparatively mild sanctions or investigations into these issues.[114] It is perhaps not

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[113] Ibid., 81.

[114] In *Brand NFL,* Oriard points to numerous instances where Rozelle took rather passive stands in order to protect the "integrity of the game" (a phrase he himself coined). In the case of players gambling, in 1963 Rozelle suspended defensive tackle Alex Karras and All-Pro RB Paul Hornung for the entire season for betting on their own teams. Rozelle's move nabbed him *Sports Illustrated's* "Sportsman of the Year" Honor for being a "strong commissioner" while ignoring the fact that gambling among players was routine and widespread throughout the 1950s and 1960s.

In the case of aforementioned labor struggles, Oriard notes that Rozelle took pains to remain neutral despite the fact that the biggest impetus for labor strife came largely came from the ironically-named "Rozelle Rule," which essentially allowed the Commissioner to block players from freely moving to other teams. It would not be until after Rozelle's resignation in 1989 that the NFL would achieve labor peace following labor's victory in the *Powell vs. NFL* case and the 1993 accord between the NFLPA and the League. In the case of drugs in the 1980s a series of high profile media reports and arrests led to a

surprising then, in the scene speaking of Rozelle's ability to last longer than most politicians, that he is juxtaposed against Lyndon Johnson, a failed political leader who pursued controversial domestic (particularly progressive racial) and foreign policies that, rather than glossing over the concerns of potential antagonists with "grace and style," took them head on into political ruin. As Walsh's comments make clear, Rozelle succeeded because he made the public more responsive to the NFL through the *appearance* of calmness and serenity. Thus in a tumultuous time of numerous scandals and evidence that the game as both sport itself and as a cultural icon was suffering from severe structural issues that could damage its legitimacy, not to mention the bodies of the players that made it popular in the first place, Rozelle came across as a responsive executive who remained positive about his product in spite of it all. Such a frame is a marked contrast from the one ascribed to the foundation of the League as entertainment—its players.

Pastoral Objects: The Primitive Player

As noted by Rogin, the countersubversive tradition, which defines itself against alien threats to the American way of life and sanctions violent and/or exclusionary policies towards them, began with a fear of "primitivism and disorder" in response to the peoples of color that inhabited the continent as natives or slaves. In the case of the Indian in early America, they came to embody the "masterless men," emblematic of chaos who,

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public perception of widespread abuse in the NFL of drugs such as amphetamines and cocaine. While a mandatory drug-testing policy was implemented under Rozelle, arrests continued and at no time was there much investigation of the connection between drug use and the very real, sometimes life-threatening damage that the game itself was inflicting on players. In all three instances, Rozelle's strength to weather the NFL through the controversies came through his ability to publicly appear to be able to cope with problems without ever addressing the substantive roots of them. As Oriard concludes, Rozelle, unable to solve the League's real problems, "focused on maintaining a public image that ignored them." See Oriard, 13-15, 60-64,115-120, 139.

in European culture represented the breakdown of traditional society. Allegedly living without government and freed from European constraints of family, church, and village, they were depicted as "idle, wandering savages" who engaged in incest, cannibalism, devil worship and murder.[115] And while some early writers wrote of the nobility of the savage, it was never divorced from the needs of the white American power structure.

> Both images of primitivism appropriated Indians for white purposes. Both made the Indians children of nature instead of creators and inhabitants of their own cultures…Neither the noble nor the devilish savage could coexist with the advancing of white civilization. Both images rationalized the dispossession of the tribes.[116]

Similarly, blacks, who were often stereotyped as sexual predators, also posed a primitive threat to the social order—though not through the threat of freedom but the threat of reversing labor dependency.[117] While some of the nastier illustrations of these particular cases have to some degree been downplayed in popular culture as time has progressed, the base fears of primitivism and social upheaval they were associated with are still well at work within popular culture today and particularly evident in NFL filmography as it concerns the foundation of the NFL as popular entertainment—its players.

Evidence of this notion is found in the beginning of the *Autumn Ritual* documentary and "The Road to the Super Bowl" segments in the Super Bowl XXIX, and XXXI recaps. *Autumn Ritual* begins with a stock footage shot of a naked African child walking out of a hut. The shot then cuts to Oakland Raiders players walking out of a

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[115] Rogin, 45.

[116] Ibid. 46.

[117] Ibid. 51.

locker room tunnel onto the football field. The next 20 seconds alternate between successive shots of tribal children engaged various activities (face painting, marching, chanting, and violent play) and NFL players doing nearly mirror actions. Later, former Bengals coach Sam Wyche talks about the ritual of offensive linemen known as "grazing" where players would stand around prior to game time. His description coincides with close-up shots of players chewing gum which then cuts to footage of an Ox chewing cud. Conservative theologian Michael Novak then remarks that one of the great appeals of football is its "celebration of the elemental physical life, the elemental lusts and hates and fears." He states "beyond any theory of enlightenment or liberalism or rationality there are enacted in football elemental passions and elemental desires." Over his words are shots of players involved in fights, violent tackles, and aggressive entrances onto the playing field.[118]

Novak's comments are provocative in that they illuminate the paradox the countersubversive faces in the creation of texts: on the one hand, it is the showcasing of the primitive or the elemental which often gives a text its mass appeal. On the other hand, it is precisely these elemental passions, what Rogin calls "the regressive impulses" to the primitive or communal versus the independent and isolated which the countersubversive practitioner seeks to combat. This paradox is reconciled by presenting otherwise appealing primitive characters as child-like or animalistic and in need of some parental figure. In the case of the *Autumn Ritual* narrative, the film draws parallels between football players as primitive children or animals who thrive on aggression. This

[118] *Autumn Ritual.*

conception is expanded upon in "The Road to the Super Bowl Recaps" for games XXIX and XXXI respectively.

The "Road to the Super Bowl" segment for Super Bowl XXIX includes a segment on what is deemed the "maturing" process of an NFL quarterback, particularly the "emotional pressures" they endure. As a shot of a young Brett Favre being sacked is shown, the narrator notes that a quarterback "must learn to crawl" before he can run, and that when he "takes those first steps, he is like a puppy dog chasing his tail." The scene cuts to then-Packers coach Mike Holmgren exasperated at Favre, telling him to settle down. The narrator states, with "Mike Holmgren's help Brett Favre finally reached football puberty."[119] The message is clear. Absent the paternal authority of a coach, a player is limited in intelligence or capability and cannot grow to the potential needed for his position.

It is further honed in the "Road to the Super Bowl" for Super Bowl XXXI in a segment entitled "The Sting." The segment begins with NFL films President Steve Sabol explaining how "head coaches were expected to win with new players and many of those players were not easy to coach." The segment then cuts to successive shots of players like Deion Sanders dancing on the field, Brett Favre playing air guitar, a Cowboys lineman calling himself 'sexy,' and two Bills players embracing and kissing each other on the cheek. The narrator states, "Today's NFL player is high-profile, a product of free agency and freedom of expression.[120] He is self-assured, sheltered, and sensitive." The next sequence of shots shows players with face paint, afro-hair styles, and coach Marty

[119] "Superbowl XXIX" in *Super Bowl XXI-XXX Collector's Set*. Executive Producer Steve Sabol (New York: NFL Films, 2004).

[120] This could be seen as a subtle shot at the players' labor battles against the League in which they invoked freedom and rights as rallying cries.

Schottenheimer angrily pointing out to a player on the sideline that he has an earring on. The segment ends with the narrator stating "each year it gets tougher to build a team for the embattled head coach."[121] Like the Super Bowl XXIX segment, "The Sting" shows the players as having childlike qualities of egotism and sensitivity that need to be overcome by embattled head coaches. The painted faces, wild hairdos, and dances invoke the specter of primitivism first shown in the juxtaposition of shots of tribal children and players in *Autumn Ritual*.

"The Sting" segment also adds the threat of sexuality into the primitive fear narrative. Players, in the case of the shots here, all African American players, are shown expressing sexuality ("I'm sexy") and in the case of the Bills players what could be interpreted as a homosexual act. Such scenes not only evoke (however subtly) the already ingrained stereotype which associated blacks and sexual deviancy, but also challenge the pastoral/Strict Father frame by challenging the base assumption that sex is heterosexual sex in which men are dominant over women and that this natural order carries over to the moral order.[122] Men affirming feminine qualities become part of what is "embattling" to the paternal figure, in this case the head coach. In framing the players as childlike, sexual and primitive the narratives of these segments reinforce the necessity of the hierarchical structure the League, as well as most corporate-capitalist enterprises operates under. Without it, sensitive, sheltered workers would revert to primitive, anarchic tendencies. A figure is required who can justify or neutralize these tendencies by acting on the bodies and minds of the players—in the case of the NFL, the head coach.

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[121] "Super Bowl XXXI" in *Super Bowl XXXI-XL Collector's Set*. Executive Producer Steve Sabol (New York: NFL Films, 2006).

[122] Lakoff, 225.

Head Coaches and the Process of Normalization

Returning to the "Men Behind the Men" segment in the *NFL's Greatest Players and Coaches*, I have shown how different parts in the NFL hierarchy derive their authority in the tradition of pastoral heroes. For owners, moral authority is derived through the power to order new frontiers through the surveillance of the nascent communities they found. For executives, moral authority is derived from their capacity to be seen as leaders who innovate on the foundations set forth by the patriarchs while simultaneously keeping up the appearance of tradition and integrity of the game often through the passive projection of responsibility and ability to cope with outside threats. For the coach, often the most visible position in the NFL hierarchy, moral authority is derived from the ability to create systems of normalization which, in turn, docilize players so they can be molded into successful teams. Of the coaches profiled in the "Men Behind the Men" segment, two stand out as the exemplars of these qualities: Paul Brown and Chuck Knoll.

Paul Brown and the Creation of Normalization

The scene on Paul Brown opens with a black and white still of the late coach as the narrator states, "Paul Brown was one of the greatest coaches in pro-football history." Over grainy footage of an old Cleveland Browns game, the narrator states "all football came from Amos Alonzo Stagg [the first paid coach in American football history], but pro football came from Paul Brown." Over alternating black and white shots of Brown on the sidelines, doing calisthenics with his players and watching as players hit dummies in practices, the narrator states, "Brown was also a great innovator. He called all the

Browns' plays and used messenger guards to shuttle in his calls. His training techniques were light-years ahead of his contemporaries, and his summer camps were laboratories for experimentation that ultimately became NFL titles. For player safety, he invented the facemask. Everything he did resulted in victories."

As the scene turns to color shots following the recollection of Brown becoming owner and coach of the Cincinnati Bengals, there is a cut to an interview with Hall of Fame running back Jim Brown who says, "I was happy to play for Paul Brown because Paul was very strict. He was the king. All you had to do was deal with him and if you dealt with him successfully, then you didn't have to worry about the other guys." The Brown clip then cuts to an interview with Hall of Fame running back Bobby Mitchell saying "with myself, he would always say little things like, 'maybe you're not good enough Bobby Mitchell—you keep hurting our football team.' So then I'd go out there and take it 60. The scene then shifts back to grainy footage of a Cleveland Browns back running for a touchdown as the narrator remarks, "Brown was a demanding taskmaster, who saw a multitude of sins not only in defeat but in victory." The scene the returns to the interview with Mitchell who says, "He'd come in and walk in front of the group, and he'd say 'we'll go over what we did wrong in the game'—he'd take out this piece of paper and it would drop all the way to the floor and I said, 'gee we just beat these guys 38-0.'"

The scene then cuts to an interview with Hall of Fame quarterback Otto Graham. Graham states, "Over the years, there were times that I loved him. There are times that I hated him." As the scene cuts to black and white footage of Brown in front of a chalkboard lecturing players, Graham states, "But when I went into coaching myself, I

found myself doing exactly the same things he used to do, saying some of the same things he used to say." The segment ends with Brown marching down the sideline of an empty stadium, with Graham saying "playing for Paul Brown and the Cleveland Browns was probably the best thing that ever happened to me."

Chuck Knoll: Normalization Perfected

The scene on Chuck Knoll begins with a slow, upward pan on a still of Knoll surrounded by four Super Bowl trophies. The narrator states, "Chuck Knoll won the most Superbowls of any headcoach, but in his rookie year in 1969, he inherited one of the worst franchises in NFL history. The Steelers were dubbed the lovable losers." After a grainy color close-up of Knoll, the scene cuts to an interview with linebacker Andy Russell who says, "The first meeting with Chuck Knoll, we had a lot of cynical, old veteran players, who'd seen a lot of coaches come and go and there was sort of this attitude, 'Show me your stuff coach." As the segment cuts to footage of Knoll putting players through practice drills, Russell says, "He gave a speech where he was essentially saying, 'Look, the reason you've been losing has nothing to do with your attitude. The reason you're losing is you're not good enough. You can't run fast enough, you're not quick enough. You're not skilled enough…He said, "I'm gonna get rid of most of you, I'm gonna bring in the guys who can play these defenses. They're gonna be harder—I'm gonna make you do the hard stuff."

The segment then cuts to a close-up of a retired Knoll saying, "We say 'whatever it takes, and a lot of people have different meanings for that. But what it meant for us was, as members of a team, you have to do whatever you can do to help the team win." The segment cuts to shots of various Steelers making violent tackles and difficult

receptions as Knoll says, “Now if someone else is not functioning very well, they may be sick…someone else has to step up. ‘Whatever it takes’ means team, and I think our guys bought into that.” The segment cuts to shots of the Steelers victory in Super Bowl IX as they narrator states, “In Super Bowl IX, Knoll’s Steelers used defense and the running game to defeat the Minnesota Vikings. It then cuts to shots of the Steelers’ two Super Bowl victories over the Cowboys win and the Rams, where the narrator states “his Steelers cemented their legacy as the team of the 70’s.” The scene ends with the Steelers’ huddled around Knoll as Andy Russell says, “Coach Knoll would always say, ‘If they’re trying to fool you, that means they can’t beat you with their best stuff, they’re desperate. Just line up and say, ‘Come on.’ That was Chuck Knoll.”

The process of normalization, as defined by Foucault, seeks to instill docility through a micro-economy of penal mechanisms.

> It differentiates individuals from one another, in terms of following the overall rule: that the rule be made to function as a minimal threshold, as an average to be respected or as an optimum towards which one must move. It measures in quantitative terms and hiearchizes in terms of value of the abilities, the level, the ‘nature’ of individuals. It introduces, through this ‘value-giving’ measure, the constraint of a conformity that must be achieved. Lastly, it traces the limit that will define difference in relation to all other differences, the external frontier of the abnormal.[123]

The process of normalization can be seen in both the scenes on Brown and Knoll. The narration in the scene on Brown practically reads as a tribute to normalization techniques. The shots of Brown leading his players in callisthenic exercises and in training camp demonstrate the quantitative systems of measurement (ultimately resultant in “victories”) Brown created to establish the minimum threshold for acceptable

[123] Foucault, 183.

performance as it concerned the body of each player. The narrator's remark that Brown was a "demanding taskmaster" who saw a "multitude of sins" in both wins and losses seeks to frame Brown's behavior and coaching technique in religious light—perhaps unsurprising since it was religious orders who were the first to truly experiment with the disciplinary techniques of supervision and management of time in relation to the bodily subject.[124] The narrative legitimizes Brown's authority by linking it to older, presumably more omniscient forms of the same disciplinary practice.

The interviews with Mitchell, Brown, and Graham provide the qualitative evidence as to how these instruments of normalization are internalized by the object of discipline—in this case the players. The remarks by Bobby Mitchell, whose recollection of Brown saying he "was not good enough" and "hurting our football team" inspired him to then make a big play demonstrates how creating limits of difference in performance seek to reorient what the disciplinarian sees as inadequate measurements of value back into the optimal level of docility or minimum threshold of acceptable performance. In addition, his recollection of Brown pulling out a list of all the things the team "did wrong" even in a decisive victory shows how specific and explicit the economy of discipline is in terms of creating spaces that provide fixed positions and establish operational links between the potentially disparate parts[125] of a larger corporate body like a team.

Furthermore, Jim Brown's affirmation of Brown's strictness and his acknowledgment that the coach was "the king" illustrates how normalization reorients the

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[124] Ibid., 150.

[125] Foucault, 148.

power relationship of the player-coach from one that could be adversarial to one that makes the disciplinary object respect and assign a high political value to the disciplinarian. The normalizing tactic of value assignment thus works to not only create a system of differentiation which docilizes players but also instills obedience by allowing players to assign higher values to those above them. Ultimately, these scenes assign a moral authority to Brown that corresponds to paternalistic qualities embodied in the pastoral tradition—analogous to what Lakoff refers to as the Strict-Father model of morality. The ability of Brown to produce players through the construction of strict normalization schemes demonstrates the notion inherent in the pastoral/Strict Father mythology that the paternal figure must, through his authority, "create more self-disciplined people."[126]

This is best evidenced in the remarks by Graham when he states that, despite his feelings of both love and hate for Brown, playing for him was "one of the best things that ever happened" to him. Graham's note that despite his conflicted feelings towards Brown, when he entered Brown's position he found himself doing many of the same things, speaks to the ability of the disciplinary power to sustain itself by its own mechanisms—constantly replicating itself without having to resort to more extreme corporal forms of control. [127]

Normalization is also the key point of emphasis for the scene on Knoll, albeit with an even more specific fixation on the body as an object of discipline. This is first evidenced by Russell's recollection of Knoll's first speech to the team, which emphasized

[126] Lakoff, 70.

[127] Ibid., 277.

that the team's failure was not due to any deficiency in attitude but rather in the lack of physical regimentation necessary to succeed. Seen this way, Knoll's statements to his team that they couldn't run "fast enough," were not "quick enough," and not "skilled enough" are examples of him establishing a measurable, minimal threshold of a player's value. Failure to live up to these standards would lead to penalization through replacement—"getting rid of" those who are at the limits of abnormality in favor of those who can "do the hard stuff."

The end result of this process of normalization, as evidenced by Knoll's own comments, is a complete docilization of the player's body into conformity with hierarchical prerogatives, and the transformation of the body as an individual unit into a mechanized part of a larger, almost industrial apparatus. Knoll's statement that if someone "is not functioning very well" or is "sick" that "someone else has to step up" might as well have come from a factory manager or corporate manager. Indeed, this latter point has been referred to as the "Taylorization" of the body, depictions of which are rampant throughout commercial sport culture.[128] These depictions not only reinforce the hierarchy in the sport, but the industrial-administrative hierarchy that most of the viewers are familiar with in reality.

It should not come as a surprise that, in distinction to the scenes on owners and executives, which relied a good deal on close-ups of the subject (concurrent with an authority derived from surveillance power), most of the imagery within the scenes on head coaches maintains a focus on the actual game footage and the players' bodies in motion rather than on the coach himself. The point of emphasis of the coach's authority

[128] Trujillo, 407.

within the game's hierarchy is his ability to produce, through the process of normalization, a "mechanics of power" which defines not only how one may have a hold over others' bodies, but also that they can operate how they wish, with the techniques, speed and efficiency they determine. He increases the force of the body in terms of economic utility while simultaneously diminishing the potential of these bodies to be disobedient.[129] He is the disciplinarian who in the most direct way operates on the bodies which at once prop up the corporate apparatus of the League while also being a point of potential resistance.

In the idealized depiction of the NFL, the power to discipline subordinate parts of the game's hierarchy is exercised through mechanisms of varying visibility and direct action. The owner instills discipline through quiet surveillance of subordinate parts around him. His apparent omnipresence molds behavior of subordinate actors by creating senses of community that allow power to be seen in its face yet unseen in its effect. It is a panoptic discipline.[130] The executive instills discipline in much the same way—by assuming responsibility for and becoming the de facto figurehead of the League, he is creating an artificial person—not unlike the Hobbesian sovereign, who is respected for his ability to defend the organization from internal and external threats to its integrity.[131] In these latter cases, the instilling of discipline is achieved more or less through resigned means. While the executive may have higher visibility than the owner, both employ a

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[129] Foucault, 138.

[130] As Foucault notes the panoptic discipline reverses the traditional conception of obscuring power entirely under the premise that the full lighting and eye of the supervisor capture an individual more effectively than darkness, which is ultimately protected, *Discipline and Punish*, 199.

[131] As Rogin notes, Hobbes derived the power of the Sovereign by merging *theatrical and political* representation. The aim of this artifice was to reverse the natural order and empower not the maker but the construct. In this way, citizens were made to desire the State through the demonization of Hobbes' self created state of nature. See *Ronald Reagan: The Movie*, 298-299.

disciplinary power that is more passive in that it does not act directly on the physical bodies of subordinates. By contrast, the scenes on Brown and Knoll make clear that the head coach instills discipline on the bodies of the lowest subordinate part of the League—the players, through slightly more direct processes of normalization.

Conclusion: Pastoralism as Constructed Necessity

During the pregame broadcast for Super Bowl XLIII, NBC and the NFL aired a live interview with President Obama from the map room in the White House. The President was dressed in a casual work-shirt and slacks. Most of the questions from interviewer Matt Lauer revolved around the president's family life and interest in sports, yet a few dealt with issues of presumed substance. For example, in discussing the president's daily security briefings, Lauer asked, "There are tens of millions of people watching this broadcast right now. If they were to have access to the same information you have now on a daily basis, how much less sleep would we all be getting?" The president responded by stating, "We've got real threats, and we need to remain vigilant, but the quality of our armed forces has never been better. When you meet the people who are charged with keeping America safe it gives you enormous confidence."[132]

The interview is provocative as it concerns the construction of the pastoral ideal in NFL videography not only because it shows an actual political interview taking place in the broadcast space of the League's biggest event (suggesting there is a deeper relationship between the League and political institutions, a topic which will be explored in the following chapter), but in how specifically the president is characterized. Using the map room as a the setting for the interview, having the president dressed in casual attire,

[132] *Super Bowl XLIII Gameday* (February 1, 2009). [Television Broadcast] New York: NBC.

and focusing primarily on the president as a father and husband frames the president as the paternal figure of nostalgic lore while presenting him in way that is voyeuristically accessible to the viewer's frame of reference. Lauer's question regarding the security briefings reaffirms the necessity of the president having exclusivity to his power—for if we all knew what he did we would be sleepless, much like a child who may worry about monsters under the bed. The president's ability to maintain vigilance and his confidence in the hierarchy of people that keeps America safe projects the ability to cope with threats that completes the pastoral figure's importance in maintaining passivity amongst the mass of citizens more generally.

The brief interview demonstrates how much of the pastoral politics found in NFL-films material is easily visible and derived from the political world. In less than 11 minutes, the president is seen as having the paternal vigilance of the NFL patriarchs, the ability to cope and project confidence like commissioners, as well as to normalize a system of hierarchy which places confidence in leadership to protect against threats which the public, in its child-like state (much like the players on a football team) cannot know about. To paraphrase Bill Walsh, the political administrative apparatus, punctuated with uncertainty and violence, is tamed by a sense of calmness and serenity which removes the worst sides of people in favor of the whole.

CHAPTER 3

BEYOND COUNTERSUBVERSION: OTHER LEAGUE STRATEGIES AND CONTESTING FORCES

"In order to gain and to hold the esteem of men it is not sufficient merely to possess wealth or power. The wealth or power must be put in evidence, for esteem is awarded only on evidence."
—Thornstein Veblen[133]

"Arlington is nobody's damn suburb"
— former Arlington, TX Mayor Richard Greene[134]

So far, this study has looked at the dissemination of elements of the countersubversive tradition in NFL filmography and televised content. The reason for this is, as stated before, the prominence of the League as a cultural icon in that medium, as well as the small screen's unique ability to penetrate individuals' psyches both intimately and repeatedly. This does not mean, however, that the propagation of countersubversive belief and *resultant policy* that reflects elements of it are always directly relegated and the resultant transmission of small screen imagery alone. Indeed, to delegate this function exclusively to mass texts like film would mean that the producer of countersubversive material would need to be certain that the viewers would absorb and accept without hesitation the message the countersubversive wishes to convey, rather than create their own counter-meanings. While, as mentioned, recitation of the message may mitigate this

[133]Thornstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class , unabridged* (New York: Dover Publications, 1994), 24.

[134] Mede Nix, "Costas Reference to 'Palace in Dallas irks Alrington Mayor," *Dallas News Blog* September 22, 2009.

possibility, it is not a panacea.[135] Other strategies must be (and are) employed simultaneously with transmission of video texts to reinforce beliefs "on the ground."

Moreover, this study has only briefly touched on the actual policy incentives that induce entities like the NFL to encode countersubversive belief into their cultural texts. For a league that Michael Oriard has noted publicly disavows making political statements,[136] this study suggests there are in fact many political messages being encapsulated in NFL programming. Thus one would expect to find some suggestion of actual policy inducements and political contestation of policies which entice the League to engage in propagation of countersubversive messages in its product that benefits the League's bottom line as a corporate institution. This chapter examines both the question of additional strategies that work with countersubversive propagation and the policy inducements which make it practical for the League to employ them through the issues of public financing of football stadiums and labor struggles. In examining these topics, I hope to show how other strategies and contested politics help shape the League's propagandistic response to a much more complicated political world.

Stadium Politics

In its 2008 season "Kickoff" literature, the League boldly claims that the construction and renovation of football stadiums is a positive boon to communities because, aside from economic benefits of job creation through the stadium itself and "satellite" businesses, new stadiums "become hubs of community activity and sources of

[135] As DeCerteau notes, behind whatever "theatrical décor" of the dominant interpretation of the text lies the transgressive activity of the readers (of television viewers) to make their own meaning without the knowledge of 'the masters.' See *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 172.

[136] Oriard, 23.

civic pride" for those cities who house them[137]. Such hyperbole from the League's most unadulterated propaganda, however attractive to a fan or marketing student, masks the real story of the NFL's political economy, one that relies heavily on the upward redistribution of public revenue to extremely wealthy team owners as well as "satellite" coalitions of corporations and public representatives that support them. Yet the story behind stadium pushes by the League and its corporate-government sponsors is in many ways an outcome to a larger story of highly collectivistic internal economic arrangements which have been the driving impetus behind the League's popularity and conflicts over status that this success has wrought.

As Mark Yost notes in his study of the League's economic success, from its earliest days, the NFL has utilized a system of managed cooperation where both revenue (brought in largely through ever-growing television contracts as well as merchandising agreements and ticket sales) and talent (through the NFL Draft and a strict salary cap) are shared equally throughout the teams so that, "by operating in a quasisocialistic system, the NFL guarantees fans the high-caliber competition that has kept stadium seats filled and television viewers enthralled."[138] As Yost notes, while these touted agreements have created the competitive parity or "Any Given Sunday" appeal that has allowed the League to thrive, they have also been a point of contention between larger market "entrepreneurial" owners and small market owners largely due to the one unshared revenue source for teams—stadium revenue, which now accounts for slightly over 25 percent of a team's annual profit.[139] Yet while smaller market owners grouse about the

[137] NFL Kickoff

[138] Yost, 3-6.

[139] Ibid.

larger market owners stadium revenues threatening the "level playing field" of the game and its status within the American sports community, the actual substance of stadium debate suggests that it is a conflict over profit numbers and interclass standing rather than actual competitiveness that creates friction within the NFL's *Fortune 500*-type ownership class.[140]

Again going to Yost's study, the author notes that the biggest discrepancy and point of contention between the NFL owners is not actual stadium seating capacity for the average ticketholder but rather "premium seating"—box seats, private suites, private stadium clubs and personal seat licenses which contributes greatly to a team's overall profitability —and hence stature and wealth of an owner relative to his colleagues in the League and in boardrooms elsewhere. This point is illustrated by Yost's descriptions of the activity that occurs at luxury suites on game days at these often publicly subsidized stadiums.

> Frequent guests in [Redskins' owner] Snyder's owner's box include former Federal Reserve chairman Alan Greenspan and his wife, NBC news correspondent Andrea Mitchell, [former and late] congressman and NFL quarterback Jack Kemp, and other Washington power players. In Charlotte, bankers rather than politicians hobnob on the club level of Bank of America Stadium before Carolina Panthers' games. At Denver's Invesco Field at Mile High, oil, gas, and real estate executives gather before Broncos games in the club level sponsored by United Airlines.[141]

From Yost's description it appears that insofar as stadiums serve as places of community and civic pride, the community being talked about is not the public at large

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[140] As Yost notes, actual revenue has little to do with on-the-field success. The major-market New England Patriots, arguably the most successful franchise of the decade, has consistently ranked high in revenue while retaining one of the lowest payrolls in the League. By contrast, an even bigger major-market team, The Redskins, who spend over the salary cap regularly, have not one a division title in the decade.

[141] Yost, 7.

but in fact the corporate-political community of a given city. Sociologists Kevin Delany and Rick Eckstein argue that it is precisely the need to draw new executive talent into the corporate community that makes local corporate growth coalitions partner with, if not take the lead in, promoting public stadium subsidies for team owners. As one executive in their study commented, new stadiums (and their luxury boxes) are the sort of amenity that corporations need to draw the "A players" to their midsized cities.[142] In essence, the attraction of public underwriting of stadiums is to give team owners and corporate elites in cities "something to show off."[143]

The analyses put forth by Yost, Delaney, and Eckstein suggest that the impetus for stadium construction in the NFL comes not from the need to increase team profit for on-the-field competitive capacity but rather to increase profit for the sake of cultivating an image of powerful accumulative capability within the class station of owners and their corporate peers. As Delaney and Eckstein note, many of the "postindustrial" cities where stadium pushes from owners and corporate growth coalitions have occurred are based on the perception held by the local growth coalitions that their cities "radiate a negative impression to the surrounding world" and that the flurry of new stadium construction gives corporate executives looking to impress other high level executive talent the impression that their location is a "city on the move."[144] That it is widely accepted by

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[142]Kevin Delaney and Rick Eckstein, *Public Dollars, Private Stadiums: the Battle Over Building Sports Stadiums* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 39-40.

[143] Ibid. 188. Interestingly, the authors note that in all the interviews they did the emphasis was on recruiting male executive talent, suggesting that the exclusivity of the corporate community has a distinct gender bias.

[144] Delaney Eckstein, 188

corporate elites that these types of projects have little public net economic benefit[145] is all the more important because as theorist Thornstein Veblen observed, in order for conspicuous expenditure to be reputable, it must be an expenditure on superfluities that is ultimately wasteful. No merit would accrue from the consumption of the bare necessities of life [including, perhaps, education, mass transit, and affordable housing] except by comparison with the abjectly poor who are not, under the pecuniary standard, worthy of invidious comparison.[146] Executives who pride themselves on being touted as civic actors want "visible monuments to their efforts." It is far more appreciable to a corporate director to push to build a stadium than to try to improve inner-city test scores, especially when the new stadium could be named after their company.[147]

Of course, simply desiring to create points of invidious comparison among an elite social grouping does not translate into a political consensus that such ideas are worthy of public expenditure. Essentially, owners and corporate backers of publicly subsidized stadiums must create an atmosphere of opinion that ties the stadium to an idealized depiction of the community versus its real self and its neighbors. And indeed, as Delaney and Eckstein's work shows, it is precisely this strategy, what they call "the manipulation of community self esteem and community collective conscience" that has been the modus operandi for stadiums backers for most of the latter decade.[148]

> Those attempting to manipulate internal community self-esteem usually warn local residents about the dangers of slipping to the depths of some nearby city, which has been socially constructed as inferior. A community's decline to minor

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[145] Ibid., 187

[146] Veblen, 60.

[147] Delaney Eckstein, 189.

[148] Delaney and Eckstein, 38-40.

> league status, they argue, will surely be exacerbated by not building a new stadium, which would precipitate a team's decision to leave the city. So in Cleveland we kept hearing that having professional sports (especially in new stadiums) would keep the city from becoming another Akron. In Cincinnati, the presence of professional sports would prevent the city from turning into Louisville. Stadium proponents in Minneapolis and Denver did not want to become colder versions of Omaha.[149]

Corporate growth coalitions take ideals of invidious comparison and transpose them on to the entire communities in which they operate, creating a sense that it is the sports teams' presence which constitutes the social glue of the community. As journalists Neil DeMause and Joanna Cagan point out in their stadium study, *Field of Schemes*, for generations, "the special emotional presence of the local team has been played up—by sports promoters, by the local media, by fans themselves. These are the home teams: unique, regional representations of a city's heart and soul."[150] Backers of stadiums and related projects go so far with this idea as to include nostalgic aspects of a city's particular historical character into the designs of new projects, reinventing the modern mall experience into a genuine walk down memory lane.[151] That these projects often wipe out the actual remnants of what was left of the city's history, and that these new stadiums, purported to have the capacity to obliterate class differences, are largely attractive due to their luxury suites[152] becomes an afterthought, building the stadium to keep the team becomes the point of departure for even more conspicuous consumption at public cost.[153]

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[149] Ibid., 39.

[150] Neil DeMause and Joanna Cagan, *Field of Schemes: How the Great Stadium Swindle turns Public Money into Private Profit* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2008) 183.

[151] Ibid. 149.

[152] Delaney and Eckstein, 41.

[153] Veblen, 56.

Owners and growth coalitions are aided in their stadium subsidy plans by politicians who are eager to enhance their image among groups of constituents. Exemplary of this notion is former Ohio Hamilton County commissioner Bob Bedinghaus, discussed by Delaney and Eckstein in their study of the successful football stadium effort in Cincinnati. A self-styled "no new taxes" Republican, in 1996 he became the spokesperson for a half-percent county sales tax increase to fund construction of a new stadium for the Bengals. Under the agreement, which passed by a county-wide margin of 61 percent (though support was significantly lower in urban Cincinnati proper), the city would construct the $270 million stadium and pay for operations with the Bengals receiving all revenues while paying a mere rent of $1.1 million for nine years after which it would be dropped to nothing.[154] Moreover, a 3 percent ticket tax proposal that was meant to allocate money to the city's crumbling public school system was quickly dropped as Bengals's ownership argued it would hamper the team's ability to be competitive. As the project got underway and costs ballooned to over $400 million, Bedinghaus saw his popularity fade and subsequently lost his reelection bid, despite receiving over $144,000 from growth coalition leader and mogul Carl Linder (owner of the Reds, American-Financial Group, Chiquita, Stokely-Van Camp and Financial World). For his part, Bedinghaus remained defiant against criticisms that he had sold the county and city out, claiming "the people of southwestern Ohio would 'feel good' about these ballparks after the hoopla over money died down." Bengals owner Mike Brown compared him to Winston Churchill, who lost his election after winning a World War. [155]

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[154] Delaney and Eckstein, 46.

[155] Ibid. 49-52.

The Cincinnati case illustrates the role public political actors play in the policy process of publicly subsidized stadiums. They are, as Delaney and Eckstein state, the public persona of a corporate community that may otherwise choose to remain covert in their machinations to raise the level of superfluous spending in a given city.[156] In the case of Bob Bedinghaus, the folksy narrative of a conservative politician sitting down at his kitchen table to work out a stadium funding plan was a mask for the true crafting of the regressive tax by six businessmen and a consultant brought in from outside the city.[157] The reason for putting the politician out in front of a stadium effort has to do with what Edelman calls the preservation of the myth of popular and legislative supremacy. The high school civics version of American government which argues that there is a continuous, mechanical line of influence from 'the people' to administration and that policy reflects popular will is such a strong symbol that it is scarcely challenged.[158] Thus, putting the face of the popular will on a plan gives it a sort of trust that may otherwise be lacking.

This is not to say that politicians who support these stadium subsidy efforts are inherently corrupt or view themselves simply as corporate mouthpieces (campaign contributions and access to luxury boxes following the completion of these stadiums notwithstanding), but rather that they face both ideological and electoral pressures that make them more often than not willing to support pro-stadium forces by default. Ideologically, like most citizens, politicians tend to grant more legitimacy to powerful people or experts. Operating within institutional political structures which grant more

[156] Ibid. 50.

[157] Ibid. 53.

[158] Edelman, *Symbolic Uses*, 140.

legitimacy to powerful individuals, stadium backers rarely have to "fight city hall" because political elites have been conditioned to accept by default that new stadiums bring economic growth or heightened community self-esteem.[159] Moreover, population flight from cities has made suburban areas grow considerably more powerful in political strength. As the suburbs grow, quality-of-life issues important to city residents become underfunded as pressure is put on politicians to provide entertainment and other diversions for suburbanites. This shift puts cities (and thus city and county politicians) in a bind of having to attract both tourists and suburbanites and their money to maintain upkeep of these projects as well as other urban priorities.[160] DeMause and Cagan point out this phenomenon more starkly in an interview with New York City planner Lukas Herbert, who compares the Jets' unsuccessful Manhattan-area stadium bid with the ultimately successful stadium bid of the Yankees in the Bronx.

> "There's clearly a double standard here, says Herbert, noting that council member Christine Quinn, who was at the forefront of the campaign to stop the Jets' stadium in her Manhattan district, pushed for quick approval of the Yankees' and Mets' plans once she was elected council speaker. Herbert concludes: "Stadiums are bad in middle-class or upper middle-class white neighborhoods, but they're wonderful in black or Hispanic neighborhoods where everyone is poor. There are a lot of middle class people that live in this neighborhood, but there's also a lot of poor people here. And we were just told to shut up and take the project because it is good for us."[161]

Politicians are thus bound, not only by the pro-subsidy mentality of team owners and corporate growth coalitions, but also by their own internalization of the value of invidious comparison as a policy motivator. In addition, the external suburban desire to

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[159] Ibid., 186.

[160] Delaney and Eckstein, 58.

[161] DeMause and Cagan, 316.

increase consumption and leisure time forces politicians to back wasteful activities in order to maintain electoral support even if it means slashing funding for more economically productive activities in the urban center. The poor and urban residents, lacking the ability to compete with middle and upper classes in political power, are thus saddled with these expenditures, often accepting them on the grounds that they will provide some marginal economic benefit or at least restore aesthetic pride to the city.[162] All of these issues revolving around conspicuous consumption including growth coalition pressure, suburban vs. urban politics and class differentiation would come up again in other cases, though perhaps no more noticeably in recent years than in the push by Cowboys owner Jerry Jones to get a new stadium built in the greater Dallas area.

The Cowboys and Arlington: the Public Financing of Jerry World

While the story of the $1.5 billion Cowboys Stadium could be said to begin officially in 2004 when a group of local Arlington businessmen and politicians started the "Touchdown Arlington!" campaign to win public support for a sales tax increase to procure some $325 million (and climbing) in funds for a new stadium to lure the Cowboys to the city, the issue of subsidizing what is considered to be the most impressive structure ever built for an NFL team actually began in earnest with the purchase of the team by oil mogul Jerry Jones in 1989. Jones became one of the early "entrepreneurial owners" in the League—looking to extract revenue from sources that other teams were not exploiting. Jones found most of his opportunities in stadium revenue opportunities—selling naming and concession rights to corporations such as

[162] This was the case in Cincinnati where the growth coalition doled out numerous t-shirts and bumper stickers extolling people to "Keep Cincinnati a Major League City" while simultaneously promising to award African American construction companies portions of the stadium building contracts to help with unemployment in the city's black community. Ultimately, only 15 percent of the stadium construction was awarded to black firms. See Delaney and Eckstein, 54, 61.

Pepsi, Nike, and American Express. However, Jones' crowning achievement at the time, as Oriard notes, was turning Texas Stadium into "a playground for wealthy Texans," by doubling the price of tickets, replacing 2,500 ordinary seats with 100 more luxury suites (on top of the present 289), and instituting seat licenses of up to $15,000 some of them for season tickets held by former Cowboy players and employees."[163] Despite drawing a verbal rebuke from the League for violating the previously discussed norms of cooperation that had defined League business, Jones remained unrepentant, arguing that the best commercial deals would go to those who "aggressively" pursued them.[164]

The actions taken by Jones seem to represent the previously discussed valuation of public subsidizing of private stadiums in that they depict Jones as the quintessential man of leisure who spends, not only for higher efficiency and comfort in his enterprise and well being, but also because such expenditure is evidence of wealth and is thus honorific in his social group. Under the influence of the belief of invidious comparison, collective rebukes can be ignored because it is understood that whatever might be said rhetorically, failure to spend in due quantity would become a mark of deformity and demerit.[165] The growth of this "punctilious discrimination" transforms the man of leisure into a "connoisseur incredible viands of merit" in things considered "manly and seemly".[166] In Jones' case, his success in stadium revenue pushing has made him the most admired connoisseur of how to extract public money for new private stadiums.

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[163] Oriard, 151.

[164] Ibid., 152.

[165] Veblen, 46.

[166] Ibid., 47.

The Cowboys Stadium deal with the city of Arlington came after a decade of starts-and-fits to get a new stadium built in Irving, Texas (the now former and longtime home of the team) or in Dallas proper. Irving became an unlikely prospect for a rebuilding, given anti-tax sentiment among the older population there (in 1996 the city voted to drop out of the mass transit system, which was looking for a 1 percent sales tax increase to maintain operations[167]). With Irving out of the picture, Jones focused on returning the team to the Fair Park area of Dallas, with a new stadium being the centerpiece of a larger urban redevelopment scheme. Letters and editorials in *The Dallas Morning News* attempted to appeal to economic arguments as well community self-esteem and consciousness in order to mobilize people behind the effort. The paper itself argued that the stadium was a "unique opportunity to use the stadium as an economic magnet to spur development."[168] More impassioned pleas for support came from more or less anonymous citizens who attempted to link, not only the Cowboys, but football itself to the city's larger historical identity. In one letter, "a lifelong fan" appealed to the Dallas officials to "rescue" a rare opportunity to restore the city's heritage.

> Football has differentiated this city from other places as a source of civic pride, competitive energy and fun for decades. The great collegiate association, the Southwest Conference, held its first organizational meeting in 1914 at Dallas' Oriental Hotel. The UT-OU tradition started at Fair Park in 1929. SMU had a dominating team in the 1930s and 1940s, cresting during the Doak Walker era. The Cotton Bowl Classic was one of the premiere college bowl games, hosting national championship teams through the years. And, most notably, the Dallas Cowboys are America's team. That heritage has been fading for 25 years. Moving the Cowboys back to Fair Park would bring in playoff games, reinvigorate the Cotton Bowl Classic, save the UT-OU game, attract the Super Bowl to town and restore the mystical connection between Dallas and the Cowboys.

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[167] John Austin, "Dallas Passed and the Cowboys Ran" Fort Worth Star-Telegram, Nov. 7, 2004.

[168] "Underwriting Cowboys," The Dallas Morning News, March 10, 2003.

> Building the new stadium in Arlington destroys those traditions for the city and weakens the Cowboys as well.[169]

This letter is of particular importance for two reasons. First, it demonstrates how invidious comparison with surrounding cities leads to the perception that a city is radiating a negative impression which can only be alleviated through public conspicuous consumption on private stadiums. Football is what has "differentiated" the city from the surrounding area and is distinct from "other sources of civic pride." These statements demonstrate the second and perhaps most important analytical aspect of the letter in that they show how an artifact of popular culture is conceived of as a constitutive historic element of a city's identity. If the goal of the countersubversive in film is to use that medium to create a sense of "the real" in accordance with countersubversive goals, it is no less true in mobilizing political support in other settings and texts. The feigned historiography becomes the basis of judgment on policy issues rather than objective facts and costs.

Despite the impassioned pleas like the one examined above, Dallas rejected Jones' plans, with then-mayor Laura Miller arguing that paying an estimated $350 million in construction costs was not worth the pricetag compared to other priorities like revitalizing downtown Dallas. And while Jones and other pro-stadium forces ridiculed Miller, she remained defiant, saying, "Dallas didn't fumble. Dallas just didn't want to play ball."[170] Miller's vocal rebuke illustrates one of the key areas for contestation of League prerogative—namely the availability of other images and myths to counteract the

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[169] Larry Taylor, "Our Heritage in Decline" *The Dallas Morning News*, August 8, 2004.

[170] Austin.

frame of reality put forth by the League's countersubversive propaganda. As Delaney and Eckstein note, major urban areas like San Diego, with shared cultural histories and images that are independent of sports, can often fend off or at least drive harder bargains with owners and growth coalitions because they can appeal to other aspects of the city's history as evidence of the city's importance. They have more ways in which to limit invidious comparison than simply tax-payer backed playgrounds for owners and their corporate friends.[171]

Nevertheless, if Jones was met with resistance by Irving and Dallas, he had little issue when it came to finding willing participants for his project in Arlington, Texas. When Dallas couldn't reach an agreement with Jones, a Cincinnati-style growth coalition was waiting with open arms to aid Jones in the construction of his new home. As *Dallas Morning News* reporter Jeff Mosier notes, "Touchdown Arlington!" was led by city council member Robert Rivera, himself a former Chairman of the Arlington Convention and Visitors Bureau, and the coalition was comprised of the usual suspects of civic and business leaders, including Rusty Hancock of Martex Software and Rico Brown, former Chairman of the African-American Chamber of Commerce.[172] Playing the part of Bob Bedinghaus was first-term conservative mayor Robert Cluck, who was said to have contacted Jones first about the possibility of moving to the city, although other news accounts say the Cowboys were considering about nine to ten locations, including Arlington, before Cluck purportedly contacted the team.[173]

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[171] Delaney and Eckstein, 137.

[172] Jeff Mosier, personal correspondence August 24, 2009.

[173] Austin.

While Mosier, who covered the stadium story from its beginning, argues that the campaign itself was aimed largely at extolling the virtues of economic development such a stadium would bring, he also acknowledges that the city has always had identity issues relative to its neighbors in the greater Dallas area.

> For a long time, Arlington officials have tried to carve out their own identity separate from Dallas and Fort Worth. There have been attempts to add an "A" into the DFW moniker that refers to this area…former Arlington Mayor Richard Greene had a frequent line about this: "Arlington is no one's damn suburb… it's been an underlying current for years. Arlington has a larger population than Cincinnati and Pittsburgh, but it's still thought of as just another suburb.[174]

Mosier's assessment of Arlington's identity politics is exemplary of the invidious comparison and inferiority complexes that Delaney and Eckstein argue are keys to the ability of growth coalitions to manipulate community consciousness and self-esteem into financing stadium projects. Still, as Mosier notes, despite (or because of) its inferiority complex, Arlington was already a major tourist destination, home to the Texas Rangers and their publicly-financed park, as well as Six Flags over Texas and the Hurricane Harbor water park.[175] As noted before, when a city already has "cultural perks,"[176] it can be difficult to exploit community consciousness without also tying it to economic development. This was the course pursued by the "Touchdown Arlington!" Campaign.

The mailers for the pro-stadium campaign reflected this. The first mailing included pro-stadium quotes from various former county and city officials touting the economic and community self-esteem benefits. In between quotes about "fiscal

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[174] Mosier.

[175] Ibid.

[176] Delaney and Eckstein, 40.

responsibility" and the need to "invest" in a high-crime area[177] were pictures of the Cowboys' Super Bowl trophies, men working in hard hats, and children playing soccer with a cut-out of a giant potted flower underneath pasted on the photo. The literal centerpiece of the mailing is three connected footballs, respectively reading "2,000 new jobs, $2.9 city revenues, and $238 million economic impact." [178]The second mailer opens with the message" On November 2, Arlington Voters can Improve a High Crime Area…" followed by an image of police tape stating "Crime Scene Do Not Cross." The next page shows pictures of children playing as well as parents and families enjoying outdoor sports. Alongside the photos are the identical talking points from the first mailer with one noticeable addition—a specific point saying to vote yes in order to "Reduce Crime and Protect Families." The talking point goes on to say that "With Dallas Cowboys Stadium and the Cowboys Hall of Fame Museum, we can take a neighborhood suffering from one of the highest crime rates in Arlington and turn it into a safe attraction for tourists and visitors coming for concerts, family entertainment, and major events like the Super Bowl which brought $330 million to Houston." The mailer ends with the statement "Vote Yes on November 2. Let's Win for Our Economy and Quality of Life."[179]

The mailers are instructive in that they demonstrate how the elements discussed previously: manipulation of community-self esteem and socioeconomic bias in pro-stadium politics are used, often in tandem with elements of the countersubversive in order

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[177] Mosier notes that crime reduction was a large centerpiece of the economic-civic argument for the stadium, though he called the statistics used to justify the claims exaggerated. FBI Statistics show that the city had its biggest drop in the crime rate in nearly 7 years in 2003, a year before the stadium project was put on the public agenda. See Fort Worth Star Telegram, June 17, 2003.

[178] "Touchdown Arlington!" Mailer 1.

[179] "Touchdown Arlington!" Mailer 2.

to rearrange local loyalties to fit the League and its corporate partners' agenda. The images of construction workers, children and families evoke the paternalistic nostalgia that recalls a protective and safe world that is achieved only through the remolding of the frontier, in this case by the construction of a stadium. They are juxtaposed against the image, symbolized by the police tape, of the omnipresent specter of subversion through the criminal element. The images provide a contrast for the desired (paternal protection) versus the purported reality (crime).The presented solution to this threat is public expenditure in order to entice the wealthier dwellers on the periphery to enter the city and spend their leisure time and money there in order to boost economic conditions and wipe out the criminal demon. That Jerry Jones himself may profit by as much as $735 million from his public-private investment is curiously not called theft.[180]

On October 13, 2000, NBC broadcast the first regular season game from Cowboys Stadium on "Sunday Night Football." While the stadium had been open nearly all summer, this was its official debut on the televised stage, and the broadcast—both pre-game and the game itself, came off as more of an infomercial for the stadium and Jerry Jones rather than a focused analysis on the game itself. Pre-game show host Bob Costas referred to the stadium as "the Palace in Dallas." Al Michaels (an outspoken conservative broadcaster) said he'd "never been anywhere else in the world like it." In fact Michaels praised Jones' courage for continuing on with the project in spite of the economic downturn, perhaps unaware that Jones was not footing a significant portion of the bill for his new home. Interviewing Jones right before kickoff, Costas did note potential issues

[180] This does not mean that there was not opposition to the stadium plan. The opposition came largely from two anti-tax groups and an independent newspaper. They were outspent by a nearly $50 million to $60,000. See Jeff Classen, "Money, Star Power aided stadium issue," Dallas-Fort Worth Star Telegram, Nov 4, 2004.

faced by Jones and his cohorts regarding labor disputes and a potential change in revenue structure. In a particularly Reagnesque answer, Jones said it was his job to "grow the pie" so that players could concentrate on playing while owners concentrated on "building more stadiums."[181]

The opening to the actual game broadcast started off with successive shots of the pyramids, Parthenon, Great Wall of China, Taj Mahal, and the Coliseum. With triumphant horns playing in the background, a voice says, "The man-made wonders of the world, and now Cowboys Stadium." Al Michaels then states, "What the Roman Coliseum was to the first century, Cowboys Stadium is to the 21st Century. Welcome to Jerry World—a sports and entertainment complex that has raised the bar to an entirely new level." Analyst Chris Collinsworth called the stadium, "simply the best." Shots of Rudolph Giuliani in Jones' owner's box were shown interwoven with shots of Texas armed forces members waving a field-long U.S. flag during the national anthem. The ceremonial coin toss was performed by former President George W. Bush, the last man to bilk Arlington out of public money for the Rangers' ballpark nearly two decades ago. Nearly every commercial break in the game started with a shot of Jones conversing with Bush, Giuliani and other people of historical importance to the Cowboys' organization as well as the average fans whose seats surround the owner's box with an almost panoptic quality. Not once during the broadcast was it mentioned that "Jerry World" had been built partially with public funds or that it was facing numerous cost overruns that would hurt the city which had financed it.[182] Rather, the focus was on the building as a

[181] NBC Sunday Night Football (September 27, 2009) [Television Broadcast] New York: NBC.

[182] "Where the Money Came From" Fort Worth Star Telegram, June 5, 2009.

representation of a particular man (Jones) and his pecuniary tastes and beliefs in corporate capitalism as evidenced by the neoliberal political company around him. That the political figures are presented as supplicants to Jones' hospitality not only speaks to the previously mentioned concept that the man of leisure is looking for witnesses to his excess, but also demonstrates how the League and the networks who broadcast games celebrate and normalize the pecuniary reputability of Jones under what Veblen calls "the propaganda of culture."

> The propaganda of culture is in great part an inculcation of new tastes, or rather a new schedule of proprieties, which have been adapted to the upper class scheme of life under the guidance of the leisure-class formulation of status and pecuniary decency. This new schedule of proprieties is intruded into the lower-class scheme of life from the code elaborated by an element of the population whose life lies outside of the industrial process…the economic reform wrought [from changes in the propaganda of culture] is largely of the nature of a permutation in the methods of conspicuous waste.[183]

Evidence of the propaganda of culture is seen in "Sunday Night Football" not only through the presentation of Jones as an archetypal man of leisure but also through the presentation of the building itself. Whereas monuments like the Taj Mahal and Great Wall are shown as "first century" relics, predicated on religious or defensive power, Cowboys' Stadium is the embodiment of the proprieties of the 21st century—surveillance (as evidenced by the owner's box being situated in between standard fan seats), neoliberalism (as evidenced by the fixation on the presence of Bush and Giuliani), and imperial nationalism, as evidenced by the massive flag and military participation in the event's opening.

[183] Veblen, 211.

The stadium issue demonstrates not only the real policy inducements (public money for private enterprise) that motivate the League but also one point of contestation the League is up against. As the case of Dallas rejecting a homecoming for the Cowboys shows, even in a political reality which generally is supportive of League and corporate prerogatives, political actors can rely on other sources of political or social capital to defeat these prerogatives. Nowhere has this been historically more evident than with the relationship between the League and its players' union.

Labor Battles Then and Now

While the cultural politics of urban areas have at times been an important counterpoint to NFL prerogatives and a rebuke of NFL propaganda, they in many ways pale in comparison to the historical contestation put forth by the players' themselves in the form of labor disputes that first centered around gaining the right to organize and are now focused on being able to protect and expand on the labor freedoms that the League often reluctantly granted because of those struggles.

In *Brand NFL*, Michael Oriard provides arguably the most complete history of the drive to organize the players into a legitimate union—a struggle which would last nearly three decades, would create multiple work stoppages, and would ultimately be decided by federal courts rather than picket lines. In fact, the NFL Players' Association (NFLPA) was in many ways the result of a Supreme Court case—*Radovich v. NFL* (1957) which, at the time, subjected the NFL to anti-trust law (a move which, as previously noted, was later nullified by the Kennedy Administration and Congress). Conservative leadership relegated the union to little more than a grievance committee rather than a genuine collective bargaining unit, but nonetheless gave players some tangible benefits including

a minimum salary and injury compensation. More importantly, it set the foundation for future labor challenges by slightly more progressive union leaders.[184]

The first large-scale, player-driven drive for labor freedom in the NFL began with the 1974 strike, which occurred just three years after the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) recognized the NFLPA as a legitimate collective bargaining unit. The initial contract issues centered around a list of 63 demands which dealt nominally with salary increases and the impact of Astroturf on players' safety, but were, as Oriard notes, most specifically geared at attacking what the players saw as issues of basic freedom in regard to treatment by management and coaches as it concerned curfews, fines and most importantly, the right to free agency.

> The 'anarchic' freedoms demanded in 1974 are the basic rights enjoyed by every player in the NFL today, but the strike of 1974 marked the beginning of a slow-motion revolution that took two decades to play out. The modern NFL was built on two fundamental 'anti-freedoms': the players' lack of freedom to move from team to team and the owners' lack of freedom to move from city to city. The Oakland Raider's Al Davis would win freedom for owners in a three-year legal battle with the NFL in the early 1980s…the players would not win theirs until 1993.[185]

The strike, which would begin in July of 1974 with a public picket in San Diego where players sported signs with radical slogans like, "Monopoly is Played with Dice" and, "People are Players, not Property," ended by September with the union defeated both through a lack of solidarity among star players and other veterans as well as a concerted propaganda push by the owners, represented through a Management Council, to portray the players as greedy and ignorant of economic facts regarding the League's

[184] Oriard, 57.

[185] Ibid. 61-62.

operations. Interestingly, Oriard imputes a great deal of the failure of the 1974 strike to the media in NFL team towns, who stressed the "rugged individualism" of American life over "the social compact" ideal of the team sport and portrayed NFL teams as "Darwinian Jungles" rather than families.[186] The strike also showed the more repressive side of the NFL, as clubs cut most of the players associated with the union, including future coaching legend Bill Curry.[187]

Players made a second push for labor freedom in 1982, just as the NFL was reaching the beginning of its pinnacle as America's favorite sport. It was preceded by a landmark NLRB ruling that the NFL had engaged in unfair labor practices during the 1974 strike and court decisions which found basic tenets of the NFL's economic system—the college draft and restricted free agency, in violation of antitrust law unless they were agreed to under collective bargaining. [188] Presumably armed with the law behind them, players and their union leader Ed Garvey struck during the regular season in 1982 (another first) in order to push forward a management model for the League that made the NFLPA a full partner in the management and operation of the NFL. Owners, unwilling to cede operational control of the League to any degree, cancelled the season. As with the previous strike, a lack of labor solidarity between star players such as Joe Montana and Terry Bradshaw also contributed greatly to any effective public mobilization for a labor action.[189] The strike failed, but legal victories and increases in

[186] Ibid. 82-88.

[187] Ibid. 92.

[188] Ibid. 101.

[189] Ibid. 110-112

player salaries (driven in part by competition from the now-defunct USFL) made free agency a real possibility for future negotiations.

The final and most successful drive for labor freedom began in 1987 when new NFLPA head Gene Upshaw called for a regular season strike with free agency as a primary demand. The 24-day strike ended up far more successfully than the previous ones for a couple of reasons: first, labor solidarity was higher as even high profile players such as Jim Kelly and John Elway sat out the start of the season (though the NFL's biggest star, Joe Montana, again did not). Secondly, in contrast to their actions in the last strike, NFL's owners decided to play the season anyway with scab or "replacement" players—a move which turned fans and the press decidedly against the League. As Oriard notes, the general attitude in 1987 "seemed to be that owners were doing what owners do: make lots of money, bust unions, and profess concern for 'the integrity of the game' while dumping a fraudulent version of the NFL on a gullible public." Still, with a television monopoly on pro football broadcasts at the time, scab games delivered enough ratings that the strike itself was fruitless in terms of immediate gains.[190] However, it did give the union enough time to file labor suits against the NFL entitled *Powell v. NFL* and *McNeil v. NFL*. Victory in the latter case (and the temporary decertifying of the union as a bargaining agent) would force the NFL into a managed partnership with the NFLPA that was ratified in 1993. The deal guaranteed free agency as well as a percentage of television revenue sharing for players, and saw the League achieve its longest labor peace since the 1950s.

[190] Ibid. 136

The Current Controversies

With the current collective bargaining agreement that has given the NFL its labor peace and commercial longevity set to expire with the 2011 season, a new activism has emerged among the NFLPA and its players both in terms of expanding labor freedom and creating greater transparency in the conducting of League financial affairs. It began in earnest with the passing of former longtime NFLPA director Gene Upshaw in 2008 and the subsequent appointment of DeMaurice Smith, a corporate attorney and political ally of President Obama[191] in March 2009. What makes Smith's appointment particularly interesting is that he is the first NFLPA Executive Director to have no previous ties to the NFL in a coaching, management, union, or player capacity. The appointment, which came as surprise to analysts, may be in part due to the issues surrounding the next bargaining agreement, which present one of the biggest challenges to the League's financial operations to date as it concerns transparency and revenue sharing.

In July 2009, Smith and a handful of NFL player representatives met with liberal Democratic leadership in Congress in a push to lobby lawmakers to reconsider the League's anti-trust exemption status as well as its bookkeeping practices. The push came after a League Management Council proposal (made public by the union) demanded that players accept a 20 percent football revenue sharing reduction in the next collective bargaining agreement. [192]The League claimed such a reduction is necessary to offset losses in profit, a claim the union and others find dubious given the League's continued

[191] Jeffery Lord, "Who is DeMaurice Smith?" The American Spectator Online, October 15, 2009.

[192] Leaders meet with top lawmakers" Associated Press, July 15, 2009

boost in ratings.[193] Moreover, a union commissioned study found that the average value of the teams has grown from $288 million to $1.04 billion over 10 years, an increase of about 14 percent a year, severely undermining the League's claims and providing the basis for a legal reconsideration of the League's accounting practices and anti-trust protections[194].

Other indicators that the NFLPA intends to take a more militant line include the shoring up of star power behind union prerogatives, with marquee quarterbacks Tom Brady and Drew Brees both becoming player representatives in 2009. Such an early commitment of solidarity provides a marked contrast to what reporter Ron Borges calls the "shameful" practice of star players of previous eras snubbing union efforts.[195] Still the largest signs that the players' are willing to take a prolonged stand on the revenue pay cut come from the militant tone of Smith himself, who has called the upcoming fight "a battle of owners against players, and, I believe, against fans."

> When you negotiate with the networks, when the owners get the monies from the networks even if the games aren't played, is it really a battle of billionaires against millionaires? Or is it a battle between owners on one side and the people who play and the people who watch…our fans identify with that. They understand punching a clock every day. My hope is that sooner rather than later we get to the point where we can jointly announce at least to our fans that the one thing we don't have to worry about is football going away."[196]

By framing the issue in populist rhetoric, Smith is clearly trying to position the CBA negotiations as a progressive fight for the preservation of not only the game but the

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[193] Television ratings for the 2009 season were up a record 17.4 million viewers. See Chris Gasper, "Knocking heads on CBA," The Boston Globe, October 11, 2009.

[194] "Smith Trying to Avoid Lockout", Associated Press July 14, 4009

[195] Ron Borges, "Tom Brady adds star Power to Off-Field Negotiations," Boston Herald, December 4, 2009

[196] Elliot Harris, NFLPA Executive Director's View of the Game, Chicago Sun-Times, January 19, 2010.

blue collar mentality that surrounds it. In doing so, he, and the players he speaks for, look less like cattle in the pastoral pens the League likes to display in its propaganda and more like human beings, a significant challenge to the League's self-image and policy agenda.

Conclusion: When Countersubversion Meets Political Reality

Writing about the larger historical and political impact of *Birth of a Nation*, Rogin argues that the film's ultimate success as a political document rested in its ability to tap collective fantasies that created a "conviction of truth beyond history." In a political world shaped by contingencies and conflicting interpretations, the aim of D.W. Griffith's work was to "abolish interpretation" and to make the film not merely "an avenue to history but its replacement."[197]

The NFL, through the countersubversive discourse in its filmography, particularly its emphasis on militarized unity and a pastoral organizational structure, attempts to do what Griffith sought out to do a century ago—put a utopian gloss over a political world (and sport) where interpretations of events are not necessarily linear. The countersubversive practitioner is attempting to replace a world where other shared cultural dynamics (in the case of stadiums, community identities, and in the case of players, their roles as laborers under a restrictive system) may undermine the policy agenda the League desires. From the cases studied here, it appears that insofar as the League is successful, it is only when there is a lack of shared cultural identity (as with stadium construction) or relative peace in its relations to its players, which is now eroding. At the same time, the success of contesting forces will likely also depend on whether their capacity to mobilize their interpretations (e.g. billionaire owners vs. fans)

[197] Rogin, 228.

of events is captivating enough to convince others that the NFL utopia is unworthy of their support. How these issues will continue to play out will likely have as much or more to do with external forces (economic recession, infrastructure decay, etc.) than any of the participants may realize.

CONCLUSION

THE NFL, PROPAGANDA AND POLITICAL TRADITION

"Practices attributed to the subversive actually depict countersubversive aspirations; the more powerful the demonology, therefore, the more it speaks, against itself, truths about American politics." - Michael Rogin[198]

"They are the ones with prejudice and bigotry coursing through their vanes [sic], through their hearts, and through their souls. They are consumed with jealousy and rage. They are all liberals--and make no mistake: That's what this is about…These people are scum."
- Rush Limbaugh, after being rejected in his bid to own the St. Louis Rams[199]

In doing this study I had two main goals. One was to show how the NFL—through its NFL Films-produced filmography as well as in its broadcast material and stadium campaigns, works as a propaganda engine for values associated with the countersubversive tradition—namely fascination with violence and valuation of hierarchical order. In the former case, the NFL acts as sort of proxy battleground in times of military mobilization where the public can partake in the military spectacle without having to actually bear witness to combat. Moreover, NFL films normalize violence as an inevitable trait of everyday existence, reinforcing a Hobbesian view of human nature that cries out for a National Security State to be erected and celebrated for its ability to protect the country from boundary invasion by demons.

In the case of valuation of hierarchical order, I showed how NFL films normalize the corporate, paternal organization by connecting the corporate form and the actors within it to earlier notions in American pop culture about surveillance-oriented pastoral

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[198] Rogin, 284.

[199] David Zirin, "Response to Rush Limbaugh's Rage," Edge of Sports.com Blog, October 15, 2009.

heroism (embodied in owners, executives, and coaches) and the taming of the wilderness and its savages (embodied by the players). Lastly, I showed how the NFL uses other strategies along with countersubversion to promote policy goals, such as evoking invidious comparison in communities in order to extract public subsidies for their private stadiums. By preying on community self-esteem, the NFL and corporate growth coalitions exploit the lived identities of people within an urban area by connecting them to the team's private profits. In noting this, I demonstrated how the NFL has genuine political-economic incentive to propagandize the countersubversive agenda. Whether its stadium deals, anti-trust protections, or lucrative partnerships with the Department of Defense, the promulgation of the countersubversive agenda leads to a climate that produces lucrative profit opportunities for the NFL as well as the maintenance of a political atmosphere in which the prerogatives and privileges of those who own the League will be seldom challenged as they are taken for granted as business as usual. At the same time, this promulgation of countersubversion is not as hegemonic as the NFL would like—as stadium defeats and labor strife indicate.

It is this latter point that speaks to the second goal of this study, namely to bring to the fore how elements of popular culture like the NFL and their relationship to the countersubversive value system help constitute a significant part of the American political tradition and why it is important for political science to acknowledge this relationship. As I noted in my introduction, the scholarship surrounding the American political tradition has offered numerous explanations as to *what* the American tradition is (liberalism, republicanism, etc.) without explaining *why* the values that create a tradition gain such traction within mass society over an extended period of time.

If, as E.E. Schattschneider once put it, "the definition of alternatives is the supreme instrument of power,"[200] it becomes particularly important for stakeholders of the status quo to have a tool like propaganda—particularly *countersubversive propaganda*, with its emphasis on external and internal monsters, fear of boundary invasion, and subordination to hierarchical order to rely on in order to restrict political alternatives to the maintenance of a comparatively conservative ideology even (or especially) in times where the status quo might otherwise be questioned.

As Rogin argues, this is particularly necessary in a purported liberal polity like the United States where the "divided vocabulary of competition and self-interest" runs up against the vocabulary "of community and self." Rather than acknowledge the contradictions between individualism and nationalism outright, countersubversive propaganda attempts to heal the split by avoiding its sources in society by creating unity through the split of the countersubversive and his foe.[201] Rogin saw mass texts, particularly film, as the most important propaganda vehicle for the propagation of countersubversive values because they not only made political demonology visible in widely popular and influential forms but because they also had a power that was normally denied the word alone—they *show* us what we are talking about in our everyday discourse. In doing so they speak to a fundamental impulse to ingest historical, physical, and personal experience—they present the image as the reality[202] and provide a reference

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[200] E.E.Schattschneider, *The Semisovereign People: A Realists' View of Democracy in America*, (Harcourt-Brace Jovanovich College Publishing, 1975) 66.

[201] Rogin, 283.

[202] Ibid. 296.

point by which we can reassure ourselves of the validity of our own fears and fantasies while being assured we are also protected from them.

This is not to deny that challenges to the status quo and contestation over meanings do not break through into dominant countersubversive discourse at times. Indeed, as evidenced by stadium and labor issues, the NFL itself has been a place where, despite its rigid hierarchical system, players have at times been able to at least moderately reframe the substance of the debate about what the game is and its meaning in American life. The first significant case of this was former St. Louis Cardinals lineman Dave Meggyesy's startling departure from the game at the top of his career to write the exposé *Out of Their League*, which showed the rampant racism behind the early days of the game that reads as if it's part of the countersubversive tradition scholarship itself.

> Black ball players are selected even more stringently on the basis of "correct attitudes than whites. Blacks are in an especially difficult position; if they act like Toms, they will be completely dominated by the white ball players and lose respect for themselves and each other. But if they are too "militant" and try to assert their basic manhood by attempting to break out of the whites' stereotype of the dumb, insensitive jock, they are immediately under suspicion and often cut from the squad,[203]

Meggyesy's recount of the racism and paranoia of "militancy" can easily be seen as the countersubversive fear of internal subversion of foreign elements into an established culture and ideology. When released, the book shed a public light on the dark underbelly of the League and contributed to a (slight) reimagining of race relations in the pro football. Moreover, the early battle for a genuine union during Meggyesy and Oriard's time eventually led to the legal cases that granted players a significant place at the NFL's economic table. More recent examples include Steelers' linebacker James'

[203] Dave Meggyesy, *Out of their League*, (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1970) 195.

Harrison's declining to visit President Obama at the White House,[204] perhaps indicating an indifference to the sovereign in juxtaposition to official NFL filmography.

Of all the most current examples none is perhaps more exemplary of direct contestation against countersubversive propagandizing itself than the League's rejection of a potential bid by Rush Limbaugh to be a minority partner in a potential sale of the St. Louis Rams. When Limbaugh who,as previously mentioned was once fired as an NFL analyst on ESPN for racist remarks about Donovan McNabb, was announced as part of a bidding group for minority ownership in the Rams, black player outrage was pointedly critical. New York Giant Mathias Kiwanuka told the New York Daily News, "I don't want anything to do with a team that he has any part of. He can do whatever he wants; it is a free country. But if it goes through, I can tell you where I am not going to play." New York Jets linebacker Bart Scott said, "I can only imagine how his players would feel.... He could offer me whatever he wanted; I wouldn't play for him."[205] Such outright refusal to potentially play under one of America's premier demonologists (a man who once claimed that watching the NFL was like watching "a game between the Bloods and the Crips without any weapons")[206] undoubtedly put pressure on otherwise conservative owners to publicly denounce a Limbaugh ownership bid, with even Commissioner Roger

[204] "Steelers' Harrison won't visit Obama." Associated Press. May 18, 2009.

[205] David Zirin, "Why NFL Owners Must Flush Rush," Edge of Sports.com blog, October 12, 2009.

[206] Rory O'Connor, "Why Does America leave it to NFL Owners to tell Rush Limbaugh where to go?" published on Alternet.org, October 15, 2009.

Goodell saying Limbaugh's history of "divisive" comments would not be tolerated in the League proper.[207]

These examples suggest, albeit anecdotally, that pre-existing ideologies, built up from lived experience (like the life of a black player in a conservative sport) provide the ground for contestation of countersubversive propaganda by providing alternative reference points to its meanings. Still, such challenges run up against the overwhelming resources, conservative political connections,[208] and near-monopoly on the NFL 'brand' the League has on its presentation in image mediums like television and film. And despite an uncertain labor situation in 2011 and a poor economy, the NFL continues to see success in television ratings and revenues—both are up over 10 percent from last year,[209] meaning they still have the overwhelming economic edge in terms of getting their propaganda out to the mass public.

What this study demonstrates is not only how the countersubversive tradition is presented today in a particular form of popular culture but also how it influences the definition of political alternatives that constitutes American politics. As John Fiske once said, television cannot create reality, but it can *reinforce* the dominant sense of reality.[210] It's time to acknowledge this and perhaps trade in the hue of the Hartzian amber of liberal tradition scholarship for the glow of the Sunday afternoon television broadcast.

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[207] "Limbaugh Already Down One Vote," Associated Press, October 13, 2009. Of particular note in the story is that Indianapolis Colts owner Jim Irsay, one of the more socially progressive owners (and one of a handful of owners employing a black head coach) was the first owner to speak out against Limbaugh.

[208] Zirin, "Why NFL Owners…" As Zirin notes, in the last 30 years, 23 of the League's 32 owners donated more to Republicans than Democrats by large margins.

[209] Gasper, "Knocking Heads"

[210] John Fiske, *Television Culture: Popular Pleasures and Politics*, (UK: Routledge, 1988) 21.

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