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Journal of Sport and Social Issues 2014 38: 199 originally published online 16

December 2013

DOI: 10.1177/0193723513515889

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Journal of Sport and Social Issues
2014, Vol. 38(3) 199–221
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DOI: 10.1177/0193723513515889
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Abstract

This article explores how the National Football League's (NFL's) commemoration ceremonies on the 10th anniversary of 9/11 present a unique instance of sports–media–military convergence through their meticulous implementation across multiple games, broadcasting channels, and geographic locations. Expanding on themes of healing, the valorization of troops, and the sanitizing of war, as well as territorial conquest, I argue that the NFL's 9/11 commemoration ceremonies are complicit in the silent re-empowerment of the neoliberal state in times of perpetual war. The policing and monitoring of U.S. citizens is hereby legitimated through reasserting hegemonic portrayals of masculinity that firmly frame the subject/citizen in a heteropatriarchal mold, as well as by creating a neoethnic version of national identity that renders certain ethnic minorities, particularly Middle Easterners, as aberrant.

Keywords

NFL, militarism, 9/11, hegemonic masculinities, neoethnic identities

For all the metaphors, football here, even at the highest level, is a game. A game with rules, restrictions, and time limits. The game is a distraction from the real thing.

—William C. Rhoden (2003)

September 11, 2011 marked the 10th anniversary of the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center. It was a day that has been documented, debated, and dissected unlike any other in human history. Through various mass media outlets, the tributes, reflections,

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and searches for a deeper meaning “poured forth in a kind of collective media-fed group therapy” (Farhi, 2011). In an article for *Harper Magazine*, David Rieff (2011) concludes that this creation of “large-scale solidarity” reaffirmed group loyalty rather than the establishment of historical accuracy, glossing over the moral and political complexity of this event. Where were *you* that day and what do *you* remember? Those were the repeated questions many media organizations asked. On Sunday, September 11, 2011, it was nearly impossible to forget what had happened 10 years earlier.

While I purposely shunned the media for most of the day to escape American television networks’ presentation of more than 75 hr of news programming (Hale, 2011) in the form of live broadcasting, documentaries, memorials, and dramas, all connected to the event; in the end, I could not escape it at all. While watching NBC’s *Sunday Night Football*, I was exposed to a carefully crafted pregame commemoration ceremony representing a unique instance of sport rhetoric functioning as an extremely persuasive vehicle for sustaining and extending a culture of militarism in U.S. society. Butterworth and Moskal (2009) argue that American identity is constituted in and by a culture of militarism, “wherein Americans are implicated in a structural relationship between government, the military, and entertainment industries to the extent that it has become functionally impossible to live outside the rhetorical production of war” (p. 413). As I watched roaring images of the Sunday broadcast of the National Football League, with the unrolling of an American flag the size of the entire field, New York Fire Department fire fighters (NYFD), New York Police Department (NYPD), and members of the armed forces lined up between football players, Robert DeNiro eulogizing civilian victims, a member of the Army Band performing “Taps,” hyped up crowds chanting “USA, USA!,” George W. Bush walking out on the field to flip the inaugural coin, and a highly emotional performance of the “Star Spangled Banner”—I was wondering what all this could possibly mean, 10 years after September 11, 2001.

Being born and raised in Germany, the intrinsic militaristic culture of the United States has always been a source of wonderment and at times even a point of outright discomfort for me. I vividly remember attending my first baseball game in the United States where it seemed perfectly normal to have ceremonies honoring the troops, the presence of military recruiting stands, and the raising of a Prisoner of War (POW) flag underneath the Star Spangled Banner. In sharp contrast, considering a tribute to fallen soldiers of the German army, the Bundeswehr, in Afghanistan during a soccer match of the German Bundesliga? Absolutely unthinkable. Singing the German national anthem and proudly displaying the tricolored black, red, and gold flag during major sports events? Still the root of uncomfortable feelings for many Germans. Most of this, of course, goes back to the atrocities Germany committed during the Nazi era, the disbanding of the Wehrmacht, and Germany’s demilitarization after World War II. Today, most Germans oppose unilateral military actions and are rather suspicious of claims advocating them. This became clearly evident in the deterioration and rupture of U.S.–German relationships after former chancellor Gerhard Schröder refused to support George W. Bush’s invasion of Iraq in 2003.

Hence, for me, it is of great interest to explore and analyze the drastic display of militaristic culture in the United States, especially as demonstrated in the “seizing” of

the National Football League (NFL) by the military. I am inquiring, therefore, how these sport-rhetorical productions, which mask the United States military's deepening expansion into various aspects of (popular) culture, are used and what purpose they are ultimately intending to serve, specifically regarding the silencing of public discourse. This research is of significance beyond academic realms, as I firmly believe that the relationship between sports, media, and the military demands eloquent contestation and critique. I argue that the NFL's commemoration of 9/11 is largely a spectacle of the culture of militarism, pervaded by militaristic discourses from broadcasters who appear eager to use the game to garner support for ongoing wars, especially those that are unpopular with the American public, and to reassert national identity through excessive displays of patriotism. While previous scholarship has critiqued the converging forces between the military and the NFL during the administration of G. W. Bush (see, for example, Butterworth, 2008; Butterworth & Moskal, 2009; Silk, 2012; Stahl, 2010), this paper argues that the commemorative services held by the NFL during the 10th anniversary of 9/11 present a unique instance of sport, media culture, and militaristic convergence through the meticulous coordination, planning, and implementation of these ceremonies across multiple games, broadcasting channels, and geographic locations, including several stadiums and memorial sites. Expanding on themes around healing, the valorization of troops and the sanitizing of war, as well as territorial conquest, this paper argues that the NFL's 9/11 commemoration ceremonies are complicit in the silent re-empowerment of the neoliberal state in times of perpetual war. The policing and monitoring of U.S. citizens is hereby legitimated through reasserting hegemonic portrayals of masculinity that firmly frame the subject/citizen in a heteropatriarchal mold, as well as by creating a neoethnic version of national identity that renders certain ethnic minorities, particularly Middle Easterners, as aberrant.

To understand how the military is increasingly present in American culture, the following literature review focuses on what several scholars have termed *the military-industrial-entertainment complex*, before describing the history of the NFL's connections to the military and war. After contextualizing hegemonic portrayals of masculinity that are oftentimes embedded in this symbiotic relationship between sports and the military and outlining my methodology, this paper will conclude with an analysis and discussion of three pregame ceremonies that were held during the NFL's commemoration of the 10th anniversary of 9/11. These chiefly exhibit the following themes: acts of healing and heroes, conceptualizing the neoethnic homeland, the valorization of troops and the sanitizing of war, tussling for patches of territory, and last, hegemonic masculinities and the re-empowerment of the neoliberal state.

The Military-Industrial-Entertainment Complex

In his farewell address to the nation on January 17, 1961, President Eisenhower already warned of a military-industrial complex emerging from the U.S. military's increased entanglement with various aspects of society:

Now this conjunction of an immense military establishment and a large arms industry is new in the American experience. The total influence—economic, political, even spiritual—is felt in every city, every Statehouse, every office of the Federal government. We recognize the imperative need for this development. Yet, we must not fail to comprehend its grave implications. Our toil, resources, and livelihood are all involved. So is the very structure of our society. In the councils of government, we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex. (Eisenhower, 1961)

With broad technological, societal, and geo-political changes that occurred in the 1980s and 1990s, mass media have also been increasingly drawn into an alliance with military interests, which has since been described by varying terms, such as “the military–entertainment complex,” “militainment,” “the military–industrial–media–entertainment network,” or the “military–information–entertainment complex” to name a few.

For military researcher Nick Turse (2008), today’s excessive high-tech military complex reaches deeper into American lives and the American psyche than Eisenhower could have ever imagined. The by-products of the corporate–military–entertainment merger, intended to project a hip image, are startling: from The National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing (NASCAR) and rodeo events that widely portray sponsorship by branches of the armed forces, recruiting campaigns that use the latest social networking technology (GoArmy.com, Facebook, and Twitter pages) to capture the attention of teens, to the involvement with popular (civilian) brands, such as Disney, Starbucks, Oakley, or Coca-Cola. “Just like the fictional Matrix, the Complex is nearly everywhere and involved in almost everything, and very few people aren’t plugged into it in some way, shape, or form” (Turse, 2008, p. 17). Der Derian (2009) specifically sees the power of the MIME-NET (military–industrial–media–entertainment network) in the seamless merging of the production, representation, and execution of war. “The result is not merely the copy of a copy, or the creation of something new: It represents a convergence of the means by which we distinguish the original and the new, the real from the reproduced” (Der Derian, 2009, p. xxxvi). New technologies and media of simulation continue to create fidelity between the representation and the reality of war.

The presentation of war is understood as a “spectacle” where discourses manage to control public opinion by distancing, distracting, and disengaging citizens from the realities of war. In *Understanding Power*, Chomsky (2002) argues that these spectator sports serve a passive acquiescing, depoliticizing function, and present a great way to build up chauvinism, irrational competition, and loyalty to power systems, steering attention away from matters of importance, such as U.S. foreign policy. These trends “challenge[d] the meaningfulness of the active, legislative citizen, cultivating instead a citizen-spectator fed directly from executive branch public relations” as Stahl (2010, p. 25) notes. In this way, militarism generates a nation of complicit citizens, most of whom are unaware that their own actions may contribute to an increasingly militarized culture. And if, as Butterworth and Moskal (2009) argue, this form of militarism reduces citizens to complicit spectators, then commercial sport—such as the NFL—represents a particularly potent site for the production of militaristic rhetoric.

The History of the NFL—Warspeak

U.S. sports and military activity have been strikingly paired for decades, creating a “sports–media–military–entertainment complex.” Football in particular demonstrates a strong affinity to militarism (Stossel, 2001). The etymology of the Greek word *athlos* is “the fight of warriors” as well as “the contest of athletes.” The birth of the modern NFL, arising out of a merger with its rival the American Football League, overlapped with the escalation of the Vietnam War. Butterworth and Moskal (2009) suggest that football in particular seemed to serve cultural needs most effectively during this time of confusion and national upheaval.

Hand-to-hand combat speaks metaphorically for football. “Football is a game of contact, collision and violence. But it is also a game of valor” (Rhoden, 2003). Football is clearly a territorial sport driven by the invasion or defense of one’s home turf. Stossel (2001) points out that early American football relied heavily on what we now call the “ground game” (passes were not used) and thus featured “lightly armored men tussling for patches of territory in the dirt: a World War I-era form of combat, men in trenches, the Somme without the slaughter” (para. 12). There were hints of tactics from earlier wars as well. In 1892, after studying Napoleon’s military campaigns, the “flying wedge,” a football play based on using mass momentum provided by advance blockers to clear the way for the tailback carrying the ball, was invented (Stossel, 2001).

Over the decades, the technology of football and the technology of war have drastically evolved, and it is not surprising to find the frequent evocation of more traditional war terminology, such as “long bomb,” “battles in trenches,” “blitz attacks,” “ground and air assaults,” or “surgical strikes.” For someone not familiar with this common football vocabulary, it is easy to think of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq instead. Cover stories in *Sports Illustrated*, such as “If Oakland downs New England, it won’t be from the air attack. Darren McFadden leads the league in rushing and should explode against a struggling Patriot’s defense” (*Sports Illustrated*, 2011), affirm football’s entanglement with what Jansen and Sabo (1994) term *warspeak*. The use of these sport/war metaphors has been a common practice in sports’ broadcasting for many years, serving to (con)fuse the distinctions between values of nationalism with team identity and athletic aggression with military destruction. To understand the military’s symbiotic relationship with the NFL in promoting a culture of militarism, it is essential to observe these developments historically in the context of the first Gulf War and September 11, 2001.

Football During the Gulf War and After September 11, 2001

According to Stossel (2001), the first Gulf War presented “the apotheosis of war’s footballification” as General Norman (nicknamed Stormin’) Schwartzkopf frequently invoked football’s Hail Mary play strategy to describe actual ground operations on television. On the other hand, a “warification of football” took place as Desert Storm trading cards could be found among regular baseball and football memorabilia. The metaphorical use of sports started the continual process to impart a justification for the

war, not the reasons for entering it (Nadelhaft, 1993). Many still remember SuperBowl XXV in 1991, which staged the Buffalo Bills and the New York Giants as a war spectacle involving a barricaded stadium, X-ray security searches of 72,500 fans, antiterrorist squadrons in the stands, American flags distributed to every seat, an emotional performance of the national anthem by Whitney Houston, and a half-time speech by President George H. W. Bush, as Jansen and Sabo (1994) observe. It became obvious that the portrayal of a contest between two “equal” football teams was intended to deflect attention away from the dramatic structural inequalities that separated the United States from Iraq as a developing nation (Nadelhaft, 1993).

After September 11, 2001, constant reminders of the American military in baseball stadium rituals and military appreciation events, NASCAR auto racing displays of belligerent patriotism (see Vavrus, 2007), and NFL “kickoff” shows have multiplied. Similar to SuperBowl XXV, on October 7, 2001, George W. Bush announced the U.S. incursion into Afghanistan with initial air strikes, just half an hour before kickoff between the Eagles and Cardinals. While the timing of the strikes may have made sense strategically, Stossel (2001) rightfully wonders, however, whether the Bush administration chose this kick-off moment as the most conducive for domestic public consumption:

Millions of Americans were already parked in front of their TVs, testosterone pumping. And is there any more red-blooded American moment, on a weekly basis, than the swelling of anticipation between the singing of “The Star-Spangled Banner” and the kickoff at a professional football game? (para. 3)

With the invasion of Iraq in 2003, television pregame programming increasingly took on martial themes, making way for synergies among industry, military, and media (Butterworth, 2008). ESPN even agreed to change the name of the college football Fort Worth Bowl to the Bell Helicopter Armed Forces Bowl. And while the signs of war bled into the world of spectator sports during this period, television war coverage also absorbed the signs of spectator sports (Stahl, 2010). Television capitalized on the anticipation of the new “war by appointment” by appropriating the genre of the pregame show as the “Countdown to Iraq” once the Bush administration announced its intentions to invade Iraq on March 17, 2003. Surveying over a 1,000 Americans in 2003, Stempel (2006) further provides empirical evidence to demonstrate how the existence of a “televised masculinist sport–militaristic nationalism complex” contributed support for the U.S. invasion of Iraq. Involvement in televised masculinist sports was robustly correlated with the doctrine of preventive attacks, support for invading Iraq, and strong patriotic feelings for the United States. Stempel also observed certain racial patterns as White-coded masculinist sports (e.g., NASCAR, golf or baseball) were more strongly associated with support for the Iraqi war than non-White-coded hypermasculinist or masculinist sports were (e.g., football, basketball, or boxing). Similarly, Senkbeil’s (2011) detailed corpus analysis with thousands of journalistic texts from 2002 to 2007 also showed how Bush’s aggressive foreign policy all too often found willing supporters among the dominant voices within sports discourse. Clearly, as Stahl (2010) emphasizes, sport and war continue to co-evolve in a persistent partnership of meaning production: “Functioning between body and body politic,

sports provide a symbolic microcosm for playing out the prevailing vectors of force that imbue war and international relations with meaning” (p. 53). After contextualizing the military’s symbiotic relationship with the NFL, it now remains to situate these commemorative ceremonies as sport/war tropes that serve to construct portrayals of hegemonic masculinity.

The MIME-NET’s Promotion of Hegemonic Masculinity Portrayals

Hegemonic portrayals of masculinity are oftentimes embedded in this symbiotic relationship between sports and the military to “expand the sport-media complex’s masculinist spectacle” (Vavrus, 2007, p. 248). Boyle and Haynes (2008) note that to understand how patriarchy is reinforced in capitalist societies, one needs to take into account sport’s importance in communicating familiar stereotypes of men and women, and their physical abilities. Bernstein and Blain (2002) emphasize the notion that in sport, physical and biological differences interact with social and cultural assumptions about gender. I therefore follow Vavrus’s (2007) conception of masculinity as an ongoing discursive and cultural practice influenced by powerful institutions (e.g., media organizations), “whereby certain configurations of human attributes gain greater social legitimacy and subsequent ‘consent’ than others, thus making them hegemonic” (p. 247). Similarly, Jansen and Sabo (1994) state that

The prevailing cultural definitions of masculinity or hegemonic masculinity are essentially ideological constructions that serve the material interests of dominant male groups. Hegemonic masculinity reflects, supports, and actively cultivates gender inequality (i.e. men’s domination of women), but it also allows elite males to extend their influence and control over lesser status males. (p. 7)

Football as a “bastion of men’s culture” celebrates excessive forms of hyper masculinity, the “ideal man in the masculine conception” (Burstyn, 1999, p. 10). I argue that hegemonic portrayals of masculinity are promoted in these commemorative services mirroring society’s intensive remasculinization and pervasive cultural belief that war and violence are specifically related to manhood, a masculine activity at its core, rendering women powerless and invisible. The MIME-NET’s promotion of such muscular, paternal masculinity, which also and importantly glorifies heroism, bravery, aggression, and “family values,” needs to be critiqued for advancing regressive neo-conservative political discourse. I argue that the portrayals of hegemonic masculinities invoked during the NFL’s 10th anniversary commemorations of 9/11 specifically contribute to re-empowerment of the neoliberal state with far reaching implications for conceptualizations of race and gender.

Method

To analyze the NFL’s commemoration ceremonies for the 10th anniversary of September 11, I use critical discourse analysis (CDA) guided by Altheide’s (1996)

emphasis that media technology, when combined with a theoretical and methodological approach to qualitative textual analysis, can extend our capacity to study and understand public discourse: “The media are consequential in social life” (p. 69). I therefore follow Chouliaraki and Fairclough’s (1999) understanding of social life as “social practice” and of discourse, as one of several elements of social practices that are in a dialectical relationship. CDA marks one approach to qualitative textual analysis, whereby analytical claims about discourses are anchored in close analysis of texts. Hence, CDA’s value lies in supporting qualitative analyses of particular texts and their communicative interaction. I understand the presentation of war within these commemorative ceremonies as a “spectacle” where discourses manage to control public opinion by distancing, distracting, and disengaging citizens from the realities of war.

Clearly, advances in media technology underlie economic and cultural transformations, opening up new forms of experience and knowledge. Thus, “the consequential economic and cultural centrality of signs detached from specific material locations and circulating across boundaries of space and time” (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999, p. 3) becomes increasingly evident. This is exactly what Der Derian (2009) describes is at the heart of what he calls the virtuous war: the technical capability and ethical imperative to threaten and, if necessary, actualize violence from a distance—with no or minimal casualties:

When military forces and entertainment industries join in mimesis, when war games and language games become practically undistinguishable (“All but war is simulation”), when the imitative, repetitive, and regressive powers of simulation negate any sense of original meaning, more than just peace is at risk. (p. 96)

Hence, it is imperative to acknowledge that the economic, social, and cultural changes of late modernity exist as discourses. It is the goal of CDA “to unpick the relations which constitute social practices and to identify the mechanisms which produce antagonisms and struggles, also making explicit its own position in these struggles” (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999, p. 27). Critical theoretical practice aims to be reflexive in illuminating its own conditions of possibility. Struggles are depicted in the course of communicative interaction, which is the discursive facet of the (re)constitution and reproduction of the social as Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999) emphasize. In short, CDA aims to demonstrate that semiotic and linguistic features of interaction are systematically connected with what is going on socially, which in turn is also happening semiotically or linguistically.

By using a CDA and focusing on the discursive as well as intertextual elements of these broadcasts, I demonstrate how these commemorative services are used to spread militaristic messages, which silently mask the military’s deepening expansion into various aspects of our everyday lives. In this sense, I hope to contribute to an understanding of the need for critical theorization and analysis of the media–entertainment complex to illuminate not only the culture of militarism that continues to emerge despite a change in government and the end of the Bush administration, but also to show its detrimental impact on democratic public discourse by acquiescing citizens

and to point toward what unrealized alternatives may exist—“how aspects of this new world which enhance human life can be accentuated, how aspects which are detrimental to it can be changed or mitigated” (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999, p. 4).

Commemorating 9/11 NFL-Style

Ironically or not, and for the second time since 2005, the first Sunday of the NFL's season kick-off fell on the anniversary of September 11, 2001. A total of 13 games were played on that Sunday. In this analysis, I analyze the commemorative services held during three games that took place that day: At 1:00 p.m. Eastern Time (ET), the Baltimore Ravens hosted the Pittsburgh Steelers, the team closest to the site of the crash of United Flight 93 in Shanksville, Pennsylvania. The 4:15 p.m. ET broadcasting window included FOX's telecast of the Washington Redskins hosting the New York Giants, and to conclude the day, the Dallas Cowboys visited the New York Jets on NBC's *Sunday Night Football*. An analysis of the commemoration ceremonies from these three games was conducted by accessing available video material of these particular events from nfl.com, CBS, FOX, and NBC's online archives (see the reference section for a complete list).

The NFL specifically aimed to unite fans on the 10th anniversary of September 11, 2001, by synching pregame salutes during the Sunday afternoon CBS and FOX telecasts, followed by a special Sunday night presentation of the nationally televised Cowboys—Jets game featuring pregame and halftime presentations from MetLife Stadium, which is only about 12 miles away from Ground Zero. All games in each of the broadcast windows featured a special video introduction followed by performances of “Taps” from near the sites of the attacks, and moments of silence. For the 1:00 p.m. games, “Taps” was performed in Shanksville, while the 4:15 p.m. games featured a rendition from Arlington National Cemetery. The Sunday night game included a special pregame performance from Hoboken, New Jersey. In addition, players, coaches, and official personnel wore special NFL 9/11 ribbons as a patch or pin on their uniforms and apparel. All stadiums hosting games on that day also featured the ribbon logo on the field (National Football League, 2011).

September 11, 2011—A Game Day Like Any Other?

NBC and FOX were scolded for their “refusal” to join other networks in special 9/11 anniversary coverage (Hale, 2011). A statement from FOX read that “FOX is contractually obligated to air an N.F.L. double-header on Sunday, Sept. 11, which will run into prime time on the East Coast” (cited in Hale, 2011). A spokesperson for the NFL stated that the games were scheduled to “give us an opportunity to appropriately capture and lift the spirit of America on that day,” and that the networks (in particular NBC, CBS, and FOX) “viewed it as something that would be positive. They understand the role that sport, and the N.F.L. especially, play as a unifying force” (cited in Hale, 2011). Furthermore, an official press release by the National Football League (2011) read,

The NFL, its players and fans will take time to remember the courage and resilience that followed the events of September 11, 2001 with special tributes in stadium, on field and on television during all games on Sunday, September 11 . . . The games and broadcasts on that opening Sunday will unite fans to recognize those who lost their lives, honor the families who lost loved ones, and salute the American spirit, the early responders on 9/11, and other heroes that contributed to the nation's recovery. The schedule of games for that day was designed to appropriately commemorate 9/11 on a national level and what it represents to Americans. (para. 1-2)

The NFL clearly asserted its own vision of being *the* national pastime here. According to The Nielsen Company, the 2011 regular NFL season reached more than 200 million unique viewers, averaging 17.5 million viewers per game. NBC's *Sunday Night Football* was the most-watched show on broadcast primetime averaging 21.5 million viewers (Bean, 2012). By engaging in a symbiotic relationship with the NFL, the military, therefore, gains access to huge national audiences they would otherwise be unable to reach.

As I demonstrate in the following CDA, these meticulously crafted and coordinated pregame commemoration ceremonies across various broadcasting channels and geographic sites create an extremely persuasive vehicle for sustaining and extending a culture of militarism, desperately garnering support for two largely failed wars, and reasserting national identity through excessive displays of patriotism and hegemonic masculinity. The valorization of troops present in these ceremonies aims to sanitize the realities of war. Furthermore, the NFL's 9/11 commemoration ceremonies are complicit in the silent re-empowerment of the neoliberal state, especially through the policing and monitoring of its citizenry in a heteropatriarchal mold, as well as by creating a neoethnic version of national identity that renders certain ethnic minorities as "disposable populations." I will begin by reviewing two special productions by FOX Sports that aired prior to the Washington Redskins—New York Giants game, which show the prevalence of discourses created around the NFL's alleged capacities for healing and unifying the nation.

Acts of Healing and Heroism

One of the special FOX Sports pregame montages aired on September 11, 2011, titled *Football Helps Heal* clearly established football's function as a sport/war trope aiming to unite and heal the tormented American soul. FOX commentator Curt Menefee introduced the crowd to this particular game day, emphasizing that

Giants versus Redskins, America's team, the Dallas Cowboys play in New York tonight . . . Of course, on this tenth anniversary of 9/11 these match-ups are not coincidences. Needless to say the terror attacks affected the lives of so many Americans including four people you are about to meet who lost family members at Ground Zero but found out that one thing that helped the healing process was football. (FOX Sports, 2011b)

The video-insert shown then effectively used pathos, portraying the NFL as a healing force by depicting four family members of victims who died in the attacks on the World Trade Center.

Kevin Parks: One of the strong bonds my dad and I had was sports; he grew up as a Jets fan, and I grew up as a Giants fan, and yes we always gave each other a hard time about it.

Eleni Kousoulis: I remember after 9/11 a lot of things were talked about stopping; one of the things was the NFL and whether or not they were going to go on with the season.

George Coughlin: I think it was a very good thing that the NFL came back and played. It was an emotional day; not just for the players but for all of us watching.

Kevin Parks: It's such an American game. I think it was very symbolic that they were back playing as soon as possible. It definitely helped me.

Patrick Lyons: One reason why I love the NFL is because my dad loved the NFL. (FOX Sports, 2011b)

As football is positioned here to reflect the nation's strength to recover from tragedy, I consider the framing of the NFL as a crucial healing force problematic and troublesome in that its honoring of the victims of 9/11 and the military largely depends on the constitution of wartime citizenship by "empty patriotism" (Kellner, 1992). Through the simultaneous presence of a live TV audience, which has become a rarity in entertainment media today—making sports one of its last holdouts—FOX and the NFL are using these ceremonies strategically to create a simplistic discourse of the nation. By emphasizing the NFL's alleged healing capabilities as the national pastime, these broadcasts are spreading unchallenged patriotic feelings of unity that have to resonate across the entire society to generate popular backing for empire and warfare.

FOX also aired another epic piece prior to the game titled *Journey for Our Heroes*. In this 1.5-min clip, former President G.W. Bush asked the American public to consider what a hero is. On the screen then appeared a montage with the wall of a firefighter memorial reading "may we never forget," before numerous shots of fire fighters and police officers were shown providing their definition of a hero. Some excerpts from the transcript read as follows:

G. W. Bush: In the midst of great danger.

Fire fighters/police members: Heroes stand together united as one . . . refusing to let adversary break their will . . . Courage is not received, it is demonstrated through deeds performed for others.

G. W. Bush: Nobody asks to be a hero . . . During our nation's darkest hour, we started to heal through the help of our national pastimes with the flip of the coin and the roar of the crowd.

Fire fighters/police members: We began to recover . . . we watched then, as we watched today . . . because football is engrained in the heart of this country . . .

It shows that liberty can never be taken from us.

G. W. Bush: And we always have the hope of a better tomorrow.

Firefighter: Today we move forward as a new NFL journey begins, but we will always honor those who are forever embedded in our hearts.

G. W. Bush: We will never forget our heroes! (FOX Sports, 2011c)

As the excerpts above reveal, FOX's *Journey for our Heroes* is drenched with empty patriotism (the camera frequently zooms in on signs such as "Flight 93. *You* fought back. It's our turn *now*" or "They can't take away our freedom") and one-dimensional support-the-firefighters/police rhetoric that focuses on heroic acts of bravery and repeatedly positions the NFL as a healing factor. The discourses witnessed here clearly function as a device of "deflection" (Stahl, 2009) as they direct civic attention away from the question of whether the particular war policies enacted are just; and, instead, they aim to quarantine the citizen from military affairs and silence critical voices by emphasizing the need for unity. After the presentation of the clip, it was not surprising to find FOX Sports' commentator Curt Menefee enthusiastically extending "a huge Texas-sized thank you to the 43rd President of the United States, George W. Bush and all the 9/11 first responders for participating in that powerful and, yes classy opening to our show" after boasting that it indeed, "promises to be an emotional and patriotic day here on FOX on this tenth anniversary of the 9/11 attacks" (FOX Sports, 2011c).

Later, on that day's *Fired Up* segment, another FOX commentator, Howie Long, a former NFL defensive end described how "the unimaginable horror" from 10 years ago left him awestruck by acts of "American heroism": "Our country united in a way that my generation had never seen before." Long further asserted the NFL's unifying and healing function as the national pastime that

provides an opportunity to set aside the troubles of a larger world . . . Today, like never before, I know that the freedom they promised us, the freedom earned by our armed forces, the freedom sacrificed by those we lost on 9/11—will always be stronger than the enemy's ability to harm us. So today, we look back remembering those we have lost, and the true heroes of that day, and we look forward to do what we have done longer than the 31 years that I have been associated with the NFL. We will play a game and in that uniquely American way, we'll relax and we will remember. God bless. (NFL on FOX Sports, 2011a)

Howie Long's extensive statement of American heroism reiterates simplistic ethnocentric and nationalist values referring to an appreciation of "the poetry of our national anthem" and an understanding of "the wisdom of the framers of our Declaration of Independence." He thereby fails to critically address any of the inconsistencies or failures of U.S. foreign policy since September 11, 2001. His declaration re-invokes the same "enemy" rhetoric that has become all too common in the post-9/11 era and endlessly brags about U.S. might and prowess. As an avid sports fan myself, I find it disheartening that these FOX pregame broadcasts solely focus on the display of patriotic consumption and the re-enactment of official policy, while these ceremonies could also provide an important space to encourage a critically engaged citizenship that fosters a civic culture where political initiative and ardor are channeled into open democratic discourse and where political leaders are held accountable for the war policies

they enact. To sum up, these FOX broadcasts present a troubling reminder of the very limited construction of healing and heroism in contemporary America.

Conceptualizing the Neoethnic Homeland

The NFL's commemoration ceremonies also mirror the rise of a post-9/11 neoethnic version of national identity, wherein certain minority groups are now incorporated and redefined as integral to the nation while others are conceptualized as "disposable populations" (Silk, 2012).

Kusz (2007) and Silk (2012) argue that in the aftermath of 9/11, an intensified patriarchal, body politic reemerged, particularly with the media spectacle surrounding Pat Tillman, who left professional football to enlist in the U.S. Army and was killed in Afghanistan by friendly fire in 2004. Tillman's "sacrifice" operates as "a symbol of wounded (White) America" (Silk, 2012, p. 54), working to reinforce subtle modes of contemporary racism, whereby Tillman's positioning as an idealized White, masculine American citizen was connected to and depended on the demonization of African American athletes.

Noteworthy in FOX's *Journey for Our Heroes* in 2011, however, was the producers' obvious intent to provide viewers with an ethnically diverse representation of firefighters and police members, as several were Hispanic, African American, or of Asian descent. During the commemoration ceremonies field-size flags were unrolled in all stadiums displaying African American athletes dispersed throughout with police and military members joining together to hold the flag, invoking a strong image of unity. The camera frequently zoomed in and rested on the faces of African American "star" athletes, such as the Ravens' Ray Lewis, LaQuan Williams, and Brendon Ayanbadejo, as well as the Eagles' cornerback Nnamdi Asomugha. Mike Tomlin, who would help lead the Pittsburgh Steelers to their second Super Bowl appearance in his tenure after their victory in 2009, was also prominently featured.

Several scholars have repeatedly addressed the American public's ambiguous relationship with professional Black male athletes and its often self-righteous critique of their alleged over-privileged, unpatriotic behavior, and their outlandish lifestyles. King (2008) notes that during the built-up of the Iraq war in 2003, a double standard arose concerning which athletes could legitimately deploy the language of war. Kellen Winslow, a former tight end for the University of Miami was one of those athletes heavily scrutinized for yelling "It's war. They're out to kill you, so I'm out there to kill them . . . I'm a fucking soldier" (cited in King, 2008, p. 530) during a press conference after his team's loss. The university later released a statement in which Winslow apologized as he "meant no disrespect to the men and women who have served, or are currently serving, in the armed forces. I cannot begin to imagine the magnitude of war or its consequences" (cited in King, 2008, p. 350). During the 2011 commemoration ceremonies, Winslow now starting for the Tampa Bay Buccaneers was also one of those African Americans firmly incorporated into narratives of U.S. exceptionalism as he was stomping onto the field in warrior pose and with camouflaged facial stripes carrying a huge American flag pole through a human tunnel formed by his cheering

teammates (NFL, 2011). The scene staged here is clearly reminiscent of the famously propagandistic picture of the raising of the U.S. flag on Iwo Jima in 1945 and aims to invoke a strong sense that African American athletes are now allegedly fully incorporated and integrated into American national identity. I argue that with the images of the NFL's commemoration ceremonies in 2011, we can see a deliberate shift away from the demonization of Black athletes to the incorporation of these previously aberrant bodies into U.S. exceptionalism.

While these ceremonies may be alluding to a "post-racial world," they are effectively eliding the ways in which structural racism continues to permeate U.S. institutions. American football is predominantly an African American sport—67% of its players were African American during the 2011 season (Lapchick, 2012, p. 4); however, ethnic diversity is severely lacking when we look at coaching, executive, and managerial positions within the NFL itself: While the Rooney Rule, which requires that people of color be interviewed as part of the search process for head coaches, helped improve the number of African American head coaches in the NFL from two in 2001 to eight in 2011, a lot remains to be done. For example, there has never been a president/CEO of color in the NFL, and only five general managers in 2011 were African American. The Jacksonville Jaguars became the first NFL franchise to have a majority owner of color when Shahid Khan, a Pakistani-born American businessman, joined team ownership in 2012 (Lapchick, 2012). For the current 2013 season, none of the eight new NFL head coaches hired were African American, and hence, their number has currently dropped to three (Rosenthal, 2013). What these ceremonies portray, then, is an illusion of the equity to access the American Dream, glossing over the persistence of institutionalized inequalities. Following Goldberg (2009), I, therefore, argue that the integration of African American athletes into U.S. exceptionalism mirrors "born again racism"—a racism gone private, without race, without the categories to name it as such. As there is seemingly greater heterogeneity and multiplicity, segregation is refined; as visible openness and accessibility are enlarged, exclusionary totalization is extended: Race "orders who (are to) have the pleasures of civility's social networks and civil habits and who suffer its exclusions, who are within and outside its circle of confinements or web of worldly connections" (p. 52).

In this post-9/11 conceptualization of the neoliberal state, certain minorities are now crucial to maintain and reproduce U.S. hegemony and dominant ideological values, while others are still rendered as abject. The NFL's Remembrance ceremonies did not care to mention, for example, the Muslim brothers Husain and Hamza Abdullah who have gained attention for walking away from million dollar NFL contracts to conduct the pilgrimage to Mecca, the Hajj. The Abdullah brothers had also spent the holy month of Ramadan travelling across the country to visit mosques, food kitchens, and community centers holding teaching sessions about Islam (Brown, 2012). While the NFL's 9/11 commemoration ceremonies extensively allude to the heroism and bravery of soldiers defending "our freedoms" and proudly display the prowess of African American athletes, remarkable stories such as those of the Abdullah brothers that could promote intercultural understanding in times of persistent Islamophobia are not given any airtime. Thus, while we see an ethnically diverse cast of FOX's *Journey*

for *Our Heroes* and while the ceremonies extensively focus on Black athletes carrying huge flags, one can consider the absence of people of Middle Eastern and Arabic descent—as “the ‘new niggers’ of this globalizing racial Americanization, present-day pariahs” (Goldberg, 2009, p. 94)—as striking and confirming a neoethnic ideology of U.S. exceptionalism.

Valorizing the Troops and Sanitizing the War

The NFL broadcasts shown on this particular day were also saturated with discourses framed around the valorization of the troops aiming to sanitize the horrors of war. Famed actor Robert DeNiro functioned as an “anchor” figure delivering special tribute before and after all the games. These NFL’s September 11 Remembrance ceremonies were syndicated and disseminated simultaneously through the different stadiums on that day. The statements he rendered, although with slightly different textual versions, clearly emphasized the importance of honoring and valorizing the victims of 9/11 as well as the troops serving at home and abroad. During the Ravens–Steelers game at 1:00 p.m., the stadium announcer asked the crowd to “Please rise and remain standing as we remember those we lost and honor the country we love” in a national minute of remembrance, before DeNiro eulogized the victims:

Ten years ago, 19 terrorists hijacked four airplanes and in an instant 2,977 innocent victims lost their lives. To all who sacrificed that day, from Ground Zero, to the Pentagon, to the heroic passengers on Flight 93 in Shanksville, Pennsylvania—the NFL remembers. (NFL 9-11 Taps and Anthem, 2011)

Prior to the kickoff between the Washington Redskins and the New York Giants, 150 family members affected by the terrorist attacks were invited onto FedEx Field in Landover, Maryland. A few minutes earlier, former U.S. Secretary of State, General Colin Powell, had served as the Redskins’ honorary captain for the pregame coin toss and Robert DeNiro saluted the U.S. troops serving all over the world:

On September 11, 2001, U.S. Flight 77 crashed into the Pentagon. Among the 194 people who perished, 125 were working there. In the decades since the men and women of our armed forces have bravely sacrificed and served with vigilance to ensure our country’s safety. Today, one and a half million men and women in uniform serve in over 135 countries around the world. On behalf of the NFL and our grateful nation—we salute you. (“Redskins,” 2011)

Later on that night before the New York Jets game, Robert DeNiro delivered a final captivating eulogy for the victims of the World Trade Center from Ground Zero projected onto stadium wide screens, as he once again referred to the “innocent victims from over 90 countries” who made this ground sacred and who are “immortalized” with the opening of the national September 11th Memorial as “the NFL and all Americans fulfill our pledge to never forget as we continue our commitment to honor their memory” (NBC, 2011).

I argue that such valorization of soldiers present in these ceremonies and during football games erodes consideration for the actual violence members of the armed forces are likely to experience. The relentless “support the troops” rhetoric rather commodifies members of the Armed Forces for the audience’s pleasure and consumption and normalizes the realities of war. Stahl (2009) notes that the abstraction and massification into “troops” thereby effectively functions as a dissociation device to draw attention away from individual body counts. It also leaves no room for the consideration or acknowledgment for the loss of civilian lives caused by U.S. military actions in pursuit of the war on terror. In this sense, these commemoration ceremonies perpetuate Butler’s (2003) observations that Arab people and Muslims have been strategically Othered and rendered as nonhuman by Western notions of agency and political mobilization. Their lives are “ungrievable” as a national melancholia—a disavowed mourning—denies these Othered victims any public recognition or representation in the broadcasts shown here. The names, images, and stories of those Iraqi and Afghani civilians that the United States has killed are effectively erased from public memory.

Watching these football games and their commemorations valorizing the troops and victims of September 11 makes apparent that an image of American national identity is sold and constructed, which depends on and is (re-)constituted by war. Crowds cheering for their teams in different stadiums across the country and TV viewers at home are encouraged to partake as supportive citizens regardless of their actual level of political engagement with matters of war. This not only aides in the expansion of a militaristic culture, it also strategically aims to silence the growing resistance to the ongoing “war on terror” and civic deliberation and dissent are defined as an attack on the soldier body and, thus, an ultimate immoral act (Stahl, 2009). Citizen identity is hereby severely limited and deprived of much of its political agency in democratic discourse.

Tussling for Patches of Territory

Furthermore, a discourse of football as territorial conquest and “defending one’s home turf” spanned all the three pregame ceremonies, and was particularly prevalent in NBC *Sunday Night Football*’s enactment of an extensive pregame show, which clearly presented the highlight and emotional climax that day. MetLife stadium itself turned into a high-security zone with bomb sniffing dogs and New Jersey State Troopers visible at all entrances (Begley & Mazzeo, 2011). Jets owner Woody Johnson was “proud to join with our fellow countrymen and women to reunite as the greatest nation in the world” (cited in Begley & Mazzeo, 2011). After Sergeant Jeffrey A. Frank from the 2nd Marine Aircraft Wing Band performed “Taps” in front of the 9/11 memorial in Hoboken, New Jersey, the camera zoomed across the river to the New York City skyline to Ground Zero, and back into MetLife stadium, where several players were wearing Fire Department City of New York (FDNY) or the New York City Police Department (NYPD) hats (which is a rather unusual exception to the NFL’s rigid dress code rules). The camera provided a captivating image of two light columns invoking the former towers of the World Trade Center, solemnly shooting into the sky before resting on a still shot of the Ground Zero Memorial, where two lit-up water pools

represented the former foundation of the towers. As the national anthem was winding down, 80,000 Jets and Cowboy fans waving pin-sized American flags, which were distributed to every attendee of the game, appeared on the screen before the camera flew us over to an epic shot of the Statue of Liberty. Viewers then confronted a bird's-eye view perspective of the stadium echoing massive chants of "USA, USA." A field-size flag was ceremoniously and properly refolded while Alicia Keys' song "New York—Empire State of Mind" was blasting through the stadium.

The scenes invoked here assert a territorial conquest that is about to take place—dominating territory, providing the false impression that war is a fair battleground between two equal teams where victory is decided by merit. This was further asserted through the camera's focus on a sign that read "2 Teams, 1 Nation Under God, 9/11 Never Forgotten." I consider the prevalence of militaristic sport tropes as problematic in that they (con)fuse the distinctions between values of nationalism with team identity and athletic aggression with military destruction. With the common perception that sport is merely a metaphor for war, it is easy to deceive the audience of war's actual gruesomeness as football invokes war's symbolism, but not its fatal consequences. This is precisely where we become dangerously trapped and entangled in the MIME-NET, which attempts to render virtual wars as virtuous through the creation of what Baudrillard (1994) termed *simulacra*: The expansion of the "military–industrial–media–entertainment network" creates a simulacrum, where "Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being, or a substance" (Baudrillard, 1994, p. 1) producing a buffer between the physical pains and the horrors of war—it strategically and deliberately removes us from the actual realities of war. In these broadcasts, citizens are assimilated by the military apparatus and seduced by an entertaining war spectacle.

In an additional moment of surprise, former President G.W. Bush shortly thereafter walked out to the center of the field for the inaugural coin toss. Bush seemingly enjoyed the crowd's approving and supportive cheers as he shook hands and distributed pats on the back with various players. His controversial foreign policy decisions and false claims about Iraq's ownership of weapons of mass destruction, which were used to effectively sell the "war on terror" to the American public in the first place, were thereby clearly eradicated from viewers' minds and took a backseat in this excessive display of patriotism.

What does it mean that these commemorative ceremonies saturated with "popcorn patriotism," reiterate themselves 10 years after September 11, 2001, despite a change in government and the assassination of Osama Bin Laden? It becomes apparent here how these commemorative ceremonies and their militaristic messages in our post 9/11 era are closely tied to the presidency of G. W. Bush—after all, it was not Barack Obama, the current president of the United States who was called on to enact the coin toss or take part in FOX's *Journey for our Heroes*. On the other hand, it is important to emphasize that these discourses have also clearly outlived the Bush administration, as sports leagues and media continue to feature military themes as constitutive elements of sport broadcasting (see, for example, Butterworth, 2012, 2013). These ceremonies with their metaphoric invocation of territorial conquest reflect and effectively gloss over the state of perpetual war in which the United States currently exists. A

majority of U.S. Americans have come to blindly accept an infringement of their civil rights (e.g., with the passing of the Patriot and the Wiretap Act) “at home” all under the mantle of “national security” without questioning any of the legal consequences. Furthermore, “peace president” Obama’s silent reframing and expansion of the global war on terror by conducting secretive, unrestricted aerial drone warfare in countries the United States is officially not at war with, especially Pakistan and Yemen, thereby also goes largely unnoticed and is not critically assessed in public debates.

Hegemonic Masculinities and the Re-Empowerment of the Neoliberal State

Last, analyzing these discourses makes apparent how these pregame ceremonies function as effective sport/war tropes in mobilizing patriarchal values that construct, mediate, and maintain hegemonic forms of masculinity, which are indicative of the neoliberal state’s re-empowerment and monitoring of its citizenry. The few women portrayed in FOX’s *Journey for our Heroes* all appear very stern and masculine, exclaiming that a hero is brave enough “to perform acts others dare not do.” During the Ravens–Steelers game, the camera briefly rested on Steelers’ coach Mike Tomlin before it zoomed in on the sole blond female police officer who was surrounded by hyper-muscular football players, fire fighters, members of the armed forces, all uniting to hold the American flag. The images shown here portray hyper-masculine, heavy-hitting, domineering males who make sport their battleground to wage war for freedom and democracy.

Similar images of hard-bodied players were revealed from MetLifeStadium as they were lining up with rather blank, emotionless, and stern faces holding hands on their hearts. A performance of “Amazing Grace” by the Port Authority Police Department (PAPD), NYPD, and FDNY Pipes and Drum Band followed before professionally composed members of the armed forces, NYPD, FDNY, and football players all joined together in unfurling yet another huge American flag to cover the entire field. Notably, in the midst of all these muscular men, again only one single female police officer was shown. The camera focused on a moved Rex Ryan, the Jets’ iconic coach who is usually well-known for his boisterous attitude and braggadocio while stadium banners reading “Re-United” in the background appear. Rex later told reporters that “It was a draining game . . . I am just so proud we were able to pull this thing out, for the town, as well. I probably even feel better about that than I do for our football team” (cited in Waszak, 2011).

With very limited depictions of female service members, police officers, and fire fighters, these commemorative ceremonies accentuate hyper-muscular, paternal masculinities, and a neoconservative ideology in which masculinity is associated with heroism, bravery, violence, and aggression. This neoconservative project of intense remasculinization reminds us of the inextricable links between gender and war that render women virtually invisible through the strategic “inferiorization” of females and femininity, and points to the re-emergence of the neoliberal state: “[it] has become a renegotiation and reempowerment of the state in such a way that war as a general social condition is used to heighten the ability of the state to proclaim itself ‘the source

of all rights” (Jeffords, 1989, p. 184). The media representations witnessed here, therefore, play a central ideological role for reasserting patriarchal values that construct, mediate, and maintain hegemonic forms of masculinity.

These discourses clearly reassert the general assumption that the military has been a domain of patriarchal, masculinist traditions—social hierarchy, conquest, sexism, homophobia, violence, and gun worship—whereby democratic processes of deliberation and debate are swallowed by martial action. The NFL’s 9/11 commemoration ceremonies make evident how the neoliberal state negotiates its re-empowerment specifically through the regulation and monitoring of race and gender. While race is deployed in a Foucaultian sense as technology of determination and population management through the establishment of post-9/11 neoethnic identities as I elaborated earlier; the rendering of females as invisible also furthers neoliberal and neoconservative agendas to continuously frame the subject/citizen in a heteropatriarchal mold. In times of divisive politics, economic uncertainties and ongoing wars, these sport-militaristic discourses affirming the re-empowerment of the neoliberal state through the regulation and monitoring of race and gender within heteropatriarchal confines thereby seems more imperative than ever.

Conclusion

As my CDA demonstrates, the commemorations held by the NFL to honor the victims of 9/11 are one of many components that feed into the expansion of the MIME-NET. The NFL’s commemoration ceremonies are largely a spectacle of the culture of militarism, as they present a unique instance of the sports–media–military nexus in contemporary society through the meticulous coordination, planning, and implementation of these ceremonies across multiple games, broadcasting channels, and geographic locations. The militaristic–sport rhetoric invoked in these ceremonies signifies continuous, limited discourses around themes of healing, valorizing the troops, and sanitizing the war, as well as territorial conquest, while it functions to instill one-dimensional “support the troops” rhetoric to reassert national identity and support for war far beyond the George W. Bush administration. With an all-volunteer army still embroiled in Afghanistan and Iraq, the U.S. military is more than ever relying on sophisticated corporate marketing tools to attract reluctant new recruits; the visual spectacle of these NFL ceremonies, which are broadcasted across the country to a live TV audience, thereby presents one potent recruitment avenue. By seizing the NFL as highlighted with these commemoration ceremonies, the military expands the already familiar conflation of sport and war, and simultaneously trivializes the cruel realities of war as it emphasizes the seriousness of supporting the American military.

As neither war nor the pervasiveness of U.S. militaristic culture has receded since President Obama took office in 2008 and as militarism in sports has arguably expanded, it is necessary to contextualize the NFL’s 9/11 commemoration ceremonies in the larger framework of the neoliberal state. These ceremonies are complicit in and mask the silent re-empowerment of the neoliberal state, especially through the policing and monitoring of its citizenry. These commemorations function as effective sport/war tropes in

mobilizing heteropatriarchal values that construct, mediate, and maintain hegemonic forms of masculinity, particularly by rendering women invisible and by creating a neo-ethnic version of national identity that incorporates previously aberrant bodies, predominantly African American athletes, into U.S. exceptionalism, while it still renders Others as aberrant; mainly ethnic minorities of Middle Eastern and Arabic descent.

After observing the NFL's commemorative services honoring 9/11, we should ask ourselves what the balance is likely to be between the costs of remembrance and its benefits. I argue that these ceremonies nourish flawed illusions about our ability to accurately remember with severe sociopolitical consequences: "After all, to remember may not just mean to grieve; it may also mean to harbor a vision of securing justice or vengeance long after it is time to put the guns away" (Rieff, 2011, p. 48). The process of an encroaching militarization of public space and our everyday culture has clearly been in the making for over a decade now, if not since Operation Desert Storm. Instead of seeing increasingly critical stances and voices raising concern about this, it seems as if the majority of the American public silently watches and consumes "militainment" without much hesitation. A more recent example was the incredible staging of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill versus Michigan State game for Veterans' Day 2011 on the USS Carl Vinson carrier (which was a symbolic choice given that Osama Bin Laden's ashes were dropped into the ocean from it) with basketball players wearing camouflaged jerseys, and President Obama in a bomber jacket giving an emotional speech to honor the troops.

Although I regard Giroux's (2010) claim that "The glorification of military values is quickly approaching the level of fascist idealization" (p. 195) as slightly exaggerated, I do agree that "Militarism in this scenario diminishes both the legitimate reasons for a military presence in society and the necessary struggle for the promise of democracy itself" (p. 195). Critically examining these one-dimensional sport/war tropes in the NFL's 9/11 commemoration ceremonies demonstrates that engaged citizenship in a functioning democracy needs to be aware and demands a critique of a militarization that threatens and works to eliminate those public spaces necessary for democratic debate and discourse. Otherwise, I believe that our silence harms and undermines our democratic institutions. The seizing of the NFL by the military with the representational images of the 9/11 remembrance services continues to uncritically reflect the United States' entanglement in a state of perpetual war. By exposing how these ceremonies feed into the re-empowerment of the neoliberal state with hegemonic portrayals of masculinity that are patriarchal at root and by underscoring the empty, jingoistic patriotism that is so pervasive in these broadcasts, I urgently advocate for a critical pedagogy and scholarship that lays bare, resists, and opposes a culture of militarism.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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