

US Imperialism, Sport, and “the Most Famous Soldier in the War”

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United States imperialism poses many complexities for opponents, analysts, and fellow-travelers alike. It has involved invasion and seizure, in the case of the Philippines and Cuba; temporary occupation and permanent militarization (Japan); naked ideological imperialism (the Monroe doctrine¹ and Theodore Roosevelt); and a cloak of anti-imperialism (Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Barack Obama). “Yanqui”² imperialism is quite different from the classic nineteenth-century model. It’s much harder to gain independence from the United States than it ever was from European colonists, because US imperialism is often indirect and mediated. It produces few dramatic moments of resistive nation building, unlike the painful but well-defined struggles towards sovereignty that threw off conventional colonial yokes across the twentieth century.

This is because Yanqui imperialism began at a well-developed stage of industrial capitalism and developed – in fact led into – the post-industrial age, seeking to break down colonialism in order to gain access to labor and consumption on a global scale. Its mature form coincided with the Cold War, which favored imperial proxies over possessions, owing to both prevailing ideology and the desire to avoid direct nuclear conflict

with an equal. And once that conflict was over, the free markets that had been undermined by classic imperialism were firmly re-established in the 1990s as rhetorical tropes in ways that confirmed the drive towards a loose model of domination, with economic power underwritten by militarism rather than colonialism, via the exploitation of a global division of labor.

That mobile model was itself tied to technological and socioeconomic developments. Jacques Attali (2008: 31) explains that a new “mercantile order forms wherever a creative class masters a key innovation from navigation to accounting or, in our own time, where services are most efficiently mass produced, thus generating enormous wealth.” He recognizes that new eras in knowledge and communication index homologies and exchanges between militarism, colonialism, and class control. The First World recognizes that its economic future lies in finance capital and ideology rather than agriculture and manufacturing – seeking revenue from innovation and intellectual property, not minerals or masses. Hence the advice given by the consulting firm of former US secretary of state and master of the dark art of international relations Henry Kissinger that the United States must “win the battle of the world’s information flows, dominating the

airwaves as Great Britain once ruled the seas” (Rothkopf, 1997: 38, 47). Today’s imperialism is as much a discursive formation as a military struggle, of governmentality as much as government. Culture is crucial, and sport a core aspect of it.

Alongside Japan and Western Europe, the United States forms a power triad of the technical and ideological world. China and India are finally becoming the economic powers that their population numbers should ensure. But while they provide many leading software engineers in addition to a huge army of labor, they have lacked the domestic venture capitalists, the military underpinnings to computing innovation, and the historic cross-cultural textual power that characterize Sony, the BBC, Hollywood, or the Pacific Northwest. It comes as no surprise, for example, that the triad still accounts for 80 percent of the globe’s TV programming market.

None of this means that the US variety of imperialism lacks the drive or the horror of Old World imperialism – just the overt policies and colonial *rites de passage*. The country that advertises itself as the world’s greatest promise of modernity has been dedicated to translating its own national legacy, a nineteenth-century regime of clearance, genocide, and enslavement as much as democracy – a modernity built, as every successful one has been, on brutality – into a foreign and economic policy with similar effects and, at times, methods. Consider the astonishing acts of brutality funded, supported, and undertaken by the United States government across Latin America throughout the 1970s and 1980s and in Honduras in 2009. Yanqui governments and corporations take as a self-ascribed divine right that they may intervene in the political economy of the region in any way and at any time that the United States deems fit. The outcome for Chile after the CIA-engineered *golpe* of 1973 was thousands murdered and tortured, and a so-called economic miracle that was nothing of the kind. Under the democratically elected socialist Salvador Allende, unemployment had run at 4.3 percent. Under the military dictator Augusto Pinochet, it reached 22 percent. Real wages decreased by 40 percent and poverty doubled thanks to intellectual allies and corporate chiefs affiliated with US foreign and economic policy. Many were freshly minted from University of

Chicago graduate seminars in neoliberalism, under the signage of Milton Friedman, who even attended the court of Pinochet (during the same period, he was wheeled around Australia and other US client states to preach his warlockcraft) (Miller, 2007a).

The United States relies on ideology more than colonization, albeit underwritten by self-interested military and commercial power. Europeans wanted to occupy and exemplify conduct to conquered peoples up close; Gringos prefer to invade then instruct from a distance. They learnt a great deal from the old European powers via Spain’s religious *conquista de América*, Portugal’s *missão civilizadora*, and France’s *mission civilisatrice*. Just after World War I, British prime minister David Lloyd George told the Imperial Conference that the empire was “the most hopeful experiment in human organisation which the world has yet seen,” because its *modus operandi* was ethical rather than coercive, “based not on force but on goodwill and a common understanding. Liberty is its binding principle” (quoted in Mansergh, 1969: 158). These logics of cultural policy have been central to Yanqui imperialism.

This history seems largely unknown to the US population. When surveys address popular knowledge of US foreign policy, again and again we find the incorrect assumption that the state’s primary overseas role has been helping others or securing the nation (Miller, 2007b). How could this happen in the case of a country with a million warriors across four continents, 702 military facilities in 132 sovereign states, battleships in each key ocean, a much-vaunted desire to mount wars on at least two international fronts at the same time as ensuring domestic security, and a “defense” budget greater than those of the next 12 biggest countries put together? How many destabilized governments and rigged elections will it take, from Lebanon, Indonesia, Iran, and Việt Nam in the 1950s, through Japan, Laos, Brazil, the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Bolivia, and Chile in the 1960s, Portugal, Australia, and Jamaica in the 1970s, and Central America in the 1980s, before *gringos* realize that US imperialism is bellicose, anti-democratic, and dedicated to economic self-interest (Miller, 2007a)?

We can only understand such ignorance in the light of the ideology and hegemony of nationalism. There is a long mythic history of delusional

popular thought in the United States that dates from the simultaneously anti-British and anti-imperial rhetoric and imperialistic conduct of early white invaders (Pope, 2007). Today, the laughable quality of US journalism, specifically news coverage of military conflicts, is a vital component of the mix (Miller, 2005, 2006, 2010a). And sport?

It has long been a core component of this ideological mystification, not least for its capacity to recruit and train servants of empire. Sport helps to fuel nationalism and militaristic adventurism through its invocation of struggles for territory and identity as grandiose and collective violence as purifying. Historically, processes of internal Americanization equated sport with nationalism. For instance, the push towards Americanizing Native Americans and new immigrants in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was embodied in the formation of compulsory sporting schools and voluntary sporting associations respectively, while black slaves provided crucial labor in the emergence of southern horse-racing. In the two decades from 1881, the US birthed national bodies to regulate and represent tennis, golf, and college sports. The American Legion sponsored baseball to counter working-class radicalism and encourage social integration. Baseball, hockey, and (American) football professionalized and associated themselves with patriotic rhetoric. This soon became part of a new image overseas. In 1888, an international baseball tour was staged to promote sporting goods and display the new nation’s missionary zeal, and World War I saw a major articulation of sporting values with militarism and citizenship (Miller *et al.*, 2001; Pope, 2007; Shapiro, 1989).

Sport also became an arm of US foreign policy. The US Peace Corps argued in *Sports Illustrated* in 1963 that sport was more productive terrain for its mission than teaching because it was less “vulnerable to charges of ‘neo-colonialism’ and ‘cultural imperialism.’” John F. Kennedy established a President’s Council on Youth Fitness to counter a “growing softness, our increasing lack of physical fitness,” because it constituted “a threat to our security” (Lasch, 1979: 183; Kang, 1988: 431; Montez de Oca, 2005). In the run-up to normalizing relations with China, table tennis became a proxy via “ping-pong diplomacy.” And consider executive hectoring of the US Olympic

Federation to boycott the 1980 Moscow Games, Congressional censure of Beijing’s 2000 Olympic bid, the Treasury denying ABC a license to telecast the 1991 Pan-American games because they were held in Havana, or the government opposing major league (MLB) baseball’s attempts to open up Cuban links until 1999 (Miller *et al.*, 2001).

In keeping with the complexities of US imperialism, this chapter looks at both political-economic and symbolic elements in Yanqui sport. It applies the New International Division of Cultural Labor (NICL) to US professional sports and the bourgeois media utilizing a global labor pool and audience to modulate an oversupplied local market where players are too wealthy and crowds too poor to permit the restless drive to growth that both fuels and frustrates capitalism. The chapter then shifts to ideological analysis, via a case study of how sport signifies within the United States in the context of nationalism and imperial warfare, looking at the circumstances surrounding the life, death, and legacy of college and National Football League (NFL) player and military recruit Pat Tillman.

The two halves of the chapter are rather distinct. They do not obey the norms of US academic life, where integration of an argument is crucial and a clear narrative path is prized. That neatness is satisfying but unreal. It militates against political-economic and symbolic analyses being forced together, for methodological reasons as much as anything else. But we see those forces in creative tension across the work of a Marx, an Adorno, or a Foucault, without the need to tie them together or keep them apart via an interpretive violence that guarantees a neat story. Without claiming to mimic those *maitres à penser*, their capacity to allow for threads to spool chaotically at the same time as drawing on grand narratives is exemplary. US imperialism and sport are both animated by the division of labor and ideology, and each is in need of address with due recognition of their relative interdependence with and autonomy from each other.

Professional Sports and the NICL

The theory of the NICL is a reconceptualization of economic dependency theory. By the 1970s,

developing markets for labor and products, and the shift from the spatial sensitivities of electrics to the spatial insensitivities of electronics, pushed businesses in the Global North beyond treating countries in the South as suppliers of raw materials into viewing them instead as shadow-setters of the price of work. That process broke up the prior division of the world into a small number of industrialized nations and a majority of underdeveloped ones, as production was split across continents. Folker Fröbel, Jürgen Heinrichs, and Otto Kreye (1980) christened this phenomenon the New International Division of Labor. They sought to comprehend what Andrew Herod calls “the economic geography of capitalism through the eyes of labor” (2001: 18).

The idea behind the NICL is that just as manufacturing fled the First World, cultural production has also relocated: popular and high-cultural texts, computer-aided design and manufacture, sales, marketing, and information may now be created and exchanged globally, based on the division of labor. The NICL has been most dramatically applied to film and television production (Miller *et al.*, 2005; for sport, see Miller *et al.*, 2001, 2003; Andrews, 2006b). In order to understand it, we must give equivalent attention to the global, where capitalism is ordered; the national, where ideology is determined; and the local, where reception is experienced.

Labor-market expansion and developments in global transportation and communications technology have diminished the need for co-location of sporting management, labor, and consumption. At the top of certain sports, rates of pay for workers who compete internationally have combined with a deregulated world TV market to create labor cosmopolitans across football, ice hockey, swimming, basketball, track, cycling, baseball, golf, tennis, and cricket. In keeping with other new professional diasporas, they migrate on both a seasonal and a permanent basis (Cohen 1997: 155–176).

In the United States, this trend really began in the so-called amateur sphere. In 1960, colleges recruited 8 percent of their athletes from Africa. Then came the “latter-day scramble for Africa” that resembled nineteenth-century imperial powers seeking new territory: an unseemly search by US colleges to attract athletes who could heighten their national standing. By 1980, African

track-and-field athletes provided 33 percent of the campus total, as numerous Olympic successes by middle-distance runners from African nations spurred Yanqui schools to recruit them. When these student athletes came to the United States, they were frequently overworked to service boosterism, leaving town with devastated bodies that allowed no room for further success on behalf of themselves and their countries (Bale, 1991: 79, 74). The acme of this story is Henry Rono, a Kenyan brought to the United States who set four world records in three months in 1978 as a college runner but never won Olympic gold medals. Of course, Africa is not the only source of cannon fodder – tens of thousands of student athletes from abroad compete in the United States each year from dozens of nations, with the numbers rising steadily over time (Popp, Hums, and Greenwell, 2009; NCAA, 1996).

The NICL has since moved into the heart of the professional leagues. Because of the classic capitalist problem of overproduction, US professional sports are being forced to transcend the provincialism of domestic arenas and media outlets. Foreign recruiting is also designed to circumvent the historic gains made by local athletes to secure income redistribution. For instance, between 1974 and 1991, the proportion of revenue spent on MLB players’ salaries increased from 17.6 percent to 42.9 percent, because baseballers achieved free agency in 1975, following court and union action. From that time on, wealthy clubs could hire the most desirable players, leaving poorer teams struggling. These circumstances stimulated the desire to develop players outside the US college system in order to cut beginners’ compensation. In 1970, fewer than 10 percent of MLB players were born outside the United States; by 2003, the proportion was almost 20 percent (Marcano Guevara and Fidler, 1999: 517–518; Brown, 2005: 1117). The 2009 season featured 229 players from 15 nations and territories, amounting to 28 percent of the total roster.³ It’s all about minimizing development costs.

Officially bi-national leagues, where teams themselves come from outside the United States, must comply with multiple legal systems. For example, North American baseball, basketball, and hockey are all subject to Canadian as well as US labor legislation (see Jarvis and Coleman, 1999: 347). This has not been a problem for base-

ball in its dealings with Latin America, however. Academy members fall outside the US amateur draft’s protection of wages and conditions – sporting corporations are uninterested in applying the labor laws and conditions that protect their own executives! That’s not surprising: the Monroe Doctrine licenses dismissive attitudes towards legal frameworks of the region.

Most infamously in terms of these secondary labor markets, MLB teams set up baseball academies across Latin America in the 1980s. They search for young men (defined as 11 years of age and older) who will sign up for much less than equivalently gifted players domiciled in the United States. Some US-based *hispano hablantes* even drop out of high school to join the Dominican amateur leagues, in the hope of being noticed by MLB representatives (Brown, 2002). Teams discourage young boys from attending school, and require them to avoid agents (whose bargaining skills have been so important in the domestic arena). The biggest source of talent is the Dominican Republic, with Puerto Rico, Venezuela, and Mexico of increasing importance. In the 2002 season, 89 Dominicans had major-league contracts, and 1561 were playing in the minor leagues, accounting for almost 25 percent of all pro-ballplayers in the United States. MLB teams have 30 baseball academies in the Republic, and the sport ranks among the top five national industries. Life in the academies is brutish and short, and there are many tragic stories of players destined for the equivalent of a wrecking yard if injuries or skill levels militate against their success. Rejected in their early twenties, they lack marketable skills (Marcano Guevara and Fidler, 2002; Gmelch, 2006; Klein, 2006).

When US-based players have sought to play off-season back home in Latin America, MLB has often blocked them, lest there develop an alternative baseball system. So there was great irony and symbolic violence in baseball’s nomination of March 2000 and 2001 as “The Month of the Americas,” a putative recognition of Latin@ contributions to the sport.⁴ As if in mocking preparation for this moment, *Sports Illustrated* offered a photo-essay of young boys in the Dominican Republic using makeshift equipment in the dirt, overlooked by satellite dishes bringing coverage of US games (Chass, 1998a, 1998b; Wingardner, 1999; Marcano Guevara and Fidler,

1999: 512, 518).⁵ It is especially significant that these programs are aimed at states in the Global South. The North has an entirely different type of aid, based on developing spectator interest in baseball rather than schooling stars (Japan, not the Dominican Republic, was the first place outside North America to host an official MLB series, in 2000) (*Sports Illustrated*, 2000).

Secondary labor markets overseas also provide a place to test home-grown players – for example, in 1998, more than 130 NFL “footballers” had played in league-sponsored competitions outside the United States. There are few foreign-born NFL players – under 2 percent in 1970, rising to no more than 3 percent over the next three decades (Millman, 2009). Canada has always been the largest supplier. In the 1999–2000 season, the league featured 50 overseas players from 23 states (some born of US parents living abroad as part of the work of empire, such as soldiers quartered overseas, while others were the children of economic migrants, and few were direct recruits to the NFL) (Brown, 2005: 1121). The sport has never been of great international interest, for three reasons: its choreography features centralized control, lack of initiative, and suppression of individual expression and finesse, as per US labor practices; its development and attempted export occurred later than baseball and basketball; and it competes seasonally and semiotically with “real” football.

Having saturated the domestic supply of good, cheap, obedient athletes and affluent consumers, the National Basketball Association (NBA) went overseas in search of cheap talent and likely customers during the 1990s, opening offices in Switzerland, Spain, Australia, Hong Kong, and Mexico. Whereas three international players were drafted into the NBA for the 1993–1994 season, opening rosters for 1999–2000 contained 37 athletes from 25 countries, while in 2002–2003, 69 players from 33 countries featured. They comprised almost 14 percent of all NBA professionals. The numbers tripled in the past two decades. The 2008–2009 season included 77 players from 33 nations, and 2009–2010 a record 83 from 36 countries, with slightly more on opening-night roster the next year (Jackson and Andrews, 1999: 34; Brown, 2005: 1119).⁶

Of course, the corollary of this development is the disintegration of essentialist Yanqui

shibboleths, notably that “white men can’t jump” (a position that was always implausible, given the history of the high jump, pole vault, and triple jump). US discourses of racialization, which held that black people could play high-quality basketball and leap high while others could not, were shown to be intensely local. With the growing presence of Latin, Asian, and European players across the NBA, such assertions looked increasingly anachronistic. They finally tumbled to the floor in 2002, when the US national team was easily defeated on successive nights in the World Basketball Championship by Argentina and Yugoslavia – on a US court. By that point, most lists of the 20 leading players in the NBA included a Yugoslavian (Pja Stojakovic), a Virgin Islander (Tim Duncan), a German (Dirk Nowitzki), and a Canadian (Steve Nash), while the best of the young included representatives from France (Tony Parker), Spain (Pau Gasol), and Turkey (Hedo Turkoglu) (Wilbon, 2002). Gasol was NBA rookie of the year and was joined in the All-Rookie team by Parker and Russia’s Andrei Kirilenko. The following season, the number one basketball draft pick was Yao Ming from China, and 29 percent of NBA draftees came from outside the United States. In 2007, the NBA championship was won by a team with backgrounds in four countries, against a team with backgrounds in one (the United States). That year, like the two previous ones, the MVP Award went to a foreigner, and Nowitzki won the finals MVP in 2011 (Coffey, 2002; Price, 2002b; Steele, 2002; Wells, 2008).

For its part, the Women’s National Basketball Association (WNBA) began with use of the NICL, rather than turning to it once the domestic market in players and fans had become supersaturated in cost/quality and wealth/quantity respectively. The NICL was a means of immediately moving to a high standard of player ability and global spectator appeal. Twenty-three nations were represented by 46 players in the 2002 season, with 25 percent of WNBA professionals born outside the United States. The most powerful countries were Brazil and Australia. Five All-Stars were foreign nationals, from Australia (Lauren Jackson and Penny Taylor), Portugal (Ticha Penicheiro), Canada (Stacey Dales-Schuman), and Congo (Mwadi Mabika) (Orton, 2002). In 2005, 29 players came from 19 countries and in 2010,

22 from 13. The WNBA was also sending its players overseas in the off-season to supplement their meager incomes.⁷

But the NICL is not simply an unfolding narrative of US domination. It references fiscal crises for the national sports system at the levels of both demand and supply, necessitating an outreach that also undermines the hermetically-sealed domestic world. The NICL runs counter to a potent brand of amateur intellectualism and reactionary academia that celebrates a putative “American exceptionalism,” which supposedly makes US sport an export rather than an import culture.

The concept of exceptionalism began as an attempt to explain why socialism had not taken greater hold in the United States. It has since turned into an excessive rhapsody to Yanqui world leadership, difference, and sanctimony. So we encounter claims made – in all seriousness – that “foreignness” can make a sport unpopular in the United States and the media will not accept practices coded as “other” (Brown, 2005). Consider the *Village Voice’s* denunciation of football: “Every four years the World Cup comes around, and with it a swarm of soccer nerds and bullies reminding us how backward and provincial we are for not appreciating soccer enough” (Barra, 2002). During the 2010 World Cup, this anti-leftist xenophobia became focused domestically. Glenn Beck, one of the right’s pitchmen in the bourgeois media, referred to Obama’s policies as “the World Cup” of “political thought,” advising us that “the rest of the world likes Barack Obama’s policies, we do not” and “we don’t want the World Cup, we don’t like the World Cup, we don’t like soccer.” Gordon Liddy, the convicted Watergate conspirator, decried the game on his talk show because it “originated with the South American Indians” and asked “[w]hatever happened to American exceptionalism?” His guests from the coin-operated Media Research Center said it was “a poor man or poor woman’s sport” that “the left is pushing . . . in schools across the country” (Willis, 2010).

Perhaps the most appalling instance of “American exceptionalism” was provided by the Reaganite Republican Jack Kemp, who derided football before Congress as a “European socialist” sport by contrast with its “democratic” US rival (quoted in *Economist*, 2006). Similarly ethnocen-

tric denunciations – predicated, of course, on letting Latin@s and migrants know they’re not “American” – largely flow from the intemperate keystrokes and irate penmanship of angry white men. Frustrated at the prominence and popularity of the sport, they are desperate to attack its “European . . . death and despair” (Webb, 2009). As at December 2009, Google offered 31,000 hits for “soccer is un-American,” many of which, unsurprisingly, dwelt on the sexuality of its players and followers. But these are death-throes against the tide of history. Wiser critics, such as Habte Selassie (2002), connect such protectionist expressions to Cold War scapegoating of immigrants, with the rejection of football in the 1940s and 1950s a rejection of difference. By 2005, the United States had English- and Spanish-language TV networks dedicated to the sport, covering leagues in Britain, Germany, Japan, Africa, France, Spain, the Netherlands, Australia, Mexico – and the United States (men’s and women’s by 2009). In Los Angeles, 93,000 people turned up to watch a football match in 2009. The clouds had grown heavy and thick around elderly, inadequate ways of understanding the US sporting market, via “American exceptionalism.”

Time magazine’s European business correspondent (Ledbetter, 2002) offers a better model for explaining the world-historical extent of cultural protectionism in the United States, which applies across the entertainment spectrum (Miller *et al.*, 2005). One might regard the level of protection in US sport as akin to socialism – a draft for *faux* students who have been trained for free in directly and indirectly state-subsidized universities; limits on salaries; revenue sharing; stadiums paid for through taxation; exemptions from anti-trust legislation; and limits on cable competition (Ford, 2002). This is a planned, command economy by any other name – one that works with the recognition that, in sport, firms need opponents in order to survive. Unlike its role in other forms of capitalism, competition in sport is more an end than a means. And it is in cahoots with imperialism’s means of dealing with economic crises.

There is considerable debate about whether the sporting media are immune to recessions. Premium sports claim that their brand will protect them from reductions in television rights and sponsorship revenue, while media compa-

nies confront balance sheets with reduced advertising and subscriptions. In barely a decade, overbidding for TV rights, fueled by Rupert Murdoch’s dual ambition of creating a global sporting television service while achieving hegemony in its foundational market, has turned broadcast sport from a prized commodity to a valued loss leader, and finally into a contractual liability. As one commentator put it, during the largest slump in spending on advertising since World War II, but before the debt-driven crisis of five years later, “the US media market is glutted with more sports and entertainment properties than there is ad money to go round” (McCarthy, 2002: 27).

The early twenty-first century clearly shows that the protectionism of the US sports market has produced a domestic oversupply. Television networks, cable and satellite companies, universities, and municipal governments have begun to question the vast public subsidies given to the four major professional men’s sports of “football,” ice hockey, basketball, and baseball, and the nature and extent of their externalities. Expansion teams are under close scrutiny – Disney immediately looked to sell the 2002 “World” Series winners, the Anaheim Angels, which it had only bought as a means of “relandscaping and reinvigorating” the location that housed Disneyland (Goldsmith, 2002). Morgan Stanley suggests that the major TV networks lost US\$1.3 billion on sports between 2002 and 2006. The NFL’s fortunes went into a steep decline, with a decrease in ratings of 13 percent in the five seasons to 2002. Disney dispatched *Monday Night Football* from ABC to ESPN in 2006 due to falling audience numbers, where it was a success at that much lower ratings threshold. In 2009, NBC was unable to sell all its advertising slots for the Super Bowl (Hiestand, 2002; J. Solomon, 2002; Nunn and Rosentraub, 2003; *Economist*, 2009a).

This oversupply led to write-downs of US\$3 billion in the value of rights to sport paid by US media companies. Such hard-fought deals as NBC’s contract for future Olympic games are financial albatrosses around corporate necks (Chenoweth and O’Riordan, 2002). Murdoch’s News Corporation lost US\$5.4 billion in 2008–2009, partly because of declining advertising revenue for regional cable sports networks and

increased marketing and sports-rights costs, such as the National Association for Stock Car Racing (NASCAR). When rights come up for renegotiation, television's losses are passed onto sports. Competition for shrinking resources between owners, administrators, coaches, elite players, and other fractions of the sporting industries were not pretty in the early years of this century, and uglier still in the post-2007 global financial crisis. By 2009–2010, the NBA needed a US\$200 million line of credit to subsidize bankrupt teams. Under these circumstances, smaller sports (including many Olympic and US college codes and the WNBA) and media companies vulnerable to the credit squeeze are in jeopardy (Arango, 2009; News Corporation, 2009; Sherlock, 2008; Zirin, 2009).

Along the way, the working-class pretensions of professional sports – especially powerful in asinine claims made against football – have been eroded. In the five years from 1997, the proportion of NFL fans earning below US\$30,000 decreased by over 7 percent, while the proportion earning over US\$100,000 increased by 30 percent. In keeping with this gentrification, banks moved to the center of US sports sponsorship, even as they were dealing with the public opprobrium resulting from their role in the Great Recession and subsequent reward of corporate welfare. The 2009–2010 NFL season saw ticket prices soar and attendance numbers crash as average prices for the hour or less of actual action per match went to around \$100 (Goetzl, 2008; *Economist*, 2009a, 2009b; Zirin, 2009).

The response to this overproduction has been a classic move of imperialism: stimulating overseas demand. The NFL's increasing reliance on a global marketplace has even produced "collaborations" with rival codes: in 2002, FC Barcelona, the leading Catalan football club, signed a cross-promotional deal with the league. American "football," a minor sport globally, gained from this association with a truly competitive sport, while Barcelona obtained a certain *entrée* to the United States. The Barcelona deal followed one struck by Manchester United with the Yankees, the only US sporting club with any real meaning across the globe since the demise of Michael Jordan (Martin and Reeves, 2001; G. Solomon, 2002; Miller, 2004). The NFL invested forlornly in overseas teams via NFL Europe/Europa until it

gave up in 2007, and continues to subsidize thousands of hours of television across the globe and offer feckless exhibition games and a few league fixtures attracting expats and followers of the odd and the banal (*Times-Picayune*, 2002; Carrington, 2009: 23).

The NBA commissioner euphemized the drastic impact of domestic over-expansion as a sign that "the American sports market is mature," as he unveiled plans to draw 50 percent of the league's revenue from overseas (Hiestand, 2002). This movement from provincial protectionism to an NICL that addresses the crisis of domestic overproduction is the key to the future of US basketball, with white European stars an added "advantage" both internationally and at home via racialized marketing. As the famous anti-racist black coach John Thompson said, "it's only economically smart" (quoted in Coffey, 2002). Basketball's use of Yao Ming and other leading players to attract audiences in their countries of origin and diasporic contexts is a conspicuous example of global marketing (Rowe and Gilmour, 2008). When he retired, the reaction was as much about his sales impact in China as his career.⁸ The NBA also legalized zone defense in order to diminish the boredom of US players backing opponents into the low post, favoring instead the skilled European jump shooter through the application of international rules in a hitherto protected environment (Price, 2002a). Meanwhile, the stubbornly parochial, race-baiting world of NASCAR has struggled, with logos dropping from vehicles like flies, and teams amalgamating to counter desperate financial straits (*Economist*, 2009a).

TV's response to the crisis is to look for new markets overseas. ESPN, a series of Yanqui sports television cable channels owned by Disney that modestly styles itself the "worldwide leader in sports," has 31 networks outside the United States, in addition to related interests in promotions and other media. Its texts are on sale in 194 countries and territories, across 15 language groups: a Latin American network started in 1989 and operates alongside three subregional networks, plus there are five networks in Canada, several EU channels, and programming throughout the Arab world, in addition to 13 stations across Asia. ESPN customizes programs established in the United States, notably the highlights

show *SportsCenter*, and emphasizes local interests in materials devised for particular audiences, especially football. At issue here are the expropriation of profit and the consolidation of already dominant sports (Miller, 2010b). When the Irish-based Setanta television company went bankrupt in 2009, ESPN bought up its rights to screen the English Premier League in the United Kingdom. In 2008, ESPN Star Sports, a joint Disney–News Corporation venture (Mickey-meets-Rupert) invested US\$1 billion over a decade in the new Twenty20 cricket world championships (Gibson, 2009; Hutton, 2009; Rowe and Gilmour, 2009). NBA TV began in 1999, and is now available worldwide.⁹

To summarize these findings, we can say that the sporting cartels of the United States are endeavoring to use the NICL to minimize the price of their overproduction. Protectionism has consequently eased somewhat in terms of player origins and rules of the game, but major barriers remain to truly international exchange. Massive resources are dedicated to importing and exporting players and exporting tastes, but few to importing the latter. The empire wants to expropriate and buy human capital, and develop audiences, from elsewhere. This is a classic imperialist economic move.

Ideological Ramifications – Tillman Time

In returning to my earlier query about how it is possible for vast swathes of the US population to be so gullible about imperialism, “the sporting star” can be seen as embodying the brutality of the nation blended with its beauty (also see PART FOUR). The sports star is simultaneously a product of popular culture, a marketing system, a social sign, a national emblem, an outcome of capitalism and individualism, and an object of personal and public consumption. Joseph Maguire (1993) typifies this sporting body as a model of discipline, a mirror, a site of domination, and a form of communication. The disciplined body is remodeled through diet and training. The mirroring body functions as a machine of desire, encouraging mimetic conduct via the purchase of commodities. The dominating body exercises power through physical force,

both on the field and – potentially – off it. Finally, the communicative body is an expressive totality, balletic and beautiful. These taxonomies bleed into one another, and can be internally conflictual or straightforwardly functional. They are carried by human, commercial, and governmental practices that stretch and maintain boundaries between athletes, sporting performance, and aspiration. A man becomes a sports star when his off-track lifestyle and personality merge with his sporting achievements as amalgams of training, playing, and the self. Whilst bodies may be caked in mud or clad in uniforms, their names, numbers, sponsors, case histories, and smiles can all be retrieved and replayed by the electronic brush of history under the sign of nationalistic fervor, and their dedication metaphorized to humanize and endorse imperialism. The internal ideological work of nationalism and the external violent work of imperialism meet neatly under the sign of the NFL with its efforts to generate a global hyper-masculinist *demesne* that symbolizes brutality and produces revenue. These attempts may not have succeeded internationally, but domestically, their hold over the national imaginary remains regrettably powerful.

It comes as no surprise that studies of US television sports fans indicate high correlations with support for imperialist warmongering, principally among white men (Stempel, 2006). Sporting allegory has traditionally reinforced masculinism and patriotism, especially at times of great conflict or formal celebration. To cite some prominent US instances: Andrew Johnson hosted the New York Mutuals baseball club at the White House in 1867; Theodore Roosevelt indexed his manliness by riding horses; opening day MLB pitches have regularly been thrown by presidents since 1910; the first network TV broadcast in the United States was a 1945 “football” game with Harry S. Truman in the stadium, binding sport, politics, and corporate power together in a symbolic whirl; Dwight D. Eisenhower favored golf; and Ronald Reagan was carefully if comically depicted as a cowboy. Sport has also provided linguistic tropes of empire and masculinity: Richard M. Nixon’s secretary of defense Melvin Laird euphemized the mining of Haiphong Harbor and increased bombing of North Việt Nam as “an expansion ball club”; the Nixon

White House staff called itself “operation line-backer”; and Tricky Dicky’s own nickname was “quarterback.” The oleaginous Reagan regularly cited the role he played as student “football” player George Gipp in the 1940 biopic of a Notre Dame football coach, *Knut Rockne, All American*. Reagan repeatedly quoted Gipp’s dying words that had inspired his side to new heights – “win one for the Gipper” – in a 1981 Commencement address at the university commemorated in the film, when opening the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics, as a rallying cry during the Nevada senate race in 1986, and at George H.W. Bush’s nomination two years later. Reagan also trivialized his 1984 presidential opponent Walter Mondale as “Coach Tax Hike.” In 2000, Bill Bradley’s campaign for the Democratic nomination played on his Olympic gold medal in basketball and subsequent title-winning career with the New York Knicks. George W. Bush solidified his public image in the 1990s as owner of the Texas Rangers baseball franchise, and spent much of his presidency riding bikes and running trails when he wasn’t sleeping or invading, while John Kerry fruitlessly countered with “I’ve been a hunter all my life” in 2004. During the 2008 presidential campaign, Barack Obama played basketball with soldiers in Iraq, John McCain appeared at NASCAR events, and Sarah Palin announced that she enjoyed shooting caribou from planes (Miller, 2001, 2010b; Zirin, 2008a).

Beyond presidential politics, militarists deploy this type of symbolism all the time: officers see themselves as all-rounders, as pentathletes (Keenan, 2006). “Football” has specialized in nationalistic fervor through coordination with the military since the American War in Việt Nam, and there is now even an Armed Forces Bowl, in which college “football” is sponsored by Bell Helicopter-Textron, one of the vast array of “private-enterprise” companies whose livelihoods rely on public-sector welfare via the development and purchase of murderous technology. In this instance, promotional activities are not about selling products to fans, as per most sports underwriting. Instead, they are dedicated to creating goodwill towards corporate militaristic welfare through homologies between sport, nation, and *matériel*, via a contest that is televised – and owned – by ESPN, featuring ghoulish recruiters looking to prey on young

spectators plus the presentation of a “Great American Patriot Award.” For its part, baseball offers “Welcome Back Veterans” and “Military Appreciation” events (Butterworth and Moskal, 2009).

At both encoding and decoding levels, it seems as though sporting metaphors associate romantic male sacrifice with national glory through classic second-order meaning. The Gipp exemplar takes the mythic last words of an historical character as replayed in a film. Four decades later, the actor playing him redispenses the words for political purposes, cleaving to himself the *persona* of the original speaker. Enunciation loses historical specificity, banality benefits, and thought disorder reigns. And that is where the story of Pat Tillman begins.

Tillman was a successful Arizona State University (ASU) “football” player who became a successful NFL player with the Arizona Cardinals, then turned down the opportunity to further his career through a US\$3.6 million contract, due to his ideological affinities with US imperialism: Tillman had interpreted the horrors of September 11, 2001 as justifications for military retribution. His decision became a crucial aspect of US imperial propaganda, because of his status as a “football hero” (a bizarre Yanqui neologism). His prominence made him individually symbolic, rather than *lumpen*-fodder, and he was sent a very public note of congratulation by the soon-to-be-disgraced secretary of defense, Donald Rumsfeld (*Democracy Now!*, 2008). Why? Because Tillman’s recruitment delivered a “testosterone cocktail” that “was impossible to resist” (Zirin, 2005): “Journalists simply could not write about Tillman without evoking his role as a protagonist of mythic proportions” (Chidester, 2009: 366). When he died in Afghanistan in April 2004, Tillman was immediately hailed for his sacrifice by the state, academia, the NFL, and the bourgeois media, and was posthumously awarded a distinguished medal, the Silver Star, for “gallantry in action against an armed enemy” which he had supposedly pursued and “forced to withdraw” (Couric, 2008).

McCain (2004) gave an eulogy at Tillman’s nationally televised (ESPN) funeral that quickly turned the occasion into a hymn to “our blessed and mostly peaceful society,” supported of course by military service, where “the purpose of all

good courage is love.” McCain said that soldiers’ “blood debts” and “goodness” would endure, and reassured Tillman’s family as it waited “to see him again, when a loving god reunites us all.” This courage and these debts had driven Tillman from football to fighting, according to this ideologue – who had never met him, and whose “thoughts” were immediately published by the far-right *National Review* magazine. Hack conservative intellectual Ann Coulter called Tillman “an American original – virtuous, pure and masculine like only an American male can be” (quoted in Collier, 2005). And the libertarian simpletons over at the Cato Institute took his volunteerism as a sign that a military draft was not necessary, so pure was the population’s desire to serve the nation while sidestepping the state (Healy, 2004).

The White House hailed Tillman as “an inspiration on and off the football field . . . who made the ultimate sacrifice in the war on terror” (quoted in Zirin, 2005). The Governor of Arizona ordered that flags at ASU be flown at half-mast, and the university began to market match tickets under his name. The Cardinals divined that he “represented all that was good in sports” and placed his uniform in a glass case alongside bouquets and teddy bears. The league said Tillman “personified all the best values of his country and the NFL.” Much was made of his non-stop energy and desire to hurt opponents in tackles (quoted in *Sports Illustrated*, 2004).

Meanwhile, the league’s appalling record of metabolic syndrome and cardiovascular mortality amongst its “athletes” – much higher than ordinary people, let alone by comparison with authentic sporting stars – was matched by dreadful health reports in terms of their lack of fitness and overall likelihood of early death, and new research that indicated an alarming, in fact astonishing, correlation with neurodegeneration (Selden *et al.*, 2009; Wojtys, 2009). Tillman may have died on the field of adventurism but his former colleagues were set for less glamorous deaths as empire’s symbolic stars whose bodies were ultimately worth nothing.

But Tillman’s story became more complex and contradictory as time passed. He was an atheist, as his youngest brother Richard explained to McCain and ESPN at the funeral: “Pat isn’t with God. He’s fucking dead. He wasn’t religious. So

thank you for your thoughts, but he’s fucking dead” (quoted in Tillman with Zacchino, 2008). And during his time abroad, Tillman had become anti-war and a fan of Noam Chomsky’s – he was going to meet the veteran analyst of imperialism had he returned from theater (Zirin, 2005). Then it turned out that Tillman had been the victim of manslaughter by his colleagues, not murder by his enemies. In short, he failed the tasks laid down for him by history – he was not what he looked like, not what he had been built up to be, and not what the war machine had manufactured. He was a critic of US imperialism at the very moment that he was celebrated as its epigone and epitome. His movement into the NFL had gone from sporting recruit to nationalistic recruit to ideological recruit to fallen recruit to dead activist.

General Stanley McChrystal is notorious for several things, foremost among them having been Obama’s chief warmonger of Afghanistan, a key long-term operative in the empire’s mistreatment of detainees, and a very amateurish *Rolling Stone* interviewee.¹⁰ He was also a central player in the scandalous, mendacious propaganda use of Tillman’s name, service, and death. When McChrystal was appointed to run the empire in Afghanistan, Tillman’s father accused him of having conducted “a falsified homicide investigation.” Tillman’s brother Kevin referred to him as a “fraud,” because McChrystal had approved the award of a Silver Star to Pat despite the Ranger’s death at the hands of compatriots (which McChrystal admitted under oath that he had known, even though the citation referred to “devastating enemy fire”). In 2007, the Pentagon’s acting inspector general held McChrystal “accountable for the inaccurate and misleading assertions” in the citation, but he was overruled by the army (Fox News, 2009; *Democracy Now!*, 2008; Laidlaw and Mendoza, 2007; Krakauer, 2009; Tillman with Zacchino, 2008). The military later determined that the Silver Star citation was “based on what he [Tillman] intended to do” (White, 2005). Got it.

Tillman’s family spent years trying to penetrate the Pentagon’s obfuscation and propaganda simply to establish what had been known from the moment of his death – that he’d been killed by Yanquis, heroized by Yanquis, and used by Yanquis in a way that was first and foremost

dedicated to lying to his family members as part of a massive cover-up of the kind that color Republican and Democrat administrations alike (Collier, 2005; Camacho and Hauser, 2007; Andrews, 2006a). As second-order meaning, this bought into a long and disgraceful association of whiteness with sporting and military valor versus an association of blackness with flashiness and selfishness (Kusz, 2007). As a white man, Tillman was fodder for this binary.

Tillman's brother and fellow-recruit Kevin testified before Congress that the impending disclosures about Abu Ghraib had driven the Pentagon to clutch at Pat and claim him for nationalism: "Revealing that Pat's death was a fratricide would have been a political disaster during a month already swollen with political disasters and a brutal truth that the American public would undoubtedly find unacceptable, so the facts needed to be suppressed. An alternative narrative had to be constructed" (*Democracy Now!*, 2008). Kevin went on to explain how repulsed the family was to learn that "our elected leaders were subverting international law and humanity" through the seizure and torture of people, because "suspension of Habeas Corpus is supposed to keep this country safe" and "reason is being discarded for faith, dogma, and nonsense" (Tillman, 2006).

Any attempt to rearticulate Tillman's death and its *faux* heroization led to immediate and maddened calumny from the right. When ASU art professor John Leños generated a poster of Tillman entitled "Friendly Fire" that questioned these militaristic distortions "and the quasi-religious and dogmatic adherence to Tillman's mythological heroic image by mainly conservative male Americans," he was immediately subjected to scrutiny by CBS, CNN, and ABC. That produced angry outbursts by viewers, hundreds of violent, splenetic emails and threats, and an inquiry into Leños by ASU and denunciations of him by the school's bureaucrats (Leños, 2005). When the *San Francisco Chronicle* disclosed that Tillman had regarded the invasion of Iraq as "fucking illegal" (Collier, 2005), Coulter thundered that "I don't believe it" (quoted in Zirin, 2005). There was even an embarrassingly performative, sentimental academic lament for him that fretted over the loss of US servicemen as if

they were the central sufferers of imperial overreach (Lockford, 2008).

As Kevin Tillman noted to Congress, querying the official rendition of his brother's death was equated with "casting doubt on Pat's bravery and sacrifice." It was nothing of the sort. Rather, once the nature of the scandal was exposed, "Pat was no longer of use as a sales asset." Needless to say, Rumsfeld did not contact the family once this "asset" had been compromised – but did find the time to deny there had been a cover-up. His typically torturous prose announced that the story had been "handled in a way that was unsatisfactory." This was an oblique reference to the fact that Tillman's mother learnt her son was the victim of fratricide from the *Arizona Republic*, not an Arizona Republican. For questioning the Pentagon, she and her surviving sons were routinely derided by the right. One of the Army's principal investigators, and a recommender of the Silver Star award, Tillman's commander Ralph Kauzlarich, suggested to the network that the Tillman family had been unable to accept that this was "an unfortunate accident" because it was not religious (i.e., superstitious) and hence saw Pat's fate as to become "worm dirt." (This "reasoning" was also evident in an internal military memo; Breslau, 2008.) At least Tillman's worm-afterlife had a name – the Afghan soldier killed alongside him was left unidentified for years (Fish, 2006; Goff, 2006; *Democracy Now!*, 2008; Couric, 2008; Breslau, 2008; Greenwald, 2007).

But even true believers came to question the administration's propaganda. The TV drama series *Bones* offered a thinly veiled fictionalization of the cover-up (Takacs, 2009). Once the Republicans lost their Congressional majority in 2006, the House of Representatives committee system mounted inquiries, albeit ineffectual ones (Greenwald, 2007; Tillman with Zacchino, 2008). ESPN had already done a very thorough job of investigative journalism, extremely rare in the fawning fandom that characterizes the US sporting press. It essentially showed that everyone in the chain of command understood this was a fratricide within hours of the event (Fish, 2006). The depth and breadth of ESPN's research may be taken as one of those fissures that occur when the empire is viewed as a compromised bureaucratic thicket

rather than a pure national *esprit de corps* – when the state overdetermines the nation, and reflexive Yanqui dislike of government overtakes the association of military command with, to quote McCain, “love.”

Conclusion

The NICL governs the material relationship between US sport and empire. The national sporting economy has been compromised by overreach, such that it relies on talent from overseas to play and money from overseas to watch. Ironically, the NFL, a global failure, recently produced a significant ideological debate about the violence of Yanqui imperialism.

We need to understand the fissures between capital and the sovereign state, between the rhetoric and reality of US imperialism. Like Pat Tillman, the US public is not monolithic or entirely gullible, US academia is not entirely nationalistic, and the US press is not completely imperialistic. There are long and profound histories of Yanqui anti-imperialism in unions, political parties, churches, critical intellectual circles, and international feminism. Sport has generated its own stellar literature of dissent (summarized and exemplified in Zirin, 2008b). A progressive, pacific internationalism has deep strains in US thinking, and ultimately determined the Tillman story in both life and death. Tillman himself was clearly a complex figure, a bizarre amalgam of *machismo* and subtlety, of militarism and criticism, of nationalism and cosmopolitanism. He was all the contradictory subjects suggested by Maguire’s typology of the peak athlete, because he embodied the violence at the heart of contemporary empire with its relatively autonomous discursive side – a Yanqui who saw the constitution as a political, not a religious document, and was able to reconsider his ideological commitments in accordance with international law and material experience. His death, as tragic as all others in war, rearticulates an entire history of US sport’s imbrication with imperial endeavor. It reminds us that the world of work and the fragility of bodies are central to sport in both its economic and political signification. This chapter may not

have followed the dictates of essay writing in terms of a neatly reasoned, unitary argument, but I hope that it has offered a realistic account of a polyvalent phenomenon and offered some valuable tools for engaging and dismantling imperial practice.

Acknowledgments

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Notes

- 1 The Monroe Doctrine, adopted as US foreign policy in the 1820s under President Monroe in opposition to European intervention in the Western Hemisphere, holds that any and all activities taking place in the Americas can basically be taken as the business of the US whenever it sees fit.
- 2 Yanqui is the term used by the countries to whom the adjective “American” applies but which are not part of the USA.
- 3 See http://mlb.com/news/press_releases/press_release.jsp?ymd=20090406&content_id=4139614&vkey=pr_mlb&fext=.jsp&c_id=mlb, accessed December 17, 2012.
- 4 “Latin@” is the non-sexist form favored across the Americas of “Latino/a.”
- 5 See also “MLB honors Latin impact in 2000 with ‘Month of the Americas.’” MLB press release, November 10, 1999.
- 6 See <http://www.voanews.com/english/news/usa/people/International-Players-Impact-on-NBA-Grows-in-Past-Two-Decades-116426514.html>; <http://www.reuters.com/article/2010/10/26/us-nba-internationals-idUSTRE69P3T020101026>, accessed December 17, 2012.
- 7 See http://wnba.com/players/international_roster.html; http://www.wnba.com/news/rosters_100514.html, accessed December 17, 2012.
- 8 See http://shanghaiist.com/2011/07/20/yao_ming_retirement_press_conferenc.php, accessed December 17, 2012.
- 9 See <http://nba.com/global>; <http://nba.com/Fan-Night>, accessed December 17, 2012.
- 10 See <http://www.rollingstone.com/politics/news/the-runaway-general-20100622>, accessed December 17, 2012.

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