

The Pennsylvania State University

The Graduate School

**AMERICA'S GAME:
PROFESSIONAL FOOTBALL AS POPULAR CULTURE LORE**

A Dissertation in

American Studies

by

John E. Price II

© 2019 John E. Price II

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

August 2019

The dissertation of John E. Price II was reviewed and approved* by the following:

Simon J. Bronner
Distinguished Professor of American Studies and Folklore
Dissertation Advisor
Chair of Committee

Charles D. Kupfer
Associate Professor of American Studies and History

Anthony Bak Buccitelli
Associate Professor of American Studies and Communications

Raffy R. Luquis
Associate Professor of Health Education, School of Behavioral Science and Education

John Haddad
Professor of American Studies
Program Coordinator, American Studies

*Signatures are on file in the Graduate School.

ABSTRACT

The relationship between popular culture and folklore is symbiotic, with each informing and expanding the other. However, cultural studies scholars historically dismiss folkloric aspect of sports or relegate them to a pre-industrial lifestyle, wholly replaced or marginalized in the twentieth century. Similarly, folklorists have been reluctant to analyze the role of sports in popular culture, focusing instead on either how recognizable folklore is used by popular culture or how contemporary folklore exists outside of popular culture. In order to bridge the gap between the two academic perspectives, this dissertation applies the tools of folkloristics to professional football in Cold War America, illustrating how popular culture has become a medium through which Americans form communities and enforce folkloric boundaries of language, symbolism, and narratives to create a group identity.

Professional football is an ideal exemplar to demonstrate how popular culture has evolved into the role of modern tradition-bearer. Through professional football, Americans formed tribal loyalties, established customs and beliefs, and created a language of fandom that has expanded into the larger popular culture. Mass-media and entertainment enforced and propagated football's emerging lore, instructing consumers on which outfits to buy to fit in, and which foods to eat during the big game. The NFL took an active role in the process, creating a museum to itself and charging its own production company, NFL Films, to turn weekly game summaries into three-act dramas. The resulting elevated professional football from a game to a metaphor for America itself, reflecting and distorting beliefs and anxieties in the same way folklore has historically existed in other contexts.

This dissertation outlines some of the problems with popular culture scholarship from different disciplines, suggests a solution for looking at popular culture through folkloristics, and demonstrates in detail how poplore is created, maintained, and functions in its native community: the mass-mediated, mass-produced, and mass-consumed popular culture of twentieth century America (and beyond).

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES	vii
PREFACE.....	viii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	xiv
Chapter 1. REIMAGINING POPLORE: THE LORE OF POPULAR CULTURE.....	1
Identifying Popular Culture	6
Popular Culture as Cultural Hearth.....	12
Defining Poplore.....	14
Poplore in Action	19
Community	20
Jargon.....	22
Nicknames.....	22
Proverbs	24
Music.....	25
Vernacular Environment.....	28
Material Culture	30
Customs.....	31
Narratives.....	32
The Four Functions of Poplore	34
Chapter 2. MANUFACTURING POPLORE: CREATING AND CELEBRATING POPULAR CULTURE MYTHS	36
The Role of Myth.....	37
Football as American Myth	45
Football as American Metaphor.....	46
NFL Films.....	55
NFL Films as Myth-Maker	57
NFL Films as Texture	60
The NFL Films Effect.....	62
The Pro Football Hall of Fame	71
The Pro Football Hall of Fame as Monument	72
The Pro Football Hall of Fame as Framed Museum.....	76
The Pro Football Hall of Fame as Holy Site.....	85
Football as Popular Culture Mythology.....	87

Chapter 3. MARKETING POPLORE: JOE NAMATH AS POPULAR CULTURE'S FOLK HERO.....	91
Beaver Falls	94
Alabama	97
Integration	101
Big Man on Campus	102
The American Football League	105
Broadway Joe.....	108
The Face of the AFL.....	113
Super Bowl III.....	117
Pregame Controversies	120
Victory	123
The Aftermath.....	125
NFL Films.....	126
The Year of Namath.....	131
Bachelor's III.....	135
Advertising Icon.....	145
More Than a Folk Hero.....	152
Chapter 4. RESOLVING POPLORE: A NEW DIRECTION IN POPULAR CULTURE STUDIES	159
The Poplore Dynamic	160
Why Professional Football.....	164
When Lore Does Not Pop: Doug Williams	168
Black Quarterback Syndrome	170
Redemption Arc	172
Super Bowl XXII	174
Advertising Outsider.....	177
The Values of Popular Culture	179
The Future of Poplore	184
BIBLIOGRAPHY	189

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Tailgating, October 18, 2014.....	28
Figure 2. Redskins fan paraphernalia at the Pro Football Hall of Fame.....	30
Figure 3. <i>American Progress</i> , John Gast, 1872.	46
Figure 4. Vince Lombardi and Bart Starr, circa 1965.....	54
Figure 5. The Pro Football Hall of Fame in Canton, Ohio..	70
Figure 6. Historical marker outside of the Pro Football Hall of Fame..	72
Figure 7. Pro Football as Pop Culture.....	76
Figure 8. The Gallery.....	85
Figure 9. Victory.....	87
Figure 10. Joe Namath, 1965.....	112
Figure 11. Joe Namath on <i>The Brady Bunch</i>	146
Figure 12. Doug Williams.....	167
Figure 13. First Among Equals.....	169
Figure 14. Picard Face-palm Bust.....	187
Figure 15. Bronze Picard Face-palm Bust..	187

PREFACE

This game has got to be about more than winning. You're part of something here. Along the way, I want you to cherish it, because when it's gone, it's gone forever.

—*Any Given Sunday*

I have been fluent in the language of football for as long as I can remember. As a child I watched the sport with my family. As a teenager I played the sport with my teammates. All the while, I never considered that anyone actually studied popular culture, let alone football. As I knew first-hand, football clearly held a unique place in American culture, but determining "why" and "how" proved elusive. Over the years leading up to and including graduate school I began to consume all of the attention football had received from academics but I had issues with nearly everything I read. Some books were too simple, and some were too complex. Some treated football with disdain, others with too much praise. My understanding of cultural criticism grew and I began to learn how to conceptualize the problems I had felt reading those earlier works. The myth-symbol school had been too easy to please, and the Marxists too pessimistic by half. Michael Oriard's library of football tomes was motivating for his ability to create quality and quantity, but even he sometimes missed the mark. Any idyllic fantasies I had held about football were long gone and, from my perspective, football was neither good nor bad, it just was. But its cultural power was undeniable, and the relationship between football and American culture had yet to be explained to my satisfaction. I realized, then: popular culture was the key.

The popular culture described and analyzed by academics is often portrayed in negative terms; popular culture is artificial and manipulative, a capitalist hegemony that actively works to exploit the subjugated masses and reinforce the hierarchies of power. However, whether the paradigm is artificial or not, malevolent or not, most Americans seem to like popular culture; that is, after all, what popular means. Some may make fun of certain shows or disapprove of the attention focused on certain celebrities, and complaining about popular culture is a genre of popular culture in and of itself, but very rarely does anyone disengage from popular culture. Instead, individuals carve out niches for themselves, picking and choosing which parts to consume. Popular culture is also self-referential, so ignoring one part may hobble your ability to understand other parts. How will you laugh at that *Family Guy* reference if you have never seen *The Brady Bunch*? It all creates one big symbiotic ecosystem where both producers and consumers actively imbue content with meaning. And right in the middle of it all, dominating American culture, is football.

Placing football within this cultural paradigm was frustrating, however. The more I tried to categorize football, the more exceptions I found. Flying home from an American Folklore Society conference, it hit me—I had been working backwards. The question was not to prove football's importance; everyone already understood football's importance. The problem was how to conceptualize popular culture in a way that enabled tried-and-true methodologies to demonstrate football's place as a fundamental part of modern American identity. And so my conceptualization of poplore was formed: the methodologies of folkloristics combined with the focus of cultural studies to produce a new understanding of how American culture speaks to itself.

The goal of Chapter 1, "Reimagining Poplore: The Lore of Popular Culture," is to establish the parameters for poplore, and why the current academic methodologies are not sufficient for looking at the role of popular culture in creating its own traditions, customs, and narratives. A survey of folklorists' attempts at reconciling the symbiotic nature of popular and folk cultures will demonstrate that folklorists have often mischaracterized the dynamic. Concepts like fakelore, folklorismus, and folkloresque have their uses, but all three implicitly define folklore as constant, measurable texts that are then modified and appropriated by dominant social forces. None of the three consider the reciprocal nature between the two cultural forms, and therefore miss the entire breadth of lore—oral, material, and performative—created by popular culture, distributed via mass communication, and self-referential. By using professional football as a source of examples, and Bascom's functions as a frame of reference, the folkloric nature of popular culture texts can easily be seen. Chapters 2 and 3 go into further depth and detail on how popular culture narratives are elevated from simple entertainment to mythic or legendary stature.

Chapter 2, "Manufacturing Poplore: Creating and Celebrating Popular Culture Myths," expands on the definition of poplore by reconceptualizing myths and analyzing how popular culture myths are constructed out of established cultural metaphors. The presence of folk groups or folk cultures are not necessary to understanding the role of myths in a community, primarily because the role does not change if a group is organic or artificial. The element of sacred truth is the key, and whether a narrative is based on documented events or an unknowable past, cultures use myths to maintain dominant cultural norms. Building on Barthes' formula of myths as second-order metaphors (metaphors made up of other metaphors), professional football was in the perfect place to be transformed into mythology. As academics have outlined for decades,

football serves the multi-faceted purpose of cultural metaphor for war and violence, frontier expansion, social order, and as both a celebration of masculinity and an expression of male anxieties. NFL Films used these metaphors to create a symbolic language that American audiences innately understood. Combined with the use of intentional texturing, NFL Films productions became mythologized versions of current events. At the Pro Football Hall of Fame, the NFL intentionally treated it as a monument to the sport, annexing the histories of other leagues, and declaring the NFL was professional football. The museum is intentionally framed to downplay controversies and overtly connect the NFL with other popular culture events like politics and entertainment. The Hall of Fame Gallery houses bronze busts of all the inductees and is actively treated as a shrine to the game. The combined efforts of both NFL Films and the Pro Football Hall of Fame to historicize the NFL, in turn, create the last major metaphor: football as a religion, complete with its own consumable mythology.

The third chapter, "Marketing Poplore: Joe Namath as Popular Culture's Folk Hero," is an extended analysis of the life and career of Joe Namath and his transformation from an athlete to a fundamental element of popular culture. Namath experienced success in sports at all levels, and once he went pro, he immediately found success as an advertising icon, making his smile just as important as his legs. His career was managed and events rewritten by his marketing executives and lawyers, who made sure Namath's image remained stable, no matter his career. He played an active role in this, as well, shrugging off reports of altercations with other players and hiring journalist Dick Schaap to ghostwrite his autobiography. Namath was an icon of shifting masculine ideals in an era when popular culture itself was shifting around him. He became defined by popular culture moments: his victory guarantee at Super Bowl III; his "retirement" from football over a dispute with NFL Commissioner Pete Rozelle; and getting slapped with

shaving cream by Farrah Fawcett. In a strict folkloric sense, his life was not legendary, if only because it actually happened that way. Namath was more complex than that; he was a hero who claimed to be authentic, but was surrounded by promoters and spin-doctors. Namath was the first of a new type of folk hero, one whose life was shaped and molded to fit into popular culture, buoyed by on-field success, and defined through advertising.

The poplore dynamic is not limited to these examples, however. In the fourth chapter, "Resolving Poplore: A New Direction in Popular Culture Studies," the formulas in previous chapters on how popular culture creates lore are applied to Doug Williams, the Washington Redskins quarterback who broke multiple records in Super Bowl XXII, including being the first black quarterback to play in a Super Bowl, win a Super Bowl, and be named Most Valuable Player of a Super Bowl. Williams was in prime position to become a Namath-like figure, firmly cemented into popular culture, but instead he quickly faded away, relegated to a specific section of football history. Popular culture did not need or want Doug Williams for a variety of reasons that ranged from an aversion toward his quiet, subdued personality, to the overtly racist beliefs in the inferiority of black quarterbacks. The case of Doug Williams is a reminder that poplore reflects the values and beliefs of popular culture, but those values are not always positive; popular culture can be ugly and the poplore reflects that.

Transitioning the lessons of the twentieth century into the twenty-first, the role of poplore in digital culture complicates, but does not displace the work by digital folklorists. Much of digital folklore scholarship has the same implicit bias that fakelore and folkloresque have: the assumption that folklore is a quantifiable, tangible text that can be followed and found with digital culture. The poplore dynamic focuses instead on the way popular culture is used by communities in folkloric ways. Examples of memes taken directly from popular culture can

fulfill both poplore and folklore definitions, demonstrating the two analytical modes complement each other. But poplore is perhaps most valuable as a tool for understanding twentieth century popular culture, where participatory culture was limited to informal and vernacular means, and group creation depended on popular culture creating and redistributing itself.

Combined, these four chapters outline the problems with popular culture scholarship, suggest a solution for looking at popular culture through folkloristics, and demonstrate in detail how poplore is created, maintained, and functions in its native environments, such as the mass-mediated, mass-produced, and mass-consumed popular culture of twentieth century America.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It's been a long road, getting from there to here. First and foremost, I cannot express enough appreciation and thanks to my committee chair and doctoral advisor, Simon J. Bronner. He took a chance on me and through his example as a scholar brought me to this point. Similarly, Charles Kupfer has been a constant source of support during my time at Penn State and a reliable sounding board for my weirder ideas. Together with Anthony Buccitelli, John Haddad, Charity Fox, Christina Kennan, Hannah Murray, Cindy Leach, Ella Dowell, and the rest of the faculty and staff in the American Studies department and the School of Humanities, I could not have asked for a better doctoral environment.

My doctoral cohort was a line-up of heavy-hitters from day one, and I was fortunate enough to be around such brilliant and kind people as Megan McGee Yinger, Andrea Glass, Becky Johnson, Andrew Miller, Semontee Mitra, Spero Lappas, Blayke Barker, and Caitlin McCaffery. Together with the donut leadership of Susan Ortmann, hairstyling efforts of Brant Ellsworth, weightlifting skills of Spencer Green, sartorial expertise of David Puglia, and genuine positivity of Jared Rife, our weird little AMST family only grew stronger over the years. Even when the new kids, like Sarah Wilson, Peter "Flash" Bryan, Peter "Thunder" Lehman, Cory Hutcheson, Annamarie O'Brien, Julia Morrow, and J. Jeanine Ruhsam, showed up, AMST was a home away from home for many of us. I would have never even started down this road if it had not been for the guidance of John Michael Vlach, Frank Goodyear, and Orlando Ridout V, who supported me and made me realize that being an academic can also be enjoyable.

I have been #blessed with a wide variety of friends who range from Charlies to Lambda Chis, with a slight detour through 734, Inc. David Austin, Joe & Nell Callahan, Aubrey & Jackie Cameron, Coach Jamie Cetrone, Zach Chrzan, Russell & Cheryl deMeese, Adam & Riley Famiglietti, David Z. Goldstein, Richard Gavin Gunn, Andrew & Ciara Gunner, International Matt Hayman, Scott & Cecilia Holtz, David & Elizabeth Hotz, Matt & Jordan Kelly, Ed & Elena Kochanek III, Eric & Jay Lake-Guerrieri, Noah & Katie Lentz, John Maniscalco & Rand Paul, Brian Montrose, Matt Munkacsy, Leah & John Panowitz, Jeff & Whitney van der Press, Andy Roehl & Whitney Wyckoff, Michael Rosenblum, Coach Aaron & Kaitlyn Rossi, Nancy & Reggie Sen, Jordan & Alison Scott (Avocados at Law), Kyle, Andrea & Chloe Smallegan, and of course, Mr. Adam Sommer, are just some of the people who have had an immeasurable impact on my life. Whether it has been a good or bad impact, nobody knows.

This dissertation genuinely would not have happened without the continued help and support from Ralph Robertson, Vincent Joseph, Joseph Namath, Ed & Steve Sabol, Doug Williams, Danny Carey, Justin Chancellor, Adam Jones, Maynard James Keenan, John Bonham, John Paul Jones, Jimmy Page, Robert Plant, Brandt, T. Donald Kerabatsos, Jeffrey Lebowski, Jeffrey, Maude & Bunny Lebowski, and Walter Sobchak. To Robert Diggs, Gary Grice, Russell Jones, Clifford Smith, Corey Woods, Dennis Coles, Jason Hunter, Lamont Hawkins, Elgin Turner, and Darryl Hill, I owe knowledge, wisdom, and understanding.

And, of course, I can never thank my family enough for their encouragement and patience. Words cannot describe my appreciation for my mother, father, David & Lisa, Aunt Nadine & Uncle Mike, Hercules, Zeus, Shana, and my grandparents.

For John Edward Price and Betsy Lidell Morse.

Chapter 1.

REIMAGINING POPLORE:

THE LORE OF POPULAR CULTURE

When influential images are used selectively by editors, publishers, and authors, then a new element of deliberate caprice is added to public memory.

—Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory*

There exists forms of cultural expression in modern America that act like folklore, entertaining the people, educating the youth, validating beliefs, and maintaining social conformity. These forms are not based in geographic areas, nor are they limited to specific ages. They cross ethnic boundaries as easily as they do religious lines. The community these forms created has only one requirement: technological hurdles that the overwhelming majority of America surpassed in the 1920s, and again by 1960.¹ Both the forms and the community are known as "popular culture," and the mass-produced and mass-mediated popular culture of the twentieth century quickly overtook America, reshaping the country in its image. In the process, a distinct relationship developed between mass society and its entertainment industry, particularly in the growth and development of professional sports. Movies, radio, and television all gave Americans new options to see, hear, and experience sports from across the country in real-time and create a unified sense of identity. The stories, customs, beliefs, rituals, products, and foodways that came out of these popular culture experiences were consumed by popular

¹ "Television," American Memory Collection, Library of Congress.

culture—not just by the people, but across different formats and genres, so that the popular culture ecosystem grew and developed on top of itself.

From the narratives that came out of popular sports, a community and its customs were created, enforced, educated, and validated. The narratives Americans saw on the screen told them about right and wrong, gender norms, and behavioral standards. The self-referential nature of popular culture turned sports stories into myths, sports celebrities into legends, and sports movies into sources of proverbial wisdom. A new system of folklore was emerging, one that was rooted in a folk group connected by popular culture, not ethnic or geographical ties. The virtual group, connected through movie theaters and team fandom, was a new type of community but a community, nonetheless. And just as every community, these developed their own system of traditions, customs, and narratives. Instead of categorizing them as folklore, however, they were better understood as poplore—the lore of popular culture.

Folklorists are best suited to understand the relationship between poplore and popular culture, in no small part because folklorists already understand a similar connection between folklore and folk culture. Folkloristics, however, has historically been reluctant to engage with aspects of popular culture like professional sports, and more specifically its contextualized nature as an organized, commercial enterprise. The evolution of how the folk was conceptualized as either living in a remote, bygone past, or a noble, simple group connected to nature, was detailed by eminent folklorist Richard M. Dorson in *Folklore in the Modern World*. Both, he concluded, were ways of distinguishing the folk from the modern forces of politics and industry. This led to the common belief that folklore was disappearing and it was the job of folklorists to collect as much, as quickly as they could. The American Folklore Society was founded with this self-

imposed mandate of collecting the "fast vanishing remains of folk-lore in America."² Dorson recognized the mistaken perspective of those generations, and settled on what he called the contemporaneity of folklore.³ For Dorson, folklore was not from an unknowable past, but rather coexisted as a reaction to modern life, or continuation of previous traditions. The remaining essays in the collection detailed various forms of modern folklife—traditional cultures in an urban environment, folktales in mass media, and the lore of subcultures—and a similar disciplinary trajectory has maintained in the decades since.

The field has offered at least three different ways to reconcile popular culture and folklore by adding new terms. Starting in 1950, Dorson advocated the use of "fakelore" to denigrate invented texts sold as authentic. He explicitly rejected the influence of mass culture—"blatant, loud, aggressive," and used fakelore to protect folklore as it was being "invaded by commercializers."⁴ He also saw fakelore as a uniquely American problem, with no apparent parallels in other cultures, a somewhat specious claim that depended on Dorson's alignment of folklore with authenticity and the natural world, outside of modern forces of industry and commercialism. That anti-capitalist distinction of folklore as an altruistic and organic expression of culture would also factor into the reception of the term "folklorismus."

Imported from Germany through Hans Moser in 1962, folklorismus is folklore used in either inauthentic or foreign contexts, typically for capitalist exploitation. In her presidential address to the Folklore Society, Venetia J. Newall detailed the parameters for folklorismus: "the performance of folk culture away from its original local context; the playful imitation of popular motifs by another social class; and the invention and creation of folklore for different purposes

² Simon J. Bronner, *American Folklore Studies*, 16.

³ Richard M. Dorson, *Folklore in the Modern World*, 23.

⁴ Richard M. Dorson, *American Folklore in History*, 7

outside any known tradition."⁵ Moser specifically situated folklorismus as a performance by the upper classes who used folk cultures as wedding themes or for political purposes. Again, the assumption was a measurable level of authenticity that was at odds with folkloristics. Referencing a conversation with Linda Dégh, Newell reiterated that "folklore is always manipulated ... folklorismus is folklore."⁶ Instead of scoffing at the term, Newell suggested treating folklorismus examples as any other text and analyze the psychological function it played for participants and audiences. Folklorismus, and specifically the duality it exposes—folklore taken outside of its narrative or performative context, directly leads into the third attempt at synthesizing popular culture and folklore with a new type of analysis.

In a more recent attempt at considering the relationship between popular culture and folklore, Michael Dylan Foster and Jeffrey Tolbert introduced the concept of "folkloresque," ostensibly spinning off use of the term "carnavalesque" by Mikhail Bakhtin, but actually taking a literal approach to the application of "-esque" suffix as "resembling the style."⁷ Focusing on how popular culture resembles folklore, the edited collection put a spotlight on how popular culture "uses, understands, and interprets folklore."⁸ Through examples like popular fiction, animation, and topical humor the book's authors related to the editors' definition of folkloresque as popular culture's own definition of folklore. However, as useful it is to illustrate how popular culture absorbs and repurposes folklore, the concept relies on the same binary between authentic and artificial expression as Dorson's fakelore. Rather than applying the carnivalesque (or Santino's "ritualesque"⁹) to popular media, the folkloresque simply gave a new name to the commercial

⁵ Venetia J. Newall, 131.

⁶ Ibid., 147

⁷ Foster and Tolbert, 5.

⁸ Ibid., vii.

⁹ Jack Santino, "The Carnavalesque and The Ritualesque."

use of folklore.¹⁰ As with the other attempts at bringing popular culture and folklore into conversation with each other, folkloresque depends significantly on the existence of folklore that is generally understood to be genuine or verifiable. Even digital folk studies, the newest incarnation of folklorists studying popular culture, tends to look at ways that established folklore genres are reproduced in digital culture.

The merging of folkloristics with practice theory has brought a new perspective to the field, and unlike the previous examples, challenges the basic assumptions of folkloristics. In the eyes of Simon J. Bronner, folklore in a modern context can increasingly be best understood as *praxis*, "knowledge expressed through activities in social life."¹¹ Folklore, then, is not traditional expression as much as it is repeated action. The fact of its repetition implies meaning, but the symbolic significance is found in the act itself, not necessarily its result.¹² Changing the focus away from the source of tradition or whether a text or performance is authentic, which has weighed down Dorson and others, the practice theory point of view places emphasis on the action of tradition, where the commercialism of everyday life is simply the framing structure for meaning instead of an illegitimate outside force.

While some of these methodologies are more relevant to the dynamic between American popular culture and folklore than others, none of them explicitly detail the reciprocal relationship that sends folklore into popular culture, in addition to popular culture into folklore. By looking at popular culture's production of its own lore through sports, folkloristic insights can be gained about the values, anxieties, and beliefs of American popular culture.

¹⁰ Foster and Tolbert, 28. For an application of "carnavalesque" to popular media, see Gulnara Karimova, "Carnavalesque Analysis of Popular Culture: 'Jackass,' 'South Park,' and 'Everyday' culture," *Studies in Popular Culture* 33 no. 1 (Fall 2010), 37-51.

¹¹ Simon J. Bronner, "Art, Performance, and Praxis."

¹² Simon J. Bronner, "Toward a Definition of Folklore as Practice."

Identifying Popular Culture

A challenge facing the study of popular culture, but one that might not be so foreign to folklorists, is the nebulous definition of the term. Much like "folk," "popular" is both a subject and a description. While "mass culture" and "popular culture" are sometimes used interchangeably, the terms are focused on two different types of cultural perspectives. "Mass" implies an industrialized and depersonalized society where the people are powerless components of a homogenized consumerism. When assessing the role of professional football, or other forms of nationally mediated entertainment, the mechanisms of distribution may be through mass-production or mass-consumption, but the events themselves are not necessarily mass-produced, nor homogenized. "Popular," however, puts the rhetorical focus on the people and their interactions with their surroundings, not simply their subjugation to social dynamics imposed on them. Popular can also simultaneously describe the quantity, quality, production, and reception of cultural texts, complicating the definition but still maintaining focus on the role and agency of the people.¹³

Culture, too, has a range of meanings,¹⁴ and when the two terms are combined, popular culture is often not defined by what it represents, but by its relationship to other forms of culture: elite or high, and folk or low. This tripartite division is clearly an oversimplification and can cause dissonance when considering combinations like the folklore of popular culture. Adding to the confusion, cultural studies methodologies derived from Gramscian Marxism often refer to popular culture as hegemonic, a sort of amorphous concept of dominant norms that either smothers or integrates subversive forms and groups. Cynically, Gramsci thought folklore was a tool of oppression and should be studied and eliminated. Its role as a "religion of the people"

¹³ John Storey, *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture*.

¹⁴ Raymond Williams, "The Analysis of Culture."

gave the state a powerful tool for controlling the people: the folklore of the masses was used by the ruling class to enforce the status quo, and their own position atop the social order.¹⁵ In that understanding, folklore was not subordinate, but a part of the dominant structure that already included elite and popular culture. Elite culture was a reflection of capital—both economic capital and social capital. Popular culture was a measurement of mass—mass production and mass reception. Folklore and folklife were tied to community identity and traditional knowledge, both of which informed the larger dominant norms. Gramsci was a revolutionary, after all, and said of his desire to teach folklore for the purpose of eliminating its role in propping up hegemonic culture would "correspond intellectually to what the Reformation was in Protestant countries."¹⁶

A leading voice in the development of American Cultural Studies, Jay Mechling detailed the division between the three "realms of culture" ("high, popular, folk," in his terminology), their corresponding expressions, which he called "rhetorical forms," and the problems that arise when attempting to define any of the ensuing combinations.¹⁷ Not only did he see texts crossing boundaries, as with cinematic interpretations (popular) of Shakespeare plays (high), but the co-existence of the various forms created an experiential intertextuality expressed through "shadow texts" that merged different forms and realms together. Mechling's examples of shadow texts were people seeing the news through the language of movies, such as comparing the explosions in Independence Day with the visuals of the September 11 terrorist attacks. The same intertextuality and system of cultural echoes repeat across all aspects of the culture grid; for sports, shadow texts are easily seen between movies and television shows, and professional

¹⁵ Antonio Gramsci, *Observations on Folklore*.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 136.

¹⁷ Jay Mechling, "American Culture Grid."

sports—often overtly through fictionalized plots based on true events or references to movies and characters by athletes and announcers.¹⁸

John Storey, a prolific historiographer of cultural studies, established a false history of "popular culture" emergent from folk cultures of the past. Although Storey's analyses of the relationship between popular and folk are useful when looking the modern mechanisms of lore created by popular culture, his assertion of historic causality is at odds with folklorists' understanding of the same relationship. Although he references the right scholarly works, Storey typically misinterprets folklore as a "quasi-mythical rural [culture of] common people,"¹⁹ taking the historical divisions too literally. That is, Storey sees the ideas of "folklore" or "folklife" as invented categorizations imposed by the upper classes turn the culture, songs, customs, and tales of the peasantry they lorded over into a "romantic fantasy."²⁰ Storey's definition of "folk" as mostly an invented label is actually more relevant in the modern context of music, where "folk music" has become a commodified genre with a defined style, reproduced and marketed by major record labels.²¹ Folklorists may agree with Storey on the categorization of the peasantry as a form of establishing social hierarchies, however, they may reject his seeming lack of respect for the agency of those communities and groups to act in opposition to enforced social norms, as folklore itself can be subversive expression.

In the twentieth century, popular culture came to be defined with mass production and mass society, and received criticism from both conservative and radical commentators. F.R. Leavis, an infamously elitist critic, preached that the masses were an enemy force threatening the

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ John Storey, *Inventing Popular Culture*, 5.

²⁰ Ibid., 13.

²¹ Benjamin Filene, *Romancing the Folk*.

"culture" he so vigorously protected.²² By the end of the nineteenth century, a segregation of the arts and entertainment had successfully cordoned off specific forms from the masses. Opera, Shakespeare, museums, and even physical spaces like parks, had been bought by the emergent American upper class—literally and figuratively. Troupes that once roamed the country, performing for a variety of audience, were paid to stay in New York. Shakespeare, who wrote for socially mixed crowds, was canonized and the participatory nature of his plays was eliminated.²³ Leavis not only applauded this development, he saw "culture" as a "minority keeping"—something that could only be appreciated by the elite, who, coincidentally, had access to it.²⁴ The biggest threat to civilization, in Leavis' estimation, was popular culture—movies, advertising, dime novels, and mass-produced goods. He was offended by the audacity of it all—the very idea that entertainment could be mass-produced. "[Films] provide now the main form of recreation in the civilised world," he lamented;²⁵ "But it is in vain to resist the triumph of the machine."²⁶

The triumph of the machine was also paramount to the critiques of popular culture coming from the Frankfurt School. Although, as strenuously as Leavis wrote against mass production's role in diminishing culture, Adorno wrote against mass production's role in propping up the dominant culture. Instead of "mass culture," Adorno and Horkheimer referred to it as the culture industry, a systemic apparatus where "the masses are not the measure but the ideology."²⁷ "The total effect of the culture industry is one of anti-enlightenment," Adorno explained. It was a mode of servitude that "neither guides for a blissful life, nor a new art of

²² F.R. Leavis, "Mass Civilisation and Minority Culture."

²³ Lawrence Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow*; Sven Beckart, *The Monied Metropolis*.

²⁴ F.R. Leavis, 17.

²⁵ Theodor W. Adorno, *The Culture Industry*, 140.

²⁶ F.R. Leavis 17

²⁷ Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*; Theodor W. Adorno, *The Culture Industry*, 99.

moral responsibility, but rather exhortations to toe the line, behind which stand the most powerful interests."²⁸ Being Marxist, Adorno's "powerful interests" were those of capitalism: the owners, producers, and marketing executives who were co-opting artistic forms to sell goods and tell stories that reaffirmed their place atop society. Homogenization of thought, sanitation of experience, conformity of production, and intentional deception of the masses were the enduring forces of the culture industry for the Frankfurt theorists.²⁹

Between the competing critiques of popular culture, a striking number of similarities arise. Both Leavis and Adorno strenuously dislike the role of popular culture and they both think the masses are being manipulated by corporate entities. They both think art is suffering, if not outright dying because of mass-mediated popular culture and they both wrote with a sense of despair, begrudgingly accepting the victory of the machines over culture, while dreaming of a revolution. Missing from both perspectives is any sense of agency by the people themselves. The singular focus on corporate or vulgar domination over popular culture forms like cinema or television excludes the possibility that the consumers can direct the type of goods they are sold. The reciprocal nature of culture instead suggests that while Adorno's "powerful interests" may exploit the system and influence the trajectory of culture through false choices and manipulative advertising, consumers can influence right back, demanding choices, demanding products, and demanding the stories they want to see. In a cultural perspective, instead of assuming capitalists are forcing certain norms and traditions on the people, the people may instead be requesting those norms and traditions be reinforced.

Popular cultural theorists can learn from folkloristics here. By its very nature, the study of folklore is the study of conservative cultural expression; this includes subversive folklore like

²⁸ Theodor W. Adorno, *The Culture Industry*, 105.

²⁹ Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.

taboos and jokes which assume the presence of conservative cultural norms. Barre Toelken's range between conservative and dynamic elements in folklore provide a baseline for considering the place of people in actively directing which components of society are retained and which are seen as malleable.³⁰ Myths and proverbs are on the far end of conservative, wordplay and rumors anchor the dynamic side. In between, legends, tales, and songs combine dynamic with conservative.³¹ Throughout Simon Bronner's studies on folklore's place in modernity, he has examined how and why folkloristic elements survive in a society dominated by the mechanical popular culture both Adorno and Leavis feared. Whether in more recognizable forms like wood carving and youth culture, or through modern social constructions like college culture and the internet, Bronner repeatedly showed that societies do not lose their desire for traditions, they simply evolve the ways in which traditions are expressed.³² The pressure between conservative and progressive cultural forces was specifically identified by Henry Glassie in 1968:

Increasingly in the future, the student of American culture will be dealing with a single society dominated by a governmentally and economically endorsed popular culture within which each individual will have available two possibilities for cultural deviation: one progressively oriented, the other conservatively oriented; the latter may form the subject matter of folkloristic study.³³

Glassie was right, he just did not consider that the tension between folklore and modern popular culture would be resolved through the growth of lore from popular culture itself; through poplore.

³⁰ Barre Toelken, *The Dynamics of Folklore*, 39-43.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 41.

³² Simon J. Bronner, *Campus Traditions; Explaining Traditions; Grasping Things*; et al.

³³ Henry Glassie, *Pattern in Material Folk Culture*, 4.

Popular Culture as Cultural Hearth

Underlying the idea that modern American lore is actively created by, derives from, and is reflected in popular culture, is the relationship between the people and popular culture—one that folklorists will immediately recognize as that of a folk group and its cultural hearth.

Geographic sources can provide folklorists a starting point to visualize a specific tradition's journey. Glassie did this famously, tracing the history of American material culture from main settlement regions on the east coast.³⁴ Other material culture and linguistic surveys followed Glassie's lead and mapped the route of diffusion across the physical landscape.³⁵ However, in the twentieth century, popular culture was not limited to the landscape. Mass production and communication technology ensured goods arrive across the country at the same time, new movies open on the same day, and newspapers on both coasts ran the same stories. Radio and television connected the entire country—or, at least, those with receivers—with real-time broadcasts of the news, entertainment, and politics. Without leaving home, Americans across the country could experience the same thing, at the same time, restructuring the demand and manifestation of communities. Americans could hear the World Series and Roosevelt's "fireside chats" as if they were there in-person. By creating the illusion of a simultaneous personalized experience, radio—and later, television—changed the relationship between mass entertainment like sporting events and the general public, recentering the transmission of knowledge from a physical locality to a virtual network.

Toward the end of the twentieth century, cultural geographers wrestled with the existential question of where to take the discipline after all the maps had been drawn. Moreover,

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ For example: Howard W. Marshall and John M. Vlach, "Toward a Folklife Approach to American Dialects."

they were identifying that Americans were facing a similar crisis of "placelessness."³⁶ As traditional communities broke up and spread out, geographers perceived an emerging loss of identity and belonging.³⁷ As a solution, Mark Jayne smartly suggested that the issue facing the field was not a lack of physical communities, but the lack of recognition that "culture exists in relationships"; people did not stop having relationships when they moved, they simply found new ones.³⁸ Jayne saw that consumption patterns were the new migration routes for geographers to map, and that lifestyle was more meaningful to identity than spatiality. Instead of looking at subcultures of consumption in limited urban environments, though, the idea can be expanded to the country as a whole. Over the course of the twentieth century in America, communities of consumption emerged and began to replace, or at least supplement, old group identities.

Consumption itself, and especially conspicuous consumption, was not new. The volume and availability of standardized goods, entertainment, and services across society was new.

In his book *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson struggled to explain the rise of nationalism in the Americas, especially as compared to other parts of Europe and Asia. His theses for the creation of imagined communities worked in those places, but mostly failed in the Americas. He noted that the independent states in North and South America were not linguistically different from their imperial antagonists, nor were their revolutions sparked by lower class consciousness.³⁹ Anderson explained that pre-revolutionary cultures were in fact already geographically established, often as administrative units of the larger empire. That is, Virginians knew they were Virginians because the King told them they were. This sense of identity, while not organic, was nurtured by the technological advancement of the time; namely,

³⁶ James R. Coull, "Cultural Geography: Has It a Future?"

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Mark Jayne, "Cultural Geography, Consumption and the City."

³⁹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 47.

the monetization of newspapers and the media entrepreneur behind it all: Benjamin Franklin.

This era of limited mass-communication foreshadowed the later dynamics of modern popular culture. Instead of travelling coast-to-coast, colonial newspapers only needed to ride to the next city to coordinate or steal from their competitors. These papers were heavily tied into the political and commercial life of their regions and readers depended on them for information about the rest of the colonies. The self-identification of colonists was thereby, two-fold: official acknowledgement of a separate identity, and a shared news culture between linked cities. Even in its colonial roots, American identity was bound by shared consumption of media.

By the mid-twentieth century, Americans' consumption—and thereby its sense of identity—was mass-mediated, mass-produced, and mass-experienced.

Defining Poplore

Simply put, *poplore* is a term to categorize cultural texts and expressions that are produced by, spread via, or reference popular culture, in ways similar or identical to folklore.

Identity built by popular culture takes the place of folk groups and mass media acts as the tradition-bearer, transmitting the lore. Folklore and folklife of course still exist, and will continue to exist as long as informal groups produce traditional knowledge, but *poplore* has added a hybrid layer of cultural expression in between informal and formal. While concepts like *folkloresque* look at established motifs and accepted genres existing within popular culture, *poplore* is the lore born from popular culture.

The relationship between popular culture and the formation of lore is already accepted by folklorists; as Glassie readily admitted, "The folklorist is accustomed to discovering a Grub Street hack at the source of today's folk ballad," and "material folk culture has constantly felt the

influence of popular culture."⁴⁰ In the world of twentieth century modernity, however, folklorists have spent time looking for texts and performances that have adapted to mass society, not created from mass society. Perhaps the closest academic precursor to *poplore* was Michael J. Preston's analysis of office humor, or "Xerox-lore," as he called it.⁴¹ Dundes and Prager expanded upon the form in *Work Hard and You Shall Be Rewarded: Urban Folklore from the Paperwork Empire* but the basic assumption remained: this was a modern evolution of folklore, not a new type of cultural expression.⁴² Poplore can best be understood by folklorists, who already have a disciplinary legacy of creating modes of analysis for oral, material, and performative culture. Folklorists understand why lore is created, how it is transmitted, and what it represents to those who bear it. The same analytical tools can and should be brought to study poplore, with the understanding that instead of a folk group, the source of poplore is popular culture—mass-media, mass-entertainment, mass-produced goods, and mass-consumed services.

The term "poplore" already exists in folkloristics, having been coined by Gene Bluestein in his 1994 book, *Poplore: Folk and Pop in American Culture*.⁴³ Earlier, the phrase "Pop Lore" was used by Steven J. Zeitlein in his analysis of celebrity gossip, but his usage was more general and not meant to be a new theoretical classification.⁴⁴ Daniel S. Margolies' contribution to *A Companion to Popular Culture*, was a historiography of the ways in which folklorists and ethnologists have approached the study of popular culture, but meant more as an interdisciplinary primer than challenge to accepted methodologies.⁴⁵ In the *Journal of American Folklore*, Yiorgos Anagnostou described the evolution and role of "popular folklore," as a new mode of

⁴⁰ Henry Glassie, 17.

⁴¹ Michael J. Preston, "Xerox-lore."

⁴² Dundes and Pagter, *Work Hard and You Shall Be Rewarded*.

⁴³ Gene Bluestein, *Poplore*.

⁴⁴ Steven J. Zeitlein, "Pop Lore: The Aesthetic Principles in Celebrity Gossip."

⁴⁵ Daniel S. Margolies, "Ethnographic and Folkloristic Study of Popular Culture."

cultural production by nonprofessional ethnographers, but was mostly concerned with the interaction between academic folklorists and the emerging genre.⁴⁶ Of the various ways, Bluestein's book is the best scholarly work on the theoretical dynamic between folklore and popular culture.⁴⁷

Although the term "poplore" needs to be reimagined from Bluestein's definition, his book is an underappreciated analysis of the role and creation of folk music as a form of political expression. Bluestein weaves together a historiography of the discipline, frequently pointing out the ways in which British definitions fail in an American context. Instead of the conventional wisdom that "there is folklore in America but no American folklore,"⁴⁸ Bluestein reframes what the folk means in American history, pointing to the evolution of "folk" performances as points of active infusion; the African banjo becoming synonymous with Appalachian bluegrass, for example. Bluestein particularly challenges Dorson's influential definitions of the field between oral literature, material culture, customs and beliefs and performance. Calling the delineation a "convenient typology for the folklorist," Bluestein notes they have "little connection to the actual folk of the folk, who rarely specialize in a particular mode of expression."⁴⁹ Instead, he turned away from Dorson-influenced folkloristics, and saw folklore as an expression of democratic cultural and artistic power.

Bluestein leaned heavily on the theories and concepts of Johann Herder, an Enlightenment-era nationalist who rejected universality in search of distinctly German traditions. According to Bluestein, Herder rejected the social Darwinist impulses of British antiquarians like Percy, who collected lore for the sake of preserving a vanishing past, not because of any

⁴⁶ Yiorgos Anagnostou, "Metaethnography in the Age of 'Popular Folklore.'"

⁴⁷ Joseph J. Arpad, "Review Essay: Poplore."

⁴⁸ Gene Bluestein, 13.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 17.

"intrinsic value."⁵⁰ Herder saw the folk as living cultures united by language, not Enlightenment racial and social categorization. Bluestein subscribes to all of this, and for him, Herder is a ground-breaking radical thinker. For both Bluestein and Herder, the folk were not receivers of a mediated culture, they were producers of an organic culture: the authors of a national literature; a spoken language that defined the community, their values, their experiences, and their personality. Of course, Bluestein's Herder is not the Herder as remembered by conventional history books, and Bluestein takes exception with the portrayal of Herder over the ensuing generations. "Nothing could be further from racist ideology than Herder's philosophy," Bluestein protested.⁵¹ "Romantic nationalism," and particularly its fascistic legacy in Germany history, linked Herder with "racism and chauvinism" and overwrote Herder's actual contributions as seen by Bluestein. In fact, according to him, Herder's philosophy was more akin to the "roots phenomenon" (so-called because of Alex Haley's book): peoples' "need to associate themselves in a positive way with their cultural antecedents."⁵²

In Bluestein's picture of modern America, music was the form of expression that most adhered to this Herderian dynamic of national culture produced by the people. Through music, Americans were able to integrate and blend the varying ethnic and social divisions that existed or were imposed on them. Instead of, as Bluestein previously described, a country "with so little history and no significant 'primitive' groups,"⁵³ Bluestein saw a country that while "one of the most racially segregated societies," was in turn, "without a doubt the most integrated musically."⁵⁴ This was complicated by the trappings of modern society, though. Radio, permanent recording, musical engineering, mass distribution, and mass reception all influenced

⁵⁰ Ibid., 32.

⁵¹ Ibid., 44.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid., 13.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 58.

the way in which music was created and heard. The "folk music" genre had become a standardized performance style, instead of a repository of traditional songs. Woody Guthrie and the "Folk Revival" were inauthentic to folklorists like Dorson, who saw them as products of popular culture, playing original songs for mass audiences. Bluestein saw the solution as recategorizing them as poplorists—popular culture expressions of Herderian folk forms. Guthrie and others used traditional instruments, traditional forms of expression, and reflected the political and social views of the people, but they did so within the modern socio-economic structures of twentieth century America.

Bluestein's combination of Herder's definition of folklore's role with modern American cultural expressions makes for an interesting synergy. He convincingly pushed back against conventional assumptions in the field—as he personified through Richard Dorson—and detriualized modern art by giving it the same weight as accepted folklore. Unlike fakelore, which Dorson used to denote manufactured or corporatized folklore, Bluestein's poplore was not a tool of control or oppression,⁵⁵ but the people asserting their own cultural power and agency.

And although, Bluestein clearly identifies "poplore" with the political expression of the people, much of his reasoning for establishing the new term would now align more with Foster's *folkloresque*. Of course, Bluestein's book was written two decades before Foster's, so perhaps the relationship should be reversed, but a more comprehensive—and common-sense—definition of poplore expands on Bluestein's parameter and takes into consideration the shifting ways Americans self-identify.

To that point, William S. Fox wrote about the problems the field faced with increased modernity reducing or flattening social dynamics like race, ethnicity, and religion. He concluded that the markers of identity were changing and folklorists should change their measurements,

⁵⁵ William S. Fox, "Folklore and Fakelore."

too. "Mass media, public education, substantial inter-marriage rates, increased moral and legal emphasis on achieved rather than ascribed status characteristics," meant that folklorists needed to update their tactics to find folk expression in a modern world. Occupation, age, and, as cultural geographers had noted, consumption had become major sources of self-identification.⁵⁶ Ray Browne, the credited founder of Popular Culture Studies, echoed Bluestein in his assessment of the power of popular culture, saying, "Popular culture is the voice of democracy, democracy speaking and acting, the seedbed in which democracy grows." He continued, "[popular culture] is the way of living we inherit, practice and modify as we please, and how we do it."⁵⁷ If, then, popular culture is a source from which Americans self-identity, voice and create culture, and learn how to live, the term poplore can and should be expanded beyond Bluestein's definition and reimagined as the modern parallel to folklore, the lore of the folk: poplore, the lore of popular culture.

Poplore in Action

There is perhaps no easier way to illustrate the place of poplore in American culture than through sports. Sports in America occupy a unique place: they are for children and adults, men and women; fan communities exist locally, nationally, and internationally; professionals and amateurs blend corporate and personal goals; and sports-centric media inundate audiences with statistics, human interest stories, and aggrandized narratives. Every genre of folklore can be transposed onto sports culture, forming a poplore ecosystem that creates lore out of popular culture, transmits the lore through popular culture, and functions in popular culture as lore.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Margalit Fox, "Ray Browne," obituary.

Bascom's four functions apply just as easily to poplore as they do folklore.⁵⁸ Over the course of the following examples, amusement, validation, education, and conformity will all be stressed by the traditions themselves. The result is that sports—as exemplified here by professional football—do, in fact, maintain stability in culture.

It is important to note that poplore and folklore co-exist and are sometimes not easily differentiated, especially in something as layered as sports. Folk groups, verbal art, material culture, and performances are found in practically all levels of sports culture. Teams can become folk groups,⁵⁹ fans can create folk art,⁶⁰ and players develop their own beliefs and superstitions,⁶¹ among countless other examples. Identifying poplore as a discrete form of cultural production is not to remove folklore from the discussion, but rather to allow for folklorists to recognize the role of popular culture in creating vernacular expressions instead of needing to redefine "folk" each time a new tradition develops.

The following examples of poplore are not meant to represent a comprehensive list, but demonstrate how football culture is created by and transmitted through popular culture in ways recognizable to folklorists.

Community

A fundamental component of sports culture is self-identification with some level of the professional organization. The most visible and common example is through team loyalty.

Words like "nation" and "country" are often used to symbolize the tribal element of fandom.

"Steeler Nation," was first used by NFL Films in their 1978 season highlight film, and "Raider

⁵⁸ William R. Bascom, "Four Functions of Folklore."

⁵⁹ Gary Alan Fine, *With the Boys*.

⁶⁰ Michael Ian Borer, *Faithful to Fenway*.

⁶¹ George Gmelch, "Baseball Magic."

Nation" was formally adopted in 1995 when the team moved back to Oakland. "Redskins Country" infers the Native American association, and Green Bay's "Cheeseheads" use Wisconsin's stereotype as a mark of identity. Mass-produced goods like hats and jackets allow fans to declare their group allegiance irrespective of physical location. Wearing a team's jersey is a deliberate presentation of self, with multiple layers of meaning. The jersey itself announces team loyalty, and the condition of the jersey or its relative age can show the importance placed on that loyalty. An old and worn hat can signify a life-long fandom, just as wearing the jersey of a new player can show current membership.

Beyond team loyalty, the structured hierarchy of professional football gives fans options for where to place their affiliation. In the 1960s, a fan could identify with the National Football League or the American Football League (or both). After the merger, the Super Bowl retained the opposition between the National Football Conference and the American Football Conference, tacitly encouraging fans to retain their league preferences. Conference divisions add a third layer to the structure, and the regional nature of most divisions encourages the expression of divisional personalities as exaggerations of those regions. The NFC North is the "Black and Blue Division," due to its historic rivalries and harsh winters. Sportswriters often declare a specific division as the best or toughest, which can be used by fans as a source of pride.

As with folk groups, these fandom communities utilize other forms of lore to create identity and enforce boundaries of membership.

Jargon

A key component of enforcing community is understanding the language of the fandom. Football has had jargon from the beginning,⁶² but the mass-mediated nature of professional football standardized the language of professional football.⁶³ Terms once limited to players and coaches entered popular discourse, creating a point of separation for fans. For example, the 1960s Green Bay Packers popularized the "Lombardi Sweep," a play where both offensive guards pull to the strong side and lead-block for a halfback. Modern variants include the "jet sweep"—where the quarterback is in shotgun and hands off to a flanker instead of a halfback, and the "quarterback sweep"—which is a key play in running a Wildcat offense.

The jargon of football culture can also be team-specific. In Super Bowl XVII, the Washington Redskins were trailing the Miami Dolphins in the fourth quarter. Coach Joe Gibbs needed a touchdown so he called his favorite play: I-Right 70-Chip. Quarterback Joe Theismann handed off to John Riggins for a 43-yard touchdown. The *Washington Post* called the play "magic" and NFL Films immortalized the play in its Super Bowl XVII highlight film, with a dramatic slow-motion focus on Riggins running over Dolphins defenders. Since then, "70-Chip" has become part of Redskins fandom.⁶⁴

Nicknames

Nicknames are also found in all sports, but take on the added layer of popular culture's influence in professional football. National sportscasters can, and often do, mix popular culture references into their shows, creating for the audience a symbiotic relationship where popular culture defines players and players define popular culture. Chris Berman is famous for his

⁶² Willis Stork, "Varying the Football Jargon."

⁶³ NFL.com, "Terms Glossary."

⁶⁴ Ken Denlinger, "Magic '70 Chip' Ends Four Decades of Trying."

creative use of nicknames, to the point that some players become permanently identified with the phrase. Andre "Bad Moon" Rison, Amani "It's Not A" Toomer, and Joseph "Live and Let" Addai are some of his more memorable, although even Berman knows "everybody has their favorite." In an interview with Rich Eisen, Berman explained that he was not giving out nicknames to become famous, he simply needed to fill time during highlights. What ended up happening though, was he inadvertently created a game for the audience. Berman told Eisen, the ones that work best are the nicknames people already know—movie references, puns, common phrases that can be molded into the players' names. "You don't have to know he's a pitcher, you don't have to know he throws a curveball, you don't have to know anything," he explained, adding, "every kid's heard it, every parent's said it." Atlanta Falcons wide receiver Andre Rison got his Berman-bestowed nickname "Bad Moon" tattooed on his arm. Berman laughed when he found out, "No way he knew who Credence Clearwater Revival were. No way!"⁶⁵

In the 1970s, NFL Films anointed the Dallas Cowboys "America's Team." Not only did the nickname stick, it was immediately used by both fans as a sign of adoration and rivals as a sign of disrespect. In 1979, NFL Films editor Bob Ryan was compiling the 1978 Cowboys highlight film, a standard event that they did for every team, every year. The films were feel-good propaganda for teams to use as marketing tools that Bob Ryan compared to "life according to Stalin." The Cowboys had lost Super Bowl XIII, so Ryan and the Cowboys public relations director needed a hook for the highlight compilation. Ryan considered that the Cowboys games were always televised, head coach Tom Landry and quarterback Roger Staubach were both national figures, as were many others, and the Cowboys had the Dallas Cowboys Cheerleaders, who were already a national sex symbol. Alluding to the larger political environment, sociologist Camille Paglia told NFL Films that the late 1970s were a time when Americans were

⁶⁵ Chris Berman interview with Rich Eisen, NFL Network.

"longing for a reassertion of American identity," and to Ryan, cowboys were the quintessential American hero. "I never thought it would be as big as it is," he confessed. "It sounds so pompous," but through the voice of John Facenda, Ryan's words and the Dallas Cowboys became an inseparable piece of popular culture:

Cowboy goals are lofty: win the National Football Conference title and then the Super Bowl. This is usually attainable, for as their fans well know, the sum total of their stars make up a galaxy. Their record is envied and their innovations copied down to the last glamorous detail. They appear on television so often that their faces are as familiar to the public as presidents and movie stars. They are the Dallas Cowboys, "America's Team."⁶⁶

Proverbs

The lived experience of football culture includes a collection of phrases often called adages, idioms, or inspirational quotes, but are essentially proverbs, transmitting the sports equivalents of Old Wives Tales and collective knowledge. The message is more important than the exact wording, so direct quotes are often shortened or condensed, giving each example slight variation over time. Traditional memory credits Vince Lombardi as the source of many of these proverbs, even apocryphally, reinforcing his image as a patron saint of football.

"Leaders aren't made, they're born."

"Practice doesn't make perfect; perfect practice makes perfect."

"Winning isn't everything, it's the only thing."

One of the most ubiquitous and well-known football proverbs is credited to Paul "Bear" Bryant, the famous head coach of the University of Alabama, himself a fellow patron saint of the sport.

It goes: "Offense sells tickets but defense wins championships." The message is clear to anyone

⁶⁶ NFL Films, "The Timeline: There's Only One America's Team."

familiar with the sport: the offense scores the points, gets the media attention, and the fan support, but the defense—that is, the ability to stop the other team's offense—is what wins. It's a sort of truism; football is won by scoring more points, so holding the opponent to fewer points guarantees victory. The phrase, often shortened to just "defense wins championships," is a part of the national vernacular and used in non-football contexts frequently. Statisticians have even spent considerable amount of time attempting to prove whether the proverb is correct.⁶⁷

Music

Another example of NFL Films influencing popular culture was through Steve Sabol's lyrical writing style and John Facenda's immediately recognizable voice. Sabol fancied himself an artist, not just a filmmaker, and would write textured prose for Facenda. Rhymes, alliteration, tongue-twisting phrases, and poems were all regularly integrated into NFL Films scripts. The most famous of these comes from the 1974 Oakland Raiders highlight film. The poem, titled, "The Autumn Wind," was adopted by the Raiders owner Al Davis as a kind of "battle hymn." Even if a football fan cannot recite the whole poem, the poem's lasting imprint on popular culture will make it immediately recognizable to many:

The Autumn Wind is a pirate
 Blustering in from sea,
 With a rollicking song, he sweeps along,
 Swaggering boisterously.
 His face is weather beaten.
 He wears a hooded sash,
 With a silver hat about his head,

⁶⁷ Examples include: Judy Battista, "Defense Once Won Titles, but Score Has Changed"; Brian Goff, "Defense Wins Championships in the NFL: Fact or Folklore?"; Tobias J. Moskowitz and L. Jon Wertheim, "Does Defense Really Win Championships"; Domonique Foxworth, "It's Time We Modify the Old Adage Defense Wins Championships."

And a bristling black mustache.
 He growls as he storms the country,
 A villain big and bold.
 And the trees all shake and quiver and quake,
 As he robs them of their gold.
 The Autumn Wind is a Raider,
 Pillaging just for fun.
 He'll knock you 'round and upside down,
 And laugh when he's conquered and won.

One point of oddity in professional football is the general lack of songs and other forms of spectacle so prevalent at the high school and college level. Many NFL teams have official fight songs and many had official bands, but the songs rarely get played and all but two teams disbanded before the twenty-first century. The Baltimore Ravens and the Washington Redskins both use marching bands, but neither feature too heavily in fandom or popular culture. The Ravens boast that their band—"the largest musical organization associated with the NFL"—helps promote "traditional football atmosphere."⁶⁸ The Redskins marching band, in turn, boasts its 80 years of pregame and halftime shows.⁶⁹ The Redskins have probably the most recognizable "fight song" in the NFL, although again, it has relatively few competitors. "Hail to the Redskins" is sung both sincerely and ironically by fans (depending on the team's performance), and often parodied.⁷⁰ The song also has a checkered past, its lyrics having changed twice to remove more controversial verbiage. The song is mostly known only through its first verse:

⁶⁸ BaltimoreRavens.com, "Marching Ravens."

⁶⁹ Redskins.com, "Marching Band."

⁷⁰ Richard Harrington, "Rockin' Around The Redskins."

Hail to the Redskins
 Hail victory
 Braves on the warpath
 Fight for ole' D.C.

The Redskins tried to forge an identity as the NFL's "Team of the South" in the 1960s, and for a few years changed the final line to "Fight for Old Dixie." The team changed the lyrics back in 1962 around the same time the team was forced to integrate and, presumably, try to appeal to more than white southerners.⁷¹

While team songs are few and far between, the NFL does have a history of popular musical connections, most notably through channel-specific broadcast introductions. Starting in 1989, ABC used a combination of classical and pop music to begin each week of *Monday Night Football*. The name of the instrumental song that introduced the broadcast may not be well-known, but its first bars are instantly recognizable. Like football's Fifth Symphony, "Heavy Action" gave popular culture its own orchestral motif.⁷² *Monday Night Football* also featured Hank Williams' "All My Rowdy Friends are Coming Over Tonight" as its opening theme song, reworded as "All My Rowdy Friends are Here on Monday Night." Each weekly episode began with Williams yelling in a recognizable drawl, "Are you ready for some football?" The song, based on a previous major hit, was repurposed into a football-centric song, and became a new major hit, transitioning back into popular culture in a new context.⁷³

The verbal expressive lore of the NFL has been largely created by and mediated through popular culture, integrating into the larger national language. Non-football fans know the phrase "Are you ready for some football?" as well as the Cowboys' nickname "America's Team." They

⁷¹ Locke Peterseim, "Not Just Whistling Dixie in D.C."

⁷² Elizabeth Shockman, "Classical Music for Bros."

⁷³ Erika Berlin, "45 Years of Monday Night Football's Memorable Theme Music."

can make up nicknames with Chris Berman and hum the tune to Monday Night Football, even if they do not know the player or the name of the song. The language of the NFL, an integral part of popular culture, is also a source of popular culture.



Figure 1. Tailgating, October 18, 2014. Photo by Brandon Rush.

This file is licensed under the Creative Commons 4.0 International license.

Vernacular Environment

The built environment of professional football is dominated by stadiums that cost millions of dollars and seat tens of thousands of people. However, the ways in which fans interact with that environment has become a part of popular culture, most notably through the vernacular festival called tailgating. There, fans will have cook-outs, play games, and drink alcohol, molding the parking lot to their needs. Beyond the informal rules passed down by parents to children, the rules of tailgating are mostly set and enforced by representations in popular culture. Sitcoms, advertising, and newspapers dictate the rules on what to wear, how to

act, and what to eat and drink. Grilled meats are good, deconstructed kale is not.⁷⁴ Team colors are mandatory, and the wrong outfit can mean exile from the group.⁷⁵ Anti-social behavior is antithetical to tailgating, but being too social can be seen as overstepping.⁷⁶ A potentially folkloric reaction to the imposed architecture has migrated into popular culture, with popular culture now acting as tradition-bearer. The result, according to Lindquist, is that fans "locate" their sense of identity through their performance of fandom within the game-day experience.⁷⁷ Cultural anthropologist John Sherry also linked the community-building facilitated by tailgating harkens back to festivals throughout history.⁷⁸ Again, the tailgating experience—the building of community and locating of identity—is learned from popular culture.

⁷⁴ Mary Beth Albright, "History of Tailgating."

⁷⁵ Beth Carter, "Tailgate Parties are a 'Powerful Impulse' and a Microcosm of Society."

⁷⁶ Julian Kimble, "The Types of People You Meet While Tailgating."

⁷⁷ Danille C. Lindquist, "Locating the Nation."

⁷⁸ Judy Keen, "Tailgating isn't just a party."



Figure 2. Redskins fan paraphernalia at the Pro Football Hall of Fame. On the right side is the hat and nose of the "Hogettes," a cross-dressing fan community. Photo by Author.

Material Culture

Getting dressed to go to a football game may not be as simple as wearing the right colors for some fans. Elaborate costumes have become a part of NFL fandom, from the dystopian armor-clad Black Hole of Raiders Nation to the cross-dressing Hogettes of Washington. The Pittsburgh Steelers have one of the most famous items of fandom with the Terrible Towel, originally fan-made, but now an officially licensed and imprinted with the word "Steelers." Football gear has also been used by street gangs as a form of identification, most notably in Los Angeles. In the late 1980s and 1990s, Oakland Raiders apparel was adopted by the pioneering rap group N.W.A. and immediately shifted the role of football jerseys in popular culture. N.W.A. member Ice Cube explained the connection, or lack thereof, in an ESPN documentary

"Straight Outta L.A.," claiming they just thought the colors—silver and black—looked good and they were not affiliated with the two major gangs, the Bloods and the Crips, red and blue, respectively.⁷⁹ In turn, the Raiders' gear became associated with N.W.A. and fans of the group made the Raiders the most visible team in popular culture for years. The trend they started in the 1980s was adopted by others, and sports and hip-hop remain visibly linked and connected in the popular culture consciousness.

Customs

Like other sports, superstitions exist in professional football at practically every level, from players to fans. George Gmelch established the paradigm for sports rituals, taboos, and fetishes, noting that the less control someone has, the more ritualistic they will end up.⁸⁰ In professional football, nobody has less control over the outcome of the game than the fans. As such, a whole range of superstitious rituals have evolved, many of which have entered popular culture, typically either in parody or advertising. Common superstitions involve imitative magic, whether it is sitting in the same seat, wearing the same clothes, or eating the same food. As Gmelch pointed out, these rituals only continue if they work, so once the magic is broken, fans are free to move around, change clothes, and eating something different... until a new winning combination is found. Bud Light highlighted fan rituals as a marketing tool.⁸¹ Set to Stevie Wonder's "Superstitious," the 2012 commercial ran through a montage of fans performing their superstitions: twiddling thumbs and twirling objects; slapping signs and tapping feet; crossed fingers; unwashed jersey and mismatched socks; and, of course, praying to the football gods while tailgating. The ad ended with the narrator reassuring fans, "It's only weird if it doesn't

⁷⁹ *30 for 30: Straight Outta LA.*

⁸⁰ George Gmelch, "Baseball Magic."

⁸¹ "Very Superstitious."

work." What may have originated as folkloric expressions had entered popular culture as an extension of conspicuous consumption.

As well as informal customs, formal parts of professional football have entered the popular culture inventory. Certain referee hand-signals are ubiquitous, their football meaning transferring into everyday contexts. The touchdown signal, both arms sticking straight up, has become a visual metaphor for success. Similarly, the signal for "incomplete" metaphorically means failure in everyday usage. Players can create gestures mimicked in popular culture, such as Namath's raised index finger, Tebowing, and spiking the football—credited to the New York Giants' Homer Jones in 1968.⁸²

Countless other forms of performance are influenced or taken directly from professional football and repurposed in popular culture. The two feed each other: the NFL creates popular culture customs, rituals, and rules; popular culture uses those performances to tie together the various strains of everyday life.

Narratives

Professional football has made its biggest mark on popular culture through the creation of prose narratives. Typically, narratives are split by folklorists into three categories: myths, legends, and tales. Through NFL Films and the Pro Football Hall of Fame, the NFL was able to historicize its own past in a way that turned, essentially, struggles between corporations into a sacred narrative that spoke to the fundamental truths of American popular culture (see Chapter 2). The heroes of the sport have come in a wide variety, from local celebrities known for specific games or plays, to national celebrities on par with famous actors and politicians. The process of creating popular culture folk heroes is a blend of extraordinary football

⁸² Bill Pennington, "Giants' Wide Receivers May End Long Drought."

accomplishments with modern marketability and celebrity, best exemplified through the rise of Joe Namath as a national icon (see Chapter 3). Tales, however, pose an interesting dilemma for folklorists analyzing popular culture. In folkloristics, tales are understood to be fictional, but also traditional.⁸³

There are two options, then, for creating a definition of "popular culture tale." The most obvious is to focus on the fictional aspect and combine movies, television shows, novels, and any fictional portrayal of football. Any popular entertainment that featured football would qualify into the new category of "popular culture football tale." Movies like *Any Given Sunday*, *The Longest Yard*, and *Jerry Maguire*, as well as episodes of *Leave it to Beaver*, *Hogan's Heroes*, *The Brady Bunch*, and dozens of other sitcoms, would be reimagined as not just television shows, but representations of football tales in popular culture. The referential nature of popular culture would support this reconceptualization rather well. The meanings and implications behind fictional characters and events from movies and television shows are, by their popular nature, understood by mass society. The stock character "Paul Crewe" now exists in culture, as does the Jerry Maguire phrase "Show me the money!" Rousing speeches are standard in sports movies, so Al Pacino's speech in *Any Given Sunday*, Keanu Reeves' in *The Replacements*, and Denzel Washington's in *Remember the Titans* can be categorized as the same type of cultural expression. Just as folk tales, popular culture tales can be broken down into their narrative elements and put into a tale type index.

The creation of a popular culture tale type index would resolve the second part of defining tales: tradition. Instead of tracking the physical movement of tales, however, the popular culture tale index would map the usage of types in different contexts. For example, if Al Pacino's character in *Any Given Sunday* was to be considered a tale type, defined potentially as a

⁸³ Kay F. Stone, "Folk tales."

coach past his prime and being threatened by the younger generation of owners and players, folklorists studying popular culture can trace the evolution of that character type through media forms and identifying real life antecedents, and analyze why the character took that trajectory.

As is true with the rest of the poplore complex, popular culture tales are just as meaningful and expressive as their folk tale reflections, just evolved in a mass media environment.

The Four Functions of Poplore

With a countless number of examples, the existence of popular culture lore of professional football is undeniable. And, although, the point of creation may be formal, corporate, or even entertainment, the lore functions in the same role for popular culture as folklore for folk groups. The stories, customs, and objects popular culture creates for itself fulfill all of the social needs that Bascom outlined.

Professional football is obviously a form of **amusement**, as are the lower-order games like Berman's nicknames and backyard football. Tales about football and tales that incorporate football types are prevalent in popular culture, presenting audiences narrative negotiations of cultural values and morals. Football is used in popular culture as a mode of **education**, both literally and figuratively. The rules of football become metaphors in popular culture for social situations: success through fairplay is the desired result; to score a touchdown is to succeed, no matter the context; and to throw the yellow flag is to declare norms have been broken. NFL Films taught fans how to watch football, including what words to use, as seen with "America's Team." Proverbial wisdom from famous football coaches and players literally teach lessons.

Popular culture's ability to disseminate dress codes, terminology, and rituals results in popular culture also enforcing **conformity** across the country. To be an NFL fan is to know the

Monday Night Football theme song just as much as it is to understand a play diagram. Mass-produced goods create uniformed identity, whether officially licensed jerseys, homemade themed costumes, or divorced from football altogether and simply because their favorite rapper wears it.

Popular culture **validates** the expression of football culture; advertisers tell you which truck to buy and what meats to cook in order to correctly tailgate. Beer commercials explicitly justify fan superstitions and beliefs, nominally giving consumers the right to be fans. The lyrical prose of Steve Sabol's NFL Films scripts defined franchises and moments in NFL history; Cowboys fans know they are correct to be Cowboys fans because NFL Films told them so.

Professional football is not just a national sport, but it helps to maintain popular culture. Football adds to the language and customs of popular culture, and creates situations that are referenced and replicated across mass media. The NFL's myth-making ritualizes society's values and history (see Chapter 2). The popular culture folk heroes produced by the confluence of professional football and entertainment culture, gave society a new form of hero to idolize, both physically impressive and business-savvy (see Chapter 3). And the consistent creation of football tales through movies, television, and other mass entertainment, have provided American popular culture with a new index of tale types to draw upon and recast in order to tell stories that reflect current social dynamics. Instead of dismissing the role of popular culture in creating and maintaining traditions, as with "fakelore," or looking at the role of folklore in creating popular culture, as with "folkloresque," folklorists interested in the dynamic between popular culture and folklore should look in the reciprocal direction: the lore produced by popular culture, and for popular culture.

Chapter 2.
MANUFACTURING POPLORE:
CREATING AND CELEBRATING POPULAR CULTURE MYTHS

What would this country *be* without football in October?
—Hunter S. Thompson

Despite baseball's moniker as "the national pastime," it was football that developed the deepest connections to American culture in the twentieth century. After World War II, and particularly with the increased accessibility of home television, football was propelled to the forefront of popular culture and integrated firmly into that popular culture. By 1969, the Harris poll showed that football had overtaken baseball as the most popular sport. Gallup would concur in 1972, and despite some ebbs and flows between football and baseball, football was solidly in command of American sports culture by the end of the 1970s.⁸⁴ The Super Bowl has been one of the most-watched single television events since its first game in 1967, and subsequent sequels broke ratings records for decades.⁸⁵ It was television that gave the National Football League its biggest boost, and the effect was that in the latter half of the twentieth century, interaction with popular culture became, in many ways, reliant on knowledge of professional football and its current events.

More than simply integrating into popular culture, however, football became a pillar of the new national conversation that mass media was building. Through television, advertising,

⁸⁴ National poll data taken from the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research.

⁸⁵ "Super Bowl LIII Draws 98.2 Million TV Viewers."

and the general self-referential nature of the entertainment ecosystem, the United States had created a new cultural hearth from which American identity and values were defined and enforced. The NFL found and exploited a very special niche in this environment, and with the help of NFL Films and the Pro Football Hall of Fame, the National Football League turned itself into a source of a new national mythology. These sacred narratives were not of ancient gods or the supernatural, but they did tell stories of American triumph, giving viewers a manipulated retelling of current events that elevated the game of football to that of an ideological struggle, which, through ritualized fandom, told Americans about themselves. In the context of the time, with a shifting domestic condition and ever-present Cold War against a vilified arch-enemy, the NFL under Commissioner Pete Rozelle took on the role of tradition-bearer for a traditional past that they themselves invented and curated. The resulting effects of NFL Films and the romanticization of 1960s football still live on in the nostalgia of popular culture; the image of the sport that NFL Films created then is often used to contrast the political, social, and sporting challenges of the present, having become the manufactured lore of popular culture.

The Role of Myth

To best understand how the National Football League became the important narrator of American identity that it has become, it is first necessary to understand the role of myth and mythology in culture.

Various disciplines study myths and their importance, and in everyday speech, the word myth has taken on a variety of contradictory meaning. The most pernicious of which may be that "myths" are "false" stories, leading to the poetically symmetrical rebuttal: defining myths as false stories is a myth. The history of the term is rooted in medieval efforts to separate non-Christian

religious systems, but modern folklorists correctly reject both that perspective, and the definitions of others like Lord Raglan who suggested myths were never based in real events and therefore could be combined into monomyths.⁸⁶ Joseph Campbell similarly attempted to treat historic mythologies, rooted in distinct cultural contexts, as interchangeable. From there, Campbell created a narrative cycle for what he saw in his monomyth, later named "The Hero's Journey." Ironically, that became his enduring contribution to the study of myths as it famously inspired George Lucas to model the plot of *Star Wars* (1977) around Campbell's structural narrative.⁸⁷ Campbell's understanding of myths may have been tone-deaf to the realities of studying cultures, but his "monomyth" fit nicely into the three-act structure of a feature film. It is ironic because the popularity of *Star Wars* and its enduring place in the vocabulary of popular culture, has contributed significantly to the study of popular culture by folklorists, in turn, prompting the need for a new term to illustrate the connection between traditions born out of popular culture, as defined in Chapter 1. More recently, Sarah Iles Johnson tackled the futility in trying to find an exact definition of the term, in no small part because myths were an important genre of study for philologists, literary critics, cultural studies scholars, narratologists, folklorists, sociologists, psychologists, and cognitive scientists.⁸⁸ Johnson noted that the endeavor was even more complicated when introducing the concepts of ritual and belief, themselves both terms with a history of "slippery" definitions.

No matter the varying definitions from other fields, folklorists have the most specific and idiosyncratic definitional boundaries for what constitutes a myth. Following the delineation that began to take hold in the 1960s, myths were categorized and placed in relation to legends and

⁸⁶ Jan Harold Brunvand, *The Study of American Folklore*.

⁸⁷ Joseph Campbell, *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*.

⁸⁸ Sarah Iles Johnson, 281.

tales as a tripartite division of the larger category "prose narratives."⁸⁹ Whereas tales were fictional stories, understood to be fictional, and legends were true stories imbued with a level of unbelievability, myths took hold in folkloristics as sacred stories believed to be true by the culture from which they were celebrated. Importantly, however, they were rooted in an unknowable setting, whether it be the distant past or featuring characters like gods or demigods. Succinctly elucidating this perspective, Brunvand defined myths in *The Study of Folklore* as "Traditional prose narratives, which, in the society in which they are told, are considered to be truthful accounts of what happened in the remote past."⁹⁰ He added that myths are considered sacred truth, and often the basis for religious rituals. C.W. Sullivan's entry in *American Folklore: An Encyclopedia* similarly placed myths as a "Traditional prose narrative that enables people to discuss preternatural topics."⁹¹ These parameters have somewhat stabilized for folklorists, who generally now accept that myths are a culture's sacred narratives.

However, in folkloristics, the precise definition of what constitutes a myth has often been side-stepped in favor of looking at the role of a myth in a cultural setting. Sullivan expanded on his definition, explaining that myths exist a type of cultural metaphor used to process events and beliefs, not specifically explain them.

Myth, then, is metaphor, and it 'works' like that other great repository of metaphor, poetry, allowing the user to relate two different items, one often concrete and the other often abstract, or one familiar and local and the other unfamiliar and remote, so that the concrete or familiar-local one helps us understand the abstract or unfamiliar-remote one.⁹²

⁸⁹ William Bascom, "The Forms of Folklore: Prose Narratives."

⁹⁰ Jan Harold Brunvand, *The Study of Folklore*, 136.

⁹¹ C.W. Sullivan III, "Myth," 497.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 498.

Echoing Sullivan's definition, Dorothy Noyes put forward a new system for handling myths where the narratives were defined not by the narratives themselves, but how cultures and communities interacted with the narratives.⁹³ This analysis is particularly useful since the qualities that define and differentiate myth, legend, tale are often a matter of interpretation. What one culture may see as a sacred truth, another may see as a fictional fable, and so forth. A moment that has passed into the lore of folkloristics was when Francis Lee Utley used Lord Raglan's criteria for "myth" to conclude Abraham Lincoln, in fact, never existed.⁹⁴ Instead of focusing on the mechanics of the narrative and if it meets a specific number of requirements, understanding myths as cultural metaphors — or poetry as Sullivan suggested — provides a larger scope to consider how a culture uses and transmits its sacred stories. It is no coincidence that myths are often tied into rituals and belief systems. Positioning myths as the provider of "why" and "how" to religion's "what," allows folklorists a key tool to understand the context and texture of a culture much more effectively by taking away the burden of proof from the analysis. Folklorists do not need to determine whether something is a myth, rather, the culture that treats the narrative as a sacred truth and uses it prop up a belief system has already done categorized it as a myth.

To further deconstruct the role of myths, it is worthwhile to look at the semiotic interpretation put forward by Roland Barthes. Although his work in *Mythologies* has faced scrutiny, even from himself, his deconstruction of how myths operate as a type of "second-order semiological system" is particularly relevant when turning back to the creation of popular culture narratives.⁹⁵ His assertion was a rather simple one and something folklorists can easily accept and integrate into their own definitions: "myth is a type of speech," "a system of

⁹³ Dorothy Noyes, *Humble Theory*.

⁹⁴ Barre Toelken, 3.

⁹⁵ Roland Barthes, 223.

communication," "a message."⁹⁶ Importantly, though, "myths "presuppose a signifying consciousness."⁹⁷ To put it in terms that Barthes might approve: myths are the language of language. In that way they are both natural and artificial, signs in and of themselves, but made up of other predefined signs. Barthes laid out his case by leaning heavily into a Saussurean triad: sign, signifier, and signified. He explained, "the signified is the concept, the signifier is the acoustic image (which is mental), and the relation between concept and image is the sign (the word, for instance), which is a concrete entity."⁹⁸ As a second-order system, however, a myth has signifiers that are, themselves, signs, with their own underlying formulas; myths are signs made up of signs.

To illustrate Barthes' view on myths as a second-order system, a man—the physically tangible person—is a sign composed of the spoken word "man" and the mental attachment to the literal word, and the concept of a man and the ways in which a man can exist and the meaning behind that existence. That meaning is not permanent, however, and shifts depending on the person seeing the sign. Race, age, class, gender, politics, tribalism—all of these can inform how the image is understood and how the sign exists to an individual, the "myth consumer," as Barthes defined it. To place a man inside of another sign—for example, a man playing football—forms a new context in which the man, himself a sign for all the cultural qualities associated with a man, exists alongside a variety of other signs—a football, a stadium, an audience—and forms a whole new sign with cultural meaning. An image of a man playing football, then, is literally a man playing football, but also simultaneously the collection of, and confluence of the meaning of man, the meaning of football, the meaning of stadiums, and the

⁹⁶ Ibid., 217.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 219.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 222.

meaning of audiences, all of which have a variety of interpretations depending on the person receiving the message.

For Barthes, the creation of myths added in a new dynamic that complicated the matter further: myths are an expression of ideology. Signs already have political and cultural meanings attached to them, and the combination of those individual meanings creates larger ideological messages. Perhaps the man playing football is taking a subversive act, or perhaps he is an abnormality in some way. The way the myth is expressed then becomes both a transmission of content, but also value. Is the man playing football performing a celebratory act or crossing a taboo? Barthes was concerned with a Marxist approach to cultural criticism, so the role of capital in the creation of myths was of specific interest to him. The media, entertainment, and political communication each have particular agendas and messages created by the use of semiological forms already understood by their audience. Myths are one of these forms, and easily manipulated by outside forces, forcing Barthes to conclude that "myth hides nothing and flaunts nothing: it distorts; myth is neither a lie nor a confession: it is an inflexion."⁹⁹

Interestingly, Barthes' point of view on the power of myths as layered images of meaning parallels well with the folkloristic concept of "mythic traditions" and the American use of myth as popular culture tradition-bearers. Although Brunvand did not use that specific popular culture connection, he did write of the power of archetypes and historical narratives as symbols of national identity, particularly in America, which did not have centuries of organic culture to rest on.¹⁰⁰ In passing, Brunvand used "Custer's Last Stand" as an example of an historical event that lives on in culture as a metaphor for specific concepts and values, but breaking down the legacy of an event like that in popular culture only strengthens the case. As a real historical event,

⁹⁹ Ibid., 240.

¹⁰⁰ Jan Harold Brunvand, *The Study of American Folklore*, 149.

"Custer's Last Stand" had specific political contexts and meaning. But as a "mythic tradition," the Last Stand became a sign of signs: character types, legends, and songs all emerged, and with the turn to the mass media environment of the twentieth century, those became codified within popular culture through television shows, referential jokes, and of course, movies. Through these popular culture productions, just as Brunvand suggested, narratives formed that channeled the point of view and perspective of the producers as well as the consumers. How the popular culture consumers received these popular culture myths often directly reflected the state of internal politics, be they our attachment to social issues and even national identity. To wit, a movie that portrayed Custer as the hero would have a different reception than a movie that portrayed Custer as the villain, even as both engaged a myriad of social and political ideological systems.

Another point of similarity between Barthes and folklorists was the role of myths in creating conservative narratives. For Barthes, again, this was politically driven through his Marxist lens where myths were enforcers of capitalist hegemony. Myths are not just a language, but the system of language of the bourgeois, to Barthes, echoing Gramsci.¹⁰¹ In Barthes' summation, the myth-maker's drive is to naturalize history, and make the systems of culture unmovable and unquestionable. Myths that treat their component signs as fact, cement those component signs to the consumer, and manipulate how the myths direct the discourse. Although Toelken was not as explicitly political about it, he similarly outlined how myths were ultimately a conservative measure to maintain stability within their native culture. Specifically acknowledging the role of myths as "dramatic experiential models of protected truths and laws," Toelken established myths as the performance of cultural conservatism. To clarify, he defined his cultural version of conservatism as:

¹⁰¹ Antonio Gramsci, "Observations on Folklore."

...all those processes, forces, and attitudes that result in the retaining of certain information, beliefs, styles, customs, and the like, and the attempted passing of those materials, essentially intact, through time and space in all the channels of vernacular expression.¹⁰²

For both Toelken and Barthes, myths were transmitters of knowledge. Their explanations of a conservationist impulse of traditions also aligned with Bascom's "four functions of folklore," which centered on the use of traditions for maintaining "cultural stability."¹⁰³ And although Barthes was more explicitly cynical in his assessment, both saw myths as the most effective tool for a culture to impose order upon itself. Specifically when myths were tied to religious functions, it was the dominant forces in a specific community or culture who were the ones maintain the myths, and it can be reasonably speculated that the messages woven into those myths were approved by the dominant group and either explicitly or implicitly supported the continued dominance of that group.

All of these definitions, explanations, and analyses combine together to paint a picture of myths as much more than the sum of their parts. Myths, whether they be religious or civic, or based on true events or speculative and extraordinary, describe and justify a community's sacred truths through metaphors for the purpose of maintaining dominant traditions, symbols, and values. With that understanding of the role of myths in culture, the American system of myth-making can be accurately deconstructed and placed in proper context as the powerful cultural force it is.

¹⁰² Barre Toelken, 45

¹⁰³ William Bascom, "Four Functions of Folklore."

Football as American Myth

Discussions about the mythology of the United States fall into the same trap as other forms of folklore: perceptions that American culture is too young, too multicultural, and too artificial to have an organic cultural past ignore the obvious that a unified culture norm has been created by mass-mediated popular culture. As detailed in Chapter 1, popular culture—specifically as curated through radio, movies, and television—became the cultural hearth for a new American identity in the twentieth century. After World War II, and as the United States settled into the Cold War—a global conflict defined by ideology and culture more than martial conflict, the popular culture morphed around a booming economy and technological leaps.

Television was at the forefront of this change, giving a significant portion of Americans access to the same news, same entertainment, and same advertisements, simultaneously. With only three channels, television in the 1950s and 1960s served as a homogenizing force on popular culture and almost immediately new narratives about American identity evolved. One of those narratives came from professional football, which was in the middle of its rise of dominance over American sports culture. In the 1960s, the National Football League proactively took control over its messaging and in the process manufactured football into a more than just a national sport, but as a national mythology.



Figure 3. *American Progress*, John Gast, 1872.

The quintessential portrayal of American westward expansion, metaphorically mirrored by football.

Football as American Metaphor

Myths are metaphors for cultural values considered sacred truths by the dominant group, and as such football was embedded with a variety of symbolic meanings that resonated across American popular culture. Football's unique popularity in the United States further strengthened the role of the sport as a metaphor for American identity, and both scholars and journalists have spent decades unpacking those connections.

The most common of these analyses have been to draw parallels to the dynamics of football with the **conquering of the American frontier**—a uniquely American historical memory. The more overt of these connections focused on the rhetoric of the game; team names like the Cowboys, Redskins, Chiefs, 49ers, and Broncos explicitly tied to the archetypes and

symbols of westward expansion. Sports journalist Sal Paolantonio directly compared football to Manifest Destiny in his book *How Football Explains America*, itself a kind of American-centric response to Foer's *How Soccer Explains the World*.¹⁰⁴ Tracing the evolution from rugby to football, Paolantonio broke down the game, explaining the scrum was the first major difference between the two to get removed. "[The scrum] suggested everything that was un-American: a mass of humanity moving in no particular direction, with no particular purpose", he asserted.¹⁰⁵ Americans were not stagnant, they were driven to succeed, or fail. At least in Paolantonio's view. Football, like other sports adapting and evolving in the new "Age of the Spectator,"¹⁰⁶ connected with fans who could understand and cheer for the symbolic struggle they were watching: "Capture territory. Hold it. Advance," as Paolantonio succinctly described it. Failure to advance meant surrender to your opponent, another decidedly un-American outcome.¹⁰⁷ The line of scrimmage became an allegory for America itself; just as generations of pioneers had marched across the continent, so would the offense.

The focus on frontier imagery was blended into a larger metaphor of **war and violence**.¹⁰⁸ Again, the rhetoric of the culture easily demonstrated this connection. The AFL and NFL of the 1960s included teams named the Raiders, Vikings, Patriots, Chargers, and Titans. The Vikings featured the Purple People Eaters on defense; the Cowboys had their own Doomsday Defense. The Raider's Jack Tatum was called "The Assassin," and the Steelers were led by "Mean" Joe Greene. Colloquial terms for the quarterback like "field general" and "gunslinger" took to the headlines. A rushing defensive player performed a "blitz" while another dropped back to "spy" the quarterback. Again stepping back into the Cold War context,

¹⁰⁴ Sal Paolantonio, *How Football Explains America*; Franklin Foer, *How Soccer Explains the World*.

¹⁰⁵ Sal Paolantonio, 4.

¹⁰⁶ Benjamin G. Rader, *American Sports*.

¹⁰⁷ Sal Paolantonio, 7.

¹⁰⁸ Simon J. Bronner, *Explaining Traditions*, 354.

the focus on militarized entertainment revealed an interesting insight into the American mind of the time. During World War II, the country had been under wartime restrictions and fully mobilized in an effort to win. With the lack of that common unity, was football giving Americans a way back into that wartime mindset? Baseball certainly could not meet the needs of an audience looking for violence, and football's rise to the top sport—and its continued place as the most popular sport for over fifty years—suggested football benefited from the audience's desire for vicarious violence.

Perhaps the most erudite cultural critic to tackle this topic was comedian George Carlin. Immortalized on his 1984 album, *Carlin on Campus*, he expanded on the differences between football and baseball.¹⁰⁹ In it he specifically highlighted the militarized nature of football:

In football the object is for the quarterback, also known as the field general, to be on target with his aerial assault, riddling the defense by hitting his receivers with deadly accuracy in spite of the blitz, even if he has to use shotgun. With short bullet passes and long bombs, he marches his troops into enemy territory, balancing this aerial assault with a sustained ground attack that punches holes in the forward wall of the enemy's defensive line.¹¹⁰

Carlin contrasted the militarized football with the pastoral baseball and its more free-flowing rules. Whereas football is "rigidly timed," baseball was more fun and laid back, a picnic atmosphere played in a park. Interestingly, Mark Twain agreed with Carlin that baseball was the perfect representation of 19th century America, but for almost opposite reasons. To Twain, baseball was an exercise in the unexpected, not a day of leisure. "Base ball, which is the very symbol, the outward and visible expression of the drive, and push, and rush and struggle of the

¹⁰⁹ George Carlin, *Carlin on Campus*.

¹¹⁰ Stand up includes variations; transcribed from: <http://www.baseball-almanac.com/humor7.shtml>

raging, tearing, booming nineteenth century!" he wrote in 1889.¹¹¹ In comparison, however, Twain's America may have indeed seemed pastoral and quaint, as Carlin dramatized. And, although the rhetoric of war was all over football, it was arguably more recognizable to Americans as a metaphor for the changing economic dynamics of the country.

To that end, football did reflect the growth of the **business** conditions of Cold War America. The game was full of hierarchies, specialized personnel, and intertwining economic factors. The professional teams were corporations; they had literal owners—in all but one example (Green Bay)¹¹²—who presided over a layered administrative front office that includes vice presidents, middle-managers, and assistants, who all handled the operations and promotion of the business. The management of the team itself was also placed in a strict hierarchical organization: the head coach delegated to assistant coaches, who were each responsible for smaller groups of players specializing in various skills. The game was strictly regulated by officials who kept time, marked exact measurements each play, and settled on-field disputes. As a corollary to the business environment replicated by the NFL, the **social dynamics** of the game began to respond to the changing social dynamics of the country. The added benefit of helmets gave football players an added mystique of inaccessibility and, in a more romantic sense, allowed for meritocracy to prevail. The NFL had banned black players in 1934 but officially desegregated in 1946 when Kenny Washington and Woody Strode played for the Los Angeles Rams.¹¹³ It was not a popular move with other owners, and the Washington Redskins were the last team to integrate, in 1962.¹¹⁴ The league's racial history remains checkered, at best, but with

¹¹¹ Twain's speech originally appeared in the *Boston Daily Globe*, April 9, 1889, but has been reproduced countless times since then.

¹¹² The Green Bay Packers are not controlled by a single owner like other professional football teams. The team is publicly owned, with over 300,000 individual shareholders.

¹¹³ Adam Rank, "Forgotten Hero: Washington Broke NFL's Color Barrier in 1946."

¹¹⁴ Ryan Basen, "50 Years Ago the Washington Redskins Were the Last Team to Integrate."

the emphasis on a business-like hierarchy, worker anonymity, and the nominal use of performance as measurement of players' value, the world of pro football in the 1960s was treated as a microcosm of a new American identity, bound by contracts, not color. It was an identity that the sports' demographic could understand, both by relating to the business structure and the erasure of self in favor of the corporation's goals.

As a metaphor for **masculinity**, football celebrates, distorts, subverts, and directs American conceptions of male identity. The **celebration** of masculinity goes back to the first media portrayals of football in the nineteenth century. Touching back on football as a metaphor for violence, football — especially in the pre-war days of limited padding and an evolving rulebook — was often compared to organized brawls. Oriard described the pre-war newspaper illustrations as either "heroic or grotesque," depending on the readers' point of view and loyalties.¹¹⁵ But to other artists, like the Leyendecker brothers, the romanticism of the game was found in its celebration of masculinity. J.C. Leyendecker and Frank X. Leyendecker created some of the most recognizable images of football players by portraying them as "slashing vectors of force;" that is, "clear-eyed, square-jawed" heroes.¹¹⁶ Evolving past the Rooseveltian version of masculinity, pioneering football voices like Walter Camp championed football as a synergy between intelligence and physicality working together to execute plays.¹¹⁷ However, football's pre-war masculinity was a by-product of its classicism. The game was rooted in college culture, and the upper-class white male was the dominant demographic on the field and on the page. As the game spread it incorporated players of all backgrounds, including both African-American and Native American players, but the imagery of the sport remained predominantly white.

¹¹⁵ Michael Oriard, *Reading Football*, 79-83.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 193.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 209.

Those African-American and Native American players were often the source of the **distortion** of the masculinity that integrated into football's language of symbols. The portrayal of black and Indian bodies were rooted in stereotypes easily understood by the masses. Jim Thorpe was celebrated, but in large part because he was "not truly representative" of his race, those noble savages, stoic and crafty, but also cruel.¹¹⁸ More often than not, Native Americans were celebrated in football as mascots for various colleges and professional teams, often as part of the spectacle of the game. The caricatured war-bonnet-wearing "Chief Illiniwek" faced off against Stanford University's "Prince Lightfoot" in the 1952 Rose Bowl.¹¹⁹ George Preston Marshall named his franchise the Boston Redskins in 1933, marketing the exoticism of the image of a team full of players in war-paint as a way to sell tickets. In 1937, the Redskins moved to Washington and, controversially, continued to embrace stereotypical Native American imagery as part of the team's persona.

Black players had—and have—a much more complicated relationship with football, especially at the professional level. While Native American players were dealing with centuries of colonial stereotypes, black players were dealing with the ever-present legacy of slavery, black-face minstrelsy, and scientific racism that categorized black players as less intelligent and more brutish, and was reflected in popular culture through racialized language, including illiterate slang.¹²⁰ After the NFL's reintegration in 1946, black players succeeded on the field. In the positions they were allowed to play, that is. Infamously, the conventional bias of football was that the mid-line positions—quarterback, center, and middle linebacker—were not suitable for black players, who lacked the intelligence and leadership abilities to play.¹²¹ In turn, black

¹¹⁸ Michael Oriard, *King Football*, 283-284.

¹¹⁹ Jennifer Guiliano, *Indian Spectacle*.

¹²⁰ Michael Oriard, *King Football*.

¹²¹ Doug Williams, *Quarterblack*.

players succeeded at positions like running back, wide receiver, and defensive lineman. Because of the racialized perception of physical capabilities, the conventional wisdom went that blacks were best suited for those positions because they required the least intelligence and most athletic ability. Animalistic qualities of black players were exaggerated, even when their stature or skills were no different than white counterparts. The physical size of football players increased over time and the physicality of the style of play reinforced the exaggerated hypermasculinity of football players in general, and doubly so for black players. Although less overtly racist, this dynamic would only increase over the second half of the twentieth century, and became a recurring issue as the NFL took a more active role in its self-promotion.

Conversely, and as famously posited by Alan Dundes in his 1974 article "Into the Endzone for a Touchdown," football may be the American cultural form for addressing male adolescent sexual anxiety.¹²² Particularly responding to the notion of football as a male rite of passage, Dundes put forward his theory: "I think it is highly likely that the ritual aspect of football, providing as it does a socially sanctioned framework for male body contact—football, after all, is a so-called body contact sport—is a form of homosexual behavior."¹²³ His conclusion was based on a psychoanalytic analysis of the language and tactics of the players, both focused on feminizing opponents. In particular, the "verbal dueling" couched in explicitly sexualized imagery, the focus on penetration and dominance, and the parallels between sex and sports in general, led Dundes to view football as the American equivalent to a type of ritualized masculinity found in other cultures. Certainly, what Dundes proposed ran counter to the hypersexualized nature of normative football culture that fetishized the sport's hyperfeminine counterpart. Most overtly represented by cheerleaders, the female partner to the hypermasculine

¹²² Alan Dundes, "Into the Endzone for a Touchdown."

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 209.

football player was "slim, not muscular; weak, not powerful; soft, not hard; gentle, not tough; decorative, not substantial."¹²⁴

Masculinity in football is not just responsive to cultural norms, as seen in previous examples, but also **directive** and held up by popular culture as a source of normative masculine performance. Perhaps the best example of this is in the figure of head coach, an archetype almost distinctly molded by Walter Camp at the game's birth.¹²⁵ Camp literally wrote football's rules, updating and perfecting the various issues encountered in the first years of the sport's existence. Instead of the Rooseveltian "strenuous life" version of masculinity that stressed the power of action, or the "muscular Christianity" found in other recreational contexts where sport was a road to righteousness, Camp's ideal for football was a sport dominated by a "rationalized, bureaucratic, specialized corporate work force."¹²⁶ The leader of a football team was not on the field, at all, but the head coach who designed the plays, trained the players, strategized the game, and gave the orders; the coach was the general, commanding his field army through intermediaries, like assistants and team captains. Arguably no other one person influenced the evolution of football as much as Walter Camp and his disciples took forward his philosophy of managerial order. The coach, as he was in popular culture, was the brains of the team as well as the paternal figure charged with maintaining order and discipline.

As Bronner detailed, none of these metaphorical or allegorical connections worked alone. They were all tied together to create a unified language extant in American popular culture heading into the 1960s.¹²⁷ Without being directly political, football was able to transmit political ideologies. Without needing direct social commentary, football was able to transmit normative

¹²⁴ Michael Oriard, *King Football*, 351.

¹²⁵ Michael Oriard, *Reading Football*.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 41.

¹²⁷ Simon J. Bronner, *Explaining Traditions*.

ideas of masculinity and race. And without directly defining American identity, football was able to transmit a particular set of American values. For the purposes of myth-making, these metaphors were the first-level system of meaning used by the NFL under Pete Rozelle to create larger mythic symbols and turn football from a game that resonated with Americans to a game that defined Americans sense of self.



Figure 4. Vince Lombardi and Bart Starr, circa 1965.
Two of the leading individuals in the performance of masculinity through football in the 1960s.
This file is licensed under the Creative Commons 4.0 International license.

NFL Films

When Pete Rozelle took over the National Football League in 1960, he evolved the role of league commissioner to that of "PR guy" and fundamentally changed the place of professional football in popular culture.¹²⁸ With his small army of marketing experts, public relations agents, and lobbyists, Rozelle's NFL moved beyond the sports pages and embraced television as a vehicle for distribution. He took full advantage of the new medium and instead of just broadcasting games and showing statistics, Rozelle actively sculpted the image of the game. The masses had been reading about football for decades, and even seen the spectacle in person, but Rozelle's NFL was on television and he wanted to make sure what people saw was nothing short of a weekly gladiatorial struggle between the best men the country could produce. To accomplish this, his best tools were the Pro Football Hall of Fame, the league's museum to itself, and NFL Films, the league's production company. No matter the original intentions, the resulting shift in how football was experienced in American culture drove it to become the most popular sport in the country.

Surpassing that of mere sport, however, football, through NFL Films, gave Americans a mythological cast of characters, places, and stories, shot with cinematic flair and backed by sweeping music. Football's language of metaphors were used as the alphabet of the new American mythology. Professional football became ritualized; people and places were canonized into a new pantheon of popular culture. Each team was provided its own heroes, villains, sacred moments, and venerated places. Real events were historicized and romanticized; audiences were told explicitly by NFL Films how to remember the games they watched—and perhaps more importantly, the games they did not watch. In this role, NFL Films was part marketing tool, part propaganda wing, and part Homeric bard, penning the definitive memory of

¹²⁸ Michael Oriard, *Brand NFL*, 11.

the people. To make the mythology tangible, the Pro Football Hall of Fame became the league's holy site. The museum's exhibits told pilgrims the NFL's version of the history of the sport, and in a sprawling display, bronze busts of the game's gods ensured their accomplishments would pass on through history.

None of this was accidental or an organic by-product of the sport's place in culture. Under Rozelle's stewardship in the 1960s and 1970s, the NFL's self-promotion moved it beyond just a sports league and into the realm of civic religion, complete with a mythology of its own making. And the Hall of Fame even had a gift shop, for those who want to represent their popular culture sect through conspicuous consumption. Oriard, a former football player, directly took on the idea of football as a cultural myth, and complicated the relationship between game, spectacle, and narrative. In his view, the real power of football was on the field, in the actions and heroics of the players. The NFL's attempt to increase the spectacle of the experience threatened to "demythologize" the sport, and relegate it back to being simply entertainment. Moreover, for Oriard, football was not as easily allegorical to American ideals as often asserted. Unlike the points of view outlined above, Oriard saw the contradictory nature of football as its biggest point of resonance; football was violent but beautiful, organized but chaotic, and team-oriented but individualistic. Although Oriard's analysis of the cultural impact football largely aligns with those he critiques, he gave outright blame to the NFL for the way it marketed professional football and forced the audience see it through the eyes cameramen.¹²⁹

Oriard's delineation between the managed experience of the spectacle and the fans' reverence for the game is somewhat arbitrary, however; starting in the 1960s, the memory of the sport was predominantly written by marketing professionals and film-makers, on all levels. The most influential organs of that process were the NFL's own NFL Films and the Pro Football Hall

¹²⁹ Michael Oriard, "Pro Football as Cultural Myth."

of Fame. Through NFL Films, the league created the texture of the performance and provided a language of fandom. At the Pro Football Hall of Fame, the league canonized a history of itself that they wrote, framing events in specific ways to help further the NFL's agendas.

NFL Films as Myth-Maker

"More fairy tale, than epic," wrote historian Michael Oriard about the birth of NFL Films. However, "unlike some modern fairy tales, this one actually happened."¹³⁰

The creation and immediate impact of NFL Films has been so thoroughly documented that, like a folk tale, various details change but the story remains the same¹³¹: Ed Sabol was a hobbyist film-maker when league commissioner Pete Rozelle hired him to lead the new endeavor. Sabol's unique approach was to treat games like movies: to capture the action from different angles, edit the games with quick cuts, and back the film with classical music. It was an instant sensation, and NFL Films began producing a weekly highlight show, "NFL Game of the Week." Instead of just running through a beat-for-beat account of games, episodes were told through stories; players and coaches were characters enacting dramatic struggles of heroism. Action slowed down to half-speed exaggerated fleeting moments into game-defining melodramas. Marching bands and classical pianos replaced the generic roar of the game, punctuated only by specifically chosen grunts and collision of big hits. On top of it all, guiding the visual narrative and focusing viewers' attention to important details, was the baritone poetry of John Facenda. Scripts were often penned by Ed's son, Steve, and the combined effort of everyone at NFL Films brought about the "self-mythologizing of pro football."¹³²

¹³⁰ Michael Oriard, *Brand NFL*, 14-15.

¹³¹ Oriard, MacCambridge, Vogan, and Crepeau all tell the same story slightly paraphrased.

¹³² Michael MacCambridge, *America's Game*, 183.

Beyond the so-called fairy tale, the real force behind NFL Films was Ed Sabol. Pete Rozelle ran the NFL, but Sabol ran NFL Films. In 1967, *Sports Illustrated's* Tom C. Brody called him the "C. B. DeMille of the Pros," molding each game into "a little extravaganza of its own." Sabol stocked his new company with dozens of cameramen and editors to cover the league's weekly lineup. Instead of film-making experience, Sabol hired people "insane about football," demonstrating that he seemingly already understood football's place in the popular culture's imagination. And by not focusing on experience, Sabol's crews produced innovative films that pushed the public to reimagine what a sports documentary could look like. Brody detailed the weekly "orgy of activity" to coordinate the various crews and create films ready to be shipped to local broadcast stations by midday Monday.¹³³

Sabol's power was not just in running a film company, however; NFL Films created national stories out of games, and those stories became memories for the audience. What the editors chose to include, or not include, influenced how the story unfolded for the viewers. How the shows were scored—which songs played when, which sound effects used and why, changed the way the stories were received. Ed Sabol, served as a kind of Foucaultian author,¹³⁴ interpreting games, plays, and personalities for the public. In Brody's 1967 account, Sabol spoke about the power he held to manipulate the memory of games. During the 1966 NFL championship game between Dallas and Green Bay, Sabol and his team determined that the key to the game was Dallas tackle's Jim Boeke offsides penalty in the 4th Quarter. Boeke had gone offsides earlier, as well, but it was inconsequential. Faced with the ethical dilemma of whether or not to tell the entire country that Jim Boeke cost Dallas the game, Sabol's business partner Dan Endy admitted that "Our first instinct was to squelch it." After all, if football was the

¹³³ Tom C. Brody, "C.B. DeMille of the Pros."

¹³⁴ Michel Foucault, "What is an author?"

ultimate team sport, it would be irresponsible to blame one mistake by one player for an entire loss. But that's exactly what Sabol chose to do. The NFL Films narrative of the 1966 championship game was structured like a short story, bookended by a meaningless mistake by Boeke, and a fatal mistake by Boeke. Sabol defended his decision as "honest," but Dallas fans disagreed.¹³⁵ Presumably so did Boeke, who, through NFL Films, was explicitly told by the NFL that the loss was his fault. A generous interpretation of Sabol's decision-making process might give him the benefit of the doubt; he did not intentionally try to hurt anyone, he just wanted to tell the best story he could. A more cynical interpretation might see Sabol as a propagandist, hiding his—and the NFL's—agendas behind a cheery demeanor. Indeed, NFL Films has been frequently quoted as "perhaps the most effective propaganda organ in the history of corporate America."¹³⁶

The success of NFL Films paralleled the transition of sports in American culture to home entertainment. Football began being broadcasted in the 1950s and quickly caught on. Rader credited the appeal to the lack of options for men on "blustery fall Sunday afternoons."¹³⁷ Although Rader set up a false dichotomy between watching football versus watching "an array of 'high brow' programs," he did correctly identify the effect that democratizing access to the game would have on helping the public understand the rules of football. Television broadcasts gave the public the chance to watch, but also analyze games, plays, and players. The use of television timeouts for commercials lengthened the game and gave viewers more time to react and try to predict what would happen next.¹³⁸ Although television was a one-way communication method, the culture around watching football was decidedly participatory. Instead of needing to

¹³⁵ Tom C. Brody, "C.B. DeMille of the Pros."

¹³⁶ Travis Vogan, *Keepers of the Flame*, 5.

¹³⁷ Benjamin G. Rader, 263. He also lauded the NFL's owners for mostly being Irish Catholic.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

physically be present to participate, however, televised games allowed fans to recreate the experience in their homes. Millions of households tuned into the same game at the same time also created a type of virtual community and popular culture touchstone: the poplore ecosystem (detailed in Chapter 1). Rather than hurting ticket sales, as NFL owners feared, the move to televised games rapidly increased football's popularity. Rozelle's revenue-sharing structure gave the league the power to combine broadcast rights and the result was a two-year, \$9.3 million contract with CBS.¹³⁹ Later, the American Football League partnered with NBC, creating a unique opportunity for Rozelle and the AFL's Lamar Hunt when they were engaged in merger negotiations. The first AFL-NFL Championship game was broadcast on both NBC and CBS, two of the three main broadcast networks, and remains the only dually broadcast Super Bowl. Almost immediately, the Super Bowl became an annual popular culture holiday, regularly breaking records for the most-watched television program of the year.¹⁴⁰ With that backdrop, and with Americans already conditioned to watch football on television, NFL Films evolved into the role of myth-maker, weekly providing fans narratives and opinions to supplement (or supplant) their own experiential memories.

NFL Films as Texture

One reason for football's unique connection to American culture, and in turn, the success of NFL Films in dramatizing that connection, is what folklorists refer to as the texture of the performance. Although NFL Films was not quite what Dundes had in mind when he wrote of the importance of breaking down forms of cultural expression by its text, its context, and its texture,

¹³⁹ Travis Vogan, 45.

¹⁴⁰ "Super Bowl LIII Draws 98.2 Million TV Viewers."

the methodology is easily applied to the transmission of cultural metaphors.¹⁴¹ NFL Films not only trafficked in football's metaphors for American culture, but it provided football the language through which it could understand and speak to itself. The performative language of NFL Films, when positioned as such, can be analyzed like any other form of lore.

Following Dundes' parameters, the performance of NFL Films can be broken down into text, context, and texture. The text is the literal telling of the tale, or in this case, the individual NFL Films half-hour episodes or feature-length films. Its context can be expressed as the knowledge informing the text, as well as the knowledge informing the audience. For NFL Films' productions, this also includes the corporate history summarized above and the narrative authority of Ed Sabol (and later, Steve Sabol). It also requires an understanding of the established place of football in the culture. As previously detailed, metaphors for war and violence, frontier expansion, organizational and corporate structures, and normative masculine ideals are the root linguistic symbols that NFL Films used to create mythic narratives. Current events and other cultural narratives, like politics, entertainment, and economics, also contextualize the creation and reception of performances. And despite Dundes' assertion that "Context cannot always be guessed," in the case of NFL Films, a holistic, if not comprehensive, contextual environment can be created.

The texture, then, is the language itself and the role it plays in creating meaning. For verbal language, Dundes identified components like rhyme, stress, tone, alliteration, and onomatopoeia, and specifically stated that "the more important the textural features are in a given genre of folklore, the more difficult it is to translate an example of that genre into another language."¹⁴² Transposing this onto football, linguistic texture may be the elusive "why" for

¹⁴¹ Alan Dundes, *Interpreting Folklore*.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 22.

football's uniquely American identity, as most famously reflected in its lack of popularity virtually everywhere else in the world. The myths NFL Films created were, to reference Barthes, a second-order narrative built upon the language of American identity. If there is no connection to those first-order metaphors, the second-order will be incomprehensible. That is to say, if a group cannot relate to the symbols and emic knowledge of a story, no matter how well-produced or well-advertised, the story will never resonate with that group. To illustrate this relationship and the role NFL Films played in crafting mythic narratives out of, and for American popular culture, it is instructive to look at their first foray into thematic films: *This is Pro Football*.¹⁴³

The NFL Films Effect

The enduring legacy of the movies NFL Films created in the Rozelle era was not due to its place as the NFL's official propaganda machine. It was more fundamental than that: NFL Films productions resonated with people. They expressed emotions and built suspense out of real life; they made audiences feel. Just as with spoken language, the tone of those films, the people and events they chose to stress and exaggerate, and the juxtaposition of visual and aural symbolism created the atmosphere instinctively understood by its audience.

This is Pro Football begins without any people. A referee's whistle and a series of quick-cuts between a motionless football and the marked lines of a well-groomed gridiron are the first thing audiences saw when the film debuted in 1967. Instead of a summary of the week's games, *This is Pro Football* was a kind of cinematic primer to the sport. The narrative was bookended with references to the game's forefathers—"It was a game a handful of spectators came to see. A tug of war, 22 nameless men grappling in the mud. They called it pro football." In between was really nothing more than a breakdown of each position and their role in a team's success. But the

¹⁴³ NFL Films, *This is Pro Football*.

way it was done, with Steve Sabol's script, John Facenda's voice, John Hentz's directing, and Yoshio Kishi's editing, it became an art film. Accordingly, after Ed Sabol saw it for the first time he demanded its premier be held at Los Angeles arthouse, the Huntington Hartford Theater.¹⁴⁴ Images of coaches, cameramen, and fans weaved between players crashing into each other, tying together a description of football that made it more a choreographed dance than sport. Only by working together could the players accomplish their goals, and only by working together could players, fan, coaches, referees, announcers, and cameramen create "the sport of our time." As expected, the film was soaked in metaphors and symbolism, and the final, lingering shot of a brightly painted red, white, and blue NFL logo explicitly tied the film to the sport's American character.

All of the metaphors previously established above were readily accessible. The kinetic action of the editing and backing music reinforced the endless montage of big hits. Marching bands paraded back and forth across the field, inviting the audience to feel the spectacle of the stadium. Each group of players was introduced by their role on the gridiron battlefield: courageous quarterbacks fired bullets; running backs ran with fury; linemen fought tirelessly in "No Man's Land;" linebackers existed solely to search and destroy; receivers navigated the "shifting dangers of a broken field;" and defensive backs fought one-on-one battles in search of glory. Multiple extended shots of quarterbacks leading their teams down the field were framed by their various strategies of attack—a nod to individuality among peers. There was Fran Tarkenton, "who seeded the word 'scramble' into the vocabulary of pro football." Washington's Sonny Jurgensen was "a whiplash passer whose rifle arm can put the ball anywhere on the field." Baltimore's John Unitas was "a classic quarterback whose timing and control is cool, swift, and

¹⁴⁴ Tom C. Brody, "C.B. DeMille of the Pros."

precise." And then-four-time champion Bart Starr was "a careful field general, as well as an exponent of a calculated risk."

Non-players also figured heavily in the film, from Lombardi diagramming a play on a chalkboard to cameramen setting up shots on the sideline. The organizational culture of football was an active part of this story. Coaches, announcers, referees, cheerleaders, groundskeepers, vendors, and fans all had a role to play, and they all got their moment in the film. Technology made this integration possible, from coaches calling in plays on headsets, to television directors deciding which camera to feature, to men with jetpacks flying around before the first AFL-NFL Championship game. Football was a game for young and old, men and women; suits and ties were welcome, as was faux-Indian headdresses.

The film was released in 1967, amid racial protests, war protests, feminist protests, and a thriving youth movement, but politics were nowhere to be found in the film—itsself an unspoken message about the NFL's desired place outside of other social movements. Black players were featured without comment in the film, but only one in any detail: Chicago Bears running back Gayle Sayers. As opposed to the quarterbacks, who relied on their brains and strength of character, running backs were framed in physical terms—"instinct and legs." Sayers was a "whirlwind," and a "once in a generation" player. Presumably that was meant as a compliment, but as Sayers was the only black player highlighted *and* explicitly shown as black, it could be understood as a way to enforcing racial perceptions. That is, only when a black player is a generational talent can he break through into a white man's game; the inclusivity of football is only warranted when it can serve a corporate purpose.¹⁴⁵

Black or white, there is no question that *This is Pro Football* celebrated masculinity and the various ways in which football players used their masculinity for success. The male body

¹⁴⁵ Vogan has complete breakdown of racial dynamics in the film.

was in focus for most of the film, and the back-and-forth between players, coaches, fans, children, and referees created a visual system of defining and classifying various performances of masculinity by their relationship to football. Coaches were portrayed as teachers, interested only in guiding their players to improve and their team to victory—at any cost. Summer training camp was a time for instruction. Lombardi, the suit-wearing sideline totalitarian, was shown in a windbreaker and sunglasses, teaching his team via chalkboard. Games, however, were a time for winning. In an extended scene, NFL Films' cameras focused on Eagles coach Joe Kuharich as he instructed his team on how to execute a play, watched the play happen, argue with the sideline judge on the ball placement, and finally, joke around with the same judge when it was proved his previous objections were faked outrage.

One of the more "artistic" vignettes in the film was the section on linemen. Most of the footage focused on their hands and bodies, not their faces, their numbers, or even individuals. The section began with a lone football in a pile of mud. The hands of linemen, both offensive and defensive, took their positions around the ball, mixing into the mud. "This is the part of the game rarely seen by the spectator," Facenda warned. Inside of football's elaborate choreography was a violent, depersonalized, collision of "shattering" blockers and "mountainous" defenders. "This yard of space is called no man's land," Facenda explained, in both a direct reference to war, and to the anonymous identity of linemen. Instead of highlighting individuals, like previous sections on quarterbacks and running backs, linemen were collectively described as "one ton of muscle with a one-track mind." In the NFL Films version of football, linemen were not just stripped of identity, but also stripped of intelligence and free will. The connection with nature was explicit, and being a lineman was elemental: "down in the dirt, the lair of the lineman. This is where the game is played." The implication of that was somewhat revealing. Here was NFL

Films describing football to its audience, and a line was explicitly drawn between the spectacle of it all—including all the other players, coaches, officials, and fans—and the *real* game, that was not only more violent and raw, but also hidden in plain sight; distorted collections of crude masculinity waged war, away from the cameras and the eyes of the fans.

There was, however, also an attempt at creating a positive form of masculinity throughout the film. Players were treated as living exemplars of masculine ideals: coaches were paternalistic, quarterbacks had a "cool disregard for danger," and running backs were tough, not subtle. A particular form of victory was stressed in both the narration and the imagery: the pursuit of glory. Defensive backs are framed as the risk-takers, who should guess and gamble, "but don't fail." As the last line of defense, "the glory is great, while the disgrace is absolute." Across the field, the running backs—"the racehorse fullbacks and locomotive fullbacks"—barreled into the endzone; "to them must go the glory." Those were the two most dramatic invocation of glory, but the whole film could be seen as a testament to the success of individuals in pursuit of a common goal. Just as the film intertwines fans and players, coaches and cameramen, the message of the film laces around the images: everyone is involved in creating football, so football is for everyone. Whether in the "heat of a Texas afternoon or ice-bucket chill of Wisconsin winter," football—as expressed by NFL Films—is something that is integral to American life.

Working around these metaphors, supporting and defining their context with narrative texture, was the atmosphere created by the backing tracks and music. These are what transformed NFL Films productions like *They Call it Pro Football* from generic sports highlight reels into works of art. Pete Rozelle compared *They Call it Pro Football* to a Hollywood film and Steve Sabol called it the *Citizen Kane* of sports. NFL Films historian Travis Vogan credited

Steve Sabol for leading the company in this direction and it was Sabol who compared his work to great artists like Picasso and Shakespeare.¹⁴⁶ For all the credit given to the Sabols, however, the sound direction was what made their films resonate. Through music and effects, NFL Films episodes made audiences *feel* the story. Football was experiential, a spectator sport with a unique gameday atmosphere, and while NFL Films could not recreate that exactly, they came close. The effect was a reinforcement of themes and metaphors that blended into the film's overarching narrative. Hard hits, grunts, and playcalls roared out of the screen. The songs of marching bands drove the pace of the montages. Classical music accompanied cerebral quarterbacks and jazz counterpointed black runningbacks going the distance. The music was explicit without exposition, symbolic while accessible. Football's soundtrack was a frenetic mix of horns, drums, and saxophones. The resulting NFL Films sound was just as iconic as the pacing and editing. The films' texts and social contexts gave audiences the visual cues, but the textures—the tones, the stresses, the feelings behind those visuals, were Sam Spence's job. Spence crafted around Yoshio Kishi's editing a language of audible reference points that engaged audiences and turned highlight reels into emotional rollercoasters. Guiding audiences, teaching them how to read the language of football, was the most important part of NFL Films' sound—the narrator.

The voice behind *They Call it Pro Football* became a fundamental component of the NFL Films legacy. Now, decades later, John Facenda—the anchorman who simply loved football—is just as identifiable with NFL Films as the Sabols. At the time, however, NFL Films employed other narrators around the country, often regional announcers used to describing play-by-play action.¹⁴⁷ As the story has come to be known, Ed Sabol discovered him in a Philadelphia bar

¹⁴⁶ Travis Vogan, 99.

¹⁴⁷ Tom C. Brody, "C.B. DeMille of the Pros."

when Facenda was improvising narration on top of the NFL Films episode airing on the bar's television.¹⁴⁸ Sabol was enamored with his skill at stressing particular vocalizations and intonations and hired Facenda to narrate *They Call it Pro Football*. The response was immediate. His dynamic baritone and precise pronunciation of Steve Sabol's (at times, awkwardly written) script gave life to the images. Facenda became the "Voice of God," an unquestionable authority describing, explaining, and highlighting what was important for the audience.¹⁴⁹

Descriptions of Facenda's voice and inflections routinely use words like bellowing, booming, and divine. Steve Sabol, in an NFL Films documentary about the making of NFL Films, credited Facenda's "dramatic baritone" as a "key element" to NFL Films' style.¹⁵⁰ "Sport appeals to us because it exists in the realm of the imagination," Sabol continued. The narrators they employed before Facenda were "perfect" for play-by-play commentary, but Sabol described Facenda as a verbal artist, "his voice like a musical instrument." Facenda regularly marked up his scripts with musical notation—*allegro*, *fortissimo*, *crescendo*, among them. "John was truly NFL Films' maestro of myth," concluded Sabol; its soloist among a symphony of sounds and images and quick-cuts.

Facenda's place in popular culture history has evolved into folklore. Because his speech patterns and intonations are easily recognizable to football fans, comedians, sportscasters, and everyday fans imitate him regularly. To illustrate the effect Facenda had on football's place in popular culture, one of the most iconic phrases associated with him was never actually said by Facenda. "The frozen tundra of Lambeau field" has entered the football lexicon as a high-context folkloric expression, simultaneously referencing nostalgia for 1960s football, the

¹⁴⁸ Jimmy Kelley, "Steve Sabol's Discovery of 'Voice of God' John Facenda Set NFL Films Apart."

¹⁴⁹ AP, "John Facenda Is Dead at 72."

¹⁵⁰ NFL Films, *The Legendary Voice of John Facenda*.

romanticized "toughness" of playing in extreme winter weather, and, of course, the iconic NFL Films style of creating soaring narratives. Because Facenda's unique vocal style became synonymous with NFL Films, the two merged together in cultural memory, resulting in a specific type of cultural articulation that operates as folklore, but birthed entirely in popular culture—an ideal example of poplore—the lore of popular culture. The phrase comes from the distorted memory of the 1967 NFL Championship game, later named "The Ice Bowl," due to its extreme temperatures and NFL Films' dramatic slow-motion close-ups of players' and fans' breath. But Facenda did not narrate that episode, William Woodson did. Steve Sabol did not write the script, either, Bob Ryan was the credited writer-director. The closest phrase Woodson actually said was "the ice-glazed turf of Lambeau Stadium."¹⁵¹ And yet, because of a caricatured misquotation by Chris Berman, John Facenda, the man whose voice came to define football through two decades of narrations that added an intangible depth of meaning, lives on in popular culture's memory through something he never said.

The textural components of NFL Films were established from the start through the juxtaposition of frenetic backing music and the steady voice of John Facenda. Combined, the two created and enforced the language of NFL Films for a television audience looking for escapism and reaffirmation of normative values. As Rich Cohen boldly asserted in *The Atlantic*: NFL Films taught Americans how to watch football.¹⁵² The league's exponential success since the 1960s can be credited in large part to NFL Films, for, while they did not invent football, they built a system of visual, aural, and popular culture reference points imbued with cultural meaning. If myths are cultural metaphors built through cultural metaphors, as Barthes asserted, then the stories in the NFL Films catalogue told a mythology of American popular culture, not

¹⁵¹ NFL Films, "A Chilly Championship."

¹⁵² Rich Cohen, "They Taught America How to Watch Football."

rooted in people and events of the distant past, but people and events in the time of American reinvention in the 1960s. These are not myths of ancient gods or creation stories, but they are narratives that Americans told themselves about what they perceived as the sacred nature of dominant social structures and values. Those truths may be contradictory, as Oriard pointed out, and they may be updated over time as society evolves; those changes are part of the myths, too. But, as largely supported by the sport's unique popularity in the United States, football—as presented, framed, and narrated by NFL Films—continues to tell Americans about themselves, their history, their ideals, and their values.



Figure 5. The Pro Football Hall of Fame in Canton, Ohio.
The trademark structural centerpiece is the upright football shape protruding out of the building.
Photo by Author.

The Pro Football Hall of Fame

Alongside the work of NFL Films, the active self-historicization of the National Football League was dependent on the opening of the so-called Professional Football Hall of Fame in 1963. While the swelling scores and booming narration of NFL Films created entertaining television shows that brought the league-approved poplore into the living room of middle class America, the Hall of Fame provided a physical homebase for the emerging poplore system they were intentionally crafting. Through this football-shaped complex in Canton, Ohio, the NFL was able to establish the framing for its own history and place in American culture, both retroactively and for the future. Part museum and part monument, the Hall of Fame was built to tell a history of the sport of football, not as it was, but as the NFL wants it to have been: **competitor leagues** were nothing more than little brothers, ultimately serving the greater good of the NFL; controversies, including **race relations**, were overcome easily and without struggle; and from its first days, football has been **woven into every aspect of American life**, standing alongside factory workers and world-changing presidents. By legitimizing itself as the singular institution for professional football and situating itself in the greater context of American identity and popular culture, the most important message of the Pro Football Hall of Fame was built into the intentionally generic name: the National Football League was professional football, and professional football was fundamentally American; the only conclusion, then is self-evident: the NFL was fundamentally American.

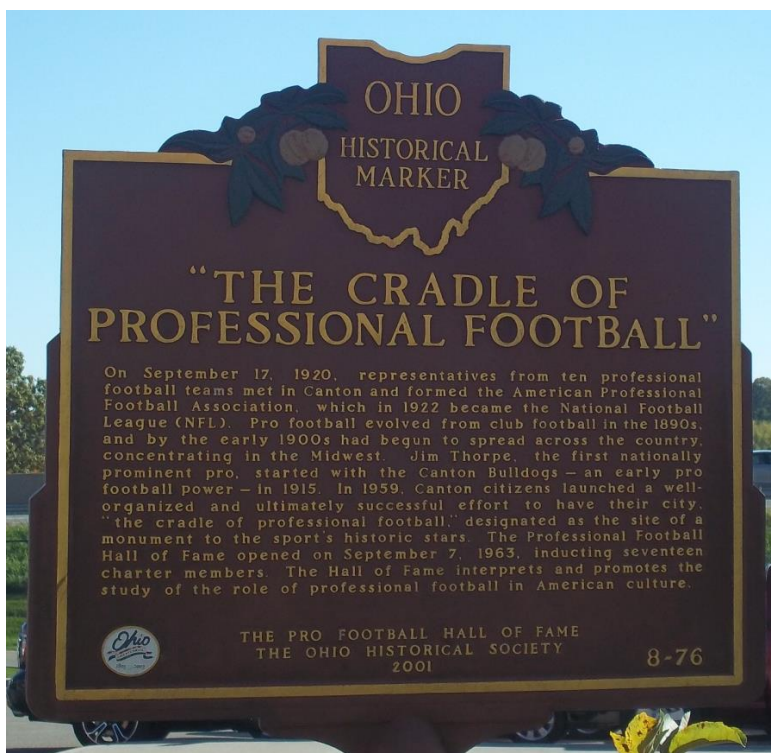


Figure 6. Historical marker outside of the Pro Football Hall of Fame.
For visitors, the NFL's self-historicization of the site begins before entering the building.
Photo by Author.

The Pro Football Hall of Fame as Monument

In January 1962, NFL Commissioner Pete Rozelle announced Canton, Ohio, would be the home of a new football hall of fame, established to celebrate "the men who have made great contributions to the game."¹⁵³ With the explicit intention of replicating the importance that Cooperstown had for baseball fans, the new complex would double as a museum and shrine, so fans could be educated on the history of the sport, as well as venerate its heroes. The first class of inductees was carefully selected and included players as well as owners and coaches.¹⁵⁴ The opening ceremonies included a dedication address by Ohio Senator Frank J. Lausche, sixteen bands marching in a three-mile parade, and an exhibition game between the Pittsburgh Steelers

¹⁵³ Al Abrams, "Sideline on Sports," July 18, 1962.

¹⁵⁴ Full list: Earl Clark, Earl Lambeau, Mel Hein, John McNally, Don Hudson, Sammy Baugh, Cal Hubbard, Bronko Nagurski, George Halas, Red Grange, Ernie Nevers, Jim Thorpe, Tim Mara, Wilbur "Fats" Henry, Joe Carr, Bert Bell, George Preston Marshall.

and the Cleveland Browns. The "famed Four Horsemen"—former Notre Dame stand-outs made famous by Grantland Rice—were in attendance and presented four of the statues.¹⁵⁵ Arthur Daley of the *New York Times* fawned over the "impressive ceremonies that reflected the exquisite taste, the overpowering dignity and the loving care that makes this shrine such an artistic triumph."¹⁵⁶

The gathering of such celebrated figures in football history awed Daley, who wrote of seeing players like Sammy Baugh and Don Hudson like a star-struck kid. Daley lamented that Baugh's and Hudson's career records were slowly being overtaken by "part-time specialists"—a very specific insult that doubly praised Baugh and Hudson for playing both offense and defense during their careers instead of playing one position on one side of the ball, as players had done for decades. Daley also announced his approval that film of their careers rolled in the museum's theater to "demonstrate for any new unbelievers the uncanny artistry of each." After all, as Daley concluded, "These football Hall of Famers also did the impossible during their playing days. That's why they are enshrined at Canton."¹⁵⁷

The selection of Canton was itself a symbolic gesture that provided an insight into the political strategy behind the hall of fame's agenda of unifying the sport's history under the National Football League brand. As per the Hall of Fame's official telling of its own history:

The Pro Football Hall of Fame is located in Canton, Ohio, for three primary reasons; (1) the American Professional Football Association, later renamed the National Football League, was founded in Canton on September 17, 1920. (2) the Canton Bulldogs were an early-day pro football power, even before the days of the NFL. They were also the first two-time champion of the NFL in 1922 and 1923. The great Jim Thorpe, the first big-name athlete to play pro football, played

¹⁵⁵ AP, "Induct 17 in Pro Football Hall of Fame."

¹⁵⁶ Arthur Daley, "Sports of The Times: Dream Combination."

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

his first pro football with the Bulldogs, starting in 1915. (3) Canton citizens early in the 1960's launched a determined and well-organized campaign to earn the site designation for their city.¹⁵⁸

The three reasons given for the Hall of Fame's location included direct ties to the NFL's institutional past, the invented veneration of sacred ground, and a demonstration of the participatory nature of the Hall, and by extension the NFL itself. The history was much more transactional than fabled, however, with Canton being one of many cities vying for a football museum or Hall of Fame. But in the push to create an historical narrative, the NFL and Pro Football Hall of Fame crafted for themselves a creation myth, complete with a culture hero and sacred sanctuary.

And yet as late as 1961, the leading candidate for the Hall of Fame seemed to be Latrobe, Pennsylvania, and its influential advocate, Steelers owner Art Rooney.¹⁵⁹ In a fifty-year retrospective, the *Canton Repository* detailed the series of events that led to the 1962 announcement and the behind the scene jockeying between league owners.¹⁶⁰ On December 6, 1959, the *Repository* published Chuck Such's article "Pro Football Needs Hall of Fame and Logical Site is Here." By his own confession, the article was not his "most compelling," but it put into motion a series of events and networking relationships that ended with almost \$400,000 being raised to "convince a financially strapped league" to choose Canton over big cities like Detroit and Los Angeles, and mid-sized peers like Latrobe, Pennsylvania. Such worked his professional networks and got Paul Brown, owner of the Cleveland Browns, to support the initiative. From there, the main push forward came from Henry Timken, a local industrialist, who pledged \$250,000 toward the effort. Within days, major meetings were taking place,

¹⁵⁸ ProFootballHoF.com, "Facts and History."

¹⁵⁹ Al Abrams, "Sidelights on Sports," April 21, 1961.

¹⁶⁰ Todd Porter, "The Birth of the Pro Football Hall of Fame."

including a dinner hosted by Timken that included Paul Brown, Art Rooney, and Chicago Bears owner George Halas, three of the most influential voices in professional football. Rooney was convinced to abandon his patronage of Latrobe, in large part because of the money Canton had already raised without the NFL's help. From there, Timken courted Rozelle, and Such visited Cooperstown, New York, to get a better sense of the economic benefits of a major sports hall of fame. Such wrote in his column that Cooperstown was on the receiving end of \$2.8 million in 1959 solely because of the Baseball Hall of Fame. By the time of the owners meeting to vote on a location, the matter was all but settled, and Canton was awarded the site.

Nowhere in that retrospective was Jim Thorpe and the Canton Bulldogs. No doubt the history of Canton being the APFA's birthplace was known to Rozelle and other owners, but it is difficult to overlook the financial factors at play. The area's major industrialist pledged a quarter of a million dollars and paid for high profile dinners and meetings with all the major players, relying on and exploiting his networking advantages. From there, "civic groups and community leaders," as the Pro Football Hall of Fame's own history calls them,¹⁶¹ raised another \$120,000 for a total of \$378,026 to give to the National Football League to build a Hall of Fame on land donated by the city. Far from a grass-roots uprising demanding the attention of the NFL, the matter was settled by economics and personal politicking. "It put Canton on the map," Such reflected, and made the city the "caretakers of the league's legends and lore."¹⁶²

Instead of that transactional history, however, the NFL and the Hall of Fame chose to specifically highlight the importance of the institutional history of the APFA, the celebrity of Jim Thorpe, and the supposed democratic participation of the residents of Canton. This example of the NFL manipulating its own history was continued in the narratives told within the Hall of

¹⁶¹ ProFootballHoF.com, "Generous Support Started HOF."

¹⁶² Todd Porter, "The Birth of the Pro Football Hall of Fame."

Fame itself. The stories they told were more poetic, more romantic, and more infused with symbolism that the straight recitation of facts, even if, in many cases, it meant facts got overlooked or side-stepped. All of this was consistent with the image the Hall of Fame both projected outward and had projected onto it from the beginning: a "monument to the storied heroes of the past."¹⁶³ And it was the NFL who was going to tell those stories.

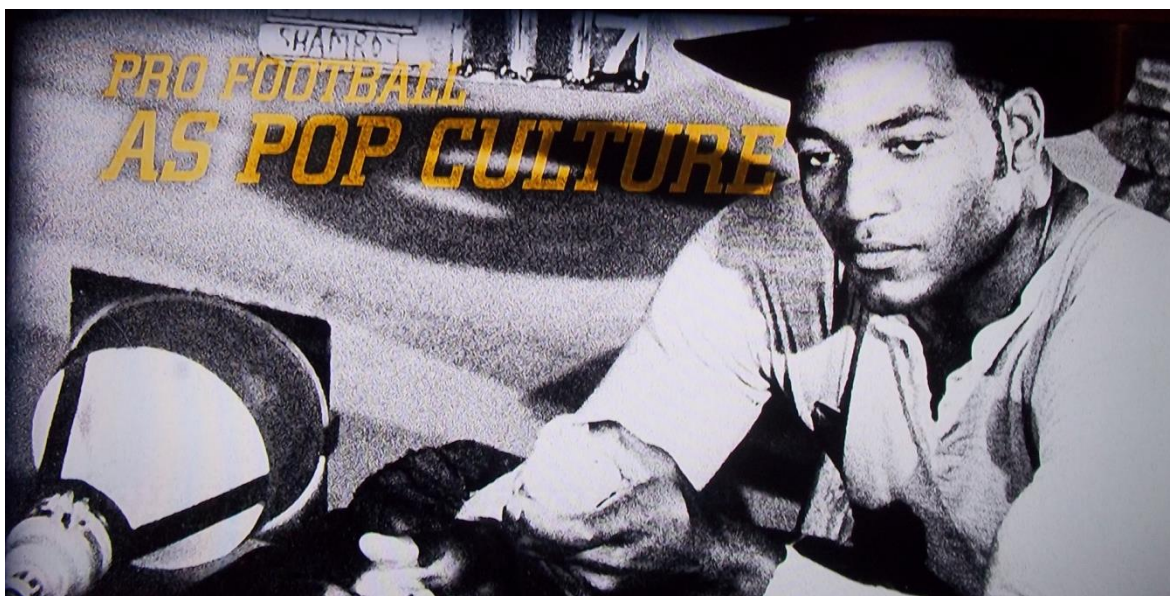


Figure 7. Pro Football as Pop Culture.

Within the Pro Football Hall of Fame, various exhibits and murals explicitly align the history of the sport with the larger history of American popular culture. Photo by Author.

The Pro Football Hall of Fame as Framed Museum

To properly analyze the role of the Pro Football Hall of Fame in creating the NFL's image, it is necessary to understand how and why the Hall is organized as a museum. However, any analysis of the contents of the Hall of Fame will necessarily depend on the era being described. Although the focus of this chapter is on the role of the NFL in the 1960s in writing its

¹⁶³ Arthur Daley, "Sports of the Times," Sept. 9, 1963.

own history as a type of American myth, it is impossible to recreate with any authority what the Hall of Fame experience was like at that time. The Hall has undergone multiple expansions and internal resigns since then, although it has always remained focused on the main circular, football-topped building. As part of the research for this chapter, the American Studies program at Penn State Harrisburg awarded me a travel grant to visit and document the Pro Football Hall of Fame. That trip informs the following descriptions and analysis. Although details may change, the overall experience of visiting the Hall of Fame is not likely to differ dramatically in the near future. Or, as the tour guide told me: "They can change the pictures [on the wall] but I'll always know my way around." In addition, to date there has been no academic scholarship on the role or contents of the Pro Football Hall of Fame. A handful of reviews of various sports Halls of Fame exist, but in many ways, this is an area of museum research effectively untouched. Considering these notes, the following description and analysis of the contents and role of the Pro Football Hall of Fame are based on my personal experience as a lifelong football fan visiting the Hall for the first time in October, 2015.

The Pro Football Hall of Fame is first, and foremost, a museum. Within the walls of that museum are a carefully curated series of exhibits that tell specific stories, ostensibly forming a larger narrative history of the sport. Although the National Football League created, owns, and operates the Hall, the museum is nominally about the history of professional football, not just the NFL, and the exhibits reflect that conceit. The histories of various other professional leagues are integrated into the larger narratives, and there is even an entire room devoted to the non-NFL pro football leagues. On the surface, and in the history told by the Hall of Fame, these "rivals" were more like sparring siblings, not corporate enemies who sometimes attempted to drive each other

out of business with lawsuits ranging into the tens of millions of dollars. As the NFL was christening the Pro Football Hall of Fame, the American Football League was suing it for conspiracy.¹⁶⁴ When the two leagues agreed to merge, the ensuing power struggle left such a strong mark that even after generations of players and executives have passed, the National and American conferences still meet in the Super Bowl every year. In the 1980s, the United States Football League successfully began a spring schedule that stole players and headlines from the NFL's year-round news cycle. When a group of the USFL's owners, led by Donald Trump, tried to move to a fall schedule and directly challenge the NFL, the NFL crushed the league. The exhibit in Canton, however, barely mentions the downfall of the league and instead praises the USFL's entrepreneurial spirit. USFL players who had successful NFL careers are highlighted, like Jim Kelly, who led the Buffalo Bills to four straight Super Bowls. Similarly, the AFL exhibit is framed entirely by its relationship to the NFL, particularly the birth of the Super Bowl and its AFL hero, Joe Namath. For visitors to the Hall of Fame, it may seem that the museum is living up to its name as the history of all professional football. But the way those relationships are portrayed is the point of contention and where the NFL's role as authoritative curator is found.

The manner by which the NFL establishes and reinforces the narratives told by the Hall of Fame is a form of framing that echoes the structuralist organization of images and ideas made popular by Erving Goffman.¹⁶⁵ To Goffman, framing was a way of explaining the process of social interactions. Building off of his previous work on the presentation of self and the manipulation of the audience through performance, frame theory posited that interactions are

¹⁶⁴ AP, "National Football League's First Rule Change in 4 Years Bans Mask Tackles."

¹⁶⁵ Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis*.

constructs of bodies and functions to organize interpretations.¹⁶⁶ The social value built into specific contexts set the stage for the actors to perform, but the way it is set by outside forces changes the ways those actors perform. Controlling frames meant setting the trajectory of social interactions. Although the theory has had its fair share of detractors,¹⁶⁷ what Goffman was doing—even if he did not explicitly state as much—was providing a way for context to be empirically measured.¹⁶⁸ As an organization of language, framing created an understandable accessibility to everyday interactions.¹⁶⁹ To Kretsedemas, "frame theory" is not necessarily a unified social theory, as much as it is a general conception of understanding how things relate to each other through social construction.¹⁷⁰ The Pro Football Hall of Fame easily fits into this paradigm, as it actively curates the ideas and values expressed, but presents them through the lens of a "museum." The audience enters the scene with the expectation that museums are sources of historical knowledge, not corporate propaganda, giving the NFL power over the curated history it provides.

The Pro Football Hall of Fame also provides a participatory experience, encouraging its visitors to interact with exhibits both passively and actively. The Hall encourages taking pictures, offers guided tours, and has an area where visitors can measure their body against molds of famous players' disembodied features, like biceps or legs. The main museum is also a kid-friendly space, and large groups weave in and out of various exhibits and directed paths alongside individual tourists. This scaffolded approach to participation stops just short of being open-ended, and the Hall does not ask visitors to be creators in making new exhibits. Again, the

¹⁶⁶ Philip Kretsedemas, "Examining Frame Formation in Peer Group Conversations."

¹⁶⁷ Perhaps most notably: Frederic Jameson, "On Goffman's Frame Analysis," and Avery Sharron, "Frame Paralysis."

¹⁶⁸ Thomas J. Scheff, "The Structure of Context: Deciphering Frame Analysis."

¹⁶⁹ Inez Hedges, "Surrealist Metaphor: Frame Theory and Componential Analysis."

¹⁷⁰ Philip Kretsedemas, "Examining Frame Formation in Peer Group Conversations."

Hall acts as an authority in this respect, directing the information in one direction, not reciprocally. Instead, the setup of the Hall empowers visitors by allowing the option to experience the spectacle of it all depending on the individuals' choices.¹⁷¹ But what theorists like de Certeau may describe as tactical resistance, does not exist. The Hall offers effectively no chance for resistance, in large part because it is a contained and controlled environment, and visitors are exposed only to pre-approved information and artifacts. Taking a different route around the museum than the one suggested by the flow of the exhibits does not provide a different interpretation of information, it simply puts a visitor at odds with the flow of foot traffic.

In a sports context, as a football hall of fame, the information and artifacts displayed indulge team affiliation and the veneration of individuals. They certainly do provide a wide range of football memorabilia and materials that are meaningful to many fans. Actual game jerseys of legendary players, hand-written gameplans by head coaches dead for decades, and scores of historical photographs are crammed into every open area. Additionally, visiting the Hall of Fame as a fan of a particular team or player brings a level of performance of self to the framed environment that ultimately gives the experience a type of personalization that further cements any emotional connections deliberately manufactured by the museum. Football fans who grew up learning the exploits of particular players, or pledged loyalty to their favorite team, or reenacted iconic moments with their friends, are met directly with an overwhelming amount of football memory provided. Emotional manipulation is everywhere; the Hall of Fame wants you to react to certain exhibits in certain ways, be they whimsical nostalgia, tears of joy, or awe. Events like "The Catch," the "Immaculate Reception," and "The Music City Miracle" are referenced and praised as pivotal moments in football history, but without any descriptive

¹⁷¹ Nina Simon's books informed this whole section.

context. The assumption is that the visitors already know the lore of the game; it's the Hall of Fame's job to celebrate that lore. The phrase "I remember that," was heard frequently and in a variety of contexts throughout the complex. In many areas, especially the more historically focused ones, the crowd was quieter, as if to give the players on the wall the respect they earned on the field. For non-fans, although unable to access that personal connection, the exhibits still demanded respect. After all, this is a museum, and the public expects museums to tell the real history. That unspoken trust, birthed in the larger culture language of museums and exploited by the authoritative posture of the Hall of Fame, is the root of the relationship and the ultimate point of contention between historical events and the NFL's spin on those events.

The version of football history told by the Pro Football Hall of Fame is one where football was an integral part of the social, political, and economic history of the United States in the twentieth century. Although the narrative recognizes pre-twentieth century football, the more overt connections between football and culture are mainly focused on the current events after World War II. Large exhibits are devoted to the technological development of the sport, from leather helmets to modern protective gear. The history of television is framed through the popularity of live football broadcasts. The development and popularity of *Monday Night Football* is treated as an historic event, not just for the NFL, but American culture. Similarly, the story of the internet is told through football, culminating with the rise of "fantasy football" as a billion-dollar hobby for millions of people across the globe. Scores of politicians from over a century are shown posing for pictures with players, speaking at NFL events, or even, like in the case of former President Gerald Ford, as a celebrated player. Informational obelisks dot the main floor of the museum, each devoted to the history of a specific decade. It is from these

where NFL history is placed alongside Apollo 11, the Academy Awards, and Nirvana as one seamless narrative of American popular culture.

The most problematic part of the Hall of Fame's narrative of pro football is with regard to race relations. Among the sprawling murals and exhibits lining the walls, a significant amount is spent on the history of black players, both in the NFL and in other leagues. Again, this is a situation where the NFL claims ownership over non-NFL history. Which is smart, since, the NFL's history with race is ugly. The museum travels in roughly a chronological order, and at the beginning of the tour the photos feature diverse rosters. White players, black players, and especially Indian players are shown together and celebrated; Jim Thorpe is only one of many. A note on George Prescott Marshall ownership of the Washington Redskins, originally named the Boston Braves, is accompanied by an explanation that Marshall chose the name to honor many of his players and the team's head coach, who was thought to be Native American. That is not true. The tour guide, unprompted, retold that story and how the name "Redskins" was a common term at the time and Marshall meant it as a sign of respect to his Indian players. Again, this is not true.¹⁷² Marshall, an original inductee into the Hall of Fame, was a notorious racist who would not have a black player on his team for the first thirty years he owned the Redskins, relenting only after being pressured by the government. And yet, the tour-guide told the story and his situational authority made it true for those listening. A man in a burgundy leather jacket muttered to his wife, "mhm, that's right."

As the tour moved into the 1930s, the photographs began to get whiter. After decades of integrated rosters in professional football, the NFL was officially segregated at the end of the 1933 season with the departure of its last two black players. That fact is nowhere to be found in

¹⁷² Robert McCartney, "1933 news article refutes cherished tale that Redskins were named to honor Indian coach."

the Hall of Fame. Nor is it found in the NFL's online history.¹⁷³ Instead, visitors to the Hall are shown a mural celebrating the "reintegration" of pro football in the 1940s. The larger historical context is completely absent from the exposition. Various pioneers and record-breaking players are featured, although a particular pioneering quarterback is notably pushed to the side. Doug Williams, the first black quarterback to play in a Super Bowl, win a Super Bowl, or named MVP of a Super Bowl, was also the first black quarterback taken in the first round of the draft—"since the 1970 NFL-AFL merger," implying a larger context that is conspicuously absent. The image of Williams and its accompanying caption are nestled into the bottom right corner of the wall-sized display, dwarfed by other images and stories. And while those men certainly earned their place on the wall, the visual implication is striking. Clearly this was an intentional decision on some level, and the result is a history of the integration of professional football that literally, physically pushes Williams to the side.

The second and final appearance of Williams at the Hall of Fame is in the Super Bowl XXII display. His helmet sits under the caption "First Among Equals," implying both a story of racial progress nowhere to be found in the museum itself, and lessening or normalizing his triumphs. It reads as if the NFL is stating that Williams was not exceptional, he just happened to be first. To highlight the incongruity of that narrative with Williams' place in professional football history, it is worth noting that his major breakthroughs were not replicated for over a decade, and in many cases, two decades or more. The next black quarterback drafted in the first round was Andre Ware in 1990, twelve years after Williams. Steve McNair started in Super Bowl XXXIV, on January 30, 2000, but lost. Fourteen years after McNair, Russell Wilson's Seahawks routed the Denver Broncos in Super Bowl XLVIII, but linebacker Malcolm Smith was named MVP. In 2006, Warren Moon became the first black quarterback in the Hall of Fame, an

¹⁷³ NFL.com, "History, 1931-1940." <http://www.nfl.com/history/chronology/1931-1940>

honor Williams has not received. There has yet to be another black quarterback voted Super Bowl MVP.¹⁷⁴

The Hall of Fame's handling of Doug Williams is just one example of how the NFL manipulates its own history and creates value judgments through the framing of exhibits. Other controversies like labor strikes and disputes between owners—like when Robert Irsay moved the Baltimore Colts to Indianapolis without the permission of the Maryland or Baltimore governments—are glossed over, mentioned but not expanded upon. The historical record provided by the Hall of Fame is not wrong, *per se*, but it is incomplete and weighted in a way that presumes positive outcomes and ensures the National Football League remains a positive force in popular culture.

¹⁷⁴ In 2014, Deadspin created the first comprehensive history of black quarterbacks: <https://deadspin.com/the-big-book-of-black-quarterbacks-1517763742> and <https://deadspin.com/the-big-book-of-black-quarterbacks-part-2-1588681846>.



Figure 8. The Gallery.
 Busts of the sport's heroes are immortalized in the Gallery in a context explicitly meant to evoke solemn reverence. Photo by Author.

The Pro Football Hall of Fame as Holy Site

As a museum, the Pro Football Hall of Fame successfully maintains the image of the National Football League as an integral piece of popular culture, but it through the "Hall of Fame Gallery" where it takes on the role of myth-maker. Not just limited to celebrating the careers of skilled players of the past, each inductee is memorialized with a bronze bust placed inside the Gallery, to live on in perpetuity as a holy relic to the church of football. The busts are arranged by year of induction along the wall of the Gallery, a black room with dim lighting mainly provided by the tracks illuminating the busts. The framing here is explicitly sacrosanct. Flash-photography is banned, visitors whisper to each other, and the physical space is detached from the rest of the museum by a long walkway, presumably meant to prepare pilgrims for their prayers.

An interesting difference between the Gallery in Canton and its inspiration in Cooperstown is that football players are not forced to choose a team allegiance. Hall of Fame baseball players are sculpted wearing the hat of the team for which they are predominantly associated. This choice is made for the players, however, and there have been disagreements between players and the Baseball Hall of Fame over cap selection. The Pro Football Hall of Fame avoids that issue entirely: busts feature no team identification, but all the teams an inductee played on are listed under his name. This creates a level of irony in which the most famous players of the most team-oriented sport are inducted as atomized icons, stripped of their team identity, their career arc flattened into a dry list of team names, followed by a range of dates. For visitors, however, the tribal affiliation is often paramount, and the Hall provides a database so they can look up the exact placement for all of the inductees from a specific team.

The Gallery is a striking scene to walk into, and the overtly hallowed context of it all can be felt immediately. Visiting in person, I saw men stare in awe at the bronze busts on the wall, sometimes getting emotional, but only for a moment. The Gallery was, for them, that place where the history became holy, the legends became saints, and their fandom became more than a trivial hobby of regional consumerism. Despite its artificially built environment, and despite its intentionally framed seriousness, the people venerate the space. They treat it with respect and honor its intended purpose. The designers of the Gallery set the scene, but it is the visitors who build the meaning into the place and transformed it into the pantheon of football's gods.



Figure 9. Victory.

**At all times, the Pro Football Hall of Fame is sending messages about the meaning of the sport to its visitors.
Photo by Author.**

Football as Popular Culture Mythology

To consider the role of myths in American culture, it is necessary to look at how the popular culture has created a homogenized dominant system of symbols and metaphors. Instead of cultural hearths based in geographic or ethnic communities, American popular culture itself serves as a cultural hearth, living through mass media. In the 1960s, football became a major part of that media environment, in no small part because of the National Football League's active marketing of itself. Through NFL Films and the Pro Football Hall of Fame, the NFL not only promoted itself, but actively historicized and rewrote its past, authoring a version of the league's history that integrated it into the nation's sense of self.

NFL Films intentionally aligned and exaggerated the sport's connections to uniquely American metaphors and symbols; westward expansion, war and violence, organizational business culture, social politics, and the celebration, distortion, and direction of masculine ideals were written into NFL Films programs, visually and audibly. The blend of orchestration, popular music motifs, and recorded sounds of the game gave a texture to the quick-cuts and montages of hard hits. Through idiosyncratic pronunciation and intonation, John Facenda's narration told Americans how to receive and digest what they were watching. Combined, NFL Films created a language of football, built with an alphabet of pre-established symbols understood without explanation. The stories fabricated by NFL Films entered popular culture as mythic narratives, telling Americans about themselves.

While NFL Films was the league's organ for molding current events, the Pro Football Hall of Fame was their tool for manufacturing the history of the sport. The league's business interests were everywhere, from the selection of Canton, Ohio, to the integration of competitor leagues into a unified history of professional football. The Hall itself has been intentionally established as a kind of sacred site, housing the sport's venerated past. The greats of the game are immortalized in bronze and displayed in a dark gallery where visitors whisper their adoration. The rest of the complex is a museum, actively curated with exhibits and displays framed in specific contexts to minimize or erase controversial parts of the past. The museum explicitly ties professional football into other forms of popular culture like politics, entertainment, and social movements. The resulting narrative is that professional football is a fundamental part of American culture. And since the Pro Football Hall of Fame establishes that the NFL is synonymous with professional football, the NFL is a fundamental part of American culture.

Both NFL Films and the Pro Football Hall of Fame manipulate their place in popular culture by accessing and utilizing football's cultural role as a metaphor for American identity.

However, because NFL Films creates popular culture myths, and the Pro Football Hall of Fame creates and enforces ritualized veneration of people and places, football has taken on another cultural metaphor: football as a religion.

As with other examples, the role of football as a quasi-religious experience has been addressed by scholars for decades. Some took a more literal approach, while others used the metaphor more symbolically. Robert J. Higgs connected football to the reverential power of Sunday in Christian societies, and saw parallels between football heroes and Christian concepts of Knighthood and chivalry.¹⁷⁵ James A. Mathisen evaluated football as a folk religion and convincingly analyzed the 1987 strike as a schism between belief and business, but drew unnecessary distinctions between religious practices and football's business culture.¹⁷⁶ Football as a ritualistic rite of passage has been commonly asserted both in academic and popular sources. Even coaches will use the language of growing up—"turn boys into men"—when discussing football's intrinsic character benefits. Craig A. Forney explicitly defined football—one of sport's "Holy Trinity"—as a civic religion, concluding, "The game of football illustrates American faith in pursuit of unprecedented accomplishments by way of intensive movement away from the ground."¹⁷⁷

For all of these, and the countless others who casually refer to football in religious vernacular, football has to be a part of the spirituality of Americans, an intangible but undeniable connection that explains why football is uniquely popular in the United States. As described and shown in this chapter, however, the reason may not be as indefinable as many assume. By

¹⁷⁵ Robert J. Higgs, *God in the Stadium*.

¹⁷⁶ James A. Mathisen, "American Sport as Folk Religion."

¹⁷⁷ Craig A. Forney, *The Holy Trinity of American Sports*, 64-65.

defining myths and mythology by their role in culture, and not by their origin or temporality, myths can be categorized as narratives that describe and justify a community's sacred understanding of itself. In this chapter, the community was the mass-mediated popular culture of Cold War America. Football—or more specifically, the sport as envisioned, created, and disseminated by the NFL, was a narrative component of that popular culture, and became an immediately accessible and intelligible language for popular culture to adopt when speaking to itself. The metaphors that football reflected were combined to form a new series of signs that resonated with Americans at the time, and a layered understanding of specific symbols evolved.

Instead of literally worshipping football, or acting as devotees of football as a civil religion, Americans used football as a way to communicate ideas across popular culture. In effect, football became part of the mythic language of modern American life, representing not just historic events and people, but the sacred traditions, truths, and values built into those events. Paradoxically, American popular culture is always shifting and societal values evolving. Fortunately, the contradictions built into football—individuality versus teamwork, victory versus equality, violence versus beauty—ensure that the sport is malleable enough to change with culture and keep it relevant to the zeitgeist. No matter where American popular culture goes, because football's symbolic vernacular is built with the metaphors of American identity, football will be there to help convey the lore of popular culture.

Chapter 3.

MARKETING POPLORE:

JOE NAMATH AS POPULAR CULTURE'S FOLK HERO

Brothers front, they say the Tribe can't flow,

But we've been known to do the impossible like Broadway Joe.

—A Tribe Called Quest

After the AFL's New York Jets defeated the NFL's Baltimore Colts in Super Bowl III, Tex Maule declared Joe Namath "the folk hero of the new generation."¹⁷⁸ Tex was partly right. Not exactly a folk hero as folklorists define it in terms of traditionally transmitted mythologized narrative, Namath exemplified a new type of hero created by the poplore ecosystem taking hold in twentieth-century American culture. Before the age of modern communication Namath might still have become a so-called living legend, taking his place alongside other great American heroes as a cultural icon. He might have become like so many of his peers in the early days of professional football: local heroes celebrated in one city and largely forgotten elsewhere. But with the benefit of the emergent mass-media environment that was firmly in place by the late 1960s and its ability to create and promote ideas and trends on a national level. By the time of Super Bowl III, Namath was already a household name; his exploits—both on and off the field—were national news and his public rebelliousness against the crew-cut generation of football heroes made him a symbol of the burgeoning youth counter-culture. Namath had arguably become the first professional football player to cross the line into a type of celebrity that had

¹⁷⁸ Tex Maule, "Say It's So Joe."

typically been reserved for movie stars and musicians, defined by endless gossip about his social life and a series of endorsement and advertisements that intertwined Namath, the person, with the public in a way that made him a part of popular culture itself.

Namath's charm was in his presentation of affable accessibility, seemingly at home both in Manhattan night clubs and driving the backroads of Alabama, and a charisma that jumped directly into living rooms. In direct contrast to his football predecessors like Umetani, Starr, and Y.A. Tittle, who were in large part defined by their strict "blue collar" professional identity that valued humility, modesty, and deference to authority, Namath was almost specifically made for life in front of the cameras, hobnobbing with celebrities and causing public controversies.

Instead of being visible only on Sundays, Namath was a fixture of popular culture his entire career and after. He was on magazine covers and television commercials, he was friends with pop culture royalty like Frank Sinatra, and he moved in front of the camera as an actor and host.

American culture in the late 1960s and early 1970s was changing—more commercial, more liberal, more integrated, and more narcissistic—and Namath embodied that change, both personally and professionally. In effect, he became the vessel through which the sport of professional football would evolve and become aligned with the larger cultural zeitgeist.

Through a close-reading of his life and career, up to and including Super Bowl III and its aftermath, Joe Namath will come into focus as a new type of popular culture folk hero whose legend was built just as much on the field as it was in advertisements. Unlike a folk hero or legendary figure who is defined by the community and their tradition-bearers, Namath (along with his lawyers, agents, and admen) spent his life crafting his own identity in real-time, manipulating current events around him, and controlling his public image. By tracing and illuminating those maneuvers, this chapter will demonstrate how Namath transcended football

and became incorporated into popular culture itself, his tradition-bearers the commercials, movies, and television shows in which he starred, and his legend told through his impish smile.

The symbolism of the exciting and dramatic AFL superstar modernizing the dusty old NFL would almost be too on-the-nose if it had not actually happened that way. When Namath's Jets won Super Bowl III, the AFL, in its last year of independence, had proved it was equal to the NFL and worthy of its upcoming integration. That kind of narrative romanticism was how the media and sportswriters framed the game at the time, and precisely how the game has been framed in the generations since. The first three Super Bowls were remarkable in that way for their institutional framing as two competing leagues playing for bragging rights: Super Bowl I and II were not just Packer wins, they were NFL wins. When the Jets beat the Colts, and Namath's hero, Johnny Unitas, it was understood at the time and celebrated as a win for the AFL. That immediate historicization, propagated by sportswriters across America, continues to live on in the official narratives put forward by NFL Films and the NFL's museum to itself, the Pro Football Hall of Fame. Namath's "guarantee" of victory, an episode that played directly into, and immediately defined the Namath mystique, cemented his name atop the event and turned his celebrity status into pop culture legend. From there the story only got more complex, because while his football career was marred with injuries and mediocre seasons, his public antics—like his feud with the NFL commissioner Pete Rozelle—became national scandals. Beyond his big mouth, his handsome face and athletic body also became methods of personal expression for Namath, and his sideline wardrobe and high-profile friends would become part of his iconography. The quiet and reserved masculinity of previous football stars was gone and Namath's new masculinity seemed to have more in common with Hugh Hefner than Vince

Lombardi. After football, Namath remained in the public sphere and his personal issues became talk show gossip, only further deepening his connection with popular culture.

Of course, just as NFL Films and other media production companies created narratives out of real life (see chapter 2), so too was Namath's life curated and promoted by professionals. Epitomizing folklorist Jan Harold Brunvand's quip that legends are stories that are "too good to be true," Namath's boyish charm on camera easily masked that he was surrounded by agents, lawyers, and marketing executives directing his life as if it was a movie. Indeed, it is worth asking how much of Namath's public image was a reflection of his natural personality and how much was manufactured by "Madison Avenue." Like all legends, though, where the questionable is rooted in the known, finding an answer may not be the point. For, as the popular culture of the 1960s and 1970s were a time of change and reorientation around a new shared entertainment culture through television, advertising, and politics, the country used Joe Namath as both a symbol for and against the social tumult. Namath's embrace of his own celebrity status, including a conscious connection to the rebellious spirit and politics of the time, transformed his life story beyond just a recitation of statistics and made Joe Namath a part of the lore of popular culture.

Beaver Falls

Long before he was a national celebrity, Joe Namath was a rebellious kid growing up in post-war Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania. Located just over thirty miles from Pittsburgh, the town numbered around 17,000 residents in the 1940s, a part of the regional steel industry.¹⁷⁹ There, "Joey" would develop and showcase the personality traits and abilities that would make him famous and pick up the vices that would later make him infamous. Biographies and interviews

¹⁷⁹ United States 1940 Census statistics found at archive.gov

are filled with anecdotes of Namath and his friends running the streets of Beaver Falls and getting into trouble. Mark Kriegel detailed many of these incidents, summarizing, "Namath appeared to relish his role as the bad boy."¹⁸⁰ This reckless youth was couched within a strict Catholic school education, which at the time subjected him to the controlling scrutiny of stern nuns.¹⁸¹ Quickly sports arrived front and center and, in what would become part of the Namath legend, football was never the future Hall of Famer's best or favorite sport. While still in high school, Namath was offered multiple opportunities to play professional baseball, including a \$50,000 signing bonus by the Cubs,¹⁸² but his mother, Rose, wanted him to go to college. Unfortunately, while his "brilliant" quarterbacking was recognized by many,¹⁸³ Namath's reputation preceded him. Penn State, Michigan, and Notre Dame all passed, concluding his grades and personality negated his talent. When Alabama assistant coach Howard Schnellenberger arrived, determined to get Namath to Tuscaloosa, Rose packed his bags and sent Joe south. The local all-star who regularly defied coaches, kept his sunglasses on during team photos, and drank before official college visits, was running head first into Bear Bryant and his code of discipline on and off the field.

Namath's neighborhood in Beaver Falls was predominantly African-American and so were most of his friends. Namath always professed a kind of naive ignorance of the social strife that was going on around him, claiming, "Growing up in Pennsylvania, I never really knew anything about racial discrimination."¹⁸⁴ In an episode found in almost every profile of Namath's childhood, a pizzeria refused service to his friend Linwood Alford, exposing both boys to the word "nigger" for the first time before the age of ten. Alford later bemused, "For a long time, I

¹⁸⁰ Mark Kriegel, *Namath*, 64.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁸² Robert Boyle, "Show-Biz Sonny and His Quest for Stars."

¹⁸³ Brute Kramer, "Beaver Falls Faces Many Grid Challenges."

¹⁸⁴ Leigh Montville, "Off Broadway Joe."

really don't think Joe thought of himself as black or white."¹⁸⁵ Namath's peculiar social color-blindness informed his personality and his skills as an athlete; he adopted what he called a "razzle-dazzle" basketball style, largely influenced by his black teammates. He was the only white member of his high basketball school team, so he was not only surrounded and influenced by what he called a "glitzier" style of play, he excelled at it, becoming co-captain his senior year.¹⁸⁶ He was a braggart. He wore flashy clothes. He could dunk, and did so often. While sportswriters would later claim Namath was usurping the "soul and cool" of black athletes, his teammates—or at least the ones interviewed over the years—loved that Namath was "just like us," using the same slang and eating the same soul food.¹⁸⁷

Although the exact terms, like "counterculture," had not been applied to Namath yet, he was clearly in tune with a growing movement that would take hold of the youth cultures of the 1960s and cement that decade into popular culture as a transformative period, proverbially summarized through the expression, "sex, drugs and rock and roll."¹⁸⁸ The Sixties became largely defined, not as a literal range of dates, but through its exposure in and evolving association with popular culture. The Civil Rights Movement, antiwar demonstrations, and women's liberation dominated the news coverage, blending politics and popular culture into one hegemonic materialization. It was the time of Camelot and the Beatles, Bob Dylan and Cesar Chavez; politicians were celebrities, and celebrities were politicians. Namath regularly denied any political involvement, but boasted, "I carried my independence to an extreme."¹⁸⁹ That independence, forged by a broken home and seedy pool halls in a black neighborhood in western

¹⁸⁵ Mark Kriegel, 10.

¹⁸⁶ Namath ,102.

¹⁸⁷ Rick Telander, "Joe Namath."

¹⁸⁸ Edward Kern, "Can it Happen Here?"; Kern actually writes "sex, drugs and rock," but colloquially the phrase is known as "sex, drugs, and rock and roll"

¹⁸⁹ Namath ,150.

Pennsylvania, shaped Namath's personality and playing style. It also got him, as his brother joyfully recounted, the "ass-kicking of his life."¹⁹⁰

Alabama

The University of Alabama was segregated when Namath arrived, his long hair jutting out from underneath a "silvered blue-straw hat with a dark blue band around it and little pearl on the side" and his small frame draped with a "loudly checkered sport coat."¹⁹¹ Alabama's head coach, Paul "Bear" Bryant, was already a venerated figure in his own right; profiles of Bryant regularly wrote about him as a deity, and his congregation of followers spanned the South. He played at Alabama, coached at Kentucky and Texas A&M, and returned to Alabama in 1958. As the story goes, when he was asked why he went back to 'Bama, Bryant's answer was "Mama called, and when Mama calls, then you just have to come running."¹⁹² The Bear's legacy had become a part of the founding myths of countless others, including both players and coaches he nurtured and those he battled. The cult of personality Bryant lorded over, along with, and largely because of his football success created a proverbial truism that has since entered the college football cultural inventory, that in Alabama, an atheist is someone who doesn't believe in Bear Bryant. He administered what might now be considered a rather ruthless form of leadership, and his practices have been compared to an Old Testament gauntlet. He ran military-style boot camps, refused to acknowledge player injuries, and was a walking embodiment of a stereotypical conservative, God-fearing man, preaching fire and brimstone to his players, the media, and the citizens of Alabama—at least, the white ones. For Namath, the racial divide that Bear Bryant helped create and enforce—although later claim to have no part in—would be an on-going thread

¹⁹⁰ Mark Kriegel, 68.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 69.

¹⁹² Paul Bryant and John Underwood, *Bear: The Hard Life and Good Times of Alabama's Coach Bryant*.

through his college career, even as he was fighting to help integrate the school. Following van Gennep's rites of passage formula almost to the letter, Namath's separation from Beaver Falls and introduction to Alabama began a process that married the showboating delinquent with athletic discipline and gave him an exemplar for how to control his image and become larger than life.¹⁹³

The first time Joe Namath's name was featured in the national press was a headline in the September 22, 1962 *New York Times*: "Namath Sparks Rout."¹⁹⁴ Alabama had defeated Georgia 35-0 and sophomore Joe Namath, according to the article, "shattered the Georgia defense." The *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* proudly took note of Bryant's praise that Namath was "the best player he has ever seen."¹⁹⁵ This success was a far cry from his freshman year, when Namath, completely alienated by living in segregation and under the thumb of "The Bear," routinely wanted to quit and flee to the safety of baseball and guaranteed money. His 'Bama teammates dressed differently, talked differently, called him "nigger" and spread gossip that he dated black girls because he was a "nigger-lover." Teammates bragged about him, saying, "this nigger we got playing quarterback. This nigger's something else."¹⁹⁶ Namath's trademark individuality developed in Beaver Falls in part by growing up as a white kid in a black community, and he needed to adapt to life in Tuscaloosa. Effectively, this meant limiting his rebellious nature to off-the-field, although it is questionable whether Namath would have done this had he not soon experienced the Hand of Bryant himself.

As recounted in most of his profiles and biographies, freshman hot-shot Joe Namath was running a scout team offense and did not execute the play properly. Bryant began yelling at him and Namath turned away, headed back to the huddle. Bryant grabbed Namath by the facemask

¹⁹³ van Gennep, "The Rites of Passage."

¹⁹⁴ UPI, "Namath Sparks Rout."

¹⁹⁵ "Namath a Standout."

¹⁹⁶ Namath, 111.

and lifted him off the ground. "Namath, when I'm talking to you, boy, you say 'Yes, sir' and you look me in the eye."¹⁹⁷ In his own words, Namath said, "he put the fear of God into me." He would later point to that moment as when "the rebel found a cause." Mark Kriegel tied this episode into Namath's upbringing as a child of divorce, concluding Namath finally had a "father without fault"¹⁹⁸ In return for his willing obedience, Bryant favored Namath with benefits he rarely gave other players, including allowing Namath to only play one-way, instead of both offense and defense. The resulting synergy between player and coach made its national debut September 22, 1962, when Namath threw for 179 yards and three touchdowns before the end of the third quarter. The following week, versus Tulane, Namath threw two and ran for another touchdown.¹⁹⁹ *Sports Illustrated* predicted that with their "schoolboy" quarterback, the Tide might be back-to-back champions in 1962.²⁰⁰ The sophomore was named second-team All-SEC by the *Associated Press*,²⁰¹ having lost only one game all year, and Alabama was scheduled to take on Oklahoma in the Orange Bowl, January 1, 1963. Namath, 19, had set two Alabama records—completions and passing yards—and was about to play in front of the President in a New Year's Day bowl game.²⁰² Success was early and often for Namath, undoubtedly influencing the way he saw himself.

When Alabama played Tennessee on October 20, 1962, celebrated photographer Neil Leifert was there documenting Bear's phenom quarterback. In a series of remarkable images, the quarterback, praised weekly in the papers, took a distinctly more human form: hunched-over [Image 3], dark-haired [Image 2], and very much looking like a teenager [Image 1]. Maybe the

¹⁹⁷ Mark Kriegel, 76.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid*, 79.

¹⁹⁹ AP, "Crimson Tide Led By Namath, Clark."

²⁰⁰ Mervin Hyman, "A Turn to Toughness."

²⁰¹ UPI, "All-Star Football Teams."

²⁰² AP, "Pick Alabama Over Sooners."

most symbolic of the series [Image 1] focused on an upright Namath, his clean crimson uniform tucked into his clean white pants, his hip pads—known in football as a "girdle"—sticking out, uncovered like no one told him how to properly dress himself. Looming behind him in a full suit and fedora, a covert Bear Bryant grimly smirked and looked off to the side, his direct gaze hidden by the shadow of his brim. Namath looked past the camera, the afternoon sun accentuating his features. His jawline would become a reference point for Namath's public image; the heroic portrait of green-eyed dark-featured determination was a recurring motif in Leifert's photographs. A third photo from the Tennessee game placed Namath on the end of the bench, closest to the camera, hunched over obscuring a line of teammates to his left. Their crew-cuts and pale complexion only made Namath's Hungarian ancestry more apparent. As a type of visual storytelling, these photos reinforced the individuality for which Namath had become famous, or infamous. The uniform, deliberately meant to depersonalize and create unity of the whole, only worked to a certain extent with Namath; even when trying to be the same, he looked out of place. He was not only socially different from his peers, he was physically different. But with sports, as the proverb goes, winning solves everything. And Namath won.

The game was shown on national television on New Year's Day. *Sports Illustrated* picked Oklahoma over Alabama and President Kennedy sat in the Oklahoma section. The gamblers knew better, though, and had Alabama as a three-point favorite. Namath did not let them down, and threw for 86 yards and a touchdown in the 17-0 victory.²⁰³ On the biggest day in the college football calendar, sophomore Joe Namath became a star. Any doubt over the emergence of Namath as a national figure was squashed by the word of the Bear himself: "That's 'Namath,' son, N-A-M-A-T-H, but don't worry about it, you'll learn how to spell it in the next

²⁰³ James Segretti, "President Watches Alabama Win, 17-0, on Oklahoma Errors."

couple years."²⁰⁴ Joe Namath had entered the lore of popular culture for the first time, shepherded by one of college football's gods.

Integration

Only months after Namath tasted national celebrity for the first time, the University of Alabama hosted a constitutional crisis when President Kennedy federalized the National Guard to force the integration of black students. The enduring image of Governor George Wallace, who infamously declared "segregation now, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever," physically standing in the doorway to stop black students from entering has become part of the inventory of popular culture. Of course Joe Namath was there: "I was as close as from here to that wall to George Wallace on the steps of the auditorium as he stood outside the door when Vivian Malone came to register. I've gotten to know her through the years, just a terrific gal."²⁰⁵ The institutional segregation and overt racism of his peers was a significant factor in Namath's feeling of isolation during his time at Alabama, especially in the early years. However, there was an emerging confluence of forces that complicated Namath's college career: the first and most important being success on the field.

Football, colloquially known as the most team-driven sport, typically did not favor or celebrate individuals in the same way as baseball or especially basketball, for which the connection between player and spectator is physically a matter of feet. With football, helmets and uniforms enforce a dehumanized anonymity—players are a number, not a person. Namath's stand-out performances cut through that anonymity; it was his name in the paper alongside Bryant's. It can be reasonably speculated that the attention deriving from his personal success

²⁰⁴ UPI, "It's Spelled N-A-M-A-T-H."

²⁰⁵ Leigh Montville, "Off Broadway Joe."

allowed Namath to reclaim his independence (to an allowable degree), and instead of breaking his will like so many others, Bryant's tough-love approach to coaching hardened Namath's personality. He became friends with those black students Wallace had tried to intimidate, he continued to wear his outlandish, and very not-Southern, clothing, and he discovered Panama City, Florida, with its "sun, the sand, and the girls." "When he saw the beach, that was it," recalled a friend.²⁰⁶ He started signing his name "Joe Willie Namath" and became a part of the larger Tuscaloosa community. It may not be a stretch to consider that Namath, the boy who grew up with black friends and neighbors and adopted what he and sportswriters of the time noted as "black" playing styles and personality traits, felt that he was part of the story of Alabama's integration. However, Namath's deliberate dissociation from politics was first made apparent during this episode; "I wasn't a crusader or anything."²⁰⁷ Whether it was indifference or a survivalist's caution, Namath never became overtly political, befriending people like Vivian White because he genuinely liked her, and because she was neighbors with his girlfriend, not because he was—as Nixon would later call him—a subversive.

Big Man on Campus

Namath's following two years continued his success and stardom and his legend began to develop. Like gunslingers or outlaws of the Old West, Namath was credited with drinking, sleeping around, getting into fights, and a list of other infractions like "directing traffic" (heavily implied, naked) in downtown Tuscaloosa.²⁰⁸ The Joe Namath of these years was the "Big Man on Campus," a peculiarly modernized and Americanized version of the "Big Man" archetype: a

²⁰⁶ Mark Kriegel, 79.

²⁰⁷ Joe Namath, 111.

²⁰⁸ Mark Kriegel, 102.

"free enterprising rugged individual."²⁰⁹ As described by anthropologist Paula Brown, the Big Man was "a man of personal power," not institutional, "renown for his personal style of politics, magical powers, mastery of oratorical skills or bravery in war."²¹⁰ Drawing forward the metaphor of football as a type of warfare (see Chapter 2 for more detail on football as metaphor), Namath fit that description quite well. His expressive personality was in direct contrast to the conservative southern lifestyle—in Namath's own words, "Don't all college freshmen wear straw hats and checker-square jackets?"²¹¹—and his accomplishments on the field certainly could be, and often were, classified as bravery.

What concerned Bear Bryant, however, were the "magical feats" being attributed to Namath, even if everyone involved denied Namath's involvement. The star athlete who had developed a love for drinking in high school and later fought alcoholism for decades was charged with being a party animal in the middle of Alabama, and it was too much for Bear Bryant to ignore. In one episode that stayed with Namath, his rebellious nature came roaring to the forefront. As he told it, Namath was perfectly sober when a cop pulled him and a friend over for drunk driving. "Well, hello, Pain-suhl-vain-i-a kid," Namath recalled in his autobiography. "Y'awl are drunk." After pleading his innocence, completely sober Namath got personal: "Man, I never had anything against police—except, you know, a couple of guys I didn't like—but now I know why you mothers are cops. You couldn't get a job anywhere else." The cop apparently did not agree and Namath and his friend were sent to jail for the night.²¹²

The quarterback Bryant protected and took under his wing had finally crossed the line, and there were too many rumors to ignore, even if all of them were not true. Namath was

²⁰⁹ Marshall D. Sahlins, "Poor Man, Rich Man, Big-Man, Chief," 292.

²¹⁰ Paula Brown, "Big Man, Past and Present."

²¹¹ Joe Namath, 110.

²¹² *Ibid.*, 113.

suspended for the Sugar Bowl, with the opportunity to rejoin the team in the spring. "Alabama Drops Namath for Training Infractions," read the *New York Times*.²¹³ In the distinctly recognizable vernacular of "coach-speak," Bryant commented only that Namath broke "training rules."²¹⁴ Bookies immediately started hedging their bets on upcoming games and Bryant himself admitted that Namath's departure had left the team underprepared at quarterback.²¹⁵ That may have been more "coach-speak" though, as the underdog Tide rolled to a 12-7 victory with their "little-trying" backup quarterback.²¹⁶

The veneration of Joe Willie Namath deepened when the Bear's prodigal son returned in the spring, reclaimed his starting spot, was named team captain, and led Alabama to the 1964 NCAA National Championship. Expectations were high for the Tide and Namath delivered in-kind.²¹⁷ Namath's recurring knee problems created a subplot that humanized the quarterback to the public and provided a natural obstacle for him to overcome, even if it meant he had to share the glory with the "thoroughbred" backup Steve Sloan.²¹⁸ By November, Bryant was openly stumping for Namath's professional career: "This boy is great and if he doesn't sign one of the biggest professional contracts ever I'll be awfully surprised."²¹⁹ The Bear was prescient and while Namath had been a national figure in college football for three years, the traits and personality he had developed both on- and off-the-field would make him a national celebrity on par with the most celebrated actors and musicians during the following decade.

²¹³ "Alabama Drops Namath For Training Infractions."

²¹⁴ No title, Dec. 10, 1963.

²¹⁵ Maurice Shevlin, "Quarterback Problem, Says Alabama Coach."

²¹⁶ "Mississippi Favored to Beat Alabama"; "Four Field Goals Set Back Rebels."

²¹⁷ Joseph M. Sheehan, "Most Varsity Teams to Begin Workouts in Next 2 Weeks."

²¹⁸ "NC State Upset By Alabama."

²¹⁹ Jack Sell, "Roamin' Around," Oct. 11, 1964.

The American Football League

The history of the American Football League (AFL) has largely been written by the National Football League (NFL), a bitter irony that covers up the genuine rivalry between the two organizations. It is an understatement to say the NFL was the more respected league; more accurately, the AFL was barely acknowledged. The NFL was the league of Jim Thorpe and Johnny Unitas. The AFL was a vanity project by a handful of oilmen who were barred entry into the NFL and second-rate players. However, the AFL was the league that would not just go away. Bud Adams, league co-founder, assessed the situation as an embarrassment for the NFL: "[the NFL] had a dandy little monopoly going. We broke it up, and they didn't like it." As Robert H. Boyle, writing for *Sports Illustrated*, noted, by 1962 the AFL had come into its own and was poised to turn a corner into both financial solvency and higher quality of play. In order to draw attendance and garner awareness, the AFL adopted much less restrictive rules and promoted "a more varied—and far wilder—game." The offenses, described as "a melee between the Marx Brothers and the Ritz brothers" created a suspense that drew in crowds even if it would have "appalled purists." Boyle concluded that if reports were accurate, and television ratings for AFL games were going up and the NFL games were slightly decreasing, "the AFL at last has a real right to what one of its owners calls the league's new mood—"cautious optimism."²²⁰ This was a marked improvement from Boyle's assessment of the league's 1960 opening weekend: "In [the first] four games—at Boston, Los Angeles, New York and San Francisco—attendance was disappointing, and the play, while sometimes exciting, was often ragged."²²¹ With a steady increase in quality of games and numbers of seats sold, by 1965, the AFL was stable and ready to fight for Joe Namath.

²²⁰ Robert Boyle, "The Underdogs Have Made It."

²²¹ Robert Boyle, "AFL Verdict: Not Quite A Hit."

As a sign of his talent, Namath was drafted in both leagues, first overall by the AFL's Jets, and 12th overall by the NFL's Cardinals, but the real decision was which team would meet his steep contract demands. The NFL may have had the prestige but the AFL had Sonny Werblin and his money. The new owner of the New York Jets was a perfect fit for the AFL and its rebellious spirit; "The whole attitude of the National League is that they found it, it's theirs and no one else can get in it. They talk about us as a 'young' league—I think the National League attitude is immature." Unlike practically everyone in managing professional football, Werblin was not a football player, he was an entertainment executive. At the media company and talent agency Music Corporation of America ("MCA"), Werblin had spent decades creating and promoting television shows and the actors who worked in them. He saw Namath as a celebrity, not a quarterback, and his offer of \$389,000²²²—the largest to that point—ensured he got his star. As the proverb goes, money talks, and the fight for Joe Namath was instantly understood at the time as turning point for the AFL. Namath's attraction to money had been evident since his days in Beaver Falls; if it was up to him, he would have taken the \$50,000 from the Cubs and never set foot in Alabama. Namath's aversion to personal politics underscored the process of his ascension into the professional ranks. Unlike the feuds between owners, Namath had no interest in whether he was going to the NFL or the AFL, but he did have an interest in making money. Through his autobiographies and interviews, Namath's drawl masked a material desire that may have not been malicious, but certainly existed. According to him, it was Bryant's idea to ask for \$200,000; "Well, hell you may not get it, but it's a good place to start."²²³ He asked the Cardinals for \$200,000. They balked but agreed. Namath added a Lincoln Continental to his demands. They balked but agreed. Behind the scenes, the bidding war fueled rumors and

²²² Reports vary over the exact figure, but \$389,000 is the most cited in contemporaneous sources.

²²³ Joe Namath, 149.

backroom negotiations and Namath's ever-increasing demands kept getting rejected, before they were accepted.²²⁴

Namath's well-mannered independence raised its head in a peculiar way during the bidding war: he was asking for the most money ever paid a football player, but claimed a kind of altruism with regard to the process itself. He said, "I didn't want to be indebted," and rattled off a series of chances he could have had the Cardinals or Werblin pay for things like soda or airfare, and he declined, paying for it himself. It is a juxtaposition that helps shed light on Namath's personality and makes sense of some of the seeming contradictions. A more cynical interpretation may have seen Namath as greedy, but by his own accounts and contemporary accounts, Namath was interested in money, but not power. He even hired two lawyers, ex-teammates, to handle the contract bargaining; "It's too much for me."²²⁵ Namath's genuinely haphazard approach to life was contrasted with the disciplined drive for success on the field that he learned from Bear Bryant. While his lawyers oversaw an ever-increasing contract amount, Namath turned back to preparing for his final college game, the Orange Bowl versus Darrell Royal's Texas Longhorns. Then he reinjured his knee.²²⁶

By the time of the Orange Bowl, all the NFL teams had withdrawn from contention, claiming they would not pay \$400,000 for a quarterback with a bad knee. Werblin would, however, and offered \$389,000 at the end of December, 1964.²²⁷ *The New York Times'* Arthur Daley ridiculed the notion of paying that much for "a novice, particularly one with a knee that becomes unhinged even in signal practice."²²⁸ Daley continued his backlash, casting doubts on the Jets' offer: "call this amount inflated publicity talk and cut it in half." He even applauded the

²²⁴ Mark Kriegel, 137.

²²⁵ Joe Namath, 150.

²²⁶ Allison Danzig, "Alabama's Hopes of Victory in Orange Bowl Dim as Namath Reinjures Knee."

²²⁷ AP. "Jets Offer \$389,000 for Joe Namath."

²²⁸ Arthur Daley, "Sports of The Times: A Matter of Endurance."

Cardinals for withdrawing from consideration: "the Cards definitely aren't that stupid." In response to the national debate over his monetary worth, Namath wowed audiences around the country with a "brilliant" performance in the Orange Bowl, including a sneak attempt at a touchdown at the end of the game. Alabama lost to Texas 21 to 17, but Namath was voted the game's MVP, a rare honor, to say the least.²²⁹ Every biography and profile of Namath's career repeatedly notes the symbolism in Namath's accomplishments, and the 1965 Orange Bowl was just another chapter in Namath's rise to fame: even hurt and even in a loss, Namath was the best player on the field. Werblin was ecstatic, jumping up and down and screaming "I'm not paying him enough!"²³⁰ His final offer to Namath was for a total of \$427,000, including \$300,000 to Namath over three years, a \$7,000 Lincoln Continental, and lawyers' fees. In addition, the Jets hired two of Namath's brothers and his brother-in-law as scouts for \$10,000 per year for three years.²³¹ This revealed another key aspect of Namath's materialism: he clearly wanted to be wealthy, but he also wanted his family and those he cared about to be taken care of, as well. In 1965, the AFL was ready to contend with the NFL; it just needed a face. Joe Namath became that front man. Sonny Werblin's entire career had been spent turning entertainers into household names, and Namath was going to be his biggest yet.

Broadway Joe

The birth of "Broadway Joe" was dated July 19, 1965. The actual nickname came from Jets tackle Sherman Plunkett: "Look at him. Cat's been out on Broadway all night. You Broadway, Joe. You Broadway. Broadway Joe." But it was the James Drake photograph of a distinctly more presentable Namath that was the *langue* to the nickname's *parole*. The jersey

²²⁹ James Segreti, "Top-Rated Alabama Falls to Texas' Jet Start, 21-17."

²³⁰ Joe Namath, 156.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, 151.

remained tucked into the pants, but the awkwardness of Namath's Alabama years was gone. His dark hair was slicked back and the lighting exaggerated his facial lines. A big smile, complete with shiny white teeth, forced a contrast with the blurry, busy background. The determined and hunched-over player from Alabama had grown tall and confident, ready for New York. The stylized text box across from him read "Football Goes Show Biz" in bold yellow letters. The actual identifier of the man wearing number 12—"New York's Joe Namath"—was relegated to an awkward position in the middle of the page, lettered in an unremarkable shade of white in a small font, easily lost in the cluttered background. The cover informed the reader of what was important—his face, and what was not—his name. At age 21, Namath was being turned into an image, a symbol for the Jets, the AFL, and a new type of celebrity athlete. Namath's name was just background information, it was the smile that mattered, contrasted against the big, blurry lights of New York City.

Interestingly, the cover story for the July 19 issue was about Sonny Werblin, not Namath.²³² Namath was simply an ancillary character in the piece, who, along with Heisman-winning quarterback John Huarte and Werblin, created what author Robert Boyle called "pro football's most interesting triangle." Werblin did not attempt to hide his strategy, showcasing a confidence in his abilities backed up by decades of success: "I believe in the star system. It's the only thing that sells tickets. It's what you put on the stage or playing field that draws people."

Boyle, calling Werblin "one of the most clever, fascinating and energetic operators to emerge in sports," took stock of the star-power Werblin was assembling: "28 rookies who cost a total of \$1.1 million to sign, the most money ever committed for new talent in one year by any pro football team." "Mr. Werblin," as Namath would always call him, thought of Namath as a movie-star long before he ever played a professional game. "When Joe Namath walks into a

²³² Robert Boyle, "Show-Biz Sonny and his Quest for Stars."

room, you know he's there." Boyle agreed, assessing that "Namath relishes the limelight," "a real ring-ding-a-ding finger-snapper, a girl ogler, a swingin' cat with dark good looks who sleeps till noon." In contrast, the other high-profile quarterback, John Huarte, was described in the article as "ramrod-straight," "wears conservative suits and rep ties," and unlike the easy-going Namath, "precise and analytical." Huarte was forward-looking, thinking about his future after football as much as the team's playbook. Namath's "major interests are 'girl and golf, girls and golf.'" A more accurate cover image, reflecting the content of the article, might have featured Werblin, Huarte, and Namath blocked in a triangle, but instead it was Namath, happy and at home among the lights. Before the 1965 season, neither Werblin or *Sports Illustrated* knew if Namath or Huarte was going to be the future quarterback of the Jets, or whether both would wait behind hyped second-year quarterback Mike Taliaferro. But everyone knew it was Namath who sold copy.

The July 19 cover was the first time Namath was on the front of a national magazine and as such can be seen as the demarcation of when Namath truly entered national popular culture.

The image has become a part of the Namath iconography and remains immediately recognizable, especially in sports circles. Fifty years later, *Sports Illustrated* recreated the image with superstar cornerback Darrelle Revis, announcing "Jets cornerback Darrelle Revis recreates iconic Joe Namath SI Cover."²³³ Some notable differences highlight a changing emphasis by the editors. Revis was smiling and well-lit, like Namath, and the Times Square background was blurred with high contrast between the darkness of night and the brightness of the lights. Instead of "Football Goes Show Biz," the 2015 cover read "One Man is an Island," a reference to Revis' reputation as a "shut down cornerback" capable of defending anyone by himself, and nicknamed "Revis Island." Unlike Namath's cover where his name was remarkably small and almost

²³³ *Sports Illustrated*, July 20, 2015.

blended into the background, Revis' name was more prominent and colored the same shade of blue as the "Sports Illustrated" header. Just as Namath's cover symbolically deemphasized the text, driving focus to the image of Namath himself, Revis' cover can be interpreted as almost inverse: his face was not enough to sell the magazine so they needed to emphasize his name. Coupled with the emphasis on the individual by the phrase "One Man is an Island," and the two covers demonstrate very different ways to celebrate an individual player. "They're both kind of stars in the league, they've both made great impacts on teams, they've both won a Super Bowl ring," noted cover story author Greg Bishop. While the staying power of Revis' career as compared to Namath's has yet to be determined, the recognition of the 1965 cover as an important image in sports history is a notable one. Viewing the cover from the future, knowing the Hall of Fame career that came after 1965 can obscure the cultural power Namath held at the time, even if it had yet to be fully articulated.

Attempting to make sense of the role of "iconic photographs" within public culture, Robert Hariman and John Louis Lucaites argued that photographs are a way for culture to make sense of the world and create tangible ways to access the virtual communities the public inhabits.²³⁴ They suggested standards for works that reach an "iconic" state that include:

Photographic images appearing in print, electronic, or digital media that are widely recognized and remembered, are understood to be representations of historically significant events, activate strong emotional identification or response, and are reproduced across a range of media, genres, or topics.²³⁵

They immediately noted that not all images considered "iconic" meet all four criteria, but as a general measurement, Hariman and Lucaites' appropriately tied together what folklorists may recognize as the old standard "variation and repetition" that underlies many of the attempts to

²³⁴ Robert Hariman and John Louis Lucaites, *No Caption Needed*.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, 27.

define what constitutes folklore. And just as folklore can be understood to reflect and engage subconscious or subtextual connections by a community, an "iconic" photo must necessarily resonate with its audience and appeal to emotional memories and responses. Recognizing the definition of "iconic" public images parallels the functional components of the folklore process helps bring the notion of "poplore," and the relationship between these different cultural forms into a better focus. Popular culture—also including public culture and mass culture—has within it symbols, narratives, and objects that function in folkloric ways but exist because of popular culture or may be transmitted through popular culture. The 1965 Namath cover is an iconic image that exists for commercial reasons *and* it is a symbol, a reference point for the public that conveys informal knowledge about a contemporary legendary figure.

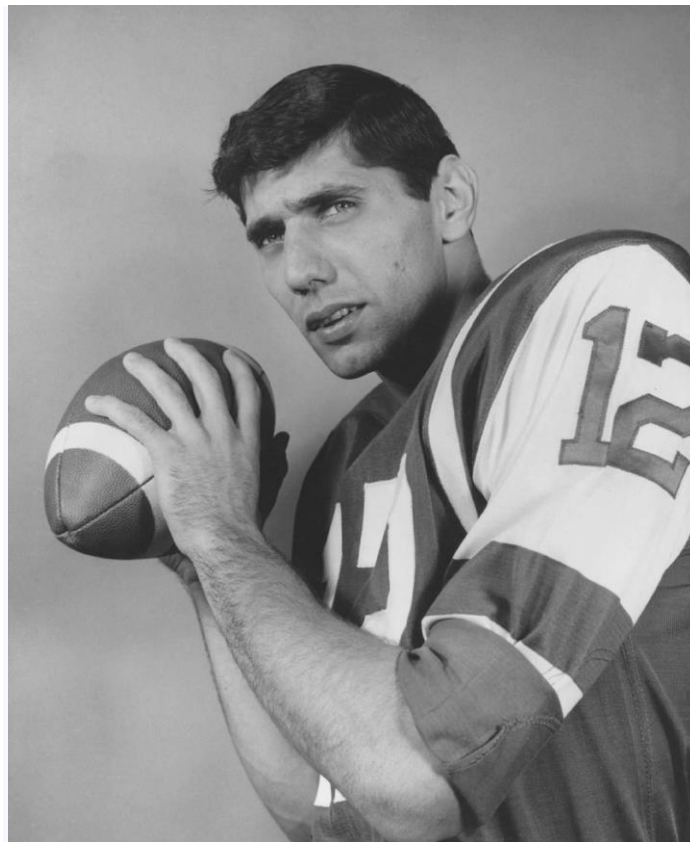


Figure 10. Joe Namath, 1965.
The physical copy of this photo is archived at the Pro Football Hall of Fame.
This file is licensed under the Creative Commons 4.0 International license.

The Face of the AFL

During his playing career, Namath would appear on the cover of *Sports Illustrated* six more times providing a visual narrative to the ups and downs that would become as dramatic as any movie Werblin could produce, featuring a main character as compelling as any Werblin could represent. Throughout the following decade, the Joe Namath of popular culture and the real person were never far from each other, or the headlines. Both Namaths informed the other and drove the public perception and, arguably, his perception of himself. Complicating the dynamic were the marketing professionals who took hold of Namath's image and cultivated it in the media. It may be impossible to know how sincerely Joe Namath performed his personality, but if nothing else, there are a group of recognizable traits that existed consistently in each phase of Namath's life, both public and private. Historians and biographers can and do trace the rebellious all-star athlete in Beaver Falls who dressed differently, bucked authority, and enjoyed a heavy social life through his tutelage under Bear Bryant to his emergence as a national celebrity with Sonny Werblin's Jets. In the process Namath became an exemplar of a new, modern type of performative masculinity that leaned into shifting social currents, and through Namath's (apparently) effortless demeanor, became fundamental to a new commercial concept of "cool."

The late 1960s has carved its own place in Americans' cultural memory: it was the time of hippies, of Vietnam, of the liberalizing of America out of the stereotyped homogenous and suburban perception of the previous decade. Of course, these gross oversimplification masked a normative view of American society that silenced entire subcultures and demographics in favor of a white-centric point of view, but as to how American popular culture would codify the transition, the Fifties were boring and the Sixties were cool. The rising counterculture assumed

this dynamic in their very name. They were reacting to a monolithic hegemony of the so-called establishment culture creating and opening subversive and subaltern spaces for open rebellion. They worked at cultivating that mystique at the time, and popular culture largely played along. Music labels began releasing counterculture-stylized artists and set up counterculture-friendly concerts. Hollywood began producing counterculture-themed films and a new generation of directors famously—or infamously—saved the film industry by breaking out of the studio system model that had reigned over entertainment for decades. Technically an independent film, produced and directed outside of the major film studios, *Easy Rider* (1969) may be the most well-known movie associated with the hippies, in part because it was distributed across the country and promoted by Columbia Pictures. That symbiotic relationship—-independent artists distributed by major entertainment corporations—was the backbone of the emerging social shift in popular culture. For as much as the counterculture may have wanted to work outside of the system, the system very quickly adopted and exploited the counterculture for their own gains.

This was a textbook example of both Gramscian cultural hegemony and the creative process of poplore—the lore of popular culture. "Folklore can be understood only as a reflection of the conditions of the life of the people," Gramsci wrote, adding, "although folklore frequently persists even after those conditions have been modified in bizarre combinations."²³⁶ By adopting and exploiting a nominally authentic subcultural movement, the hegemonic culture was able to control the messaging, the reception, and the traditional memory of the era, long after the actual subculture—assuming there was one—had been neutered. In what can only be seen as ironic, the counterculture—ostensibly rebelling against homogenous and authoritative control of culture—was defined almost entirely through commercial popular culture. Through a manipulation of how the counterculture evolved, corporate products like *Easy Rider* and

²³⁶ Antonio Gramsci, "Observations on Folklore," 135.

Woodstock became the symbols of the era. The emergent genre called "folk music," leaned heavily on the association of "folk" with "simple" and "authentic," and became measurable and quantified.²³⁷ That is, Bob Dylan and Joan Baez had an appropriate amount of "folk" in their music and were rewarded by record labels accordingly. In sports, where the blue-collar, crew-cut professionalism of post-war America still dominated, Joe Namath was the transitional figure who brought football into the Sixties. And just like *Easy Rider*, Woodstock, and Joan Baez, the independent image of Joe Namath was underwritten by marketing executives looking to capitalize on their symbolic authenticity.

Sonny Werblin was the first major player in the creation of Joe Namath, popular culture icon, but Namath himself was pivotal in crafting his own image. And although Namath's image was likely strong enough to exist without on-field accomplishments, Super Bowl III and Namath's "guarantee" took the fame of Joe Namath to a new level. He had been a superstar in college, earning national attention. He had been the subject of a high-profile bidding war, resulting in the highest salary in the history of the game to that point. In 1966, *Sports Illustrated* profiled his life in an article titled, "The Sweet Life of Swinging Joe." The article's author Dan Jenkins wrote, "Jet quarterback Joe Namath has closed the sports celebrity gap in New York with amiable enthusiasm, flushing foxes in the hip saloons and treading llama in his plush penthouse pad." Namath was the embodiment of excess and superficial pleasure, "not to be fully understood by most of us ... but Joe is not pleading to be understood."²³⁸ Jenkins explicitly aligned Namath with the youth culture of the time, recognizing that previous sports celebrities had been "grown men" who were "less hip to their times and more or less aloof from the crowd." Instead, Namath "thrusts himself into the middle of it." As a slight dig against Namath, Jenkins

²³⁷ Benjamin Filene, *Romancing the Folk*.

²³⁸ Dan Jenkins, "The Sweet Life of Swinging Joe."

praises predecessors like Ruth and DiMaggio for "earning" their fame. Regardless, "Joe Willie Namath was a happening."

Namath knew what he was doing and the image he was projecting. "Most of us [on the Jets] were under thirty, and we kind of represented the younger generation. We were into what's happening today in clothes, in music, all that sort of stuff," he wrote.²³⁹ His reticence with respect to politics—or apathy, if he is to be believed—made Namath's countercultural impulses more overtly commercial. Instead of protesting Vietnam, or for civil rights, Namath's rebelliousness was informed by popular culture while still being rooted in the activist spirit of the time: "They're my people, the young people, the 'now' people. I dig the music – Aretha Franklin, Janis Joplin, Tom Jones, The Fifth Dimension, Bobbie Gentry, Burt Bacharach, all of it, all kinds of music – and I dig the clothes and I dig most of all the feeling, the freedom, the idea of live-and-let-live."²⁴⁰ And while that list of artists may not represent the vanguard of the counterculture, it was Namath who made the connection and willingly associated himself with the zeitgeist. Reflecting a more libertarian impulse than libertine, he declared, "I think anybody should be allowed to do anything he wants to do as long as he doesn't hurt himself or anyone else."²⁴¹ To place Namath in context with his peers, he may best represent a synthesis of various social trends that ultimately made those trends more palatable to a mainstream national audience. Namath combined the traditional football norms of Bear Bryant, the expressive rebelliousness of the hippies, and the excessive celebrity of movie stars. With his ever-present attempt at humility, though, Namath recognized that these superficial factors "don't mean a thing if we don't win."²⁴²

In 1968, he won a lot of football games.

²³⁹ Joe Namath, 121.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 82.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*

²⁴² *Ibid.*, 163.

Super Bowl III

The American Football League was far from being a serious contender in the public discourse, but they embraced the underdog role. From the start, AFL owners and executives had taken their shots at the NFL. When he took over the Jets, Sonny Werblin said "I think a lot of this stuff about the National League being so far superior is a lot of bunk." He added, "I would say this—and this is a cold professional analysis, not my own—there are four teams in our league that can beat any team in their league."²⁴³ Unfortunately for the AFL, it did not work out that way; at least, not at first. The same year as Werblin's boast, Tex Maule—an NFL partisan if there ever was one, scoffed:

If the champions of the National Football League were to play the champions of the American Football League this year or next, it would be a mismatch that might be compared with the two Sonny Liston-Floyd Patterson heavyweight championship fights. The 1963 NFL champions—Chicago Bears, Green Bay Packers, New York Giants, Pittsburgh Steelers, to name the possibilities—would defeat the AFL champions, the San Diego Chargers, to name the probability, by a margin of from 40 to 50 points. This may, to AFL rooters, seem a massive exaggeration. Unfortunately for them, the facts of pro football life substantiate it.²⁴⁴

Maule conceded that, "In time, the AFL can probably field a team strong enough to give the NFL champion a struggle. But that time is not now or next year. It is not for several years." When the Chiefs lost to the Packers in the first AFL-NFL Championship Game, the sports writers let loose on the AFL for daring to claim their league's equality. Even in a comparatively even-handed assessment, Edwin Shrake cautioned the AFL to stop believing its own marketing: "the AFL is

²⁴³ Robert Boyle, "Showbiz Sonny and his Quest for Stars."

²⁴⁴ Tex Maule, "Ridiculous! The NFL by 50 Points."

as far behind the NFL as the Chiefs were behind the Packers."²⁴⁵ Shrake's commentary highlighted the narrative surrounding the "football game that might someday deserve to be called the Super Bowl": "the Chiefs were not just another Packer opponent. They were to the AFL this season what the Packers were to the NFL—the champions."

Months later, the Chiefs upset the Chicago Bears in an exhibition game, prompting the headline "The AFS Has a Taste of Glory."²⁴⁶ The Chiefs saw the key to success in making the Bears play outside of their traditional schemes. For years, the AFL's innovative offensive scheming was its greatest asset. Chiefs quarterback Len Dawson said, "that once we got them playing our type of game we could do everything we wanted." Wide receiver Chris Burford added, "Ever since the Super Bowl last January we have listened to a lot of nonsensical comment about the National Football League and the Green Bay Packers and Mr. Lombardi and how he said we aren't as good as the other top teams in the National Football League." The meaning of the victory was hardly unanimous. The coach of the AFL's Buffalo Bills outright dismissed the results: "What do they all prove? Chicago wasn't that good, and these are exhibitions. They mean a lot to the fans, maybe, but not really that much to the players and the coaches." *Sports Illustrated's* Mark Mulvoy remained convinced that "If anything, the interleague exhibitions so far have proved that American League football, in general, is still behind the NFL on a collective basis."

After the Packers won Super Bowl II over the AFL's Oakland Raiders, the narrative of the NFL's superiority only grew stronger. Tex Maule facetiously admitted the Packers had an "off day," but "an off day for Green Bay is equivalent, roughly, to a superhuman effort by most

²⁴⁵ Edwin Shrake, "Still a Long, Rough Road Ahead for the AFL."

²⁴⁶ Mark Mulvoy, "The AFS Has a Taste of Glory."

mortal teams."²⁴⁷ Before the game, and off the record, the Packers insinuated the Raiders were lazy, saying the Raiders' execution was not as "crisp" as an NFL team and there was "more loafing in the AFL." After the game, the Packers players were much less partisan, describing the Raiders offense as "sophisticated," with Henry Jordan predicting that "if [AFL teams] improve as much each year, they'll be on par with us soon." The Raiders took their own swipes at the Packers, highlighting their comparative youth and confidence. One Raider was quoted saying "It's a little like playing against your father. These guys were my childhood heroes." Raiders quarterback Daryle Lamonica pledged, "I know we can win tomorrow," stopping just short of where Namath would go the following year. For the time being, the NFL dominance remained unchallenged.

As the 1968 season progressed and Namath's Jets grew into the front-runner for the AFL Championship, Tex Maule noted the team's "luck" in avoiding major injuries like the "contenders."²⁴⁸ Maule continued this narrative that the Jets were somehow the best of the rest in the following weeks. When the Baltimore Colts won the NFL Championship, Maule quoted multiple instances of contempt from the players toward the inferior team from the inferior league.²⁴⁹ As far as the Colts were concerned, they had overcome their biggest test of the season, the NFL Championship. "I haven't thought about the Jets," said one. When asked about an injured player, the answer was, "With a broken leg, he'd play against the Jets, and do a hell of a job."

Meanwhile, the December 9, 1968, *Sports Illustrated* cover told the public perception of the AFL champions: it was Namath and all Namath. The Jets defense and running game were fundamental to the team's on-field success, but as far as the narrative went, the image of

²⁴⁷ Tex Maule, "Green Bay Handily."

²⁴⁸ Tex Maule, "Many Substitutes for Victory."

²⁴⁹ Tex Maule, "Baltimore Lowers the Boom."

Namath's bright green eyes looking slightly up and out of frame, Fu Manchu mustache centered on the page, and the caption "Joe Namath Eyes the Super Bowl," were all anyone needed to know. Namath was the first quarterback to throw for over 4,000 yards in 1967 and added another 3,100 in 1968 *en route* to being selected an Associated Press All-Star.²⁵⁰ On Christmas Eve, 1968, Namath was voted both AFL Most Valuable Player and Player of the Year by "overwhelming choice."²⁵¹ Despite the general disrespect between the two leagues, Colts coach Don Shula went out of his way to repeatedly praise Namath's abilities to the press, especially his quick release, pocket awareness, and maturity in leading the offense.²⁵² The AFL had built its identity on "helter-skelter" offensive dynamism, featuring scrambling quarterbacks, shifting formations, and high-pass percentages. In a revealing back-handed compliment, though, what impressed at least one sportswriter was that Namath "doesn't scramble," eschewing the frenzied pace of his AFL peers in favor of "ice-water" pocket passing on par with Unitas.²⁵³ In order to be good at football, in the eyes of many in the pro-NFL corner, it meant not playing AFL football.

Pregame Controversies

The lead-up to the Super Bowl was different from the previous two, in large part because of the presence of Namath. After the first two Packers wins, the Colts were looking to prove the adage that twice is a coincidence, but three times is a trend. The odds-makers considered it a *fait accompli*, making the Colts 18-point favorites. Sportswriters outside of New York routinely noted the regional influence of national stories. "Doc" Young went so far as to call the game the

²⁵⁰ "Jets Place Namath, Sauer and Philbin On A.F.L. All-Stars."

²⁵¹ "Reporters and Coaches Agree: Namath No. 1 Player in A.F.L."

²⁵² "Colts' Shula Praises, Blasts Jet's Namath."

²⁵³ Shirley Povich, "Show Biz Buffs Want Jets in Super Bowl."

"Super Hyperbole" due to the glowing press from New York sportswriters "starved for championship teams."²⁵⁴ The *Sun Reporter* (San Francisco) declared "Colts vs. Jets a Super Bowl Mismatch."²⁵⁵ Even Namath's hometown paper, *The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* relented to a 21-7 prediction, although buried it at the bottom of Al Abrams' "Sideline in Sports" column.²⁵⁶ But, as Edwin Shrake ominously declared, "Brace yourself, Miami, Joe Namath is headed your way."²⁵⁷

Namath's controversial statements began as soon as the Jets won the AFL Championship. In the post-game celebration, a "noisy excitement" bolstered by gallons of champagne and a crowd "insane with joy,"²⁵⁸ Namath boasted that the just-vanquished Raiders' quarterback Daryle Lamonica was better than his Super Bowl opponent Earl Morrall. Shula took to the media to voice his displeasure with Namath's bravado: "How can he rap the NFL Player of the Year?"²⁵⁹ Jets coach Weeb Ewbank tried to downplay the remark, telling reporters Namath was referring to one specific game when Morrall had a particularly bad performance. "I think it was all blown out of proportion," he said, trying to keep the situation from going any further. Namath had different priorities though, and when he ran into Colts players at a restaurant, things became heated and almost broke into a fight. Namath, ever the showboat, made sure everyone heard him as he shouted to Colts placekicker Lou Michaels: the Jets were going to "kick the hell out of [the Colts]."²⁶⁰ Michaels later clarified Namath's exact words: "We're gonna kick the shit out of you and I'm gonna do it."²⁶¹ Broadway Joe repeated the claim later in the week when he was presented the FAME award for Player of the Year. In front of the AFL president and astronaut

²⁵⁴ A.S. "Doc" Young, "The Super Bowl Game."

²⁵⁵ "Colts vs. Jets a Super Bowl Mismatch."

²⁵⁶ Al Abrams, "Sideline in Sports," Jan. 11, 1969.

²⁵⁷ Edwin Shrake, "Joe Passes the Big Test in a Breeze."

²⁵⁸ Robert Markus, "Jets Capture A.F.L. Crown, 27 to 23."

²⁵⁹ "Colts' Shula Praises, Blasts Jets' Namath."

²⁶⁰ Gordon Forbes, "Colts to Put Everything on Line Sunday, Shula Says."

²⁶¹ Mark Kriegel, 260.

Gordon Cooper, Namath went off-script and pronounced "The Jets will win Sunday, I guarantee it."²⁶² Again Shula took to the press to "chide" Namath in the understated coach-speak to be expected from a champion-caliber NFL coach: "It's seldom you find a colorful guy like Namath with the ability he has."²⁶³ In the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* the big, bold headline read "Namath Guarantees Jets Will Beat the Colts."²⁶⁴ Namath was disgusted at being three touchdown underdogs, taking it a personal insult. He told a bartender friend to bet as much as possible; "We're gonna win straight."²⁶⁵

Namath's cockiness was exactly what the entertainment-minded executives involved wanted. Edwin Shrake wrote in *Sports Illustrated*, "Ever since he signed his celebrated \$400,000 contract four years ago, Namath has been the AFL's leading attraction. Namath grows a mustache, it gets in all the papers. He buys a fur coat, everybody knows it. He sends his llama rug to the cleaners, it's the talk of the neighborhood."²⁶⁶ Taking stock of Namath's ability to infuriate opponents and charm friends, his biographer Mark Kriegel concluded, "If Namath were a wrestler, he'd be both the babyface and the heel."²⁶⁷ Although Namath's Jets were routinely called not the AFL's best team but the AFL's "best attraction," the layered personality of Namath only worked because of his quarterback skills and their gameday success. "Underneath that Fu Manchu mustache and underneath that male mannikin's [sic] fur coat ... beats the heart of a splendid quarterback," wrote Shirley Povich, admiring Namath's ability to "pick apart" AFL defenses.²⁶⁸ Doc Young, still not convinced by the hype surrounding the Jets, added that after the NFL "walloped," "humiliated," and "slaughtered" the AFL the previous two years, if Namath

²⁶² Mark Kriegel, 268.

²⁶³ Gordon Forbes, "Colts to Put Everything on the Line Sunday, Shula Says."

²⁶⁴ "Namath Guarantees Jets Will Beat the Colts."

²⁶⁵ Mark Kriegel, 258.

²⁶⁶ Edwin Shrake, "Joe Passes the Big Test in a Breeze."

²⁶⁷ Mark Kriegel, 263.

²⁶⁸ Shirley Povich, "Show Biz Buffs Wans Jets in Super Bowl."

defeats "one of the best [teams] perhaps ever to play the game," "he will be deserving of all the hyperbole New York writers have lauded on him." And in a historically ironic attempt at sarcasm, Young said a victorious Namath "should be rushed right away into the Hall of Fame while every AFL partisan is drunk with victory."²⁶⁹ The coaches attempted to downplay the drama. No matter the confidence in the Colts locker room, Shula admitted that "if we go out there and blow it, it'll ruin all we've accomplished this season."²⁷⁰ Ewbank, Shula's former head coach when Shula was a defensive back on the Colts, talked down his NFL compatriots' intra-league rivalry: "If we should be so fortunate to win, I wouldn't go popping off about the AFL."²⁷¹ The verbal sparring that was largely absent from the first two Super Bowls had engulfed the pre-game press, and it was all because of Namath.

Victory

As the game clock of the Orange Bowl wound down to zero the night of January 12, 1969, Namath's deification in popular culture was immediate. An audience of over 75,000 watched in person as Namath ran off the field waving his index finger above the chaotic celebration around him. Along with millions of television viewers—spectators of Marshall McLuhan's "world theater"—they had just watched the New York Jets complete the biggest upset in football history, and with it destruction of the NFL's "aura of invincibility." Morrall had been benched in the third quarter, replaced by Johnny Unitas who managed a touchdown but not much else against the Jets' stifling defense. The front page of the *New York Times* broke the news to anyone in America who had not felt the ground shake: "Jets Upset Colts By 16-7 For

²⁶⁹ A.S. "Doc" Young, "The Super Bowl Game." , 8 Jan 69. Chicago Daily Defender as doc young

²⁷⁰ Gordon Forbes, "Colts to Put Everything on Line Sunday, Suhula Says," 20.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 22.

Title In The Super Bowl."²⁷² The Colts left the field in silence. Morrall said few words, described in multiple accounts as stunned and dejected. The "pain of being the first" NFL Super Bowl losers only enhanced the drama of it all.

Super Bowl III was not a close game, or a shoot-out; the Jets defense had smothered the Colts and Namath exposed weaknesses many sportswriters did not even know existed.²⁷³ While Namath had riled up the media in public, he and the Jets had spent all week breaking down film. "I'm a poor winner," Namath told the press. Months later, he conceded that if the game had been played another time the results would have been different: "We would have beat Baltimore worse."²⁷⁴ Exorcising years of abuse, the Jets players let loose. "I'm surprised they scored on us," deadpanned Gerry Philbin.²⁷⁵ "It will take the NFL twenty years to catch up with us," the veteran former-NFL star John Sample told reporters.²⁷⁶ "They'll have to take the Colts' names off the checks," Gerry Philbin lamented, expecting to not get his winners' bonus for a few weeks due to the delay. Namath reminded the non-New Yorkers of their predictions, with a smile: "Never have so many people been so wrong."²⁷⁷

Namath was named the Most Valuable Player and both players and sportswriters heaped praises on him. "Broadway Joe Namath put the money, \$15,000 of it, right where his mouth is," read the UPI recap.²⁷⁸ Tex Maule, the NFL loyalist who rarely wrote a positive word about the AFL, its teams, or its players, gave credit to Namath for backing up his boasting: "his talent is as big as his mouth—which makes it a very big talent."²⁷⁹ "He's everything we heard about him,"

²⁷² Dave Anderson, "Jets Upset Colts By 16-7 For Title in the Super Bowl."

²⁷³ Note: I've watched the full game, and by modern standards it's very boring, even as a Super Bowl, but the accounts of the Jets dominating the Colts in all three phases are accurate.

²⁷⁴ Joe Namath, 58.

²⁷⁵ Mark Kriegel, 280.

²⁷⁶ Note: some accounts have him say twenty, others say two.

²⁷⁷ Howie Evans, "Jets: 'We Proved Them All Wrong.'"

²⁷⁸ UPI, "Broadway Joe Namath put the money, \$15,000 of it, right where his mouth is."

²⁷⁹ Tex Maule, "Say It's So, Joe."

said Shula. In an interesting historical idiosyncrasy, below the Namath-dominated headlines and after the sensational descriptions of the celebration in the locker room, articles about the game consistently noted that the Jets defense may have been the real star of the game, shutting down the Colts offense that had the NFL Player of the Year at quarterback and Johnny Unitas as his backup. But that caveat went against the emerging narrative and was drowned out in the postgame fervor, buried in plain sight.

The *Philadelphia Inquirer* ran a full-page spread on the game, including Sandy Padwe's column titled "Joe Destroyed the Great Myth," referencing the popular belief that the AFL was inferior to the NFL. Players thanked Namath for his unwavering belief in the team: "He guaranteed we could win ... he not only made me believe—he made us all believe." Namath had "symbolized all the essences of this great upset," concluded Doc Young, who days earlier, tongue firmly planted in cheek, said Namath should be immediately put in the Hall of Fame if he beat the Colts. "I closed my ears and my mind to reason," Young professed. "Prejudice, you know, makes one do foolish things."²⁸⁰ Not many were as openly conciliatory as Young, but Namath's celebrity status was undeniable. Quickly the conversation moved beyond the game and into the aftermath: on the biggest stage, in front of the biggest audience, Namath slew Goliath. "I was just telling people the truth ... I honestly felt we had the better team."²⁸¹

The Aftermath

Super Bowl III was only the beginning of Namath's journey through 1969, the year that would effectively define Namath's popular culture persona going forward. The Jets' upset over the Colts was an important moment in professional football history, and took on even more

²⁸⁰ A.S. "Doc" Young, "Analysis of a Good."

²⁸¹ Joe Namath, 50.

meaning with the immediate historicization by journalists who affirmed that "despite his reputation as a playboy, he is also a serious student of football."²⁸² The extravagance of his lifestyle, the photos with women and celebrities, all of Namath's vices that had been mocked for years, became acceptable overnight as the doubters were silenced and a new professional football reality dawned. Even Tex Maule acknowledged the changing of the guard: "the era of John Unitas ended and the day of Broadway Joe and the mod quarterback began." Maule lamented the shift from the "crew cut and quiet" generation to those with "long hair and a big mouth," but begrudgingly accepted that "haircuts and gab obviously have nothing to do with the efficiency of quarterbacks."²⁸³ Namath's Goffmanian performance of self—defined by an irreverent independence and camera-ready entertaining flair—was critical to the development of Namath as a popular culture icon. His skills on the field had made him a hero in Beaver Falls, in Alabama, and in New York, and with no more roadblocks in the way, there was nothing stopping him from transcending into the national consciousness as a commercialized symbol of the youth-focused zeitgeist.

NFL Films

The licensed veneration of Joe Namath began with NFL Films. In the wake of Super Bowl III, the NFL faced a public relations dilemma. They had spent a decade telling the world that the AFL was the inferior league, barely worthy of being on the same field as the greats of the NFL. Moreover, all season, the Colts had been heralded as one of the best teams of all time, boasting the best defense of all time and led by the NFL Player of the Year, Morrall. As if that was not enough, the Colts backup quarterback was John Unitas, considered the greatest

²⁸² Dave Anderson, "Jets Upset Colts By 16-7 For Title in the Super Bowl."

²⁸³ Tex Maule, "Say It's So, Joe."

quarterback of the century. The Packers had easily won the first two Super Bowls and the third was expected to be just as easy, if not more. And then they lost, convincingly, to the New York Jets and their firebrand, loud-mouth, and playboy quarterback. The NFL's momentary loss in bragging rights was counteracted with the rise of a new face for the sport. NFL Films was the first institutional arm to try to navigate this trade-off through their hour-long game review.

Written by Steve Sabol, the son of executive producer Ed Sabol, the historical narrative and masculine symbolism of Super Bowl III was immediately crafted and codified only a week after 75 million watched the game live on television. While the papers had highlighted the disparity between the teams and the bubbling feud between Namath and Earl Morrall, Sabol penned a story that made sure both the victors and the losers were celebrated. Instead of rejecting Namath, the episode put his celebrity front and center, framing him as the leader of a new youth movement in professional football. In effect, Namath's success—and the AFL's success—was now the NFL's success.

The episode, simply titled "Baltimore Colts vs. New York Jets: The World Championship of Professional Football," began with a high-tempo, upbeat song titled "Broadway Joe," sung by "The Super Chicks."²⁸⁴ The lyrics told the whole story:

He's kind of mod and very hip,
 with lots of heart and lots of lip.
 A swinging ladies' man who has a ball,
 but put a football in his hand and right away you'll understand
 Why Broadway Joe's the greatest of them all.
 He's a hero, he's a pro,
 He's a Mr. Something Else, our Broadway Joe.
 He's a groovy, super guy.
 He can pass a football through a needle's eye.

²⁸⁴ NFL Films, "Baltimore Colts vs. New York Jets: The World Championship of Professional Football."

What a feeling, what a sight
 When we see that Number 12 in green and white.
 1, 2, 3, 4, Hut, go, go, go
 No one else can throw like Broadway Joe!

As the song played, viewers saw a montage of (exclusively) female fans cheering for, and swooning over, Namath. He completed passes, socialized with celebrities and politicians, and lounged shirtless poolside surrounded by reporters. As the song ended, the image froze on the December 1968 *Sports Illustrated* cover, his bright green eyes jumping out from the screen. The narrator, John Facenda, immediately cut in: "Joe Namath is many different things to many different people." More highlights of Namath followed and the thesis of the episode appeared: "As a new idol emerged in New York, an old one was fading" (cut to Johnny Unitas walking off the field). As NFL Films told it, Super Bowl III was not the story of the AFL-NFL rivalry, nor was it the story of the Colts getting beaten in all aspects of the game by the Jets. As Sabol wrote it and Facenda spoke it, Super Bowl III was about Johnny Unitas and Joe Namath.

What followed was barely an informative recap of the game, but a kind of impressionistic reimagining. The scores were mentioned but not always shown, and the game footage was often cut together without direct commentary. Instead, what viewers were presented was a new entry into the lore of popular culture: the legend of Super Bowl III. The first half of the game was mostly skipped over before the narration settled down into the third quarter. Earl Morrall's disastrous performance was alluded to, but not shown in much detail. The episode may have been a Namath highlight reel, but even that had a layer of uncommented-upon irony: Namath played well, and was named MVP, but he did not throw a touchdown in the game and the key to the victory was the Jets defense containing the Colts, including 4 interceptions; in fact, most of the points were scored by Jets kicker Jim Turner's three field goals. Facenda's monotone

narration put it all in perspective for the audience: "A game that was supposed to be a laugh-in for the Colts was now a grim battle for survival." Another field goal. "The third quarter was dying, and so were the Colts."

The episode then shifted to the parallel between Unitas and Namath. The Colts pulled Morrall at the start of the fourth quarter and the "Old Master," jogged on the field. The problem, though, was "Johnny U," the face of the NFL for 11 seasons and 2 championships, was hurt—his throwing arm a "tattered memory." But, Facenda reminded viewers, Unitas had faced bigger challenges than this and his "fluid grace on the football field was all the color he had ever needed to make himself a hero." Unitas had made a career of winning big games, and the Colts were "inspired by the presence of the old champion." With a montage of big runs and big hits, the Colts marched down the field on the Jets, "finally [doing] what they were supposed to do... what they were capable of." And then the greatest quarterback in the NFL was intercepted in the endzone.

After a stalled Jets possession, Unitas got his second chance and the "Old Pro" led a scoring drive. Facenda spelled out the point for those still unsure of the symbolism: Unitas had proved "there is still a place for a proud old man in a young man's game." After an onside kick, Unitas' third drive, with three minutes left in Super Bowl III, was a frenetic medley of action spliced with reaction shots from Namath, set to the triumphant pace of a marching band working toward the impending inevitability. The horns reached their crescendo. Unitas dropped back and threw over the middle, incomplete.

The music unwound and the camera focused on the ball, alone on the field, swaying back and forth. Facenda's distinct baritone provided meaning to the moment: "Two champions on a Sunday afternoon." Unitas walked off the field, head down. "A new one, as a quarterback."

Namath jumped and hugged his teammates. "An old one, as a man." Uinitas, again. There was no more narration, but the imagery was everywhere. The NFL Champions, heads down, walked away into an out-of-focus distance. The world champions stormed the field, leaping and celebrating. The *NFL Films* camera kept up as Namath tried to make his way through the swarm of fans and reporters. The ultimate individualist, his white and green helmet was still on, momentarily yielding to the power of the uniform. Namath held up his right hand index finger. Freeze frame.

Instead of providing a down-by-down recap of the game, *NFL Films* turned Super Bowl III into a parable about manhood. Uinitas, the hero of the past, squared off against Namath, the hero of the future. It was generational, it was institutional, it was Zeus overthrowing Cronus. And it was the version of the game that became a cultural memory. Namath raising his index finger was the image that burrowed into popular culture and visually defined the game. That is, the definitional image of Super Bowl III became Joe Namath celebrating victory. To couch the visual storytelling, the "guarantee" took on a life of its own. Even though he had boasted multiple times before the game that the Jets were going to win, the specific phrase "I guarantee it" entered the sports vernacular and became a kind of motto for Broadway Joe Willie and his life of success. Without *NFL Films*, and had Namath's football image been left in the hands of older, pro-NFL, anti-counterculture sportswriters, "Broadway Joe" might have remained the divisive star of a rebel league. In effect, *NFL Films* stripped away the AFL-NFL rivalry, the Jets-Colts rivalry, and the perception of Namath as a loud-mouth punk, and in one hour rewrote Super Bowl III, the legacy of the "Old Pro" Johnny U, and the stardom of Broadway Joe.

The Year of Namath

In a more immediate sense for professional football, Super Bowl III—and by extension, Namath—also altered the business dynamic between the two leagues. The AFL-NFL merger was on-track as scheduled, but details like television rights and the composition of the new conferences were still under negotiation. Before Super Bowl III, the AFL had almost no leverage. The NFL dominated the larger television markets like New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles, while the AFL teams were centered in smaller cities like Denver, Buffalo, and St. Louis. The NFL had the most beloved and recognizable characters who had been fixtures of sports culture in the decades since WWII. And most importantly, the NFL had the demonstrably better quality teams and players. Instantaneously, Namath changed that.

Far from the sports pages, *Variety* took note of the immediate ramifications for the leagues' contracts with NBC and CBS.²⁸⁵ In their assessment, viewership trends would most certainly change after Super Bowl III which "convincingly lifted the Jets' Joe Namath to pro ball's top superstar." The NFL may control larger markets, but with a shared schedule, the AFL teams were projected to become bigger draws, increasing the value of their television rights. Instead of taking whatever the NFL offered, now the AFL and their television partner NBC could use Namath as a bargaining chip, *Variety* argued, especially if the projected increase in NBC viewers started to affect the CBS ratings. In addition, the leagues were still arguing over whether to keep the leagues intact after the merger, and the new television contracts could influence those talks. The problem was imbalance: the NFL had 14 teams, the AFL only 10. Beyond the television numbers, new national superstar Joe Namath expressed his desire for the AFL to remain intact, potentially swaying public opinion.²⁸⁶ The AFL would indeed remain intact after

²⁸⁵ "Jets Win One for OI' NBC."

²⁸⁶ UPI, "Namath Hickok Winner."

the merger, becoming the American Football Conference, proving William N. Wallace's perceptive observation: "There are interesting times ahead in this sport and Joe Namath and the Jets are responsible for them."²⁸⁷

Meanwhile, popular culture was clawing to get a piece of Namath any way it could. Movie scripts, product endorsements, and a who's who of media celebrities surrounded him. But if they were going to get Namath, it would be on Namath's terms. He declined to appear at various awards shows and functions, telling reporters he was going to travel for a while, slyly confessing, "I'm not much of a speaker."²⁸⁸ Joe Willie Namath, already dubbed the "legendary" hero of professional football,²⁸⁹ synthesized the lessons he saw from Bear Bryant about controlling the public image, with the marketing savvy that defined Sonny Werblin's Jets, into a public relations campaign that codified what Joe Namath meant to popular culture. The travelling reporters speculated on included visiting his family, Coach Bryant at Alabama, and a USO trip to the "Far East" to visit troops.²⁹⁰ When he returned he found his apartment had been burglarized and one of his fur coats was missing. Namath dismissed the loss with a laconic shrug: "I never wore that one."²⁹¹ Offers were piling up for Joe and his managers, Jimmy Walsh and Mike Bite. Movie roles came with "tubs full of vodka;" Namath-branded knit shirts included a 5% commission on sales; and Braniff Airways boasted the Namath guarantee.²⁹² He even got his own 12-inch Mego action figure.²⁹³ Perhaps the most obvious avenue for Namath—the infamous socialite and playboy—was to run his own restaurants and clubs, and so he did: the first *Broadway Joe's* restaurant launched the month before the Super Bowl. Namath's nightclub,

²⁸⁷ William N. Wallace, "Postseason Ploy Book."

²⁸⁸ UPI, "Joe Namath Plans to Duck Banquet Circuit."

²⁸⁹ Mark Kriegel, 282.

²⁹⁰ UPI, "Namath Hickok Winner."

²⁹¹ Dave Anderson, "Namath: AFL Clubs can 'Kill' Giants." NYT 30 Apr 69 pg 52

²⁹² Mark Kriegel, 288.

²⁹³ No Title, *People*.

Bachelor's III, had a star-studded reopening a month after the Super Bowl. "America's Hero" was everywhere in early 1969. Arguably the most important step in the branding of Joe Namath, though, was agreeing to write an autobiography—Namath had the chance to tell the public exactly what to think of him and his antics, and clarify which antics were more true than others.

Although not published until 1970, the book, titled, *I can't wait until tomorrow... 'cause I get better looking every day*, became a fascinating historical artifact as it was essentially a running commentary on the events of 1969. Namath, through his ghostwriter Dick Schaap, was able to define himself and provide context for the controversies he found himself in during the year. Schaap was an emerging sportswriter and had just experienced massive success with *Instant Replay* (1968).²⁹⁴ Schaap excelled at capturing the voice of players, and with Namath, he was able to frame events in a way that ensured Namath's best side showed. This kind of subjective nonfiction prose was a hallmark of the so-called "New Journalism" that took hold in the late-1960s and early-1970s. Tom Wolfe, who both embraced and denied the term in a matter of years, boiled the popularity of the movement down to a simple conclusion: "Really stylish reporting was something no one knew how to deal with, since no one was used to thinking of reporting as having an esthetic dimension."²⁹⁵

The biggest challenge facing Schaap was exactly how to portray Namath's aesthetic dimension, which while so friendly to the camera, could be difficult to transcribe in black and white. The solution was to embrace and accentuate Namath's style. The book was stuffed with witticisms about football, alcohol, and women, such as, "I like my girls blonde and my Johnny Walker Red." Beyond the one-liners and "aw shucks" prose, the book also featured several moments of self-awareness, making it a text notable for its historicity as well as its understated

²⁹⁴ Jerry Kramer, *Instant Replay: The Green Bay Diary of Jerry Kramer*.

²⁹⁵ Tom Wolfe, "The Birth of 'The New Journalism': Eyewitness Report by Tom Wolfe."

complexity. Schaap acknowledged that Namath was an active participant in writing the book and he was concerned over the level of truth he would get from Namath. In his eyes, Namath had no reason to tell the whole truth, and would face no consequences from lying: "People wanted to hear what Joe Namath has to say whether he spoke the truth or not."²⁹⁶ Moreover, Schaap was wary of working with someone who had just become a national hero; "I feared he might believe his own mythology."²⁹⁷ Schaap insisted that Namath told the truth, even going so far as to rewrite quotes if they were inaccurate. Framing like this can be interpreted as either an effort at honest transparency, or just another layer of the emerging Namath mystique. The idea of Namath rewriting his own autobiography has a kind of cynicism built into it, whether he was well-intentioned or not.

This deliberate crafting of the Namath image made itself apparent immediately. The introduction to the book began with a blistering rebuttal of his public perception as a lush: "I hate all the untrue stories about me."²⁹⁸ Echoing his denials back in Alabama, Namath shifted as much of his potentially negative public image onto others, even blaming the city of New York for his drinking excesses: "I didn't drink much in college ... I didn't learn how to drink, really, until I got to New York."²⁹⁹ Speaking directly to the reader, Namath introduced the running theme of the book, saying matter of factly, "I don't mind talking about the truth."³⁰⁰ The implication was simple, but effective: if Namath talks about it, it must be the truth. To prove the point, Namath retold the story of getting in a fight with Lou Michaels before the Super Bowl, but in his new sanitized version it was all in good fun, and the two of them were old friends. While reporters at the time were talking about a scuffle and curses flying across the bar, Namath

²⁹⁶ Joe Namath, 190.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 190.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 10.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 11.

rewrote the recent past as "all good-natured needling," and made clear that "there was never any chance of us getting into a fight."³⁰¹ From the very first pages, Namath was using his autobiography to revise history, cast doubt on the media, and craft his version as the truth. This became a necessary tool for the story about to unfold, in which Namath (through Schaap) needed readers to believe his version of the fallout between himself and NFL Commissioner Pete Rozelle, resulting in his temporary retirement from professional football.

Bachelor's III

Namath's nightclub, Bachelor's III, had become famous, or infamous in the eyes of Rozelle, for its clientele. There was nothing in the rules preventing Namath from owning the club, but the commissioner—working with federal law enforcement—created a list of "undesirable" patrons, mostly known gamblers, and told Namath he needed to dissociate from the club. The press, not satisfied with no-name bookies, were quick to run stories linking the club to mobsters such as Carmine Persico (the future Colombo family boss) and Carmine Tramunti, the then-current boss of the Lucchese Family, known as "Mr. Gribbs."³⁰² Sources even went so far as to directly implicate Namath and his partner, Ray Abruzzese, as active participants in the mob-directed gambling operations, coordinating to get around law enforcement. *Sports Illustrated* ran a story by Nicholas Pileggi citing Mafia informants that Namath personally ran games for the mob from his penthouse apartment.³⁰³ Namath denied all of the charges "with a chuckle," but while his public demeanor remained calm, his private

³⁰¹ Ibid., 10-11.

³⁰² "Mafia Boss Listed Among Customers Of Namath's Place."

³⁰³ Note: this article is not in the *Sports Illustrated* archives, but is directly referenced multiple times in other sources, including Sports Illustrated's "19th Hole" Letters to the Editor in following issue.

demeanor shifted now that he was being personally attacked, and he went on the defensive.³⁰⁴ Rozelle might not have understood how personally Namath would take the accusation and the subsequent attacks in the press. Namath was the "king" of sports, *Bachelor's III* was his castle,³⁰⁵ and he had only given in to one authority figure in his whole playing career: Coach Bryant. In retrospect, it seemed obvious that the man who embodied the AFL's rebel spirit was never going to give in to the NFL commissioner, especially when he was not actually guilty of anything—a point Rozelle repeatedly affirmed. Rozelle had given a similar year-long gambling suspension to Alex Karras and Paul Hornung—Green Bay's Hall of Fame halfback—in 1963, but when sportswriter William A. Wallace described Hornung as a "star of Namath's magnitude,"³⁰⁶ it seemed Rozelle was not the only one who could not predict how the situation would play out, and that Namath was not an ordinary sports superstar.

The whole situation was less about legality and more about the image of the league. In his statement, Rozelle laid it out explicitly: Namath was fostering the "appearance of evil, whether or not it actually exists, thereby affecting the player's reputation, the reputation of his fellow player, and the integrity of his sport"³⁰⁷ The charge was "swimming in hypocrisy" in Namath's eyes—gambling went on at the clubs Rozelle went to, as well, would he suspend himself?³⁰⁸ Under orders to not talk to anyone on the list of known gamblers, Namath indignantly asked, "My father bets. Can't I talk to him?" Image was something Namath understood and actively worked at, and running *Bachelor's III* was part of that image, part of what made Joe Willie, Broadway Joe. Rozelle was not just asking a player to drop a business effort, he was asking Namath to sacrifice his identity. Rozelle used the only leverage that might

³⁰⁴ Gerald Eskanazi, "Namath is Linked to Dice Players."

³⁰⁵ Dave Anderson, "Joe Namath: Man of Defiance."

³⁰⁶ William N. Wallace, "Namath, Told to Sell Bar, Quits Football."

³⁰⁷ "Text of Statement by Commissioner on Namath's Case."

³⁰⁸ Joe Namath, 22.

sway Namath and gave the Super Bowl MVP an ultimatum to disassociate from the club or be suspended from football. For a moment the threat of not playing football seemed too much. Namath agreed to sell his stake in the club and began filling out the paperwork. Then his anti-authoritarianism got the better of him: "Fuck the money."³⁰⁹

"The nation's most flamboyant athlete," at least according to *The New York Times'* William A. Wallace, called a press conference.³¹⁰ Namath arrived in a limo, joking "I was at least going out in style."³¹¹ Not even a last-minute phone call from Coach Bryant was able to stop the events in motion: "No, sir, coach, I know I'm right. I know I've got to do this." Facing the dozens of reporters and cameramen, Namath was joined by some of the most well-known sportscasters, giving him a kind of Foucaultian authority by association: "Frank Gifford seemed dazed, Kyle Rote showed pain and Howard Cosell looked as if he wanted to lie down in a coffin," noted *Sports Illustrated's* William Johnson.³¹² Namath spoke, but barely audibly. He raised his voice for the part that mattered: "He [Rozelle] has a job to do. If I didn't sell, I'd be suspended. I'm not selling." He started crying. "I quit." He kept going, saying over again that it was about sticking to his principles: "The last thing I want to do is quit football. The whole thing is a matter of principle." Namath threw Rozelle's accusations back at him: "I'm innocent. They said I'm innocent." The thing devolved into a surreal performance that George Stickler summed up as "another bizarre chapter to Namath's bizarre career."³¹³ Doc Young had fully recovered from his momentary humility in the wake of Super Bowl III and defended Rozelle as "doing no more than his job - guarding the good name of pro football."³¹⁴ Young then posited that Namath

³⁰⁹ Mark Kriegel, 295.

³¹⁰ William N. Wallace, "Namath, Told to Sell Bar, Quits Football."

³¹¹ Joe Namath, 22.

³¹² William Johnson, "Mod Man Out."

³¹³ George Stickler, "Namath Quits Football 'On Principle.'"

³¹⁴ A.S. "Doc" Young, "Good Morning Sports!: O.J. & Broadway Joe."

was simply using the issue as an excuse for filming movies instead of attending training camp, adding without support, "There is a growing suspicion that Joe Namath is a comet who will burn out quite soon." Namath was being manipulated by Sonny Werblin, Young charged, who wanted Namath to become "the first white Jim Brown," that is, a football player-turned-movie star.

At the same time, both supporters and detractors recognized Namath's independent streak was at the root of his decision, and that was part of what made him a special part of pro football. He simply did not like being told what to do, and it was a fundamental part of his persona. *Sports Illustrated* quoted numerous friends confirming as such: "Joe won't let football control his life or dictate how he lives;" "Joe Namath is an individualist and he's a genius at what he does. Men like that have got to be treated differently. You've got to let them have some extra room to move;" "Joe's a man of principle; he'd give it all up—football, everything—for a principle." The last of which was said by a Jets teammate who called his retirement a tragedy and a slap in the face to the AFL and the work they had put in to overcome "NFL superiority syndrome."³¹⁵ On the other end of the spectrum was a previous victim of Rozelle's, Alex Karras, who suggested the commissioner learn to play quarterback because "Joe Namath has done more to help football than Pete Rozelle has done in his whole damned career."³¹⁶

The pop culture character "Joe Namath" was defined by his public visibility and over the next week his tear-filled face was on the front page of newspapers across the country.

Newspapers like *The New York Times* and *Chicago Tribune* devoted full pages to the story. Teary-eyed Namath was the cover of *Sports Illustrated* on June 16, 1969, captioned, "Namath Weeps"—itself likely a facetious callback to the phrase "Jesus wept" (King James, John 11:35).

³¹⁵ William Johnson, "Mod Man Out."

³¹⁶ "Karras Suggests Rozelle Try Playing Quarterback."

In William Johnson's cover story, "Mod Man Out," he took stock of what Namath's retiring meant for America:

...the stock market did not crash. The trains did not stop running, and the boutiques did not begin to push sackcloth miniskirts. Random House, the publishers of Namath's forthcoming autobiography, *I Can't Wait Until Tomorrow... 'Cause I Get Better Looking Every Day*, did not stop the presses nor did Paramount halt production of *Norwood*, the movie in which Namath will play this ex-marine. And in Beaver Falls, Pa., where Namath grew up, the steel mills did not shut down in mourning.³¹⁷

Johnson was hardly convinced by the tears, even though he confessed they seemed genuine enough. The question was whether Rozelle would let him back. Bachelor's III was under Federal investigation and while Namath was popular, it was Rozelle's league. The commissioner's official statement reiterated that the club status and reputation was incompatible with Namath's position as an NFL superstar. However, he tried to have it both ways, threatening Namath with suspension if he did not sell his stake in the club, but stating, "We have no evidence that Namath was personally involved in any illegal activities."³¹⁸ Namath really was being punished for the optics of it all, not because of any actual crimes—despite real crimes being investigated—giving weight to Namath's pouting refrain of "it's not fair."³¹⁹

Namath mocked Rozelle's accusations in his autobiography. "I hang out with a beautiful bunch of guys ... Albert Anastasia and Abe Reles and Frank Costello and Longy Zwillman and Willie Morretti," he wrote sarcastically. While Namath was not giving in, Rozelle's actions spurred a series of preemptive moves in Major League Baseball and the National Basketball Association to clean up their own relationships with gambling. Ironically, these public moves by

³¹⁷ William Johnson, "Mod Man Out."

³¹⁸ "Text of Statement by Commissioner on Namath's Case."

³¹⁹ Dave Anderson, "Joe Namath: Man of Defiance."

the other leagues just highlighted Rozelle's efforts to enforce the "Caesar's Wife" standard in a sports environment that Namath correctly diagnosed as too comfortable with corruption, top-to-bottom.³²⁰ Namath did not claim to be a choir boy; he simply thought he was being unfairly targeted for something the commissioner had already affirmed was not his fault. He freely admitted that he gambled and he was undeniably a part of the New York social scene and the headlines that came with it—including a pending lawsuit over punching a reporter, and it was here, in this loggerhead, that the personal connection to the fans came into play. Spectators were being put in a position where they had to choose between the newspaper accounts, Rozelle's assertions and rumors of Federal intervention, and Namath's own defense. But since Namath always made sure people knew he was being honest, an effort mimicked in his autobiography, the seeds of doubt were written between the lines: he was open other vices like gambling and drinking, why would he lie about cavorting with mobsters?

Even without Namath's spin, the public had seemingly taken sides. The *New York Times* concluded Namath had a "5-to-1" advantage in public support.³²¹ In its survey, Namath was praised for his honesty, "something few people in public life do," and Rozelle was shamed for acting like a czar. The main criticisms of Namath came from the pushback that he was "a little-town boy who let fame go to his head." Interestingly, many of the people quoted in the *Times* survey and in later letters to the editor made an argument about Namath's rights to due process. "I don't believe in guilt by association," said one man. "Unless he's proven guilty, Joe's done nothing wrong." Another writer gave an extended explanation of the 5th Amendment and how Rozelle was "depriv[ing] a citizen of his job without following the procedure set out by our

³²⁰ Leonard Koppett, "Sports of The Times: Caesar's Wife."

³²¹ Sam Goldaper, "Namath 5-1 People's Choice in Dispute With Rozelle."

Constitution."³²² In a remarkable defense, a black man (pictured in the article) named Julius Johnson, equated Namath's struggle with the larger civil rights movements going on in politics: "In this day when we're striving for justice and equality and the basic freedoms, Rozelle seeks to take Namath's right to be in business away just because he's a football player." Other respondents were more practical about the rift: "Namath represents a good portion of the gate receipts in any stadium he plays," said one man. "The specter of Joe Namath will haunt empty Shea Stadium" because a "great talent" and "idol of fans everywhere" was being subjected to the "dictatorial powers of Mr. Rozelle."³²³ A small business owner gave perhaps the most realistic response: "Bookies and gamblers used to come into my store and use the telephone. How was I going to stop them? When people want to gamble, they'll find a way." Namath was a national figure, though, and this multifaceted defense from the public was not just limited to his neighbors.

In the following week's *Sports Illustrated* letters to the editor, fans from across the nation similarly took Rozelle to task.³²⁴ "If [the NFL] is to modernize, then the Joe Namaths of this world must be accepted as part of it," said Sonny Kleinfeld of Fair Lawn, New Jersey. Eugene D. Shapiro, of New Haven, Connecticut, ridiculed the NFL and praised Namath's principles: "The rationale behind the league's ultimatum just does not make sense: if Namath wants to bet or conspire with the Mafia, he certainly does not need a public bar in which to transact business. I am glad to see that at least one professional athlete has the courage and integrity to support his freedom despite the ubiquitous Rozelle. Bravo, Joe!" More condemnation of Rozelle's enforced morality came from Gerry Orthmann of Kennewick, Washington: "What Mr. Rozelle was saying was, 'You're a football player, Joe, so I think you should live like a Puritan.'" Shelby Linnebur,

³²² Roy Silver, "The Namath Case."

³²³ Thomas J. Mooney, "An Unfortunate Incident."

³²⁴ "19th Hole: Letters to the Editor," June 30, 1969.

from Cherryvale, KS, even went after *Sports Illustrated* for infantilizing Namath: "you said Joe cried like a child because for once he could not have his own way. Have you forgotten what happened in Los Angeles when George Allen was fired as head coach of the Rams? He cried at his press conference, and I don't remember anyone connected with *Sports Illustrated* calling him a child." And while the sportswriters saw calling Namath's bluff as the right move, as well as forecasting his inevitable return, Denver's Robert Birnberg reminded Mr. Rozelle "Without Joe Namath, [the Colts-Jets] segment of realignment is as exciting as seeing summer reruns of Heidi."³²⁵

Namath's image was directly tied to the portrayal of his public lifestyle, and Namath used his retirement to star in a movie and go on talk shows. Bachelor's III experienced an upsurge in popularity, even if many of the new patrons were journalists who "ought to get better expense accounts."³²⁶ Namath clung tight to his explanation that it was all over doing what he felt was right. After all, he could have claimed he was retiring because of his knees and not lose his Jets contract.³²⁷ As it was, the Jets cancelled his contract and four or five endorsements, estimated around \$5 million by Namath's lawyer.³²⁸ "It takes courage to surrender that kind of money for a 'principle,'" wrote Dave Anderson in the *New York Times*. "But nobody ever questioned his courage." Coincidentally, Namath had just received an award for most courageous player in the 1968 season. Namath heard all the rumors and bristled against all of them. One suggested he was being "gracefully" thrown out of the league for fixing games. "That's an insult," he protested. "I'm too damn good a passer to throw five interceptions in a game I want to fix."³²⁹ He then went on to describe how he would throw a game if was going to, and with an implied

³²⁵ Itself a reference to another moment in Namath's story: the Heidi Game.

³²⁶ Joe Namath, 29-30.

³²⁷ *Ibid.*, 25.

³²⁸ Dave Anderson, "Courage of Convictions Could Throw Namath for \$5 Million Loss."

³²⁹ Joe Namath, 31.

wink, admitted to his readers that there was one game he tried to fix: Super Bowl III. "I kept handing off high but that damn Matt Snell wouldn't drop the ball, and I kept throwing low but that silly Sauer kept making impossible catches."³³⁰

Weekly updates kept the story alive in the press. One day, Jets players were trying to intervene.³³¹ The next, Namath hired an ex-FBI agent to run club security.³³² Arthur Goldberg, the former Supreme Court justice and ambassador to the United Nations, publicly offered his services as mediator.³³³ Rumors of a deal began circulating almost immediately as Namath quit. Every week, sportswriters claimed the two were close to meeting. Meanwhile, Namath was going to put his ownership in a trust.³³⁴ Or he was just going to play in Canada.³³⁵ Both Rozelle and Namath told the press they wanted to work out an agreement, but neither side was moving.

Rozelle blinked first and requested a meeting with Namath at the end of June. When Rozelle arrived for the June 26th meeting he asked Namath to autograph photos for his daughters—"to prove that at least there's one Rozelle who doesn't hate you."³³⁶ In Namath's telling of that meeting and subsequent negotiations, he held his ground, pointing out double-standards and hypocrisies to the commissioner. Rozelle admitted as much, but said other institutions like the Supreme Court have these types of strict standards. Namath, sitting atop his moral high-ground threw that back at him: "Just because other people have double standards doesn't mean we have to."³³⁷ Namath made the argument about the accusation of guilt by association, and in his retelling went out of his way to note that not only his teammates but other

³³⁰ Joe Namath, 32.

³³¹ "Sample to Meet With Jet Mates In an Effort to Back Up Namath."

³³² Sam Goldaper, "Namath Hires Ex-F.B.I. Agent for Restaurant."

³³³ "Parties Seek Goldberg As Mediator."

³³⁴ Gerald Eskenazi, "Namath Moves Toward Compromise on Restaurant Issue."

³³⁵ "I'd Listen to Canada Offers: Joe."

³³⁶ Joe Namath, 34.

³³⁷ *Ibid.*, 35.

players from around the league all supported him. Of course, when practice began and Namath did not attend, a group of Jets came to the club to make clear they wanted him to play.

To prove he was principled, but not selfish, Namath let his readers know that when he saw how his "retirement" was affecting people he cared about, he agreed to work on a compromise.³³⁸ Eventually over the subsequent weeks, a compromise was agreed to, even though "they had a helluva time convincing me."³³⁹ Namath would sell his stake in Bachelor's III in New York, but retain the rights to own any other franchises anywhere else in the world. Namath had effectively lost the fight—he was still selling his ownership of the club, and was out millions of dollars, but he won the battle of egos. At least, Pete Rozelle certainly made him think he did. As Namath recalled, Rozelle told him, "I'd be a damn fool if I didn't want to see you in football. You're the biggest name we've got."³⁴⁰ Namath bought it and reported back to the Jets, his retirement lasting exactly six weeks. Sportswriters named Rozelle the winner, exploiting the crack in the Joe Namath mystique. "Star Quarterback Decides to Obey Commissioner's Order."³⁴¹ "Rozelle Wins It!"³⁴²

To those watching, the "compromise" solution was nothing more than Namath giving in "entirely on the terms of Rozelle's original order."³⁴³ It was a complete victory for the Commissioner. Namath did not see it quite the same way, saying in his autobiography, "That was bullshit. I'd given in more than I'd wanted to, but I hadn't sold out my principle."³⁴⁴ In Namath's version of his story, it was his dedication to his principles that mattered. When his principles began hurting others—the Jets, his family, his managers—he relented, trading one

³³⁸ Ibid., 35-38.

³³⁹ Ibid., 40.

³⁴⁰ Ibid., 37.

³⁴¹ "Star Quarterback Decides to Obey Commissioner's Order," 1.

³⁴² "Rozelle Wins It!"

³⁴³ "Star Quarterback Decides to Obey Commissioner's order," 3.

³⁴⁴ Joe Namath, 41.

principle for another: his loyalty to those he cared about. Quickly, preseason preparations fell into the normal pattern and Namath's "retirement" was a weird hiccup in an otherwise normal offseason for the world champions.

Advertising Icon

And so the popular culture character "Joe Namath" settled into form: phenomenal athlete, playboy, gambler, braggart, and champion. The Joe Namath the public knew was also a lush, aloof, and with hints of selfishness. He was superficial, argumentative, and materialistic. Professional football's first "celebrity," but an innately grounded one, able to seamlessly mingle with Frank Sinatra and Raquel Welch one night and Pennsylvania steelworkers the next. The rebellious youth had been tempered by Bear Bryant and let loose by Sonny Werblin, appealing to all the impulses of a man who wanted success at any cost—he lived the life he wanted to live and made sure everyone knew it. He also meticulously controlled his public image: always smiling when the cameras were on, and remaining "assiduously apolitical" during a time of constant political churn.³⁴⁵ By flaunting his lavish and ostentatious life, he made himself a symbol for a new generation of hip consumerism. Namath was pro-civil rights, pro-free speech, and anti-war, but always made sure to frame those as a kind of simple decency couched in his anti-authoritarianism more than any partisan ideology. Namath was the embodiment of the social transition of the late-60s and early-70s, and as such, was always at odds with those he sought to supplant. His old rival Earl Morrall never forgave him for Super Bowl III, saying in 1972:

I don't respect him. His lifestyle, his actions. I wouldn't want to follow in his footsteps. I don't want to be like him and I hope my kids and the younger generation don't grow up to

³⁴⁵ Mark Kriegel, 350.

be like him. I don't think that's the style, for everybody to be big talkers, to be high-livers and to be out chasing.³⁴⁶

He was even placed on the infamous Nixon "Enemies List." Nixon was a diehard football fan, making the Namath entry somewhat puzzling: football fans knew Broadway Joe was apolitical; moreover, he was listed as "Joe Namath, New York Giants," suggesting Nixon may not have been the one behind his inclusion.³⁴⁷ Both a hero and a villain in his own time, the combination of contradictory characteristics actually humanized Namath, allowing for his transition off the gridiron and into mainstream entertainment.



Figure 11. Joe Namath on *The Brady Bunch*, first aired September 21, 1973.

³⁴⁶ Al Levine, "Namath Gets No Respect from Morrall. "

³⁴⁷ "Apolitical Namath Sees Enemy Listing as 'Crazy,'" "

In the subsequent years after Super Bowl III, Namath's football career slowly dwindled and he never played in a postseason game after 1969. His knees, which had been holding him back since Alabama, finally made him a liability and in 1977 the Jets placed him on waivers, saving him the indignity of being cut. The Los Angeles Rams signed him only after it was clear there were no other interested teams. It was a failed experiment and Namath quietly decided to not play the 1978 season. The man who had come into professional football as a superstar slinked away from the game that he had helped redefine for a new generation. A new batch of players was leading the league now and Namath looked tame and outdated in comparison to brash stars like John Riggins and O.J. Simpson. But for all of their successes on the field and star quality on camera, Namath was hardly going away. From Super Bowl III to his retirement, Namath starred in four movies (with four more after retirement), guest starred on shows like *The Brady Bunch*, and made dozens of appearances on late night talk shows. After retirement, he increased his visibility, adding *The Captain and Tennille*, *Fantasy Island*, *The Love Boat*, *The A-Team*, *ALF*, and *Married with Children* to his resume. He hosted variety shows, presented at the 44th Academy Awards, participated in comedy roasts, and was a color commentator on *Monday Night Football* in 1985, the same year he was inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame.

What set Namath apart, though, and made him a popular culture icon, was his role in advertising and branding. The Namath "brand" had been in full swing for over a decade and Namath-licensed clothing, appliances, and over-the-counter medicine had integrated his face and name into the larger consumer environment. Under the stewardship of famed adman George Lois, Namath's face became more valuable than his knees. "Joe's money shot was a wink and a grin," wrote his biographer.³⁴⁸ The first major commercial to capitalize on Namath's star power

³⁴⁸ Mark Kriegel, 338.

with both male and female demographics was for Noxzema shaving cream.³⁴⁹ In Super Bowl VII, his old Colts foes Don Shula and Earl Morrall were now on the Miami Dolphins, working to finish an undefeated season. But Namath was there to steal the spotlight, even if just for thirty seconds. The commercial cost \$42,000 and was a massive success, credited as launching the genre of "Super Bowl commercials." A giddy, shaggy-haired Namath faced the camera and said, "I'm so excited, I'm gonna get creamed!" The then-unknown, future-Charlie's Angel, Farrah Fawcett lip-synched the ad's jingle and smothered Namath's face with Noxzema, singing "Let Noxzema cream your face, so your razor won't." The thirty-second commercial ended with Fawcett feeling up and down Namath's clean-shaven face, as he smiled ear-to-ear, "You've got a great pair of hands." The sexual inferences were barely hidden, but that was entirely on-brand for a man who wrote, in defense of himself, "I can't imagine anyone who doesn't enjoy sex, who doesn't want sex all the time. It's the best thing ever invented."³⁵⁰

Even when the commercials were completely devoid of sexuality, the addition of Namath changed the direction of the marketing. Ovaltine, a chocolate milk powder previously advertised on and by *Little Orphan Annie*, wanted Namath to join the team.³⁵¹ Flanked by eager kids and intercut with shots of stirring chocolate milk, Namath droned the catch-phrase "My old pal, Ovaltine" a dozen times. With a straight face he recited the copy: "Ovaltine is the only chocolate drink that gives you all the vitamins the U.S. government says you need all day." Echoing Earl Morrall's objections to Namath being treated as a cultural hero, there was backlash against the commercials for associating Namath, a well-known socialite who bragged his best friend was Johnny Walker Red, with chocolate milk, ostensibly targeted at children. But George Lois knew what the detractors did not: Ovaltine was not really marketed to children, it was marketed to

³⁴⁹ "Noxzema With Farrah."

³⁵⁰ Joe Namath, 3.

³⁵¹ "Joe Namath Ovaltine Commercial."

mothers buying the groceries. And "moms loved Joe."³⁵² If the company had any reservations, they were dismissed when their sales spiked in 1973. Lois bragged, "They were looking to build another factory, for chrissakes."

Perhaps the commercial with the longest-lasting impact, though, was for Beauty Mist Pantyhose.³⁵³ The camera panned left to right, over a crossed pair of shaved legs. The female narrator confidently announced, "This commercial will prove to the women of America that Beauty Mist pantyhose can make any legs look like a million dollars." A cymbal rang louder in the background and the camera slowed down on a pair of green shorts. Namath's upper body, complete with #12 jersey, was revealed, and Namath's signature smile set the record straight: "Now I don't wear pantyhose, but if Beauty Mist can make my legs look good, imagine what they'll do for yours." He broke into laughter, and the female narrator joined him, chuckling, "Somehow everything looks better through Beauty Mist." The logo appeared and Namath appeared in an inset. "Especially *your* legs." A blonde woman came out of nowhere and kissed him on the cheek; Namath winked at the camera. It was a remarkable concept for a commercial, if only for its gender-bending premise. Originally, the ad agency had tried to get Burt Reynolds, who had recently been in *Playgirl* magazine, the sibling publication of *Playboy*, marketed to women and gay men. In fact, Namath was hesitant to do the commercial for that very reason: it was a little too edgy, even for Broadway Joe. The company agreed to add the tag at the end with the woman kissing Namath to make it clear to everyone where Namath stood on the issue, and they filmed it. Namath still had objections to how it was filmed, but the public loved it.

Namath's biographer compared its lasting popular culture legacy to The Guarantee, providing

³⁵² Mark Kriegel, 339.

³⁵³ "Joe Namath Beauty Mist Pantyhose."

two iconic moments in a matter of years.³⁵⁴ Namath's objections to the commercial are a strong reminder that most of what defined him to others was a managed and self-aware consideration his image. The more Namath became defined through advertising and commercial success, the more his life became a manufactured narrative. The Namath that popular culture knew and loved was not a real person or a true telling of his life story; he was an invented person whose life was incorporated into and retold through popular culture as an advertising tool and commercial facade. The connection of iconic moments and the narrative that took form in popular culture of Namath was coherent and memorable, but it was largely artificial.

Indeed, for his generation, Namath now held multiple significant pieces of their shared cultural inventory, especially fans of the country's favorite sport. There was Namath's entry into pro football and "Broadway Joe." There was Namath's 4,000 yard passing season and his unforgettable AFL career. There was Super Bowl III and all the side stories, including The Guarantee. And by 1974, he was the most ubiquitous athlete spokesman on television. Sonny Werblin had directed Namath's career into celebrity, and George Lois took over and turned him into an advertising machine. Famous for revolutionizing advertising in the 1960s and 70s, Lois once declared, "Advertising has no rules—what it always needs more than 'rules' is unconstipated thinking."³⁵⁵ Particularly interested in monetizing feminism, Lois created an advertising strategy for Olivetti typewriters and "Olivetti girls": "convert your friends to the Olivetti cause." And who better to help Lois market feminist liberation than America's favorite salesman? In a series of print ads, shaggy-haired Namath, in a button-up shirt and tie, sat dutifully at an Olivetti typewriter. The bold text read: "Joe Namath is an Olivetti girl." The small print clarified, "Obviously, not all Olivetti girls are girls. Joe Namath uses an Olivetti

³⁵⁴ Mark Kriegel, 358.

³⁵⁵ Thomas Frank, *Conquest of Cool*, 81.

Electric Typewriter (Not a bad typist either. Bats out 38 words a minute when he's in top form.)"

The television commercial began with buttoned-up Namath dutifully typing away for his female boss dictating directions; "Yes, ma'am."³⁵⁶ "I'm very pleased with your work, Joseph." She takes off her glasses, shakes her hair and leans in. "By the way, what are you doing for dinner tonight?" Namath impishly turns to the camera and the typewriter dings. Namath thought the idea was great. After all, "the boss always wants to make the secretary."

Lois had made his entire career on subverting marketing norms, and the gender role reversal fit right into the advertising movements of the time. Thomas Frank, in his survey of modern advertising, *The Conquest of Cool*, went through example after example of how marketing professionals used the social shifts in popular culture to their advantage. Lois and his competitors and peers utilized the rhetoric, symbolism, and themes of civil rights, feminism, nonconformity, and freedom. But unlike more malicious eras of exploitation, Frank concluded the two forces—salesman and customer—were now in tune with each other's needs and demands. New products, from cars to whiskey, were targeted to "the people" as choices they wanted all along as if the company and the consumer were all part of the same team and not opposing forces of capitalism.³⁵⁷ Female hygiene products were marketed as products of women's liberation.³⁵⁸ Philip Morris created Virginia Slims, cigarettes explicitly advertised as tools of liberation against the oppressive rules of the patriarchy.³⁵⁹ And in the middle of this medley of advertising changes was Joe Namath—the man whose green eyes and innocent grin made women love him, whose bravado inspired kids to be like him, and whose nights on the

³⁵⁶ "Vintage Olivetti Typewriter Commercial with Joe Namath." <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=svALJ5TYIvo>

³⁵⁷ Thomas Frank, 151.

³⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 153.

³⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 156.

town made him both adored and scorned. Moreover, there was one unavoidable attribute: Joe Namath was cool.

More Than a Folk Hero

It would be incorrect to allow Tex Maule the final word of declaring Joe Namath a "folk hero for a new generation." Unlike many versions of folk heroes, Namath's life is not shrouded in mystery, or rooted in a specific episodic context. His life has been unquestionably documented and cross-sourced with multiple accounts of many of his more famous exploits. Indeed, unlike other American folk heroes, such as frontier outlaws and lawmen who are often placed firmly in specific geo-historic framing, Broadway Joe's place in popular culture continues to deepen and evolve. Namath is still alive and remains a visible part of popular culture, frequently doing commercials and interviews, and importantly, still involved at the center of controversies. The hero of Super Bowl III quickly evolved into a more complex cultural figure in the 1970s and onward, fully transitioning into an actor, businessman, and advertising platform, all while remaining a part of both the pro football and celebrity social circles. Namath's personal life became fodder for pop culture gossip as he struggled with alcoholism and navigated various relationships. On live television in 2003, Namath was visibly drunk in a sideline interview and told ESPN's Suzy Kolber "I wanna kiss you."³⁶⁰ In the digital environment, the incident became part of the vernacular as a kind of meme, and even the namesake for the sports website "Kissing Suzy Kolber."³⁶¹ The arc of Namath's life lends itself to comparisons to traditional motifs on the aging of hero, but the folk component simply does not apply. If anything, Namath's life may be

³⁶⁰ "Broadway Joe Kisses Suzy Kolber." <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gc65NC44dSk>

³⁶¹ Appropriately located at: kissingsuzykolber.com

too well-documented. As noted previously, so much of what has been written about Namath was intentional and deliberately meant to shape a public image of the man.

Namath was created by his handlers, and with his approval, as a heroic character, the embodiment of a unique brand of hedonism in the social language of the 1960s and 70s. Namath was not John Wayne or Clark Kent, or even Johnny Unitas, the all-American man who stepped out of a Norman Rockwell painting and to do the right thing and save the day. Neither did Namath fit into the anti-hero archetype that was about to overtake Hollywood in the 1970s. Characters like Harry Callahan (*Dirty Harry*, 1971) and Michael Corleone (*The Godfather*, 1972) built on the popular resonance of Luke Jackson (*Cool Hand Luke*, 1967) and Billy (*Easy Rider*, 1969), providing audiences the vicarious thrill of rooting for good-bad-guys. In fact, Namath was not missing heroic attributes at all; he had convictions, courage, physical prowess, and intelligence, and he was as far from anti-social as possible, but he used them for distinctly anti-heroic reasons like personal gain and vanity, instead of a more noble or romantic altruism.³⁶² Namath was a rebellious character, but not a subversive one. His identification with, and reflection of, the larger counterculture was in support of his own materialism and consumerism. Just as the marketing professionals used the rhetoric of social change to sell dishwashers and cars, Namath used the affectations of his own youth to transform professional football away from the conservative professionalism of the pre-merger NFL with the exciting dynamism of the pre-merger AFL.³⁶³ The result was an integrated league that so thoroughly blended the two competing forces of work and play that by the time he retired, Namath's persona was outdated and a little boring in comparison to his teammates. In that respect, Namath's heroic identity is fixed to that specific time in the late-60s and early-70s. Even while he continues to live as a real

³⁶² A.W. Eaton, "Rough Heroes of the New Hollywood," 515.

³⁶³ John D. Bloom, "Joe Namath and Super Bowl III: An Interpretation of Style," 74.

person, Namath the heroic character remains firmly rooted in images that exist in the shared popular cultural inventory; images like running off the field of Super Bowl III, wagging his index finger in celebration, or blissfully grinning as Farrah Fawcett smears shaving cream on his face.

It would also be incorrect to claim Namath's life as a kind of legendary narrative, even as often as the word appears in association with his name in popular contexts. In a strict folkloristic sense, to be considered a legend, a narrative must include some bizarre or unrealistic aspect to get the audience to question their assumptions or worldview. The tradition-bearer tells the story as if it is true, and the audience then has to reconcile that narrative with their previously held beliefs. It is in that negotiation of truth that folklorists find the fundamental qualities of legend narratives. Episodic examples of the "Joe Namath Legend" would almost fit this criteria. His guarantee before Super Bowl III or his performances in various big games can be told in the colloquial format of "Did you hear the one where Joe Namath guaranteed victory in Super Bowl III?" But the stories actually happened. Telling a friend that Namath guaranteed victory or ran for a touchdown when he could barely walk are certainly extraordinary accomplishments, and maybe even coincidental happenstance in some cases, but they are not untrue, nor is there anything for the audience to negotiate with respect to their worldview. And so the folkloristic formula for a legend does not apply. However, if the goal of a legend-teller is to get the audience to react with performative disbelief or astonishment ("hard to believe, and nonetheless believed"³⁶⁴), then there needs to be a new category for the type of popular culture narratives in which Namath so clearly fits.

Considering Namath as a legendary hero may come closest to accurately representing his place as a mass-mediated hero, but Brunvand explicitly dismissed modern American "heroes"

³⁶⁴ Richard M. Dorson, "Defining the American Folk Legend," 113.

like political figures and sports players as "inventions of professional writers and public-relations people, not of the folk groups to which they are attributed."³⁶⁵ However, the devil is in that last detail. A version of Namath may very well belong to various folk communities—perhaps his Beaver Falls neighbors tell tall tales about young Joey—but it is to popular culture (specifically, the mass-mediated culture of the 1960s-forward) that Broadway Joe belongs, meeting Dorson's criteria for group ownership.³⁶⁶ It was indeed professional writers and public-relations people who created and disseminated the Namath narrative and image; people like Sonny Werblin, George Lois, Dick Schaap, and Namath himself all helped in the active process of selling the Namath product. The public was community they served: the television-watching, movie-going, Super Bowl-celebrating citizenry of popular culture who bought Namath-branded clothes and Noxzema shaving cream.

Orrin Klapp's problematic analyses of the folk hero nonetheless provide basic frameworks for how to read the role of a hero within the culture that created him.³⁶⁷ At different times, and in different episodes, Namath aligned with almost all of Klapp's designated hero types. Winning Super Bowl III qualifies for "The Feat," "The Contest," "The Test," and "The Quest," all at once,³⁶⁸ as well as giving him a "Cinderella" story.³⁶⁹ Namath's days in the AFL could qualify him for "The Clever Hero," "The Defender," and undoubtedly cast him as "The Benefactor" or the AFL's culture hero.³⁷⁰ In a parallel analysis, Klapp wrote about Charles Lindbergh:

Lindbergh remained personally an "unknown," aloof, and the reporters had difficulty penetrating to the "true" personality of this hero so admired by the

³⁶⁵ Jan Harold Brunvand, *The Study of American Folklore*, 171.

³⁶⁶ Richard M. Dorson, "Defining the American Folk Legend," 126.

³⁶⁷ Orrin Klapp, "The Folk Hero."

³⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 19-20.

³⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 20.

³⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 20-22.

people. The popular conception was, therefore, built upon superficial interpretation of his feat, his looks, and his gestures. All features which might be given a heroic interpretation were seized upon by the public. His slimness and youth were really a sign of superior talent; his reticence was modesty. Without having had to do much on his own part, a conception of him grew rapidly as a fair-haired boy, the perfect hero.³⁷¹

Some details differ with Namath—most notably, his "modesty"—but like Lindbergh, Namath was defined by superficial perceptions. His character was determined in public by what they saw on television and read in the papers, be it on the football field or gossip columns, and not by any insights into a "true" personality other than what Namath told them was true.

In sum, while there is nothing definitional folkloric about Broadway Joe—not in creation, transmission, belief, or memory—he lives in the culture from which he came as a symbol of various hero motifs. The process of creating and venerating heroes works as a mirror for expressing cultural values.³⁷² From Broadway Joe, a list of American values of the 1960s and 1970s—many contrary or paradoxical—become immediately apparent and accessible for study: independent consumerism, sexually liberated heteronormativity, corporate anti-authoritarianism, non-activist civil rights, and the victory culture of games. How Namath negotiated those contradictions does not require the interpretation of parables or allegorical tales, but simply the reading of his life in real-time and in historical context. While many "celebrities" engage in some of these themes, and others may provide better insight into some cultural movements, Namath is a unique figure in popular culture history, almost too good to be true. As a real life Forrest Gump, Namath's role in American culture stretched from the steeltowns of post-war Pennsylvania, to the moment of integration at Alabama, to the counterculture of the 1960s, to the birth of the modern celebrity in New York, all while helping turn professional football into the

³⁷¹ Orrin Klapp, "Hero Worship in America," 60.

³⁷² Simon J. Bronner, *The Meaning of Folklore*, 66.

most popular sport in the country. His story is localized, but only in the sense that popular culture itself is the "folk community" and its reach and size is limited only by accessibility to mass media. Scaled back, it could be possible to see episodes of the larger Namath story as "place legends" tied to specific popular culture events, as per Dorson's delineation.³⁷³ For example, if the Super Bowl was to be considered a centralized pop culture event—regardless of its rotating physical location—the The Guarantee could be categorized as a Super Bowl legend, specific to that event. But in the larger and more holistic sense, the Namath story, is not folkloric, but poploric.

Joe Namath is a character who lives in popular culture and is whose stories are told by popular culture to itself. This mimics the folk legend dynamic directly, creating a situation where the story of Joe Namath in effect is a legend narrative for its audience, it just happens to not be produced, circulated, or received through folkloric processes. Perhaps more significantly, a version of Namath exists as a type of character legend, or cultural hero,³⁷⁴ providing insight into the transformation of sports culture and its integration into the larger celebrity-driven consumerism of popular culture in the late-1960s and 1970s. This is the real power of a figure of Namath and why his categorization as a new type of "legend" matters. The psychological and symbolic power of legends tell folklorists what communities value, what beliefs they hold, and how they see themselves.³⁷⁵ Namath does all of that for those interested in the transitional state of normative America of the 1960s-1970s. Namath does *not* provide insight into subalternated communities, nor does he reflect a fictional homogenous society, but that is part of the story of those decades, too; that is, the erasure and white-washing of minority communities in favor of a marketable "counterculture." The popular culture of the nation—by definition, a majority-driven

³⁷³ Richard M. Dorson, "Defining the American Folk Legend," 123.

³⁷⁴ Not "culture hero," the specific myth/hero type.

³⁷⁵ Timothy R. Tangherlini, "It Happened Not Too Far From Here..."

consensus, mediated by mass communication—changed dramatically from the 1950s *en route* to the 1970s and Namath can serve as a key to understanding those changes. A rebel, but not a revolutionary, Namath was an active participant in the political, commercial, technological, and social transformation of professional football, and by extension, popular culture.

Joe Namath was and is a cultural hero, rooted in a specific set of social circumstances, whose legend continues to be developed through popular culture, manufactured for popular culture, distributed by popular culture, and sold to popular culture.

Chapter 4.

RESOLVING POPLORE:

A NEW DIRECTION IN POPULAR CULTURE STUDIES

America ducks the question of origins; it cultivates no origin or mythical authenticity; it has no past and no founding truth, it lives in a perpetual present.

—Jean Baudrillard, *America*

As demonstrated in previous chapters, the relationship between folk and popular cultures was complicated by the technological advancements in twentieth century communication. As the new mass-mediated popular culture evolved its own forms of storytelling, those narratives became a part of cultural (and subcultural) identity, creating the new myths, legends, and tales Americans told themselves. Instead of two distinct forms of cultural expression, popular culture and folklore were intertwined into one self-referential and self-consuming media apparatus. Folklore fed into popular culture and popular culture took on many of the characteristics of folklore. Out of these poploric constructions, communities evolved and defined themselves. Virtual groups, tangibly bound only by mass media and mass-produced goods, imbued value and symbolism into the transient and disposable nature of popular culture, in direct contrast to the notion that popular culture's fleeting temporality made such relationships impossible. By taking on the qualities of folklore to produced folk groups and folk performances, popular culture resolved the expression of traditions and values without discarding or the role of those traditions and values in community-building, educating, amusing, validating, enforcing, and stabilizing the

sense of community shared through a unified consumption of things like advertising, movies, politics, and sports.

In order to demonstrate the modern relationship that evolved between folklore and popular culture, this dissertation has focused on professional football and the ways in which popular culture forms create their own authority through popular culture practices. Communities around professional football do not need to be centered on a geographic area, nor do they need to have deep historic roots. Instead, football-based communities are bound together through consumption of goods, services, and media, mirroring the structure of ethnic and religious groups that folklorists have studied throughout the history of the discipline. Folklorist Elliot Oring synthesized key criteria for identifying ethnic groups: the group must self-identify; the group must have a common descent or kinship; and ethnic groups are understood as part of a larger social context.³⁷⁶ Conflating corporatized fandom to ethnicity may seem trivial on the surface, but the comparison is bolstered by the ways in which the two types of groups act in similar ways: fan groups claim a separate existence, fandom is often passed on through families, and fan groups operate in conjunction with other fan groups and the larger sports context. The performance of group identity is the same; fan groups have their own verbal arts, material culture traditions, customs, beliefs, and narratives. Many sports fandoms have even begun to refer to themselves as "nations." In all functional ways, fan groups are modern folk groups; they just happen to be mediated through mass communication and popular culture.

The Poplore Dynamic

For folklorists and popular cultural scholars alike, the modern popular culture community creates a problem that has largely gone ignored (see Chapter 1 for a more detailed discussion on

³⁷⁶ Elliot Oring, "Ethnic Groups and Ethnic Folklore," 24.

this point). Both disciplines have historically, if implicitly, aligned folklore with pre-industrial or pre-modern cultural expressions. For the popular cultural scholars, this has been a way to dismiss and marginalize folklore as a thing of the past. To early influential folklorists like Dorson, popular culture and modernity were inauthentic and artificial. Concepts like fakelore, folklorismus, and folkloresque have been put forward as ways to bring folklore in conversation with popular culture, but all three begin with the assumption (whether implicit or explicit) that folklore is measurable, authentic, and ultimately displaced or distorted by popular culture. Linda Dégh pushed back against the strict binary of popular and folk, recognizing that America's mass-mediated society was full of identifiable folklore motifs and genres.³⁷⁷ Rather than popular culture supplanting folk culture, Dégh demonstrated how popular culture simply found new ways to express folklore, be it via televangelists, haunted houses, or commercials. Bluestein, too, rejected the artificial delineation between popular and folk in the modern world, but while Dégh illustrated folklore used by popular culture to speak to the masses, Bluestein saw the masses using popular culture to express political and countercultural folk beliefs.³⁷⁸

However, through reimagining Bluestein's theory of poplore as popular culture creating folklore, both folklorists and popular culture scholars can have a more tangible and practical perspective that uses the methodologies of folkloristics to study the role of popular culture in modern America. While Bluestein focused heavily on the use of music as a tool of socio-political expression, placing Pete Seeger as the archetypal poplorist, using popular music to express folk ideologies, he correctly identified that popular culture was the medium through which American identity was created and contested, particularly in twentieth century. By expanding Bluestein's definition beyond music and into popular culture in general, the mass

³⁷⁷ Linda Dégh, *American Folklore and the Mass Media*.

³⁷⁸ Gene Bluestein, *Poplore*.

society that consumes and engages with popular culture becomes both the subject and object. Poplore is, then, the lore created and enforced, transmitted and memorialized through popular culture; the symbiotic parallel of the phenomenon demonstrated by Degh and labeled folkloresque by Foster and Tolbert, who all drew attention to how folklore enters and diffuses in modern popular culture.

Rather than taking a Bakhtinian approach, which is suggested but not expanded upon by the term folkloresque, understanding the role of popular culture necessitates moving past the judgment of popular culture as inauthentic, artificial, or parody. While parts of popular culture certainly embrace the carnivalesque performances of absurdity and vulgarity, much of popular culture—like folklore—is explicitly a conservative and normalizing force on society, demonstrating correct behavior and beliefs. The complication of popular culture comes from its lack of ties to tangible truth, providing for its audiences (nominally, everyone) a series of images, symbols, and reflections of reality that are only as true or powerful as the audience believes. Instead of a Bakhtinian celebration of the irrational, popular culture is the celebration of illusion. Popular culture exists in radio waves, movie projectors, and editing bays, given meaning only through an agreed-upon hallucination. The masses project into those virtual connections their own values, beliefs, anxieties, and language of metaphors and symbols. The resulting negotiation of signs both by producers and consumers, transmitters and receivers, exemplifies Baudrillard's description of a "hyperreal" society: "a real without origin or reality."³⁷⁹

Baudrillard's America is a layered construction of holograms, not grounded in the reality of the moment but rather, "the fantasy of seizing reality live."³⁸⁰ Consumption is the only tangible element, and it is consumption that defines an individual's relationship to popular

³⁷⁹ Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 1.

³⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 105.

culture; an evolution of conspicuous consumption into tribal consumption. Each new product available for purchase adds depth to the tribal consumption and reinforces virtual community creation. For Baudrillard, commercial advertising of consumption has integrated itself to such an extent that everything is a form of propaganda for something else. The endless combination of signs, signifiers, and simulacra commodified everything and stripped all of society from its own context in favor of an imagined but believed hyperreality. But the fact of its pervasiveness and seemingly willing acceptance by the masses, including the active manipulation, subversion, and reproduction of popular culture within popular culture, questions whether mass-mediated culture is as malevolently exploitative as Baudrillard believes. At the very least, Americans apparently have learned how to live within a social structure dominated by the ebbs and flows of popular culture, its entertainment, its advertising, its commercial goods, and its framing of current events.

In order to navigate popular culture, Americans use the manifestations of popular culture for their own purposes, utilizing the constant churn of signs and symbols to meet their needs. From the folkloristic perspective, those needs are generally expressions of values, norms, beliefs, customs, and history (or tradition). Baudrillard calls history "the last great myth," and sees the cinema as proof of the hyperreal, defined as the "disappearance of objects in their very representation"³⁸¹ That is, in movies, history is erased and replaced, with the new story having no attachment to the reality of the event, but creating a reality for the audience out of nothing. To Baudrillard, Americans live in a constant state of reimagination, with popular culture constantly replacing not just itself, but everything that came before it by simply writing over itself. But that neglects an important aspect of culture-creation that Bascom directly wrote about when outlining his four functions of folklore: communities need stability. As popular culture is always changing, stability cannot be found from the productions of popular culture, so has to be

³⁸¹ Ibid., 45.

provided by the audiences themselves. To the layers of signs, symbols, and metaphors that popular culture supplies, meaning is imposed by the members of popular culture, informally and *en masse*. That is where the poplore dynamic is most important; recognizing that popular culture is used by the people as folklore allows for a more diverse, and accurate, approach to analyzing and understanding American society. Rather than looking for specific folklore genres and motifs in popular culture, switching the focus to looking for popular culture texts and objects that are used for the same purposes and in the same ways as those genres and motifs resolves the tension between a postmodern hyperreality and premodern folk group.

Why Professional Football

Professional football's most important role in American popular culture is in the construction of narratives. Through the use of existing cultural metaphors and symbols, professional football has created a language for popular culture, a metaphorical common point of reference for society to express ideas and values. Stories of heroes, villains, and touchstone events have ultimately created a system of legends and myths based entirely in popular culture. Expressly fictional entertainment such as movies and television shows use football as either a plot device or to provide character context, expecting the audience to understand the symbolism and context. And while certainly some vernacular traditions may arise organically through fandom, in large part these narratives are produced through institutional means. The National Football League, beginning under Pete Rozelle, created its own film production company, museum, and television network explicitly charged with historicizing and memorializing the NFL, its players, its games, and its place in society (see Chapter 2 for a more detailed discussion on this point). The NFL has deliberately positioned itself as being synonymous with the history

of professional football (despite being only one of many professional leagues over the past century) and rewrites its own history to brush aside major controversies. Through Hollywood-level production and intentional manipulation, NFL Films instructs its audience on how to interpret football, how to feel about football, and how to remember football. The Pro Football Hall of Fame is ostensibly a museum, imbued with the authority society grants museums, but is intentionally framed by the NFL as a sacred site, a place where truths are kept and heroes are venerated. The history told by the museum is not comprehensive nor is it objective; it is deliberately crafted to reflect the NFL's corporate agenda. With both NFL Films and the Pro Football Hall of Fame, the NFL writes his own history and then tells audiences how to remember and celebrate that history.

The NFL is not the only one involved in active manipulation of current events, so are the players, teams, and journalists. The first and best example to demonstrate the fusion of practically all aspects of popular culture converging to create a new type of popular culture narrative is the case of Joe Namath (see Chapter 3 for a more detailed discussion of this point). A celebrated athlete as a child, Namath went to the University of Alabama and won national acclaim for both his success on the field and his escapades as a rebellious and hard-partying "big man on campus." His entry into professional football was a media event that dominated headlines for months. With the New York Jets, Namath broke records and led the Jets to the first AFL Super Bowl victory, although his career declined over the years, primarily due to his chronic knee injuries. Namath earned a place as a football hero by his "legendary" performances on the field, making sensational plays and winning games he should have lost. But what separated him from his peers and transcended him to a new type of popular culture celebrity, was the active management of his public persona by marketing executives, journalists, and Namath

himself. For his entire career, his lawyers and public relations team worked to squash controversies, promote his successes, and rewrite his past. While his reputation for drinking and womanizing was certainly known, Namath's spin doctors turned it into a part of his public affability. Namath was intentionally marketed as apolitical in a time of political upheaval and as benignly unique in a time of radical counter-cultures. In the process, Namath transcended from sports hero to popular culture legend, known by the public at-large, not just fans. The narrative around Namath's exploits, however, was not organic, nor was it spread through informal means; his image and legacy were written for the audience and propagated through popular culture. His feats were not unknowable, they were documented, but manipulated by the formal tradition-bearers like NFL Films and Namath's lawyers. This did not invalidate Namath's status as legendary figure, however, and indeed *he* became a totem signifying the authorized version of his story; to speak of the person Joe Namath is to reference the story of Joe Namath. He was the first of this new type of hero: a character with the symbolic meaning of a folk hero, but produced in, by, and for popular culture.

The crucial dynamic in all of these examples has been the active relationship between various modes of popular culture acting in concert with each other. The existence of poplore does not exclude other forms of folk or popular analysis, it simply adds to the depth of understanding. There still remains folklore about football and aspects of football persist that do not adopt the role of folklore. What poplore highlights for theoretical consideration the most is the intertwined nature of both folk and popular culture, and exposes for methodological purposes the problem of placing artificial boundaries between the two. The lived experience in twentieth century America, and moving forward into the twenty-first century, was an intertextualized negotiation of institutional and vernacular: the traditional became popular, the popular became

traditional. A national event like the Super Bowl, wholly situated in popular culture, fits directly into folklorist Jack Santino's holiday calendar: "an annual festival, with an athletic contest at its ritualistic center."³⁸² Out of the Super Bowl emanates a whole variety of texts that enter the popular discourse. Big plays, musical performances, and commercials live on as new entries in the language of popular culture. Joe Namath's guarantee, Whitney Houston's national anthem, and the Budweiser frogs croaking "wassup" are all a part of popular culture long after their immediate fame, benefitting from popular culture's self-referential pattern.

But not all moments become a part of popular culture's lore. Moments that may seem destined to join the popular culture inventory fade away, maybe remembered in some corners, but largely absent from the public's traditional memory. To that point, there may be no better example in professional football than the curious case of Doug Williams.

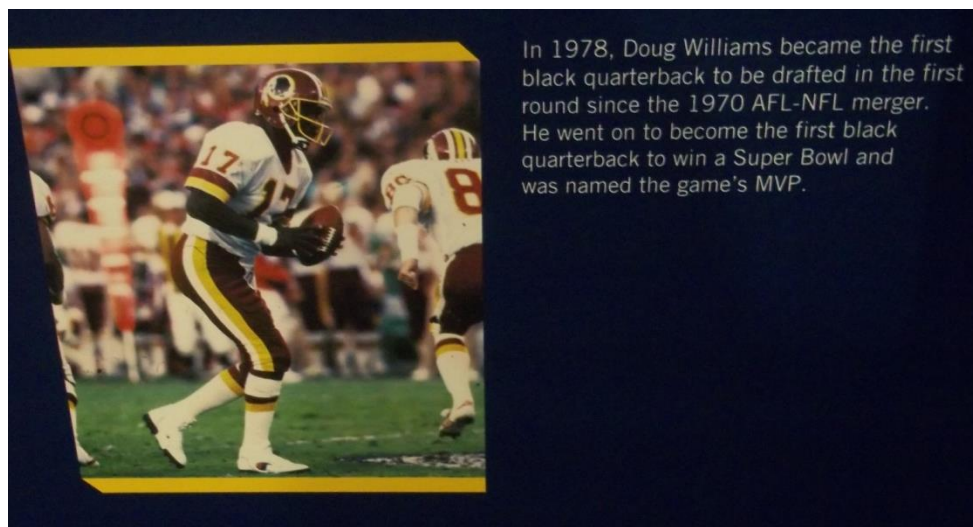


Figure 12. Doug Williams.
 Located in the bottom right corner of the *Road to Equality* mural, approx. 8" tall.
 Photo by Author.

³⁸² Jack Santino, *All Around the Year*, 11.

When Lore Does Not Pop: Doug Williams

In Super Bowl XXII, Doug Williams was the first black quarterback to play in a Super Bowl, to start in a Super Bowl, to win a Super Bowl, and to be named MVP in a Super Bowl. He threw four touchdowns in the second quarter, setting a record that still stands over thirty years later. That day, performing at the pinnacle of professional football, Doug Williams became football's Jackie Robinson, shattering the pervasive biases of a league that believed black players were good at running and tackling, but did not have the leadership qualities or intelligence to play quarterback. Williams, the former Heisman nominee and first round draft pick, had finally added "World Champion" to his resume, capping off a career that even his fellow superstar quarterbacks would envy. His place in the pantheon of football's elite was all but assured, his role as a civil rights pioneer motivated generations of black quarterbacks. Or at least that is how it could have been.

In the months and years to follow Super Bowl XXII, Doug Williams would be remembered less as the stalwart veteran who led the underdog Redskins to an imposing victory over the Denver Broncos and their hot-shot quarterback John Elway, and more as one cog of the Redskins' machine that was unstoppable on all fronts, and that which featured multiple stand-out performances. It was an era when quarterbacks were popular culture icons, and even in a loss names like Elway were etched into football's pantheon in real time. Meanwhile, Williams, a racial trailblazer and Super Bowl MVP, faded into the obscurity of the NFL's collective memory. Instead of becoming football's Jackie Robinson, venerated as part of the sport's legendary past, Williams would be out of the league by 1990, his career largely relegated by the NFL to a footnote of football history. The main author of popular culture's memory of Doug Williams has

been the NFL itself, who has pigeon-holed him into the larger racial history of the league while simultaneously downplaying his accomplishments. At the Pro Football Hall of Fame, Williams is relegated to the bottom right corner of the wall-sized mural "Road to Equality" (see Figure 12). In the Super Bowl XXII display, he is highlighted as "First Among Equals," a subtle manipulation of diction that strips his ground-breaking performance of its importance (see Figure 13).



Figure 13. First Among Equals.
Located at the Super Bowl XXII display.
Photo by Author.

Through Williams' career, and more notably, the discourse around his career, the formula for creating a popular culture folk hero revealed its complications. Namath and his associates had created the playbook for a new type of stardom, requiring a combination of on-field success with marketability outside of football audiences. By the time Namath won the Super Bowl, his face was a part of popular culture, featured on magazines and stroked by Farrah Fawcett. It was a mixture that others, like O.J. Simpson and Dan Marino, later leveraged successfully into entertainment careers: the football success created entertainment opportunities; the charisma (natural or not) made those opportunities stick with the audience. Doug Williams had the career, but he did not have the opportunities to make that jump into popular culture.

Black Quarterback Syndrome

Why Doug Williams did not break through into mainstream stardom is a question complicated by the football's racial past and specifically the NFL's on-going racial issues, not just with players, but with a lack of black integration into coaching and executive offices as well. Throughout his career, Williams was judged as both a quarterback and a black quarterback. As early as his senior year, 1977, Williams was the face of football's introspection over what he called black quarterback syndrome—the belief that quarterbacks were not smart enough or tough enough to lead an offense.³⁸³ On the surface, it seemed absurd. After all, Williams was a four-year starter at Grambling State University, set NCAA quarterback records, won championships,³⁸⁴ and was named black player of the year multiple times.³⁸⁵ Williams saw a

³⁸³ Doug Williams, 27.

³⁸⁴ Until 1998, college football national championships were decided by votes from sports writers and coaches. Non-recognized championships were labeled "mythical national championships" and black sportswriters voted Grambling the Mythical Black National Champions multiple times during Williams' tenure. see: Bill Little, "A Fast Start for MSU."

³⁸⁵ "Will Heisman Trophy Be Next?"

deeper connotation at work, though: fear. The truth behind black quarterback syndrome was that "[coaches, general managers, and owners are] afraid if they play a black quarterback and he doesn't pan out, they're going to be ridiculed by their peers. People around the league will say, 'I told you that black guy couldn't play,'" he wrote in his autobiography.³⁸⁶ "I plan on being black a long time and there's always going to be people who say 'He can't play in this league because he's black,'" Williams pushed back.³⁸⁷ From his Heisman contention, to the 1978 draft,³⁸⁸ to his tenure on the Tampa Bay Buccaneers as the lowest-paid quarterback in the league,³⁸⁹ Williams' early career was couched in race-based controversy.

In addition, Williams was at the forefront of various labor battles between the NFL and its players' union, the NFLPA. In 1979, the president of the NFL Players Association, Ed Garvey, released a four-page internal memo (immediately leaked to the press) that called the NFL a "monument to racism," and directly charged Commissioner Pete Rozelle as "responsible for a consistent pattern of racism." Rozelle fired back, calling Garvey "hysterical" and the racism charge a "red herring" to distract from contract negotiations.³⁹⁰ Williams jumped into the firestorm, telling the press that he was only paid \$50,000 per year, well below his peers.³⁹¹ The Buccaneers immediately pushed back, saying Williams was paid double that, plus game incentives. They also heavily implied that Williams had received a large signing bonus.³⁹²

Within a day, Williams called a press conference to completely walk back his accusation and

³⁸⁶ Doug Williams, 25.

³⁸⁷ Bob Logan, "Not all of Williams' foes are on field."

³⁸⁸ There are many contemporary criticisms of the implicit and explicit biases against Williams as he entered the league. One of the most bombastic was Howie Evans, "NCAA Bias: A Case for Doug Williams," and one of the most well-known was Skip Bayless, "The All-American QB, but Black."

³⁸⁹ Tampa Bay and head coach John McKay were lauded for taking Williams, the first black quarterback drafted in the first round, but tensions began almost immediately as contract negotiations went into the preseason. Tampa Bay personnel executive tried to delegitimize Williams by saying "he was the 17th player picked ... Williams seems to forget that." Williams responded by sitting out training camp, saying, "if they don't think [it's a concern], why should I worry?"; Dave Brady, "Five Top NFL Draftees Still Bickering."

³⁹⁰ "Players chief calls NFL a 'monument to racism.'"

³⁹¹ Michael Katz, "Bucs' Black Passer Supports Bias Charges."

³⁹² "Bucs Clarify Williams' Pact."

reiterate that the Buccaneers were not underpaying him because he was black. Over his five years on Tampa Bay, Williams led the team to the playoffs three times, a remarkable achievement considering prior to drafting him they had lost their first 26 games, only winning in the final two weeks of 1977.³⁹³ In 1982, Williams participated in the players' strike, but took the team to the playoffs at its cessation.³⁹⁴ Despite his on-field success, the tension between Williams and the management was there the whole time, from his first training camp to his last year under contract.

By the 1983 season, Williams was fed up with Tampa Bay and when the two could not come to terms on a new contract, Williams left for the United States Football League, which played in the spring. Williams had seen his peers sign million-dollar deals, but Tampa Bay owner Hugh Culverhouse would not meet Williams' \$600,000 demand. To Williams, this was just racism, plain and simple. He wrote in his autobiography, "I won for the Bucs, and I represented them with dignity. I had lived up to my commitment," declaring, "I wasn't going to be their slave anymore."³⁹⁵ In the USFL Williams saw a chance for respect, but the league was not long-lived. When failed businessman Donald Trump muscled the other owners into switching to a fall schedule to directly challenge the NFL, the NFL fought back and won. Williams had to return to the NFL if he wanted to keep playing.

Redemption Arc

Joe Gibbs, Williams' former Tampa Bay offensive coordinator, was by this point head coach of the Washington Redskins and offered Williams a life-line.³⁹⁶ Redskins General

³⁹³ NFL Films, "The Timeline: 0-26 Bucs."

³⁹⁴ "National Football League Players Strike Over Wages, TV Revenue."

³⁹⁵ Doug Williams, 106-107.

³⁹⁶ AP, "Late-breaking information on trades, signing."

Manager Bobby Beatherd praised the decision, saying, "Any team would feel fortunate to get a player of his caliber and feel even more comfortable that he's an experienced veteran."³⁹⁷

Unfortunately for Williams, it meant being backup to starting quarterback Jay Schroeder. The first year, Williams said all the right things, acknowledging that Schroeder was the starter and he was the backup.³⁹⁸ But by 1987, he was beginning to make it known he wanted to be the starting quarterback. A potential trade with the Los Angeles Raiders fell through, and Williams told reporters that, "[the Redskins] know I'm at their mercy," but reassured those listening that, "As long as I'm here, I'm going to work."³⁹⁹ During preseason, Williams refused to play against Tampa Bay, an odd request that was panned in the press and other players. Buccaneers linebacker Scot Brantley called Williams childish; Williams called Brantley a redneck.⁴⁰⁰ Hubert Mizell in the *St. Petersburg Times* blamed Williams for continuing to drag up and fuel the animosity between himself the Buccaneers, blaming him for creating the media hype he claimed to be avoiding.⁴⁰¹ As the season began, though, Jay Schroeder's injuries, a players' strike, and a shortened season would lead Doug Williams to the Super Bowl.

As the story goes, before Super Bowl XXII, a reporter asked Doug Williams how long he had been a black quarterback. "I've been a quarterback since high school," Williams replied, adding, "I've always been black." This episode, most likely apocryphal, has become a part of the lore of Super Bowl XXII and sums up how the media treated Doug Williams going into the game; he was a spectacle, a novelty, a kind of social experiment and litmus test for the nation. "They wanted me to say something controversial," he remembered.⁴⁰² Other questions were

³⁹⁷ "Profiles of New Redskins."

³⁹⁸ AP, Aug. 13, 1986.

³⁹⁹ Christine Brennan, "Williams Restless as Redskins Drill."

⁴⁰⁰ Christine Brennan, "Williams Answers a Critic."

⁴⁰¹ Hubert Mizell, "Williams guilty of promoting hype, ill will."

⁴⁰² Doug Williams, 149.

things like, "would it be easier if you were the second black quarterback to play in the Super Bowl?" and "will America be pulling for the Redskins, or rooting against them because of you?" *The Washington Post's* Michael Wilbon decided the craziest question all week was one directed to lineman Mark May: "How does it feel to block for the first black quarterback in the Super Bowl?" Wilbon praised how Williams handled the whole situation: "He never once snapped at anyone, never gave a 'no comment,' never even became irritated."⁴⁰³ Williams was ready for the questions, even if it overtook the rest of the conversation. Jim Murray highlighted the treatment of the two quarterbacks, calling Elway "John Wayne in 'She Wore a Yellow Ribbon,' Errol Flynn on the Burma Road. He's the United States Cavalry. He's the knight in shining armor. ... Doug Williams, on the other hand, is just black." He continued, berating his colleagues: "No one cares if Doug is good or bad, a pocket passer or a rollout. No one wants to know his game plan, what he has for breakfast—all the normal questions you ask a Super Bowl quarterback."⁴⁰⁴ Murray's colleagues were not asking those questions because the sports world though a Broncos victory was all but written in stone.

Super Bowl XXII

Super Bowl XXII began as predicted. On the Broncos' first play, John Elway threw a 56-yard touchdown. They followed that up with a field goal. At the end of first quarter, Doug Williams twisted his knee, making him doubly injured. Unknown to most, the day before, Williams had an emergency root canal, but Williams claimed he was not in any pain and could play. Similarly, Williams only missed two plays because of his knee and started the second quarter. On the Redskins' first play, Williams threw an 80-yard touchdown to Ricky Sanders.

⁴⁰³ Michael Wilbon, "Questions No Match for Williams' Aplomb."

⁴⁰⁴ Jim Murray, "Williams: He's Also a Quarterback."

The next possession ended with a Gary Clark touchdown. Then rookie running back Timmy Smith ran for a 58-yard touchdown. Sanders caught another 50-yard touchdown. On the Redskins' fifth possession of the second quarter, Williams threw his fourth touchdown to tight end Clint Didier, who caught his only pass of the game. The Redskins set Super Bowl records with five touchdowns, combined for 35 points, and 356 yards, in only 5:54 total time of possession. Wide receiver Ricky Sanders set Super Bowl record with 9 catches for 193 yards. Timmy Smith, who had never started a game before, broke Marcus Allen's rushing record with 204 yards and 2 touchdowns. Doug Williams' record four touchdowns in one quarter still stands. The Redskins ended the game 42-10, and Williams was named the game's Most Valuable Player.

The sports pages exploded. After a week of the non-stop stories about John Elway as the greatest quarterback in the league, it was Doug Williams who set multiple Super Bowl records and dominated the game. In the immediate aftermath, Williams was certain to become a member of football's pantheon of heroes. "Washington's latest hero became a superhero last night," proclaimed the *Washington Post*.⁴⁰⁵ Bernie Lincicome mused that "It is seldom that history and justice collide so convincingly, so indelibly, so publicly."⁴⁰⁶ "Doug Williams, who is black, maneuvered his way into your basic football immortality," wrote Steve Daley.⁴⁰⁷ On the front page of the *Wall Street Journal*, Leon Wynter confirmed, "Doug Williams displaced the image of whites only at quarterback. Forever."⁴⁰⁸ Judy Mann concurred, and thanked Williams for "putting to rest" the "prevailing wisdom" that black players are not smart enough to be quarterback.⁴⁰⁹ Rich Roberts gave the whole performance the nickname "The Quarter," in-line with other great NFL moments like "The Catch" and "The Guarantee." He described "The

⁴⁰⁵ John Lancaster and Lynda Richardson, "MVP Williams Wows 'Em in D.C."

⁴⁰⁶ Bernie Lincicome, "At Last, Williams Gets Reward."

⁴⁰⁷ Steve Daley, "Doug Williams justified the hype."

⁴⁰⁸ Leon Wynter, "A Black Hero Finally Gets His Due."

⁴⁰⁹ Judy Mann, "Putting Racism to Rest."

Quarter" as "the Washington Redskins' blitzkrieg destruction of the Broncos in a twilight dream sequence."⁴¹⁰ The Broncos agreed with that assessment; team owner Pat Bowlen called the game "an old-fashioned butt kicking," and the defensive coordinator called it a "nightmare."⁴¹¹ Denver head coach Dan Reeves simply told reporters, "We just couldn't stop 'em."⁴¹² To cap it off, President Ronald Reagan congratulated Williams for "one of the most inspiring performances displayed by any quarterback in football history."⁴¹³

The NFL Films highlight show was titled "Ambush at Super Bowl XXII," and set the stage for the audience: on one side, there were the Washington Redskins, and on the other was John Elway and his "superhuman talents."⁴¹⁴ In a self-aware moment, the narrator called Doug Williams "the Super Bowl's Rodney Dangerfield" for the lack of respect he received in guiding the team through the playoffs. The second quarter was described as "the most stunning 15 minutes of football in NFL history." The montage of Williams throwing touchdowns was overlaid with game announcer Frank Gifford calling him "a new Namath," for his "virtuoso performance." But for as laudatory "Ambush at Super Bowl XXII" was, it also included hints of marginalizing Williams in favor of giving credit to multiple standout players on the Redskins. Indeed, Sanders, Clark, Didier, and Smith all had great games, and the defense shut down the Broncos' top-rated offense for three quarters. The victory, according to NFL Films—and by association, the NFL—was "anything but a one-man show. It was simply the result of a team reaching perfection in all phases of the game." The popular narrative of the game was recentered by the sport's highest institutional authority; while the pregame focus was entirely on Williams, the victory was credited to the team.

⁴¹⁰ Rich Roberts, "Super Bowl XXII - The Incredible Quarter."

⁴¹¹ Michael Wilbon, "For Broncos, 'It was a Nightmare.'"

⁴¹² Mike Kupper, "Redskins Lasso Broncos."

⁴¹³ Ronald Reagan, "Remarks Congratulating the Washington Redskins on Winning Super Bowl XXII."

⁴¹⁴ NFL Films, "Ambush at Super Bowl XXII."

Advertising Outsider

In a more direct affront to Williams, he did not receive the kind of corporate sponsorship opportunities that the Super Bowl MVP had usually been offered. In the *Chicago Tribune*, Steve Daley had predicted that Williams would enter the "Enchanted Kingdom of commercial endorsements."⁴¹⁵ His optimism was warranted. Since Namath broke the barriers between advertising and sports, the television had created superstars and influenced how the public interacts with sports celebrities, and Super Bowl MVP was understood to be a lock for stardom. Unfortunately for Williams, television executives favored white heroes, often at the expense of their black peers.⁴¹⁶ Still, in 1986, Bears quarterback Jim McMahon signed over \$3 million in endorsements, and the 1987 MVP Phil Simms garnered just over \$1 million. Disney filmed Williams saying "I'm going to DisneyWorld," as had become tradition, but originally offered him less money than they gave Simms, reportedly \$20,000 to Simms' \$75,000.⁴¹⁷ Williams appeared on a Wheaties box, but along with other Redskins.⁴¹⁸ In multiple stories, advertising and marketing professionals attempted to explain why Williams was not getting the same opportunities as others. "Madison Avenue will likely have to sell Mr. Williams differently than Mr. Elway, because America was only prepared for another "first black" (a nice thought), not Terry Bradshaw's replacement," explained Leon Wynter.⁴¹⁹ Moreover, Williams was not guaranteed to be the starting quarterback the following season: "There is a 'cloud' hanging over Williams, and its name is Jay Schroeder," said Marty Blackman, an advertising executive.⁴²⁰

⁴¹⁵ Steve Daley, "Doug Williams Justified the Hype."

⁴¹⁶ Randolph Walker, "Heroes and TV."

⁴¹⁷ Tom Friend, "If They Want Me, It's Up To Them."

⁴¹⁸ Leon Wynter, "A Black Hero Finally Gets His Due."

⁴¹⁹ Ibid.

⁴²⁰ Tom Friend, "If They Want Me, It's Up To Them."

By July 1988, Williams had only signed \$127,500 worth of endorsements, a fraction of what his peers received. He was one of the only players at the time without a shoe sponsorship, forced to wear plain white shoes.⁴²¹ Before the Super Bowl, estimates were that Elway would get around \$2 million in deals if he won, and "if the Redskins win and Williams has an MVP-type performance," he could get over \$1 million.⁴²² The obvious conclusion was expressed by Clarence Page in the *Chicago Tribune*: "I am not usually quick to cry 'racism,' but in this case I don't know what else to call it."⁴²³ Others like Paul Mitchell of the *Philadelphia Tribune* echoed Page's frustration. In a column soaked in sarcasm, Mitchell apologized to the black community on behalf of the white media: "Doug Williams just was not our type. He is not the All-American boy. He's from the South. He talks funny. And he has those big lips. Don't get us wrong, Williams is a great quarterback, a great athlete, a true thoroughbred." He continued his sarcastic takedown of the media by explaining, "Hey, when Chicago won the Super Bowl two years ago we let Walter Payton grace the Wheaties box. Wasn't that enough? We just can't let our white children and more important, your children grow up with Doug Williams as our role model for this year!"⁴²⁴

Not everyone agreed that it was explicitly racially motivated, but rather that marketability was more about looks and personality than skin color. From this perspective, Williams was compared to Terry Bradshaw, a fellow Louisiana native and record-setting Super Bowl MVP, but who also was off the radar of advertising agencies. One publicist jokingly asked, "You know how many commercial Bradshaw would've done if he'd had hair?"⁴²⁵ Others attempted to disprove racism by blaming the crack epidemic. "Companies have nightmares of getting an

⁴²¹ Patrick McGeehan, "Super Deals: There's More at Stake Than Championship Ring."

⁴²² Craig Modderno, "Bowling for Dollars."

⁴²³ Clarence Page, "Why You Haven't Seen Doug Williams in TV Commercials."

⁴²⁴ Paul Mitchell, "Williams Made Most U.S. Media Eat Crow."

⁴²⁵ Tom Friend, "If They Want Me, It's Up To Them."

athlete and having the guy come up on a drug charge," said Don Smith, marketing executive.⁴²⁶ The problem with that was Doug Williams had never been involved in any drug-related rumors or incidents and he was a supporter of Nancy Reagan's "Just Say No" program. The Winter Olympics were credited with drowning out demand for sports heroes, and the Redskins as a whole generally eschewed selling themselves; Williams was one of the most marketed players on the team. Lineman Russ Grimm shrugged off the criticism that the players were not flamboyant enough for the public: "We're a bunch of blue-collar guys, and the only way we make a name for ourselves is winning things like the Super Bowl."⁴²⁷ In that respect, Williams fit right in to the Redskins identity. His small team of advisers tried to establish his brand as that of devoted family man with an incredible life story—"Mom was an elementary school cook; dad worked construction; sixth of eight children; Grambling star; top Tampa Bay draft pick; racial tension follows; wife dies; contract disputes; joins another league; joins Redskins, never plays, finally gets chance."⁴²⁸

The Values of Popular Culture

Unfortunately for Williams, his story and persona as the good-hearted champion did not catch on and he quickly faded from the nation's attention. The Redskins traded Jay Schroeder and made Williams the starting quarterback for the 1988 season, but they finished 7-9 and missed the playoffs. The following year, Williams was moved to backup behind Mark Rypien and he retired at the end of the season. It is impossible to discount the pervasiveness of the racial component, but the combination of all of these factors may have created a perfect storm of disrespect for Williams in popular culture. Unlike Namath, who remained in the public eye long

⁴²⁶ "Redskins' Williams Says Ad Execs. Shy Away From Him as an Endorser."

⁴²⁷ Tom Friend, "These Redskins Simply Do Not Sell."

⁴²⁸ Tom Friend, "If They Want Me, It's Up To Them."

after his Super Bowl success, Williams was out of the spotlight almost immediately after his Super Bowl heroics. He blames racism for much of his career trajectory, which he detailed in the 1990 autobiography, *Quarterblack*. But Williams does live on as a legendary figure, especially to black football fans. He remains a Redskins hero, and despite the NFL's odd attempts to marginalize his contributions, Williams is a significant figure in the racial history of professional football.

Comparing Williams to Namath, several differences are immediately apparent and help illuminate how figures from one segment of popular culture can transcend and become truly situated in all of popular culture, not just one aspect of it. Both Namath and Williams had stellar, nationally recognized college careers and became franchise quarterbacks in the pros. Both had instant success but were frequently hobbled by injuries. And both won Super Bowls in dramatic fashion that captured the public's imagination. But the differences were many and immediate. While Namath was made the highest paid quarterback, Williams was the lowest. Namath stayed with the Jets through multiple contracts, only leaving for one season at the end of his career. Williams left Tampa Bay in his prime after a bitter contract dispute, going to a rival league. Throughout his career, Williams was a labor agitator, defending and participating in two strikes. Namath was famously apolitical, even when it clearly aligned with his personal beliefs. Both Williams and Namath were principled, but Williams' principles were expressed through introspection and strong work ethic, while Namath's principles led to dramatic outbursts on live television. Williams knew he was going to win Super Bowl XXII, but chose not to "pull a Namath," because that was not his personality.⁴²⁹ Comparing Namath and Williams brings up an interesting discussion on the value of authenticity in creating celebrity and popular culture resonance. Namath's supposed authenticity was heavily managed by advertising agencies and

⁴²⁹ Doug Williams, 155.

lawyers. Williams' authenticity was somewhat anti-social and walled him off from opportunities. The self-control and professionalism that Williams prided himself on can be seen as a detriment from the perspective of creating a place in popular culture.

A fundamental assumption of the poplore interpretation is that popular culture reflects the wishes, values, and anxieties of the people who engage with popular culture. To that end, if something or someone fails to resonate in popular culture, like Doug Williams, it should be instructive to look at how the people view the situation. In a letter to the editor, published August 1, 1988, Kevin Cuthbert replied to Clarence Page's conclusion that Williams was a victim of racism in the advertising realm.⁴³⁰ It is a remarkable letter for its ability to summarize and convey the confluence of biases that couched every part of Williams' career.

I was very disappointed in Clarence Page's one-sided commentary on Doug Williams' inability to make more money after the Washington Redskins beat the Denver Broncos in the last Super Bowl.

I have come to know Mr. Page as an astute, albeit one-dimensional, columnist and political commentator. Unfortunately, he is conversant in only one area-race-and even then he often ignores facts that oppose his views. Here are some facts that Mr. Page only hints at in one small paragraph of his column.

Doug Williams has not cultivated his image as a sports personality as have McMahon, Elway, Bosworth and Jordan. Williams' handling of the hype associated with being the first black quarterback in the Super Bowl was admirable. Unfortunately, advertisers do not seek endorsements from soft-spoken sports personalities.

In addition, Williams is still to a large extent unproven as an NFL quarterback. He undoubtedly has a great deal of talent, but his use of it to date has been quite inconsistent. In no way does this understate his achievement in the Super Bowl. His was an outstanding performance in a high-pressure situation.

⁴³⁰ Kevin Cuthbert, "Voice of the People: Sports stars must earn endorsements."

However, prior to that performance, Williams played with several teams without much success or distinction.

When Mr. Williams' agent was asked to comment on the quarterback's relative lack of endorsements, he conceded that they have not done much in the way of seeking out potential advertisers. The agent commented that "they (advertisers) know how to get hold of me. . . . We are not going to go after them." In fact, they have actually turned down endorsements, calling the compensation an insult.

Don't they know that successful endorsements are self-propagating? If Mr. Williams wants endorsement money he should start by retaining a new agent. In the absence of a unique public image or recognizable characteristics (e.g., William Perry), an athlete must be increasingly aggressive due to the shrinking market for endorsements by sports personalities.

I would bet that Phil Simms and his agent were more aggressive after the New York Giants' Super Bowl victory. Simms had the benefit of playing in our most commercial of cities, rather than our most political. He also happened to be on a clearly dominant team and had a great season, not just one great game. To achieve big endorsement money, one must sell one's own character and have the right circumstance.

The bottom line for advertisers is that they want individuals with high name recognition to sell their products. Why use Doug Williams when you can have a Walter Payton, Michael Jordan or O.J. Simpson? It does not make business sense, and that is how these decisions are made.

Let's not forget that Doug Williams was paid good money to quarterback the Redskins in the Super Bowl. He undoubtedly will be paid substantially more this season due to his performance. This is fine because he earned it. He has not, however, earned or strived for anything beyond that. One can only assume that Mr. Williams prefers a more private profile than other big endorsers who constantly open themselves to public scrutiny.

Why, then, are Williams and Page complaining?

Cuthbert's letter is saturated with racist implications, classist judgments, and a general selfishness coupled with entitlement. He scolds Page for blaming racism and questions his intelligence, before "educating" Page with "facts" that amount to giving his opinion of Doug Williams as a bland person, and then blames Williams for not being a good enough quarterback or trying hard enough to get paid, unlike Phil Simms, who he assumes was more proactive in getting endorsements. He ends with a reminder to Page and the rest of the readers that Williams really should be happy he got paid what he did, and stop complaining. As a reflection of the psyche of popular culture, that letter seems appropriate. Cuthbert clearly expressed what he values: flamboyant and controversial athletes, naked greed, and an owner-centric relationship to labor.

To be clear, the values of popular culture are not always noble or positive. The impulse that sometimes affects those who study culture is to focus on the good beliefs or the good customs, or to see traditions as beneficial to the community. Negative and malevolent values are also reflected and transmitted through cultural expressions. Recognizing that, the case of Doug Williams is perhaps easier to understand. If Cuthbert is really the "Voice of the People," as the column was titled, then it would be appropriate to use his biases and preconceptions as an insight into what popular culture wanted out of its heroes and how Williams did not align with any of those values. The Namath type of hero was a character with the symbolic meaning of a folk hero, but produced in, by, and for popular culture. Popular culture did not want Williams, so he had no chance of transcending into poplore legend.

The Future of Poplore

The poplore dynamic of popular culture being used in folkloric ways is not limited to professional football, but is applicable across the spectrum of popular culture genres, communities, and forms. The significant change in perspective is to look at popular culture as both the subject and the object; the producer of popular culture and the consumer of popular culture. Popular culture texts that are understood to be fictional, like movies or television shows, can be categorized as tales, but the related genres of "based on a true story," or documentaries complicate the matter. Audiences are meant to believe they are watching accurate and factual narratives, but the stories are often heavily dramatized and edited by the producers, writers, and directors. Operating more as popular culture legends, the movies want the audience to believe what they are watching and question which parts are more real than others.

Similarly, documentaries are usually framed as objective, despite the active editing and narrative partiality. Ken Burns is a master at his craft, but his craft is making movies, not writing history, or as he calls them, "emotional archaeology."⁴³¹ Through his documentaries, those become intertwined and Ken Burns gets elevated to historical authority. His documentaries are celebrated for their innovation, sentimentality, and for their length, an implicit indication of depth and accuracy.⁴³² The high-low storytelling gives voices to common men and women as well as Presidents and Generals, allowing the audience multiple points of access, on both sides of controversial topics, making no explicit judgments on which side was right or wrong.⁴³³ The tactic is extremely effective as a storytelling tool, and for many who watch his documentaries, it is an educational experience—the history of baseball, the Civil War, or Vietnam are made cinematic and therefore more easily consumed by a public trained to watch movies, not read

⁴³¹ Ian Parker, "Ken Burns's American Canon."

⁴³² James Poniewozik, "Review: Ken Burns' 'Vietnam War' Will Break Your Heart and Win Your Mind."

⁴³³ Alex Shephard, "The Insidious Ideology of Ken Burns's The Vietnam War."

historical tomes.⁴³⁴ But the poplore dynamic is in full effect with Burns and his films. The information that Burns teaches America becomes a part of the public's traditional memory of those events, either supplanting formal education or recontextualizing facts into more dramatic stories. The audience trusts Burns is telling them the truth, just as the audience trusts NFL Films is telling them the truth.⁴³⁵ The texture of that truth is what makes it resonate, though, and transforms John Facenda's voice into the "voice of God," and Shelby Foote's drawl into the voice of Lost Cause revisionism.⁴³⁶

The ultimate goal of poplore, in as much as it can be said to have one, is the grounding of popular culture in true events, but rephrased to fit the needs of current society. From the past invented by popular culture (recent or distant, it does not matter), lore is created. Documentaries and current events show that by the reframing history. The music industry also heavily influences the language of popular culture. Song lyrics become proverbial or signifiers of group inclusion and famous musicians and singers become celebrities in ways similar to that outlined with Namath, wherein their real lives are turned into a managed legend. The twenty-first century shift toward digital culture complicates the relationship, but the paradigms are still at work. While folklorists have looked at the ways in which folkloric processes are reproduced in an online environment, they have spent significant time looking for ways in which classic genres of folklore are repurposed.⁴³⁷ This is in parallel to the folkloresque orientation, which looks for folklore entering popular culture. Poplore explicitly highlights the inverse, the popular culture that gets adopted as folklore.

⁴³⁴ Bill Carter, "Civil War' Sets an Audience Record for PBS."

⁴³⁵ James M. Lundberg, "Thanks a Lot, Ken Burns."

⁴³⁶ Peter Tonguette, "With The Civil War, Ken Burns Reinvented the Television History Documentary and Captivated Millions of Americans."

⁴³⁷ Trevor J. Blank, ed., *Folk Culture in the Digital Age*; Trevor J. Blank and Robert Glenn Howard, eds., *Tradition in the Twenty-First Century*; et al.

In a social media context, this would be phenomena such as a person (famous or not) "going viral" or becoming a meme. Some of the most famous and common memes are popular culture images, repurposed for folkloric expression.⁴³⁸ Well-known memes like the Picard face-palm,⁴³⁹ "One Does Not Simply Walk Into Mordor,"⁴⁴⁰ and "Look at All the Fucks I Give,"⁴⁴¹ are explicitly taken from popular culture, distilled into their basic emotional or rhetorical meaning, and used across the multiple linguistic and social barriers of the internet to express an understood meaning. Digital folklorists have done a considerable amount of work in a short period of time identifying and analyzing internet-based culture, and classifying these memes as poplore does not remove them from folklorists' research, rather it enhances the depth of analysis. The Picard face-palm meme has both poplore and folklore aspects: it is a popular culture image, used as folkloric expression (poplore); it is used in repetition and with variation across the internet (folklore); and it has re-entered popular culture as a consumer good (folkloresque; see Figs. 14 and 15).

⁴³⁸ The website "Know Your Meme" is a very good but not comprehensive repository of internet cultural forms defined as memes. Although, their definition of meme is somewhat loose.

⁴³⁹ "Facepalm."

⁴⁴⁰ "One Does Not Simply Walk Into Mordor."

⁴⁴¹ "Look at All the Fucks I Give."



Figure 14. Picard Face-palm Bust. Sold by Thinkgeek.

Figure 15. Bronze Picard Face-palm Bust. Sold by Thinkgeek.

The modern relationship between popular culture and folkloric expression is symbiotic and complicated. Poplore allows researchers to look at the ways in which popular culture asserts agency over itself, and the ways in which individuals can use popular culture as a way to express their values, beliefs, and anxieties. The technology of the twentieth century reorganized American society by shifting populations into depersonalized suburbs and making the television the focal point of the home, but it did not replace the need for communities. Americans were connected through popular culture, the entertainment, news, and politics that they consumed in their living rooms, separately but simultaneously. Lore was created from those communities, and distributed through mass media. The lore served all the same purposes and took on all the same forms as it always had. Popular culture jargon, songs, customs, beliefs, material culture, and narratives were created and their meanings negotiated on television sets, movie theaters, and radio broadcasts around the country. The result was after World War II, a new American identity was formed, rooted in popular culture. Sports like professional football gave that

identity a language of metaphors and symbols through which it could express itself. Football was an expression of American geopolitical dominance, a balance between violent chaos and structured hierarchy. Football was a medium through which race relations were navigated, and masculinity defined (and redefined). Professional football was used by advertisers and advertisers were used by professional football. The Super Bowl became a national festival, a celebration of excess that better reflected popular culture than any other holiday. Through it all, the role of lore did not change, nor did it disappear, it simply got reimagined as poplore—the lore of popular culture.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- "0-26 Bucs." *The Timeline*. NFL Films. Nov. 23, 2016.
- "19th Hole: Letters to the Editor," *Sports Illustrated*. Jun. 30, 1969.
- A Chilly Championship*. NFL Films. 1967.
- Abrams, Al. "Sidelights on Sports." *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*. Apr. 21, 1961.
- . "Sidelights on Sports." *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*. Jul. 18, 1962.
- . "Sidelights on Sports." *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*. Jan. 11, 1969.
- Adorno, Theodor W. *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, edited by J. M. Bernstein. Routledge Classics, [1991], 2004.
- "Alabama Drops Namath For Training Infractions." *New York Times*. Dec. 10, 1963.
- Albright, Mary Beth. "History of Tailgating." *National Geographic*. Nov. 5, 2014.
<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/people-and-culture/food/the-plate/2014/11/05/history-of-tailgating>
- Ambush as Super Bowl XXII*. NFL Films. 1988.
- Anagnostou, Yiorgos. "Metaethnography in the Age of 'Popular Folklore.'" *Journal of American Folklore* 119, no. 474 (Fall 2006): 381-412.
- Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Verso, [1983] 2006.
- Anderson, Dave. "Jets Upset Colts By 16-7 For Title in the Super Bowl." *New York Times*. Jan. 13, 1969.
- . "Namath: AFL Clubs Can 'Kill' Giants." *New York Times*. Apr. 30, 1969.
- . "Joe Namath: Man Of Defiance." *New York Times*. Jun. 5, 1969.
- . "Courage of Convictions Could Throw Namath for \$5 Million Loss." *New York Times*. Jun. 7, 1969.
- AP. "National Football League's First Rule Change In 4 Years Bans Mask Tackles." *New York Times*. Jan. 10, 1962.

- . "Crimson Tide Led By Namath, Clark: Alabama Extends String Of Unbeaten Games To 20 By Routing Tulane." *New York Times*. Sep. 29, 1962.
- . "Pick Alabama Over Sooners: Oklahoma Defends Orange Bowl String." *Chicago Daily Tribune*. Dec. 24, 1962.
- . "Induct 17 in Pro Football Hall of Fame." *Chicago Tribune*. Sep. 1, 1963.
- . "Jets Offer \$389,000 For Joe Namath." *Chicago Tribune*. Dec. 30, 1964.
- . "John Facenda is Dead At 72, Narrator Of N.F.L. Highlights." *New York Times*. Sep. 27, 1984.
- . "Late-Breaking Information On Trades, Signing." Aug. 11, 1986.
- "Apolitical Namath Sees Enemy Listing as 'Crazy'" *Washington Post*. Jun. 30, 1973.
- Arpad, Joseph. "Review Essays: Folklore Or Popular Culture Studies? "Poplore: Folk And Pop In American Culture," By Gene Bluestein." *Journal of American Culture* 19, Iss. 3 (Fall 1996): 113-115.
- Baltimore Colts Vs. New York Jets: The World Championship Of Professional Football*. NFL Films. 1969.
- Barthes, Roland. *Mythologies*, trans. by Richard Howard and Annette Lavers. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, [1957] 2012.
- Bascom, William R. "Four Functions Of Folklore." *Journal Of American Folklore* 67, no. 266 (Oct. - Dec. 1954): 333-349.
- . "The Forms Of Folklore: Prose Narratives" *Journal of American Folklore* 78, no. 307 (Jan. - Mar. 1965): 3-20.
- Basen, Ryan. "50 Years Ago the Washington Redskins Were the Last Team to Integrate." *New York Times*. Oct. 6, 2012.
- Battista, Judy. "Defense Once Won Titles, But Score Has Changed." *New York Times*. Jan. 13, 2012. <https://www.newyorktimes.com/2012/01/14/sports/football/defense-once-won-nfl-titles-but-no-longer.html>
- Baudrillard, Jean. *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. by Sheila Faria Glaser. The University of Michigan Press, [1981] 1994.
- . *America*, trans. by Chris Turner. Verso, [1986], 2010.
- Bauman, Richard. *Verbal Art as Performance*. Waveland Press, [1977], 1984.

- Bayless, Skip. "The All-American QB, but Black." *Los Angeles Times*. Dec. 6, 1977.
- Beckart, Sven. *The Monied Metropolis: New York City And The Consolidation Of The American Bourgeoisie, 1850–1896*. Cambridge University Press, 2003.
- Berlin, Erika. "45 Years Of Monday Night Football's Memorable Theme Music." *MentalFloss.com*. Sep. 21, 2015. <http://Mentalfloss.Com/Article/68832/45-Years-Monday-Night-Footballs-Memorable-Theme-Music>
- Berman, Chris. Interview With Rich Eisen. NFL Network. Feb. 2, 2017. <http://www.nfl.Com/Videos/Rich-Eisen-Show/0ap3000000782324/Chris-Berman-The-Best-Nicknames-Were-Ones-That-Everybody-Understood>
- Blank, Trevor J., ed. *Folklore and the Internet: Vernacular Expression in a Digital World*. Utah State University Press, 2009.
- . *Folk Culture in the Digital Age: The Emergent Dynamics of Human Interaction*. Utah State University Press, 2012.
- Blank, Trevor J. and Robert Glenn Howard, eds. *Tradition in the Twenty-First Century: Locating the Role of the Past in the Present*. Utah State University Press, 2013.
- Blaszczyk, Regina Lee. *American Consumer Society, 1865-2005: From Hearth to HDTV*. Harlan Davidson, Inc., 2009.
- Bloom, John D. "Joe Namath And Super Bowl III: An Interpretation Of Style." *Journal of Sport History* 15, no. 1 (Spring 1988).
- Bluestein, Gene. *Poplore: Folk and Pop in American Culture*. University of Massachusetts Press, 1994.
- Borer, Michael Ian. *Faithful to Fenway: Believing in Boston, Baseball, and America's Most Beloved Ballpark*. New York University Press, 2008.
- Boyle, Robert H. "AFL Verdict: Not Quite A Hit." *Sports Illustrated*. Sep. 19, 1960.
- . "The Underdogs Have Made It." *Sports Illustrated*. Nov. 12, 1962.
- . "Show-Biz Sonny And His Quest For Stars." *Sports Illustrated*. Jul. 19, 1965.
- Brady, Dave. "Five Top NFL Draftees Still Bickering." *Washington Post*. Jul. 14, 1978.
- Braunstein, Peter and Michael William Doyle, eds. *Imagine Nation: The American Counterculture of the 1960s & '70s*. Routledge, 2002.

- Brennan, Christine. "Williams Restless As Redskins Drill." *Washington Post*. Jul. 28, 1987.
- . "Williams Answers A Critic." *Washington Post*. Aug. 28, 1987.
- "Broadway Joe Kisses Suzy Kolber." <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gc65NC44dSk>
- Brody, Tom C. "C.B. DeMille Of The Pros." *Sports Illustrated*. Nov. 20, 1967.
- Bronner, Simon J. *American Folklore Studies: An Intellectual History*. University Press of Kansas, 1986.
- . *Grasping Things: Folk Material Culture and Mass Society in America*. The University Press of Kentucky, 1986.
- . "Art, Performance, And Praxis: The Rhetoric Of Contemporary Folklore Studies." *Western Folklore* 47 (1988): 75-101.
- . *Explaining Traditions: Folk Behavior in Modern Culture*. The University Press of Kentucky, 2011
- . *Campus Traditions: Folklore from the Old-Time College to the Modern Mega-University*. University Press of Mississippi, 2012.
- . "Toward A Definition Of Folklore As Practice." *Cultural Analysis* 15 (2016): 6-27.
- . *Folklore: The Basics*. Routledge, 2017.
- Bronner, Simon J., ed. *Folk Nation: Folklore in the Creation of American Tradition*. Scholarly Resources, Inc., 2002.
- . *Manly Traditions: The Folk Roots of American Masculinities*. Indiana University Press, 2005.
- . *The Meaning of Folklore: The Analytical Essays of Alan Dundes*. Utah State University Press, 2007.
- Brown, Paula. "Big Man, Past And Present: Model, Person, Hero, Legend." *Ethnology* 29, no. 2 (Apr. 1990): 97-115.
- Brunvand, Jan Harold. *The Study of American Folklore*. W. W. Norton & Company, [1968] 1986.
- Brunvand, Jan Harold, ed. *American Folklore: An Encyclopedia*. Garland Publishing, Inc., 1996.

- Bryant, Paul And John Underwood. *Bear: The Hard Life And Good Times Of Alabama's Coach Bryant*. Little, Brown, 1975.
- "Bucs Clarify Williams' Pact," *New York Times*. Nov. 17, 1979.
- Campbell, Joseph. *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*. New World Library, [1949] 2008.
- Carlin, George. *Carlin on Campus*. Eardrum Records, 1984.
- Carter, Beth. "Tailgate Parties are a 'Powerful Impulse' and a Microcosm of Society." *Wired.com*. Sep. 21, 2012. <https://www.wired.com/2012/09/anthropology-of-tailgating>
- Carter, Bill. "'Civil War' Sets an Audience Record for PBS." *New York Times*. Sep. 25, 1990.
- Clary, Jack. *Field of Valor: Duty, Honor, Country, and Winning the Heisman*. Triumph Books, 2002.
- Clifford, James. *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art*. Harvard University Press, 1988.
- Coenen, Craig R. *From Sandlots to the Super Bowl: The National Football League, 1920-1967*. The University of Tennessee Press, 2005.
- Cohen, Rich. "They Taught America How to Watch Football." *The Atlantic*. Oct. 2012.
- "Colts' Shula Praises, Blasts Jet's Namath." *Chicago Daily Defender*. Jan. 7, 1969.
- "Colts vs. Jets a Super Bowl Mismatch." *Sun Reporter* (San Francisco, Calif.) Jan. 11, 1969.
- Coull, James R. "Cultural Geography: Has It a Future?" *Area* 12, no. 2 (1980): 105-108.
- Crepeau, Richard C. *NFL Football: A History of America's New National Pastime*. University of Illinois Press, 2014.
- Cuthbert, Kevin. "Voice of the People: Sports stars must earn endorsements." *Chicago Tribune*. Aug. 1, 1988.
- Daley, Arthur. "Sports of the Times." *New York Times*. Sep. 9, 1963.
- . "Sports of The Times: Dream Combination." *New York Times*. Sep. 10, 1963.
- . "Sports of The Times: A Matter of Endurance." *New York Times*. Jan.1, 1965.
- Daley, Steve. "Doug Williams Justified the Hype." *Chicago Tribune*. Feb. 4, 1988.

- Danzig, Allison. "Alabama's Hopes Of Victory In Orange Bowl Dim As Namath Reinjures Knee: Top Quarterback Hurt In Practice Alabama Also Worried About Sloan, His Understudy, Who Has Knee Problem." *New York Times*. Dec. 29, 1964.
- Dégh, Linda. *American Folklore and the Mass Media*. Indiana University Press, 1994.
- Denlinger, Ken. "Magic '70 Chip' Ends Four Decades of Trying." *Washington Post*. Jan. 31, 1982.
- Dorson, Richard M. *American Folklore and the Historian*. The University of Chicago Press, 1971
- . "Defining the American Folk Legend," *Béaloideas* 39/41 (1971 - 1973): 112-126.
- . *American Folklore*. University of Chicago Press, [1959] 1977.
- Dorson, Richard M., ed. *Folklore in the Modern World*. Moulton Publishers, The Hague, 1978.
- Dundes, Alan. "Into the Endzone for a Touchdown: A Psychoanalytical Consideration of American Football." *Western Folklore* 37, no. 2 (Apr. 1978): 75-88.
- . *Interpreting Folklore*. Indiana University Press, 1980.
- . *From Game to War and Other Psychoanalytical Essays on Folklore*. The University Press of Kentucky, 1997.
- Dundes, Alan, ed. *International Folkloristics: Classic Contributions by the Founders of the Field*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1999.
- Dundes, Alan and Carl Pagter. *Work Hard and You Shall Be Rewarded: Urban Folklore from the Paperwork Empire*. Wayne State University Press, 1992.
- Dunnavant, Keith. *Bart Starr: America's Quarterback and the Rise of the National Football League*. Thomas Dunne Books, 2011.
- Early, Gerald. *The Culture of Bruising: Essays on Prizefighting, Literature, and Modern American Culture*. The Ecco Press, 1994.
- Eitzen, D. Stanley. *Fair and Foul: Beyond the Myths and Paradoxes of Sport*, 6th ed. Rowman & Littlefield, 2016.
- Eskanazi, Gerald. "Namath Is Linked To Dice Players: But He Denies Mafia Ran Game In His Apartment." *New York Times*. Jun. 19, 1969.

- . "Namath Moves Toward Compromise On Restaurant Issue: Star Would Place Interest In Trust But Advisers Fear Rozelle Will Insist On Complete Break From Business." *New York Times*. Jun. 20, 1969.
- Evans, Howie. "Jets: 'We Proved Them All Wrong.'" *New Amsterdam News*. Jan. 18, 1969.
- . "NCAA Bias: A Case for Doug Williams." *New York Amsterdam News*. Dec. 3, 1977.
- "Facepalm." KnowYourMeme.com. <https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/facepalm>.
- "Facts and History." ProFootballHoF.com. <https://www.profootballhof.com/visit/hall-of-fame-history/>.
- Falk, Gerhard. *Football and American Identity*. The Haworth Press, 2005.
- Falk, John H. *Identity and the Museum Visitor Experience*. Left Coast Press, Inc., 2009.
- Falk, John H. and Lynn D. Dierking. *The Museum Experience Revisited*. Left Coast Press, Inc., 2013.
- Filene, Benjamin. *Romancing the Folk: Public Memory & American Roots Music*. The University of North Carolina Press, 2000.
- Fine, Gary Alan. *With the Boys: Little League Baseball and Preadolescent Culture*. The University of Chicago Press, 1987.
- Fiske, Shirley. "Pigskin Review: An American Initiation." In *The Nacerrima: Readings on American Culture*, edited by James P. Spradley and Michael A. Rynkiewich, 55-68. Little, Brown and Company, 1975.
- Forbes, Gordon. "Colts to Put Everything on the Line Sunday, Shula Says." *Philadelphia Inquirer*. Jan. 11, 1969.
- Forney, Craig A. *The Holy Trinity of American Sports: Civil Religion in Football, Baseball, and Basketball*. Mercer University Press, 2010.
- Foster, Michael Dylan and Jeffrey A. Tolbert, eds. *The Folkloresque: Reframing Folklore in a Popular Culture World*. Utah State University Press, 2016.
- Foucault, Michel. "What is an author?" In *Modernity and its Discontents: Making and Unmaking the Bourgeois from Machiavelli to Bellow*, edited by Stephen B. Smith. Yale University Press, 2016.
- "Four Field Goals Set Back Rebels: Davis Connects on Kicks of 48, 46, 31 and 22 Yards in Sugar Bowl Game." *New York Times*. Jan. 2, 1964.

- Fox, Margalit. "Ray Browne, 87, Founder of Pop-Culture Studies, Dies." *New York Times*. Oct. 27, 2009.
- Fox, William S. "Folklore and Fakelore: Some Sociological Considerations." *Journal of the Folklore Institute* 17, no. 2/3 (May - Dec. 1980): 244-261.
- Foxworth, Domonique. "It's Time We Modify the Old Adage 'Defense Wins Championships.'" *The Undefeated*. Dec. 8, 2018. <https://theundefeated.com/features/its-time-we-modify-old-adage-defense-wins-championships/>
- Frank, Thomas. *The Conquest of Cool: Business Culture, Counterculture, and the Rise of Hip Consumerism*. The University of Chicago Press, 1997.
- Friend, Tom. "These Redskins Simply Do Not Sell," *Washington Post*. Apr. 19, 1988.
- . "If They Want Me, It's Up To Them." *Washington Post*. Apr. 20, 1988.
- "Generous Support Started HOF." <https://www.profootballhof.com/news/generous-support-started-hof/>.
- Georges, Robert A. and Michael Owen Jones, eds. *Folkloristics: An Introduction*. Indiana University Press, 1995.
- Glassie, Henry. *Pattern in the Material Folk Culture of the Eastern United States*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 1968.
- Gmelch, George J. "Baseball Magic" In *The Nacrerima: Readings on American Culture*, edited by James P. Spradley and Michael A. Rynkiewich, 348-352. Little, Brown and Company, 1975.
- Goff, Brian. "Defense Wins Championships In The NFL: Fact Or Folklore?" *Forbes*. Jan. 14, 2019. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/briangoff/2019/01/14/defense-wins-championships-in-the-nfl-fact-or-folklore/>
- Goffman, Erving. *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*. Harper and Row, 1974.
- Goldaper, Sam. "Namath Hires Ex-F.B.I. Agent for Restaurant." *New York Times*. Jun. 16, 1969.
- . "Namath 5-1 People's Choice in Dispute With Rozelle." *New York Times*. Jun. 17, 1969.
- Gramsci, Antonio. "Observations on Folklore." In *International Folkloristics: Classic Contributions by the Founders of the Field*, edited by Alan Dundes, 131-136. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1999.

- Guiliano, Jennifer. *Indian Spectacle: College Mascots and the Anxiety of Modern America*. Rutgers University Press, 2015.
- Hall, Stuart and Tony Jefferson, eds. *Resistance through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-war Britain*. Routledge, [1975], 2006.
- Hall, Stuart, Jessica Evans, and Sean Nixon, eds. *Representation*, 2nd ed. The Open University, 2013.
- Hardt, Michael and Kathi Weeks, eds. *The Jameson Reader*. Blackwell Publishers, Ltd., 2000.
- Hariman, Robert and John Louis Lucaites. *No Caption Needed: Iconic Photographs, Public Culture, and Liberal Democracy*. University of Chicago Press, 2007.
- Harrington, Richard. "Rockin' Around The Redskins." *Washington Post*. Jan. 21, 1984.110
- Hedges, Inez. "Surrealist Metaphor: Frame Theory and Componential Analysis." *Poetics Today* 4 no. 2 (1983) : 275-295.
- Higgs, Robert J. *God in the Stadium: Sports & Religion in America*. The University Press of Kentucky, 1995.
- "History, 1931-1940." NFL.com. <http://www.nfl.com/history/chronology/1931-1940>.
- Hobsbawm, Eric and Terence Ranger, eds. *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge University Press, [1983], 2013.
- Horkheimer, Max and Theodor W. Adorno. *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, ed. by Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. by Edmund Jephcott. Stanford University Press, 2002.
- Hughes, Richard T. *Myths America Lives By*. University of Illinois Press, 2003.
- Huizinga, Johan. *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture*. Beacon Press, [1950] 1968.
- Humphrey, Theodore C. and Lin T. Humphrey, eds. *"We Gather Together": Food and Festival in American Life*. UMI Research Press, 1988.
- Hyman, Mervin. "A Turn to Toughness: Bear Bryant's Rugged, Winning Ways at Alabama Have the South Looking to its Defense." *Sports Illustrated*. Sep. 24, 1962.
- "I'd Listen to Canada Offers: Joe." *Chicago Tribune*. Jun. 22, 1969.

- Jameson, Frederic. "On Goffman's Frame Analysis." *Theory and Society* 3, no. 1 (Spring 1976): 119-133.
- Jayne, Mark. "Cultural Geography, Consumption and the City." *Geography* 91, no. 1 (Spring 2006): 34-42.
- Jenkins, Dan. "The Sweet Life of Swinging Joe." *Sports Illustrated*. Oct. 17, 1966.
- "Jets Place Namath, Sauer and Philbin On A.F.L. All-Stars." *New York Times*. Dec. 24, 1968.
- "Jets Win One for Ol' NBC." *Variety* 253, Iss. 9. Jan. 15, 1969.
- Johnston, Sarah Iles. *The Story of Myth*. Harvard University Press, 2018.
- Johnson, William. "Mod Man Out." *Sports Illustrated*. Jun. 15, 1969.
- Kammen, Michael. *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture*. Random House, 1991.
- Karimova, Gulnara. "Carnavalesque Analysis of Popular Culture: 'Jackass,' 'South Park,' and 'Everyday' culture." *Studies in Popular Culture* 33, no. 1 (Fall 2010): 37-51.
- "Karras Suggests Rozelle Try Playing Quarterback." *New York Times*. Jun. 8, 1969.
- Kasson, John F. *Houdini, Tarzan, and the Perfect Man: The White Male Body and the Challenge of Modernity in America*. Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2001.
- Katz, Michael. "Bucs' Black Passer Supports Bias Charges." *New York Times*. Nov. 16, 1978.
- Keen, Judy. "Tailgating Isn't Just a Party, Research Shows." *USA Today*. Oct. 4, 2012.
- Kelley, Jimmy. "Steve Sabol's Discovery of 'Voice of God' John Facenda Set NFL Films Apart." NESN.com. Sep. 19., 2012. <https://nesn.com/2012/09/steve-sabols-discovery-of-voice-of-god-john-facenda-set-nfl-films-apart/>
- Kern, Edward. "Can it Happen Here?" *Life*. Oct. 17, 1969.
- Kimble, Julian. "The Types of People You Meet While Tailgating." *Complex*. Sep. 3, 2013. <https://www.complex.com/pop-culture/2013/09/the-types-of-people-you-meet-while-tailgating/the-trophy>
- Klapp, Orrin. "The Folk Hero." *Journal of American Folklore* 62, no. 243 (Jan. - Mar. 1949): 17-25.
- . "Hero Worship in America." *American Sociological Review* 14, no. 1 (Feb. 1949): 53-62.

- Koppett, Leonard. "Sports of The Times: Caesar's Wife." *New York Times*. Jun. 22, 1969.
- Kramer, Brute. "Beaver Falls Faces Many Grid Challenges." *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*. Sep. 3, 1961.
- Kramer, Jerry. *Instant Replay: The Green Bay Diary of Jerry Kramer*, with Dick Schaap. Anchor Books, [1968], 2006.
- Kretsedemas, Philip. "Examining Frame Formation in Peer Group Conversations." *The Sociological Quarterly* 41, no. 4 (Autumn 2000): 639-656.
- Kriegel, Mark. *Namath: A Biography*. Penguin Books, 2004.
- Kupper, Mike. "Redskins Lasso Broncos." *Los Angeles Times*. Feb. 1, 1988.
- Lancaster, John and Lynda Richardson. "MVP Williams Wows 'Em in D.C." *Washington Post*. Feb. 1, 1988.
- Leavis, F.R. "Mass Civilisation and Minority Culture." In *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture*, 4th ed., edited by John Storey, 12-19. Pearson Educational Ltd., 2009.
- Leonard, David J. and C. Richard King, eds. *Commodified and Criminalized: New Racism and African Americans in Contemporary Sports*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2011.
- Levine, Al. "Namath Gets No Respect from Morrall." *Miami News*. Nov. 16, 1972.
- Levine, Lawrence W. *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America*. Harvard University Press, 1988.
- Lincicome, Bernie. "At Last, Williams Gets Reward." *Chicago Tribune*. Feb. 1, 1988.
- Lindquist, Danille C. "'Locating the Nation:' Football Game Day and American Dreams in Central Ohio." *Journal of American Folklore* 119, no. 474 (Autumn 2006): 444-488.
- Little, Bill. "A fast start for MSU." *Tri-State Defender (Memphis, Tenn.)*. Dec. 3, 1977.
- Logan, Bob. "Not All of Williams' Foes are on Field." *Chicago Tribune*. Oct. 5, 1980.
- "Look at All the Fucks I Give." KnowYourMeme.com
<https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/look-at-all-the-fucks-i-give>.
- Lott, Eric. *Love & Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class*. Oxford University Press, 1995.

- Lundberg, James M. "Thanks a Lot, Ken Burns." *Slate*. Jun. 7, 2011.
<https://slate.com/culture/2011/06/ken-burns-civil-war-how-the-documentary-changed-the-way-we-think-about-the-war.html>
- MacCambridge, Michael. *America's Game: The Epic Story of How Pro Football Captured a Nation*. Anchor Books, 2005.
- . *Lamar Hunt: A Life in Sports*. Andrews McMeel Publishing, LLC, 2012.
- "Mafia Boss Listed Among Customers Of Namath's Place: Hoodlums Named At Namath's Bar." *New York Times*. Jun. 15, 1969.
- Mann, Judy. "Putting Racism to Rest." *Washington Post*. Feb. 3, 1988.
- Maraniss, David. *When Pride Still Mattered: A Life of Vince Lombardi*. Simon & Schuster, 1999.
- "Marching Band." Redskins.com. <https://www.redskins.com/stadium/marching-band>.
- "Marching Ravens." BaltimoreRavens.com. <https://www.baltimoreravens.com/fans/marching-ravens/>.
- Margolies, Daniel S. "Ethnographic and Folkloristic Study of Popular Culture" In *A Companion to Popular Culture*, edited by Gary Burn. John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., 2016.
- Marshall, Howard Wright and John Michael Vlach. "Toward a Folklife Approach to American Dialects." *American Speech* 48, no. 3/4 (Autumn - Winter, 1973): 163-191.
- Markus, Robert. "Jets Capture A.F.L. Crown, 27 to 23." *Chicago Tribune*. Dec. 30, 1968.
- Mathisen, James A. "American Sport as Folk Religion: Examining a Test of Its Strength." In *From Season to Season: Sports as American Religion*, edited by Joseph L. Price, 141-162. Mercer University Press, 2001.
- Maule, Tex. "Ridiculous! The NFL by 50 Points." *Sports Illustrated*. Dec. 16, 1963.
- . "Green Bay Handily." *Sports Illustrated*. Jan. 22, 1968.
- . "Many Substitutes for Victory." *Sports Illustrated*. Nov. 25, 1968.
- . "Baltimore Lowers the Boom." *Sports Illustrated*. Jan. 6, 1969.
- . "Say It's So Joe." *Sports Illustrated*. Jan. 20, 1969.
- May, Elaine Tyler. *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*. Basic Books, [1988] 2008.

- McCartney, Robert. "1933 News Article Refutes Cherished Tale That Redskins Were Named To Honor Indian Coach." *Washington Post*. May 28, 2014.
- McGeehan, Patrick. "Super Deals: There's More at Stake Than Championship Ring." *Advertising Age*. Jan. 25, 1988.
- McNeill, Lynne S. *Folklore Rules: A Fun, Quick, and Useful Introduction to the Field of Academic Folklore Studies*. Utah State University Press, 2013.
- Mechling, Jay. "An American Culture Grid, with Texts." *American Studies International* 27, no. 1 (April 1989): 2-12.
- . "Children and Colors: Folk and Popular Cultures in America's Future." In *Folk Nation: Folklore in the Creation of American Tradition*, edited by Simon J. Bronner. Scholarly Resources, Inc., 2002.
- Miller-McLemore, Bonnie. "United States Football as Religious Rite de Passage." In *From Season to Season: Sports as American Religion*, edited by Joseph L. Price, 115-136. Mercer University Press, 2001.
- "Mississippi Favored to Beat Alabama." *New York Times*. Jan. 1, 1964.
- Mitchell, Paul. "Williams Made Most U.S. Media Eat Crow." *Philadelphia Tribune*. Feb. 2, 1988.
- Mizell, Hubert. "Williams Guilty of Promoting Hype, Ill Will." *St. Petersburg Times*. Aug. 28, 1987.
- Modderno, Craig . "Bowling for Dollars." *Los Angeles Times*. Jan. 31, 1988.
- Montville, Leigh. "Off Broadway Joe." *Sports Illustrated*. Jul. 14, 1997.
- Mooney, Thomas J. "An Unfortunate Incident." *New York Times*. Jun. 22, 1969.
- Moskowitz, Tobias J. and L. Jon Wertheim. "Does Defense Really Win Championships?" *Freakonomics*. Jan. 20, 2012. <http://freakonomics.com/2012/01/20/does-defense-really-win-championships/>
- Mulvoy, Mark. "The AFL Has a Taste of Glory." *Sports Illustrated*. Sep. 4, 1967.
- Murray, Jim. "Williams: He's Also a Quarterback." *Los Angeles Times*. Jan. 31, 1988.
- "N.C. State Upset By Alabama." *Philadelphia Inquirer*. Oct. 11, 1964.
- Namath, Joe Willie. *I Can't Wait Until Tomorrow... 'Cause I Get Better-Looking Every Day*,

- with Dick Schaap. Random House, Inc., 1969.
- "Namath a Standout." *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*. Sep. 24, 1962.
- Namath Beauty Mist Pantyhose commercial: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_BCWvH2ISyI
- "Namath Guarantees Jets Will Beat the Colts." *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*. Jan. 11, 1969.
- Namath Noxema commercial: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OM59nSkjEWU>
- Namath Olivetti Typewriter commercial: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=svALJ5TYIvo>
- Namath Ovaltine commercial: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uouHisIoGqs>
- "National Football League Players Strike Over Wages, TV Revenue." *World News Digest*. Sep. 24, 1982.
- Newall, Venetia J. "The Adaptation of Folklore and Tradition (Folklorismus)." *Folklore* 98, no. 2 (1987): 131-151.
- No Title. *People*. March 1969.
- No Title. *Philadelphia Inquirer*. Dec. 10, 1963.
- Noyes, Dorothy. *Humble Theory: Folklore's Grasp on Social Life*. Indiana University Press, 2016.
- Oates, Thomas P. and Zack Furness, eds. *The NFL: Critical and Cultural Perspectives*. Temple University Press, 2014.
- "One Does Not Simply Walk Into Mordor." KnowYourMeme.com
<https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/one-does-not-simply-walk-into-mordor>.
- Oriard, Michael. "Professional Football as Culture Myth." *Journal of American Culture* 4, Iss. 3 (Fall 1981): 27-41.
- . *Sporting with the Gods: The Rhetoric of Play and Game in American Culture*. Cambridge University Press, 1991.
- . *Reading Football: How the Popular Press Created an American Spectacle*. The University of North Carolina Press, 1993.
- . *King Football: Sport & Spectacle in the Golden Age of Radio & Newsreels, Movies & Magazines, the Weekly & Daily Press*. The University of North Carolina Press, 2001.

- . *Brand NFL: Making & Selling America's Favorite Sport*. The University of North Carolina Press, 2007.
- . *Bowled Over: Big-Time College Football from the Sixties to the BCS Era*. The University of North Carolina Press, 2009.
- Oring, Elliot. "Ethnic Groups and Ethnic Folklore." In *Folk Groups and Folklore Genres: An Introduction*, edited by Elliot Oring, 23-44. Utah State University Press, 1986.
- Oring, Elliot, ed. *Folk Groups and Folklore Genres: An Introduction*. Utah State University Press, 1986.
- Page, Clarence. "Why You Haven't Seen Doug Williams in TV Commercials." *Chicago Tribune*. Jul. 13, 1988.
- Paolantonio, Sal. *How Football Explains America*. Triumph Books, 2008.
- Paredes, Americo and Richard Bauman, eds. *Toward New Perspectives in Folklore*. The University of Texas Press, 1972.
- Parker, Ian. "Ken Burns's American Canon," *New Yorker*. Aug. 28, 2017.
- "Parties Seek Goldberg As Mediator." *Chicago Daily Defender*. Jun. 17, 1969.
- Pennington, Bill. "Giants' Wide Receivers May End Long Drought." *New York Times*. Sep. 30, 2001.
- Peterseim, Locke. "Not Just Whistling Dixie in D.C." *ESPN Page 2*. Feb. 3, 2015.
- Peretti, Daniel. *Superman in Myth and Folklore*. University Press of Mississippi, 2017.
- "Players Chief Calls NFL a 'Monument to Racism.'" *Chicago Tribune*. Nov. 16, 1979.
- Poniewozik, James. "Review: Ken Burns' 'Vietnam War' Will Break Your Heart and Win Your Mind." *New York Times*. Sep. 14, 2017.
- Porter, Todd. "The Birth of the Pro Football Hall of Fame - 50 Years Ago." *Canton Repository*. Dec. 5, 2009.
- Povich, Shirley. "Show Biz Buffs Want Jets in Super Bowl." *Philadelphia Inquirer*. Dec. 19, 1968.
- Preston, Michael J. "Xerox-lore." *Keystone Folklore* 19 (1974): 11-26.
- Price, Joseph L. "The Super Bowl as Religious Festival." In *From Season to Season: Sports as American Religion*, edited by Joseph L. Price, 137-140. Mercer University Press, 2001.

- Price, Joseph L., ed. *From Season to Season: Sports as American Religion*. Mercer University Press, 2001.
- "Profiles of New Redskins," *Washington Post*. Aug. 13, 1986.
- Putney, Clifford. *Muscular Christianity: Manhood and Sports in Protestant America, 1880-1920*. Harvard University Press, 2001.
- Rader, Benjamin G. *American Sports: From the Age of Folk Games to the Age of Televised Sports*, 6th ed. Pearson Prentice Hall, 2009.
- Rank, Adam. "Forgotten Hero: Washington Broke NFL's Color Barrier in 1946." NFL.com. Feb. 17, 2012.
- Reagan, Ronald. "Remarks Congratulating the Washington Redskins on Winning Super Bowl XXII." Feb. 3, 1988. Accessed through the Reagan Library Online.
- "Redskins' Williams Says Ad Execs. Shy Away From Him as an Endorser." *New Pittsburgh Courier*. Jul. 23, 1988.
- "Reporters and Coaches Agree: Namath No. 1 Player in A.F.L." *New York Times*. Dec. 25, 1968.
- Reyburn, Susan, ed. *Football Nation: Four Hundred Years of America's Game*. Abrams/Library of Congress, 2013.
- Rhoden, William C. *Forty Million Dollar Slaves: The Rise, Fall, and Redemption of the Black Athlete*. Three Rivers Press, 2006.
- . *Third and a Mile: The Trials and Triumphs of the Black Quarterback*. ESPN Books, 2007.
- Roberts, Rich. "Super Bowl XXII - The Incredible Quarter." *Los Angeles Times*. Feb. 1, 1988.
- Rosa, Joseph G. *The Gunfighter: Man or Myth?* The University of Oklahoma Press, 1969.
- Ross, Charles K. *Outside the Lines: African Americans and the Integration of the National Football League*. New York University Press, 1999.
- . *Mavericks, Money, and Men: The AFL, Black Players, and the Evolution of Modern Football*. Temple University Press, 2016.
- Rotundo, E. Anthony. *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era*. Basic Books, 1993.

- "Rozelle Wins It!" *Chicago Daily Defender*. Jul. 21, 1969.
- Sahlins, Marshall D. "Poor Man, Rich Man, Big-Man, Chief" Political Types in Melanesia and Polynesia. *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 5, no. 3 (Apr. 1963): 285-303.
- "Sample to Meet With Jet Mates In an Effort to Back Up Namath." *New York Times*. Jun. 15, 1969.
- Samuel, Lawrence R. *The American Dream: A Cultural History*. Syracuse University Press, 2012.
- Santino, Jack. *All Around the Year: Holidays and Celebrations in American Life*. University of Illinois Press, 1994.
- . *New Old-Fashioned Ways: Holidays and Popular Culture*. The University of Tennessee Press, 1996.
- . "The Carnavalesque and The Ritualesque." *Journal of American Folklore* 124, no. 491 (Winter 2011): 61-73.
- Schoor, Gene. *Bart Starr: A Biography*. Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1977.
- Schulian, John, ed. *Football: Great Writing About the National Sport*. The Library of America, 2014.
- Scheff, Thomas J. "The Structure of Context: Deciphering Frame Analysis." *Sociological Theory* 23, no. 4 (Dec. 2005): 368-385.
- Schwartz, Dona. *Contesting the Super Bowl*. Routledge, 1998.
- Segreti, James. "President Watches Alabama Win, 17-0, on Oklahoma Errors: Sophomore Leads Attack." *Chicago Daily Tribune*. Jan. 2, 1963.
- . "Top-Rated Alabama Falls to Texas' Jet Start, 21-17." *Chicago Tribune*. Jan. 2, 1965.
- Sell, Jack. "Roamin' Around." *Philadelphia Inquirer*. Oct. 11, 1964.
- Serrell, Beverly. *Judging Exhibitions: A Framework for Assessing Excellence*. Left Coast Press, Inc., 2006.
- Sharron, Avery. "Frame Paralysis: When Time Stands Still." *Social Research* 48, no. 3 (Autumn 1981): 500-520.
- Sheehan, Joseph M. "Most Varsity Teams to Begin Workouts in Next 2 Weeks: South Likely to Produce College Champion." *New York Times*. Aug. 23, 1964.

- Shephard, Alex. "The Insidious Ideology of Ken Burns's *The Vietnam War*." *New Republic*, Sep. 19, 2017.
<https://newrepublic.com/article/144864/insidious-ideology-ken-burnss-vietnam-war>
- Shevlin, Maurice. "Quarterback Problem, Says Alabama Coach." *Chicago Tribune*. Dec.31, 1963.
- Shockman, Elizabeth. "Classical Music for Bros." *Public Radio International*. Oct. 11, 2015.
<https://www.pri.org/stories/2015-10-11/classical-music-bros-origins-nfl-s-theme-music>
- Shrake, Edwin. "Still a Long, Rough Road Ahead for the AFL." *Sports Illustrated*. Jan. 30, 1967.
- . "A Champagne Party for Joe and Weeb." *Sports Illustrated*. Dec. 9, 1968.
- . "Joe Passes the Big Test in a Breeze." *Sports Illustrated*. Jan. 6, 1969.
- Silver, Roy. "The Namath Case." *New York Times*. Jun. 22, 1969.
- Simon, Nina. *The Participatory Museum*. Museum 2.0 Press, 2010.
- . *The Art of Relevance*. Museum 2.0 Press, 2016.
- Sims, Martha C. and Martine Stephens. *Living Folklore: An Introduction to the Study of People and Their Traditions*. Utah State University Press, 2005.
- Spradley, James P. and Michael A. Rynkiewich, eds. *The Nacrerima: Readings on American Culture*. Little, Brown and Company, 1975.
- St. John, Allen. *The Billion Dollar Game: Behind the Scenes of the Greatest Day in American Sport*. Doubleday Publishing, 2009.
- "Star Quarterback Decides to Obey Commissioner's Order." *Chicago Tribune*. Jul. 19, 1969.
- Stickler, George. "Namath Quits Football 'On Principle': Rejects Rozelle's Order to Give Up Share in Lounge." *Chicago Tribune*. Jun. 7, 1969.
- Stone, Kay F. "Folktale." In *American Folklore: An Encyclopedia*, edited by Jan Harold Brunvand, 294-295. Garland Publishing, Inc., 1996.
- Storey, John. *Inventing Popular Culture: From Folklore to Globalization*. Blackwell Publishing, Ltd., 2003.
- . *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: An Introduction*, 7th ed. Routledge, 2015.
- Stork, Willis. "Varying the Football Jargon." *American Speech* 9, no. 3 (Oct., 1934): 237-239.

- "Straight Outta L.A." Directed by Ice Cube. *30 for 30*. ESPN Films. 2010.
- Sullivan, C. W. "Myth." In *American Folklore: An Encyclopedia*, edited by Jan Harold Brunvand, 497-499. Garland Publishing, Inc., 1996.
- "Super Bowl LIII Draws 98.2 Million TV Viewers." Neilson.com. Feb. 4, 2019.
<https://www.nielsen.com/us/en/insights/news/2019/super-bowl-liii-draws-98-2-million-tv-viewers-32-3-million-social-media-interactions.html>.
- Susman, Warren I. *Culture as History: The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century*. Smithsonian Institution Press, [1973], 2003.
- Tangherlini, Timothy R. "It Happened Not Too Far from Here...": A Survey of Legend Theory and Characterization. *Western Folklore* 49, no. 4 (Oct., 1990): 371-390.
- . "Legend." In *American Folklore: An Encyclopedia*, edited by Jan Harold Brunvand, 437-439. Garland Publishing, Inc., 1996.
- Telander, Rick. "Joe Namath." *Sports Illustrated*. Sep. 19, 1994.
- "Television." *American Memory Collection*. Library of Congress.
<https://memory.loc.gov/ammem/awhhtml/awmi10/television.html>.
- "Terms Glossary." NFL.com. <https://operations.nfl.com/football-101/terms-glossary/>.
- "Text of Statement by Commissioner on Namath's Case." *New York Times*. Jun. 7, 1969.
- The Legendary Voice of John Facenda*. NFL Films. 1991.
- "There's Only One America's Team." *The Timeline*. NFL Films. Nov. 30, 2016.
- This is Pro Football*. NFL Films. 1967.
- Thomas, Gerald. "Tall Tale." In *American Folklore: An Encyclopedia*, edited by Jan Harold Brunvand, 700-702. Garland Publishing, Inc., 1996.
- Thoms, Williams. "Folk-Lore and the Origin of the Word." In *International Folkloristics: Classic Contributions by the Founders of the Field*, edited by Alan Dundes, 9-14. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1999.
- Toelken, Barre. *The Dynamics of Folklore*. Utah State University Press, 1996.
- Tonguetto, Peter. "With The Civil War, Ken Burns Reinvented the Television History Documentary and Captivated Millions of Americans," *Humanities* 36, no. 5 (Sep./Oct. 2015).

Trachtenberg, Alan. *Reading American Photographs: Images as History, Matthew Brady to Walker Evans*. Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1989.

Tyrrell, Ian. *Historians in Public: The Practice of American History, 1890-1970*. The University of Chicago Press, 2005.

UPI. "Namath Sparks Rout." *New York Times*. Sep. 22, 1962.

———. "All-Star Football Teams." *New York Times*. Dec. 5, 1962.

———. "It's Spelled N-A-M-A-T-H." *Chicago Daily Tribune*. Jan. 2, 1963.

———. "Broadway Joe Namath put the money, \$15,000 of it, right where his mouth is." *Chicago Daily Defender*. Jan. 13, 1969.

———. "Joe Namath Plans to Duck Banquet Circuit." *Chicago Daily Defender*. Jan. 21, 1969.

———. "Namath Hickok Winner." *Chicago Daily Defender*. Feb. 4, 1969.

van Gennep, Arnold. "The Rites of Passage." In *International Folkloristics: Classic Contributions by the Founders of the Field*, edited by Alan Dundes, 99-108. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1999.

"Very Superstitious," Bud Light Beer commercial. Translation LLC. Nov. 16, 2012. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=67gUGnYca3Q>.

Vogan, Travis. *Keepers of the Flame: NFL Films and the Rise of Sports Media*. University of Illinois Press, 2014.

Walker, Randolph. "Heroes and TV." *Tri-State Defender (Memphis, Tenn.)* Mar. 2, 1988.

Wallace, William N. "Postseason Ploy Book." *New York Times*. Jan. 19, 1969.

———. "Namath, Told to Sell Bar, Quits Football." *New York Times*. Jun. 7, 1969.

Washington, Robert E. and David Karen, eds. *Sport, Power, and Society: Institutions and Practices*. Westview Press, 2010.

Wigginton, Russell T. *The Strange Career of the Black Athlete: African Americans and Sport*. Praeger Publishers, 2006.

Wilbon, Michael. "Questions No Match for Williams' Aplomb," *Washington Post*. Jan. 30, 1988.

———. "For Broncos, 'It was a Nightmare,'" *Washington Post*. Feb. 1, 1988.

"Will Heisman Trophy Be Next?: Grambling Quarterback Doug Williams Heads All-American Team." *Philadelphia Tribune*. Dec. 6, 1977.

Williams, Doug. *Quarterblack: Shattering the NFL Myth*, with Bruce Hunter. Bonus Books, Inc., 1990.

Williams, Raymond. *Culture and Society*. Columbia University Press, [1958] 1963.

———. "The Analysis of Culture." In *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture*, 4th ed., edited by John Storey, 32-40. Pearson Educational Ltd., 2009.

Wolfe, Tom. "The Birth of 'The New Journalism': Eyewitness Report by Tom Wolfe." *New York Magazine*. Feb. 14, 1972.

Wynter, Leon. "A Black Hero Finally Gets His Due." *Wall Street Journal*. Feb. 5, 1988.

Young, A.S. "Doc." "The Super Bowl Game." *Chicago Daily Defender*. Jan. 8, 1969.

———. "Analysis of a Good." *New York Amsterdam News*. Jan. 18, 1969.

———. "Good Morning Sports!: O.J. & Broadway Joe." *Chicago Daily Defender*. Jun. 16 1969.

Zeitlein, Steven J. "Pop Lore: The Aesthetic Principles in Celebrity Gossip." *The Journal of American Culture* 2, Iss. 2 (Summer 1979): 186-192.

Zirin, Dave. *Game Over: How Politics Has Turned the Sports World Upside Down*. The New Press, 2013.

Zumwalt, Rosemary Lévy. *American Folklore Scholarship: A Dialogue of Dissent*. Indiana University Press, 1988.

John E. Price—VITA**EDUCATION**

- 2019 Ph.D., American Studies, Pennsylvania State University–Harrisburg
- 2014 Graduate Certificate in Folklore and Ethnography,
Pennsylvania State University–Harrisburg
- 2011 M.A., American Studies, George Washington University
- 2006 B.A., History, George Washington University

AWARDS AND HONORS

- 2019 Simon J. Bronner Award for Most Outstanding Graduate Student Paper,
Eastern American Studies Association
- 2015–16 Thomas C. and Irene W. Graham Fellow, Institute for Humane Studies
- 2015–16 American Studies Graduate Research Travel Fund, Penn State Harrisburg
- 2014–15 Harold F. Martin Graduate Assistant Outstanding Teacher Award, Penn State
- 2012–14 Capital College Graduate Teaching Assistantship, Penn State Harrisburg
- 2012–13 Chancellor's Award, Penn State Harrisburg
- 2012–13 Robert W. Graham Endowed Graduate Fellowship, Penn State Harrisburg

SERVICE

- 2018— Editor-in-Chief, *New Directions in Folklore*
- 2016–18 Assistant Editor, *New Directions in Folklore*
- 2015–18 Senior Convener, "New Direction in Folklore" (AFS interest section)
- 2015–16 President, American Studies Student Association, Penn State Harrisburg
- 2015 Organizer, Constitution Day, Penn State Harrisburg
- 2014–16 Volunteer archivist, LGBT History Project, LGBT Center of Central PA
- 2013–17 Review Editor, *New Directions in Folklore*
- 2013–14 Founding Director, Cultural Enrichment Program, Penn State Harrisburg

AFFILIATIONS

- American Folklore Society
- American Studies Association
- North American Society for Sport History