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Public Memorializing in the Stadium: Mediated Sport, the 10th Anniversary of 9/11, and the Illusion of Democracy

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Abstract

Among the purported virtues of sport, whether through participation or viewership, is its capacity to foster community. In the years since September 11, 2001, the institutions associated with the production of mediated sport have constituted community rhetorically through nationalistic and militaristic rituals and ceremonies. Such ceremonies played a prominent role in the public memorialization of 9/11 on its 10th anniversary in 2011. Although it is surely the case that some communal healing is possible through mediated sport and its ceremonies, this essay argues that the centrality of this theme constitutes an illusion of democracy. As a consequence, these mediated sport productions shaped a public memory of 9/11 that diminishes active citizenship and deflects attention away from the consequences of American actions since the terrorist attacks.

Keywords

9/11, democracy, mediated sport, public memory, nationalism

The 10th anniversary of 9/11 was marked by numerous rituals of remembrance in the United States. There were, of course, solemn ceremonies in New York, Washington,

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DC, and rural Pennsylvania. News outlets published reflections and photo-essays, and television programming provided a near-constant sampling of 9/11-themed documentaries. In some cases—the History Channel, for instance—the anniversary warranted a "9/11 Week," thus making the event equal parts memorial and marketing campaign. But in light of the sheer number of available events and related ceremonies, *mediated sport* arguably became the most visible site for the memorialization of 9/11. This does not necessarily make it the most important, but given its enormous popularity and influence, mediated sport has much to tell us about communication and public culture, especially in an age during which Americans continue to struggle with the meanings of 9/11 and the subsequent war on terror. Moreover, because mediated sport has *consistently and visibly* been the site for the perpetuation of 9/11 memory, not just on the anniversary but throughout the years since the tragedy, it has done much to define our understandings of citizenship and democratic unity.

September 11, 2011, was a Sunday, thus providing major commercial sports, including college and professional football, baseball, tennis, and stock car racing, with a widely available platform for the enactment of public memory. The tenor of these memorializations can be summarized through the words of National Football League (NFL) Commissioner Roger Goodell: "We remember our great country and the people that died in this tragic incident, the first responders and their families and all the people that kept our country safe. This is a chance for everyone to come together and feel great about our country, the sacrifices so many people have had and what we all have in front of us. We've got a lot to be proud of" ("Sports World," 2011, ¶7).

Goodell's words speak to one the greatest purported virtues of commercialized, mediated sport: its capacity to foster community. Indeed, to the extent that this popular culture institution allows individuals to identify with one another it may be, in the words of Burke (1969, p. 22), "compensatory to division." Nevertheless, mediated sport's ability to constitute an "us" necessarily entails the construction of a "them," all too often in ways that do damage to Burke's (1984) declaration that human beings "should all want to get along with people." In the years since the terrorist attacks of 9/11, mediated sport's rhetorical constitution of community has commonly been achieved through belligerent forms of nationalism and militarism (Butterworth, 2010). This rhetoric is based on fragile identifications which, upon more careful reflection, reveal limits to community and threats to democratic health.

Sport, in its various forms of organization—youth sports, lifestyle sports, commercialized sports, and so on—is certainly capable of fostering communal identifications (O'Rourke, 2003; Trujillo & Krizek, 1994). With respect to the 10th anniversary of September 11, 2001, however, the rhetorical focus on "community" constituted a powerful yet, ultimately, ephemeral unity, a state of affairs more accurately described as an illusion of democracy. By this, I mean to direct our attention to the institutional arrangements among commercial sports leagues and the media organizations that assist in the production and dissemination of sporting events to a broad public. Although I acknowledge that individual participants and observers of 9/11

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memorials are capable of fashioning independent meanings from these events, I am interested in this essay in the ideological work done by the concerted efforts of officials implicated in what Jhally (1984) calls the "sports/media complex" and what Wenner (1998) terms *mediasport*. With this in mind, I will refer to *mediated sport* as the primary site for this analysis. I am concerned principally that the public memory of 9/11 presented in and through mediated sport served to exacerbate contemporary divisions, both domestically, by eliding sport's role in disabling political conditions, and internationally, by asserting a defiant nationalism on a global stage. To proceed, I begin by situating the 10th anniversary of 9/11 as a part of the growing conversation in rhetorical studies about the role of public memory, with particular attention to "official" accounts of memorialization. Next, I describe the various productions of mediated sport that took place on September 11, 2011, a date that featured several high-profile sporting events. Alongside these events, I include journalistic retrospectives that made specific claims about mediated sport's role in America's post-9/11 recovery. Taken together, these discourses constitute a memory text from which three themes emerge: the need to "never forget," a continued emphasis on militarism, and a fleeting sense of unity. Finally, I assess the limits of public memory rooted in an institution—mediated sport—limited in its capacity to cultivate democratic identifications.

Memory, Militarism, and Mediated Sport

In recent years, the concept of "memory" has "exploded into the communication discipline's nomenclature" (St. John & Kelshaw, 2007, p. 51). Although this has included psychological and sociological dimensions of memory studies, most prominent has been the attention to the ideological effects of what St. John and Kelshaw (2007) label "public/cultural" approaches to memory. Indeed, rhetorical and cultural studies recognize that uses of public memory may constitute attitudes and identities that have consequences for democratic culture. Defining memory as a rhetorical construct, Blair, Dickinson, and Ott (2010, p. 6) privilege the term *public memory* because the emphasis on publicity "situates shared memory where it is often the most salient to collectives, in constituted audiences, positioned in some kind of relationship of mutuality that implicates their common interests, investments, or destinies, with profound political implications." This definition is consistent with others in rhetorical studies and, accordingly, I will feature the term *public memory* over other similar terms, such as *collective memory* (Olick, 2007) or *cultural memory* (Sturken, 1997).

Scholars agree that public memory emerges most dramatically at times of shared anxiety or crisis. In particular, memory invites audiences to recall the past as a means for managing the needs of the present. As Bodnar (1992, p. 15) explains, memory texts are designed to "calm anxiety about change or political events, eliminate citizen indifference toward official concerns, promote exemplary patterns of citizen behavior, and stress citizen duties over rights." By definition, then, public memory is political because it seeks to direct collective opinion and behaviors. Browne

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(2004, p. 48) adds that "far from being merely nostalgic or retrospective, [memory] work is always and at once new, discursive, and unpredictable." This unpredictability leaves public memory subject to negotiation and political contestation.

With these political implications in mind, rhetorical studies of public memory have attended to a range of phenomena that shape democratic culture in the United States. Much of this attention features discourses of *trauma* in general and *war* in particular. More specifically, American public memory is commonly filtered through the contrasting legacies of World War II and the Vietnam War, both of which continue to provide lessons for the present. As Noon (2004) explains:

> Popular memories of war not only claim to preserve some heroic moment of the past, but they often make acute demands upon the living, who must periodically show themselves worthy of the gifts bestowed upon them by the wartime sacrifices of others. Indeed, for a nation whose public capacity for historical amnesia is prodigious, the rhetoric and iconography of war often represent the only available resource for framing contemporary experience. (p. 342)

Thus understood, memories of war are constitutive of national identity, which Marvin and Ingle (1999, p. 4) argue is a product of "the shared memory of blood sacrifice, periodically renewed."

If World War II and the Vietnam War are linked by virtue of their prominence in American history, it is actually World War II and the War on Terror that share a common virtue. Among the most common references made on the day of the terrorist attacks in 2001 was to Pearl Harbor, as the December 7, 1941, event appeared to offer the only suitable comparison for making sense of the contemporary tragedy. Moving forward, and in spite of the considerable differences between the two conflicts, Noon (2004, p. 340) recalls that "for nearly three years, newspaper editorials, advertisements, political discourse, and ordinary conversations [were] regularly gilded with rough comparisons between the Second World War and the war on terrorism." He asserts that such comparisons are not merely descriptive, but rather they are designed to conflate historical lessons with contemporary concerns.

Given the unprecedented shock of the terrorist attacks, the symbolic return to memories of the "greatest generation" makes a degree of sense. More than simply providing Americans with a means to ease some of their collective pain, the World War II echoes also projected an idealized conception of citizenship (Biesecker, 2002) that could be understood as a model for the reinvigorated patriotism that dominated political discourse in the aftermath of 9/11. Situated within that discourse have been multiple performances of nationalism and militarism in mediated sport. Since 2001, ubiquitous presentations of red, white, and blue imagery, flyovers, performances of "God Bless America," appearances by the Armed Forces, on-field military enlistment ceremonies, and endless pleas to "support the troops" have all worked to normalize a culture of war and discourage democratic dissent. This is not to say dissent is impossible or that all fans and observers have interpreted these rituals in

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identical fashion, but that in the more than 10 years of such events mediated sport has consistently featured an intense and restricted form of patriotism (Butterworth, 2010).

Because live sporting events can host tens of thousands of people at a time, and because they encourage passionate, public expression, they are uniquely suited to constituting fans as citizen-subjects, especially by identifying their fanship with spectacular displays of nationalism and patriotism. Stahl (2009a) spotlights the problem with this mode of spectacle by contrasting it to propaganda:

> Whereas propaganda rationally engages with argument and narrative, the spectacle forgoes persuasion in favor of fostering disengagement. Whereas propaganda addresses an audience that matters, the spectacle presumes an audience that does not. And whereas propaganda seeks to answer the question of *why we fight*, the spectacle loses itself in the fact *that we fight*. (p. 31)

In other words, mediated sport's ubiquitous nationalistic rituals work to normalize a culture of war and disable democratic dissent. Indeed, critical scholars in communication and cultural studies have contended that mediated sport has facilitated militarism and justified the "war on terror," from the jingoism of the 2002 Salt Lake City Winter Olympics (Silk & Falcous, 2005), to the synergies between the Pentagon and leagues such as the NFL with respect to military charities (King, 2008), to the sponsorship of a college football bowl game by a military hardware manufacturer—the Bell Helicopter Armed Forces Bowl (Butterworth & Moskal, 2009). This is all the more important because, even as support for the war on terror has diminished, and its goals under President Barack Obama have become murkier, the rhetorical production of militarism in mediated sport has only intensified.

These rituals and public memory ceremonies are reminders that "sporting events and sports personages ... yield particularly vivid, compelling, accessible material to be memorialized and ascribed contemporary meaning in the retelling" (Wieting & Poumbaum, 2001, p. 4). Such material in the sporting context is most commonly associated with questions of national identity (Butterworth, 2012; Gong, 2012). Perhaps, the definitive nationalistic sport memory finds its origin in the 1980 Olympic Games, when the ultimate narrative of American moral purity and underdog triumphalism came with the unexpected victory of the men's hockey team over the mighty Red Army team of the Soviet Union. If confirmation of this moment's significance to public memory was ever needed, then the presence of the team at the torch lighting for the 2002 Salt Lake City Games surely provided it. As Hogan (2003, p. 108) remarks, the 1980 team evoked its cold war triumph and "served as a symbolic assertion of American power, a promise to once again defeat its enemies in the 'war on terror.'" Given mediated sport's role in the affirmation of national identity in the past decade and its capacity to shape public memory, it should come as little surprise that leagues and media made the 10th anniversary of 9/11 an elaborate production. It is to the evaluation of those productions I now turn.

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Memorializing 9/11 Through Mediated Sport

Between the sporting events held on the 10th anniversary of 9/11 and the sports media retrospectives that proliferated in the week preceding the anniversary, mediated sport produced a number of discursive moments that can be articulated as a "text." I approach this text from the tradition of critical and ideological rhetorical studies, with the ready acknowledgment that my interpretation is not necessarily definitive. As McGee (1990, p. 274) argues, the fragmentation of contemporary culture requires that "text construction [is] the primary task of audiences, readers, and critics." Weaving together the discourses of sports journalists and the memorial events themselves, I then read a constructed text of the anniversary through the lens of "critical rhetoric," meaning that I am committed to an engaged critique that aims to "unmask or demystify the discourse of power" (McKerrow, 1989, p. 91). Earlier in this essay, I noted Burke's emphasis on identification as a rhetorical means to redress social division. I should clarify that, for Burke (1966), those identifications are imperfect and rhetoric that aims to unify does so only through a "terministic screen" that simultaneously differentiates. Stated differently, "if any given terminology is a *reflection* of reality, by its very nature as a terminology it must be a *selection* of reality; and to this extent it must function also as a *deflection* of reality" (Burke, 1966, p. 45). McKerrow (1989, p. 98) is alert to this dynamic, explaining that the "task of a critical rhetoric is to undermine and expose the discourse of power in order to thwart its effects in a social relation (the task is not so dissimilar from Burke's ... own attempt in *Attitudes Toward History*)." My goal here, therefore, is to construct the text of 9/11 memorials as presented by mediated sport in order to critique the ideologies embedded in the "official ... cultural expressions" (Bodnar, 1992, p. 13) of public memory.

Although observers might contest these official expressions—indeed, Bodnar (1992, p. 13) is also interested in the "vernacular cultural expressions" of individuals—the ubiquity and consistency of 9/11 memorializing suggests an effort to build communal identifications designed to transcend the discord and divisions characteristic of contemporary American political culture. In doing so, these ceremonies present a "terministic screen" that purports to celebrate democratic *unity* even as it diminishes democratic *expression*. As I noted earlier, September 11, 2011, fell on a Sunday, placing major sporting events held over the entire weekend under a prominent spotlight.[1] Most prominently featured were Saturday broadcasts of Division I college football and the prime-time broadcast on ABC of National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing's (NASCAR) Richmond 400. Sunday, September 11 included the first full day of regular season action in the NFL, a full schedule of games in Major League Baseball (MLB) and the women's championship match in the U.S. Open. In advance of the weekend's action, sports media circulated a range of publications offering reflections on 9/11. Perhaps, the form of print and online journalism allowed writers to apply a somewhat more expansive terministic screen than what was presented during the televised ceremonies. ESPN.com's commentary, "A Whole New Game" (Saslow, 2011, ¶9), for example, expressed an appropriate ambivalence: "We crave the escapism of

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sports more than ever—a decade later, attendance, ticket prices and TV audiences are at or near record highs—but we watch them differently." Yet, this ambivalence was largely the exception to the rule, as the retrospectives published in *ESPN The Magazine*, *Sports Illustrated*, *CBSSports.com*, *FOXSports.com*, and *CNN.com* offered a fairly comprehensive endorsement of sport's capacity to heal and shape community.[2]

I begin with an overview of the sports media coverage that led up to the anniversary, specifically because it provides a context for the memorials themselves. Like so many other media outlets, sports media made 9/11 a week-long event. ESPN television ran numerous features in the days prior to September 11, which recalled the reactions of athletes, coaches, and others who were affected by the attacks. Meanwhile, *Sports Illustrated* recalled its own headline from 2001, "The Week that Sports Stood Still." This theme was prominent across all the retrospectives, including those found on ESPN.com, CBSSports.com, and FOXSports.com. More important than the fact that, after 9/11, commercial sports came to a halt until baseball resumed play on September 17, was the narrative about sport's return to public culture. Indeed, a disproportionate amount of coverage was not about the effect of 9/11 on sport, but rather the effect of *sport* on American life after 9/11. Politi (2011) wrote on CNN.com about the "healing power of sports after 9/11." Yahoo! Sports' Wetzel (2011) celebrated sports "not as a game, but as a gathering." *Sports Illustrated*'s web page dedicated to the 10th anniversary includes a link to a photo-essay titled, "How MLB helped to heal" (Verducci, 2011). ESPN's *Outside the Lines* series included Tomlinson's (2011) commentary about "how we find healing through sports." And, perhaps most striking of all, former President George W. Bush participated in a pretaped segment for FOX that aired before all NFL games on Sunday, September 11, 2011, during which he asserted, "We started to heal with the help of our national pastimes" ("FOX NFL," 2011).

It is fair to conclude that when sporting events first returned, there was a collective outpouring of emotions that can only be understood as cathartic. "Healing" may be too strong a word, however, as it connotes a *relief* from pain and anguish. But to the extent that sporting events gave Americans a chance to gather in large numbers, to cry and mourn together, and to show care for one another, these initial ceremonies did allow for some degree of healing. Nevertheless, as sportswriters in 2011 reflected on the role of sport 10 years earlier, they also emphasized a more problematic notion: The idea that sport enabled Americans to return to a sense of *normalcy*. Politi (2011, ¶9) remarked that sport "helped everyone realize it was OK to be normal again." Miller (2011, ¶9) wrote on *CBSSports.com* that when President Bush delivered the ceremonial first pitch prior to Game 3 of the 2001 World Series in Yankee Stadium, "baseball helped lead the way back as the country took its first wobbly steps toward some semblance of normalcy." Verducci (2011, ¶1) of *Sports Illustrated* links normalcy with sport's power to heal. He recalls, "But gathering together, singing 'God Bless America,' and seeing America get back to a very public way of a normal life. There's no doubt that was a small part of the healing process."

This framing of public memory is largely consistent with the portrayal of mediated sport's return back in 2001 (Butterworth, 2010). Much as they had 10 years

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before, sportswriters continued to insist that elaborate ceremonies of remembrance and performances of patriotism could reasonably be compared to what once was "normal." There are some exceptions, of course, but the prevailing storyline among sports media was to celebrate the mere existence of sporting events as an indication of normalcy in American life, regardless of the considerable evidence to the contrary. Indeed, the spectacular displays of patriotism that characterized the 10th anniversary of 9/11 are anything but "normal," at least by the standards of sporting events before September 11, 2001. To be sure, nationalistic rituals and pageantry have long been part of mediated sport, but typically they were restricted to special occasions such as the Super Bowl and World Series games. Thus, any reference to "normal" must be understood in reference to the expansion of patriotic rituals that come to define mediated sport only in the years *after* 9/11. Now that these rituals have become so commonplace, they may simply blend into the context of the sporting events themselves. Nevertheless, it is important to review the shared characteristics of these ceremonies on September 11, 2011.

Perhaps, the most prominent elements in each event were the American flag and the many extensions of the flag as represented by the colors red, white, and blue. On Saturday, nearly every race car in the Richmond 400 featured red, white, and blue paint as an addition to its normal scheme. Some, including Kyle Busch's Number 18 car, were painted entirely in the flag's colors. Meanwhile, prerace festivities included a moment of silence, lasting the time it took for the cars to circle the track 3 times and during which fans waived miniature American flags distributed to them when they arrived at the raceway, a prerace recitation of the "Pledge of Allegiance," and a "special ladder truck American flag display" in honor of the first responders ("NASCAR Unites," 2011).

College football responded similarly, with a full schedule of games offering wide variations on the patriotic theme. Given that dozens of games were played on September 10, it is most appropriate to synthesize, rather than itemize, the many ceremonies held across the country. A review of photographs ("College Football," 2011), for example, reveals common features such as players entering the field from the tunnel holding the American flag, fans holding miniature flags, and military personnel unfurling giant flags on the field. Some programs, including Northwestern University and the University of Washington, replaced their standard logos with red, white, and blue schemes ("College Teams," 2011). The University of Arkansas went a step further, as the team's Razorbacks midfield logo was painted to match the flag and fans were seated in red, white, and blue sections at the appropriately named War Memorial Stadium (Bahn, 2011).

Both the Richmond 400 and these college football games took place on Saturday, September 10. On the date of the actual 10th anniversary, sports leagues and media were even more coordinated in the memorialization efforts. The variation found in college football stadiums, for example, was nearly erased in the standardized NFL ceremonies. Every NFL game, for instance, included a pregame ceremony with a field-sized American flag. In some cases, military personnel lined the field, with each member of the Armed Forces holding individual, standard-sized flags. During

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NBC's *Sunday Night Football* matchup between the Dallas Cowboys and New York Jets, multiple members of the hometown Jets held their own flags, too. And, much like the college games, small flags were ubiquitous among the fans. This included the nationally televised season opener on Thursday, September 8, Green Bay Packers, where fans sat according to red, white, and blue colors so that the crowd looked like a flag during the national anthem performance.

All 30 MLB teams were in action on September 11, 2011, and the games featured many similar ceremonies. These rituals have become especially commonplace in baseball in the past decade, facilitated in part by the ritualized nature of a sport that is played (virtually) everyday during its season. Much like their counterparts in football, baseball stadiums were awash in red, white, and blue, from enormous flags stretched across outfields to electronic replicas on scoreboards and video screens. Using its standard logo as a foundation, MLB also created a special logo to be painted in red, white, and blue on each field to commemorate the anniversary. Throughout major league stadiums, additional flag imagery was found on the outfield walls and the bases, as well as among fans in the stands.

Meanwhile, the U.S. Open tennis tournament reached its final weekend. Tennis is not nearly as popular in the United States as the other sports I have thus far featured. However, the U.S. Open is the final major event on the tennis calendar, and the New York location placed it in the spotlight on the 9/11 anniversary. In addition, it is arguably the most international of mainstream commercial sports, a reality that has exacerbated fears in the United States that American dominance is a thing of the past. With few young players showing the promise of filling the considerable void left by the retirements of Pete Sampras, Andre Agassi, Lindsay Davenport, among others, the last best hope of a native champion fell on the shoulders of Serena Williams.[3] Having an American potentially triumph on a day of such significance provided a compelling storyline, something not lost on Williams herself. As she tweeted early in the day, "My Thoughts and prayers to all who lost loved ones on 9-11. I know the entire country is with you today. I'm playing for you today" ("Sports World," 2011, ¶14). Alas, Williams fell in straight sets to Australian Samantha Stosur. Nevertheless, the match was framed by the same reliance on red, white, and blue found in other sports arenas that day: The prematch ceremony featured Queen Latifah's performance of the "Star Spangled Banner" against a backdrop of 12 American flags and more flags adorned the perimeter of the court during the postmatch trophy presentation.

In addition to these multiple displays of red, white, and blue, these sporting events featured two other prominent symbols: ritual performances of songs and the presence of military personnel and first responders. The ritualized performance of the national anthem or, as has recently become commonplace in MLB, "God Bless America," serves as a powerful communal experience. Arguably, these moments take on a kind of religious significance (Butterworth, 2005), thereby amplifying their gravity while also assuring widespread compliance.[4] As I noted above, Queen Latifah performed the national anthem prior to the U.S. Open women's final, accompanied by the Jubilation Choir of Queens, New York. A day earlier, Daniel Rodriguez,

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a New York City police officer who earned the nickname the "singing policeman" in the aftermath of 9/11, sang "God Bless America" at the Richmond International Speedway. Prior to the Notre Dame–Michigan college football game, a video screen scrolled the names of University of Michigan graduates who were killed on 9/11 as "God Bless America" played in the stadium ("College Teams," 2011). Before the first set of NFL broadcasts on Sunday, live video allowed viewers to see and hear U.S. Army Band bugle player Allyn Van Patten perform "Taps" as part of a memorial ceremony in Shanksville, PA ("NFL on Fox," 2011). That night, prime-time events included "Star Spangled Banner" performances by Lady Antebellum before the Cowboys-Jets NFL game and Marc Anthony before a Chicago Cubs–New York Mets game at Citi Field in Flushing, New York. Beyond these celebrity appearances, the dozens of football and baseball games throughout the weekend featured impassioned renditions of these patriotic "hymns."

Taken together, these memorials present a compelling body of fragments that can be understood as an official public memory text. A representative report offers an appropriate summation:

> At Kansas City's Arrowhead Stadium, the Chiefs and Buffalo Bills helped 150 firefighters and first-responders to hold up an American flag that stretched from end zone to end zone and sideline to sideline. "American Idol" winner David Cook sang the national anthem, punctuated with a flyover of A-10s from Whitman Air Force Base and crowd chants of "USA! USA!" At halftime, three F-18s streaked across at halftime and names of 9/11 victims were scrolled on the scoreboards. ("Sports World," 2011, ¶28)

I will comment later on the presence of military personnel and the flyover. To this point, however, this scene neatly encapsulates the spectacular imagery and patriotic fervor of these memorials.

Memory and the Illusion of Democracy

At minimum, it should be clear that the 10th anniversary memorials were designed to provoke feelings of pride and patriotism. However, I have thus far focused primarily on the description of these ceremonies. I turn now to more critical judgments, rooted in Burke's distinction between "terministic screens." In other words, by selecting the reality depicted in these ceremonies, mediated sport simultaneously deflected other realities. We can better grasp this distinction by working through a discussion of three emergent themes: Mediated sport must "never forget," Americans should "support the troops," and everyone should strive for "unity."

Sport Should Never Forget

As I described earlier, many in sports media insisted that sport's value in the aftermath of 9/11 was its ability to help Americans return to "normalcy." But that claim

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is actually undermined by the first of these emergent themes, for the average sports fan would be hard pressed to have forgotten 9/11 or the continuing "war on terror," given the almost constant references to the war and the U.S. military during sports broadcasts. In fact, these relentless acknowledgments have rhetorically reconstituted what counts as "normal" in the first place. It is a kind of normal that absorbs the most conspicuous forms of nationalistic display, "rendering [these rituals] habitual, seemingly rational, and largely immune to challenge" (Ivie, 2007, p. 204). Thus, even the most mundane of sporting events in the United States now has the potential to serve as a reminder either of 9/11 itself or the symbolic attachments to which Americans are now beholden.

Nevertheless, the 10th anniversary memorials persistently emphasized the need to remember. This was done through a variety of rhetorical forms, including multiple references to the date—"9/11," as well as "9/11/11" and "September 11, 2001"—language that declared, "Never Forget," and narratives about and lists of individual lives lost or affected by the attacks. In MLB, for example, the red, white, and blue logos were coupled with the date, "September 11, 2001," and the phrase, "We Shall Not Forget." For the U.S. Open, the court in Arthur Ashe Stadium was painted with "9/11/11" on both sides of the net (an optimal location for television viewers). NASCAR authorized driver Ryan Newman to paint his Number 39 car with an inscription, "We Will Never Forget," along with a list of the 75 people who perished when the Pentagon was struck on 9/11. Meanwhile, the networks that carried these live sporting events over the weekend aired several retrospectives that included interviews and stories about figures in sport who had a connection to the terrorist attacks. ESPN/ABC produced one segment called *I Remember* ("NASCAR Unites," 2011), while FOX titled its NFL pregame memorial, "The Journey" ("FOX NFL," 2011).

One especially powerful segment was produced by the NFL to be aired before every game, regardless of network. Actor Robert DeNiro narrated the tribute, stating gravely:

> Ten years ago today, 19 terrorists hijacked four airplanes and, in an instant, 2,977 innocent victims lost their lives. To all who sacrificed that day, from Ground Zero to the Pentagon to the heroic passengers on Flight 93 in Shanksville, Pennsylvania, the NFL remembers. On this anniversary, we honor those brave men and women by continuing to show our unity and strength as a country, as we pay tribute to their memory.

That the "NFL remembers" was echoed in a prime-time variation of this video that aired prior to NBC's *Sunday Night Football* game. Here, DeNiro said:

> I stand before you on ground made sacred by the sacrifice of 2,753 innocent victims from over 90 countries.[5] In the decade since 9/11, we have honored their memory with a show of strength and unity. The NFL and all Americans fulfill our pledge to never forget, as we continue our commitment to honor their memory.

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In both cases, DeNiro's words emphasized the importance of preserving our public memory of the lives lost on 9/11, a need that is reinforced by the "pledge to never forget."

The imagery and language associated with the memorial ceremonies was equally present in sports media coverage of the anniversary. *Sports Illustrated* featured a photo-essay titled, simply, "Remembering 9/11." Sportswriters, meanwhile, recalled the homemade signs made by fans in 2001 that read, "Always Remember" and "Never Forget" (Miller, 2011, ¶29–30) and celebrated the resilience of fans for whom, a decade later, "'Never forget' isn't just a motto on a T-shirt [in New York]; it's a way of life for many" (Wetzel, 2011, ¶16). These themes were echoed across media formats, from studio hosts to announcers to athletes and coaches.

The "never forget" mantra is instructive for what it reveals about public memory, or more appropriate to this case, what Vivian (2010) calls "public forgetting." Vivian suggests that pleas to remember 9/11 are necessarily constrained by a neoliberal emphasis that celebrates the unity and strength of people in the face of tragedy as it simultaneously encourages those people to *forget* the injustices that our unity and strength may promote. As he writes:

> The impassioned rhetoric of liberal-democratic remembrance so characteristic of contemporary state commemorations can entail a quietly pernicious mode of public forgetting and political judgment: a disavowal of institutional politics and difficult sociopolitical differences in favor of transcendent political symbolism and supposedly universal civic sentiment. (p. 64)

Vivian's commentary articulates with academic concerns that neoliberal politics favor a discourse of *consensus* to a fault (Mouffe, 2000). In short, the turn to the "transcendent" and "universal" may celebrate idealized principles but may also risk disabling more substantive forms of democratic engagement (Asen, 2004). Thus, although observers are implored to remember, it is not clear through such rituals how that memory should be *used*.

Support the Troops

Sport spectators were not only invited to "never forget" the tragedy of 9/11 but also to renew their faith in those who have been called to protect the nation in its aftermath. To be sure, the rhetoric of "support the troops" extends well beyond the world of sport, but the athletic context is among the most common places to see the affirmation not only of individual members of the Armed Forces but of the institutional interests that make help constitute a culture of militarism (Butterworth & Moskal, 2009). Despite the decline of public support for the war on terror as early as 2004, several years later the promotion of military interests through mediated sport has only intensified. The examples are too numerous to list comprehensively, but even a cursory review indicates how present militarism is within sport: Live ESPN

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broadcasts from Kuwait, live FOX NFL Sunday broadcasts from Afghanistan, live ESPN broadcasts of Mike & Mike in the Morning on a Coast Guard vessel, the aforementioned Bell Helicopter Armed Forces Bowl and the more recently added Military Bowl (sponsored by contractor Northrop Grumman), modified jerseys for college football featuring words such as "courage" or "duty," designed to raise awareness of the Wounded Warriors Project, the continued mythologizing of Pat Tillman despite evidence that undermines the heroic narrative and in spite of his family's outrage at the military's manipulation of his image, and the Miami Heat's military base training camp are just a few of the notable examples.

In what has to be considered the most obvious manifestation of this effort thus far, ESPN partnered with Morale Entertainment—a sports promotional organization dedicated to raising troop morale—to present the first ever "Carrier Classic," a college basketball game between Michigan State and North Carolina. This game, played on Veterans Day in 2011 and broadcast live on ESPN in prime time, took place on the deck of the USS Carl Vinson, the naval carrier that transported Osama bin Laden's body to the ocean after he was located and killed by the U.S. military (O'Neil, 2011). After President Obama's decision to withhold the pictures of bin Laden's dead body as an act of humanity, it is especially striking that among those who attended the Carrier Classic was the president. Although the event was widely praised as an effort to "honor" the previous and ongoing service of the U.S. Armed Forces, it is also fair to critique the Carrier Classic as an obvious public relations stunt designed to capitalize on the good image of the military to bolster the commercial interests of ESPN and its sponsors as well as the political interests of the president.

The 10th anniversary memorials must be understood in this context. The ceremonies frequently spotlighted active or retired members of the U.S. Armed Forces, as well as first responders serving as fire fighters, paramedics, police officers, and port authority officials. In some cases, these individuals performed the national anthem or "God Bless America," but in all cases they were present in the arena. This included personnel who helped with the oversized American flags, others who represented the branches of service in the presentation of colors, and veterans honored for their service and sacrifice. While there was a good deal of uniformity to the tone of these moments, individual teams did offer distinct experiences. For instance, NASCAR welcomed a group of "Wounded Warriors" as part of their prerace ceremonies in Richmond ("NASCAR Unites," 2011). Elsewhere, the Tampa Bay Buccaneers used the 2-min warning in the first half of its game to surprise the family of Army Sgt. Scott Osborn, who had just returned from serving in Afghanistan ("Sports World," 2011). Meanwhile, perhaps the most assertive presentation of the U.S. military came in the form of the Air Force flyover, a ritual that exemplifies the muscular patriotism that has become routine at sporting events.

Meanwhile, even the efforts to honor those who died on September 11, 2001, were often framed in language typically reserved for talking about the military. A particularly clear example of this came from FOX's pregame NFL coverage, in the

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words of studio host Curt Menefee. In a segment aired live before the first set games, he began, "A special welcome across all of the networks in the FOX family as we pause now to honor the sacrifices given by so many a decade ago today." There is no dispute that 9/11 represented an unconscionable tragedy. It is a curious choice, however, to frame all of the 2,977 deaths as "sacrifices." The term *sacrifice* imbues these deaths with a meaning beyond the tragedy itself, thus requiring that such loss of life not be "in vain." This logic has been deployed regularly during the war on terror as a rhetorical resource in the justification of continued military action. For example, writing about the ceremonies that mythologized former NFL player Pat Tillman, who volunteered as a U.S. Army Ranger and was subsequently killed in Afghanistan, King (2008) writes:

> In focusing on his death rather than on why he died, these dedications constituted sacrifice as the goal rather than asking whether the sacrifice itself made any sense. That is, they allowed the sacrifices made by Tillman and by so many others to justify the war, regardless of its goals or the brutality of the everyday practices that sustain it. (p. 534)

The memorializations of 9/11 (and beyond) were not exclusively about the military, of course. Yet, it reveals much about our culture of violence that an event designed primarily to pay tribute to those lives lost on September 11 itself was, at least in part, transformed into a celebration of the U.S. Armed Forces. More than simply building identifications with members of the military and even the military's cause, these ubiquitous tributes also constitute an acceptance of war in and of itself. As Stahl (2009b, p. 535) writes in his "support the troops" genealogy, "These associations ultimately work to construct, inscribe, and normalize an image of war itself and also an image of the ideal citizen-subject in relation to state violence."

Strength and Unity

The construction of an idealized—and deferential—citizen-subject is all the more problematic, given the third theme that was evident during the 10th anniversary ceremonies: unity. I contend that any sense of unity cultivated by mediated sport was fleeting, precisely because it was built on an unstable foundation that permits citizens to identify with one another only in the short term. The premise of these 10th anniversary commemorations was this: If only we could "come together" like we did after 9/11, if only we could put aside our petty differences, if only we could just be "Americans," then would we not have the kind of democracy, the kind of country, we long for? These instances of public memory instructed Americans to be united and to care for one another, but they did not provide the means to do so. *Difference* was symbolically celebrated, so long as it is coalesced in the collective and individual differences did not threaten the "imagined community" (Anderson, 1991).

In the past 10 years, Americans have frequently expressed the desire to achieve "unity," especially in the context of references to September 11, 2011, and the "war

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on terror." Consistent with views widely expressed both in the aftermath of the 2001 attacks and in the moments of reflection since, American tennis star Andy Roddick remarked during the 2011 U.S. Open, "The one thing I said a couple of weeks ago is I was probably never prouder to be an American than in the aftermath of 9/11, just people's spirit and the way people came together and the way people helped each other. Even though it was in the midst of devastation, there was [*sic*] still some great memories from it as far as the human spirit is concerned" ("An Interview," 2011, ¶50). Roddick's observations could easily have come from any average citizen or elected official, as they capture what appears to be a nearly universal interpretation of the "patriotism" that was on display in the United States in the late months of 2001. In those earliest days, patriotism was defined broadly, including ubiquitous sightings of the American flag and yellow ribbon magnets on vehicles and spontaneous chants of "USA!" at public gatherings; it also entailed unprecedented charitable donations, lines of people wanting to give blood, and other, more subtle, day-to-day instances of Americans making an effort to take better care of one another. In this respect, it was truly a moment of democratic hope. Yet, having turned to one another for solace and comfort, Americans all too soon turned to confront their enemies, be they real or imagined. Now 10 years later, democracy in the United States bears the scars of two failed wars, diminished international esteem, a devastated economy, and a fractured political culture. It is no wonder, then, that on the 10th anniversary of 9/11, so many Americans seemed eager to recapture that sense of unity felt so briefly a decade ago.

This eagerness was present in the DeNiro tribute, which declared that the proper way to honor the memory of the dead was to "show our unity and strength as a country." In many ways, this principle returns us full circle to the patriotic imagery I described earlier in the essay. As Marvin and Ingle (1999, p. 2) contend, the flag is *the* "ritual instrument of group cohesion." Deference to the flag was typically shown in concert with performances of the "Star Spangled Banner" and "God Bless America," or other collective actions such as moments of silence. It is fair to point out that there were genuinely poignant moments in some of these ceremonies. The pregame coverage on ESPN of the Cubs–Mets game, for instance, was especially striking.

Perhaps, it was the nighttime setting or the pastoral mythology of baseball, but the tribute at Citi Field was arguably more serene and less militant than those found in the stadiums of the NFL or NASCAR. Although there were similarities—an outfield-sized American flag, scores of first responders lining the field—the baseball ceremony was calmer, it contained moments of reflection, and perhaps most importantly, it offered a hint of the shared humanity that Americans held ever so briefly a decade ago. It also arguably reflected baseball's place American public culture as opposed to football. Whereas football's ceremonies seemed to emphasize *scale*—enormous flags, flyovers, and noise—the baseball ceremony at Citi Field seemed to emphasize *soul*—at least there seemed to be an effort to find something more substantive to connect citizens with one another beyond the bombast of the NFL's hypermasculinity.

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Such moments of introspection were rare, however, as these memorials mostly relied on a strident nationalism. Even with the U.S. Open, tennis's internationalism was refracted through the lens of distinctly American interests. As Jon Vegosen, United States Tennis Association (USTA) Chairman of the Board and President, described it, "The USTA's goal is to mark this solemn occasion in a dignified and respectful manner. We are one of this nation's global stages on the 10th anniversary of 9/11, and we have a special responsibility to honor those fallen and those who responded heroically on that fateful day" (McCarvel, 2011, ¶5). Vegosen's reference to the "global" nature of the event points to a more complex terrain. Major tennis tournaments take place around the world, including, for example, Wimbledon (England), commonly considered the most prestigious championship in professional tennis. Accordingly, consider whether or not American sports media would televise tributes to the 52 lives lost in the London bombings on July 7, 2005, if such a ceremony were planned for the moments prior to either the ladies' or gentlemans' final on Centre Court. Perhaps, NBC's coverage of the 2012 Summer Olympics in London provides an answer. NBC broadcast the Opening Ceremonies on Friday, July 27, using tape delay to maximize prime-time viewership. Included in the live production was a memorial to victims of violence, including those who were killed in the terrorist acts of 2005. NBC edited the tribute out of the broadcast, opting instead to air an interview with American swimmer Michael Phelps (Burke, 2012, ¶2). Given such a decision, it is fair to question whether or not sports organizations and media really seek to "honor" the victims of terrorism or if, instead, they are invoking "unity" and fanning the flames of nationalism because it makes for good public relations and ratings.

In his essay about the commemorations that took place in New York on the first anniversary of 9/11, Vivian (2006) laments the emergence of what he calls neoliberal epideictic rhetoric:

> The September 11 memorial epideictic thus provides a historic example of how contemporary public spectacles endow the idiomatic values of neoliberal democracy with simultaneously personal and universal pathos. Such spectacles provide a virtual civic forum designed for the private spectatorship of a presumably nonpartisan, emotionally-charged media event. In our so-called society of the spectacle, public events—including political conventions and campaigns, state ceremonies and cultural festivals, or national and international sports competitions—increasingly are organized to unite an otherwise fractured citizenry in a dynamic affective experience. (p. 15)

Such experiences function to contain audiences in ways that compel fans to value consensus over active citizenship. During these events, roars of approval for military jet flyovers are appropriate; questions about the purpose of those jets are not. Unified chants of "USA!" are appropriate; dissenting silence is not. Honoring the memory of lives lost on 9/11 is appropriate; lamenting the lives lost during the "war on terror" is not. None of this is to suggest that future September 11 memorials should become spectacles of conflict, cynicism, or discord. It is to suggest, however, that these

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rituals of, in DeNiro's words, "strength and unity" mask the very real divisions that reside within the American citizenry, divisions that the country would do well to confront and address rather than assuage with the all-too-familiar rallies wrapped in red, white, and blue.

Reflections on Sporting Memory

Through the calls to "never forget," to "support the troops," and to honor "strength and unity," the sporting public memory of 9/11 remained bound to the discourse of healing. In the days leading up to the 10th anniversary, *ESPN The Magazine* polled its readers and asked them, "Do sports heal?" One response came from someone who remembered the first baseball game played in New York after 9/11. That game, between the Atlanta Braves and New York Mets, took place on September 21, 2001. Reports of the game consistently suggest that the mood in the stadium was tense and pensive. Only when Mike Piazza hit an eighth-inning home run that led the Mets to victory did the tension begin to diminish. This moment has become a bit of baseball mythology—it was referenced by numerous sports writers and commentators when talking about the 10th anniversary, and it is featured prominently in the HBO documentary *Nine Innings from Ground Zero*, which otherwise focuses mostly on the New York Yankees. Of the game, the reader said, "Mike Piazza's home run off of Steve Karsay back on Sept. 21, 2001, will go down as the greatest home run in the history of New York baseball. It doesn't matter if you were a Mets fan or a Yankees fan, that blast to centerfield gave everyone chills and a sense of recovery" ("Do Sports," 2011, ¶4).

A baseball aficionado might immediately ask whether or not this fan has ever heard of Bobby Thomson.[6] But the bold proclamation that Piazza's home run is now the "greatest home run in the history of New York baseball" points to what Olick (2007) calls the "two cultures" of memory: individual and collective. It also reveals a fundamental shortcoming of public memory in sport. It may well be the greatest home run to this *individual* fan, but how does that serve the needs of the *collective*? In other words, individualized memories operate perfectly well under the auspices of the neoliberal commemorations defined by Vivian. But this does not serve democracy. It does not invite reflection; it insists on a shared meaning, one that attempts to dissolve differences—trivial though they can be, in this case, the differences between fans of the Yankees and fans of the Mets. Indeed, this is the nature of public memory cultivated by sport on the 10th anniversary of 9/11: A series of personal accounts and reflections, with the only attempts to understand our shared humanity subsumed beneath the tapestry of flags and patriotic platitudes.

As I have suggested, these memorializations constitute a unity that may appear democratic to the extent that it brings Americans together in communal expression, but that appearance is more accurately understood as an illusion. A more healthy democratic rhetoric need not eschew the principle of "unity," but it must take a more honest account of the factors that have fostered conflict and division. In one

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such moment, Brenann (2011, p. 1) acknowledges that a decade after 9/11, "This world's politics are polarized. Its attention spans are increasingly fleeting. Its psychological scars are far from healed." What might this acknowledgment mean, then, for mediated sport memorials? We might begin by considering whether or not the patriotism and militarism on which mediated sport has grown so dependent might, in fact, play a role in the polarization of politics. Thus, while I agree with the USTA's Vegosen that mediated sport had a "special responsibility" to memorialize 9/11, I contend that there are different ways for us to imagine such ceremonies. Instead of the dependence on defiance and militarism, Americans would do well to consider more of their shared humanity.

If a more humane, indeed more humble, approach to memorialization is the goal, this study might lead us to the conclusion that mediated sport is ill-suited to shaping a democratic public memory. The very context of mediated sport depends so heavily on competition and aggression that asking observers to quietly reflect on Burke's plea that human beings "should all want to get along with people" is perhaps wishful thinking. Nevertheless, mediated sport provides one of the few means by which Americans can invest in communal identifications and we are therefore better off seeking not to eliminate such ceremonies but to improve them. Only when memorials and other rituals can build identifications across differences that are situated in the daily lives of American citizens, rather than on the ephemeral moments of spectacular patriotism, can public memory in mediated sport begin to achieve the promise of an inclusive, democratic people.

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Notes

1. My analysis accounts for productions in mainstream mediated sports that were in action that weekend. Sports such as college and professional basketball and professional hockey

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were not yet in season, while others, such as men's professional golf, had no scheduled events (and the women's tour stop in Arkansas was not a high-profile event).

2. In keeping with the focus on "official cultural expressions," I have selected these sources because they are representative of national sports media voices. Local media, alternative sources such as Dave Zirin's *EdgeofSports.com*, or new media platforms such as *Deadspin.com* might reveal more "vernacular cultural expressions" and could contest, to some degree, the dominant public memory text of the 10th anniversary.
3. Traditionally, the men's championship match is played on the final Sunday of the U.S. Open. However, because of rain, the men's final was pushed to Monday, placing the women in the September 11 spotlight.
4. Breaking form during the performance of a patriotic song is highly unusual. Perhaps, the most notable case in recent years involved Bradford Campeau-Laurion, who challenged the Yankee Stadium policy of prohibiting fans from leaving their seats during "God Bless America." Campeau-Laurion filed a lawsuit after he was kicked out of a game in 2008. Any grand claims to resistance should be tempered, however, by the fact that he attempted to leave not out of political conscience but so he could use the restroom (Gendar, 2009).
5. The discrepancy between the numbers of victims is based on DeNiro's location at Ground Zero in New York City; thus, the second version did not include victims from the Pentagon or Shanksville, PA.
6. Bobby Thomson hit the "Shot Heard 'Round the World," one of the most famous home runs in all of baseball history. It took place on October 3, 1951, giving the New York Giants the National League pennant over the Brooklyn Dodgers.

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