

**Men of Steel:
Social Class, Masculinity, and Cultural Citizenship in Post-Industrial Pittsburgh**

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Men of steel: social class, masculinity, and cultural citizenship in post-industrial Pittsburgh

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The Pittsburgh Steelers serve as a critical space for the celebration of masculinity and working-class identity in the context [post-]industrial America. Within this article, the authors chronicle the transformation of a city, a region, and a people, at once steeped in the hard life of steel production and factory work, now increasingly replaced by nonphysical work and suburban lifestyle of the informational economy. As in the decades before, today's Steelers certainly operate as a symbolic reminder of the region's identity, framed around the hard work of factory life and industrial manufacturing. We investigate how the mediated celebrity identities of three contemporary Pittsburgh Steelers — Ben Roethlisberger, James “The Hitman” Harrison, and Troy Polamalu — each, in his own way, is mobilized to frame cultural citizenship in post-industrial Pittsburgh. We conclude by suggesting that the violence propagated by their bodies on (and sometimes off) the football field, symbolically articulates with the ‘hard men’ and working-class life of Pittsburgh's past.

Though Pittsburgh adjusted to industrial decline by engaging universities, hospitals, and tech firms as means to rebuild the City of Champions' economy, many people retain the sad pollution filled images of struggling steel workers amid 1970s stagflation and deindustrialization.¹

The ethnic enclaves of ‘Little Pittsburgh’ exist most poignantly in tailgate parking lots of away games. That's where you see people doing the performances of culture. The blue-collar Pittsburgh that you see flashed on the screen during games exists only in Steeler bars and in the visitors' parking lot.²

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Proem

In 1985, *Rand McNally & Company's* 'Places Rated Almanac' named Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania as the 'Most Livable City' in the United States. Coming on the heels of decades of industrial era decline marked by rising rates of unemployment³ and steady migration away from the city,⁴ the announcement was 'shocking' enough for the *New York Times* to devote resources to its own appraisal of Pittsburgh. The result of this inquiry was the following summation by reporter William K. Stevens:

With its breathtaking skyline, its scenic waterfront, its cozily vibrant downtown, its rich mixture of cultural amenities, its warm neighborhoods and its scrubbed-clean skies, it no longer is the smoky, smelly, gritty mill town of yesteryear. ... Pittsburgh's character has changed markedly in the last three decades. Despite its smokestack heritage, it has gone a long way toward conversion to a post-industrial way of life... a leaner economy, based largely on information and services, is emerging. Pittsburgh's biggest employer today is not a steel company but the University of Pittsburgh.⁵

Moreover, in the intervening twenty-five years, Pittsburgh has continued to place highly on the Almanac's rankings (3rd in 1989, 5th in 1993, and 1st in 2007); in 2010, *Forbes* magazine likewise bestowed the top spot in the United States to Pittsburgh, and *The Economist* did the same the following year.

Yet Pittsburgh, once among of the world's preeminent *industrial* cities, has a complicated history that continues to reverberate in the present moment—a present that while temporally removed from its factory-forged mentality continues to harbor, if not celebrate, a cultural investment in such (white, ethnic) working-class identity. Briefly stated, the late 19th century rise in machine technologies and an influx of mass immigration spurred Pittsburgh's emergence as a world leader in manufacturing and the production of material commodities—namely in the

metal, glass, coal, and steel industries. Over the course of the century that followed, the lattermost industry—that of steel refining and manufacturing—became the hallmark of the city’s commercial and civic identity. By the middle part of the ‘American century,’ the ‘Steel City’ was producing roughly one-third of the nation’s steel and was home to the world’s largest corporation, Carnegie Steel Corporation (later U.S. Steel).

Symbolically, the city came to be known as the ‘backbone of the American industrial revolution.’ It was a hard city, with its hard factory workers and its ‘dirty’ technologies. Pittsburgh was, as Chad Millman and Shawn Coyne put it, ‘a city that worked, more than anything else, and it attracted a certain breed of laborer. These men [sic] expected life to be a physical trial, and [industrial life] made their expectations pale to reality’.⁶ The city’s male-dominated, steelworker labor force endured brutal conditions that posed arduous physical demands and multiple hazards to the body. Moreover, an abundance of factory jobs and manual labor produced strong working-class identity politics, urbanization, labor struggles, and unionization. However, the decline of the U.S. manufacturing industry in the late 1970s and early 1980s reshaped Pittsburgh, at once restructuring the labor force and in turn destabilizing the city’s working-class culture and blue-collar civic identity.

In this article, we explore the role played by Pittsburgh’s professional football team, the Steelers, in protracting popular imaginings of steelworker masculinity under perceived threats by globalization, outsourcing, and the city’s burgeoning ‘knowledge economy’.⁷ We describe how ‘Steeler Nation’—an imagined community which, according to journalist Jim Wexell is ‘the only true sports nation’⁸—has emerged as a collective configuration celebrating bygone industrial era working-class masculinities at a moment when many of Pittsburgh’s industrial pillars have been compromised (if not replaced) by the thrusts of new forms of capital production. We begin by

offering a brief history of industrial Pittsburgh, from its iron foundations, to its ascension through steel, through its apogee in post-World War II America, and ultimately to its post-industrial decline and subsequent renaissance. We then turn our attention to the football-playing embodiments which are most-often mobilized within the popular sphere to link machinations of steelworking *cultural citizenship* within post-industrial Pittsburgh to that deeply mythologized, hard-working, hypermasculine past: Ben Roethlisberger, James Harrison, and Troy Polamalu. We argue that media representations of these athletes—by privileging particular subjectivities and subject positions—carry forward the class- and gender-based frames of cultural citizenship and serve as an exploratory site for examining contextual performances of masculinity and class-based embodiment in the post-industrial city.

In so doing, we take up Aihwa Ong's⁹ argument that citizenship is more than an expression of political or juridical membership to, or within, the state. Rather, as a cultural formation, we see citizenship as tied to processes of self-making and being-made by power relations and structures of the broader collective citizenry. Thus do we contend that sport, and particularly popular mediated sport stars, offers an important site for framing how the fan-consuming self is articulated with and against the broader citizenry. If we are willing to concede that becoming a citizen 'depends on how one is constituted as a subject who exercises or submits to power relations',¹⁰ then we must consider the architectures of the self acting with and against the self-making masses. We consider sport to be one such architecture, and its celebrity athletes to be important—yet negotiable and always already flexible—nodes within those discursive formations of citizenship. Here, we point out how each of the aforementioned athlete's celebrity is constitutive of an important, if problematic, post-industrial public sporting pedagogy. We

conclude by exploring the intersections of cultural citizenship, football, and post-industrial manhood.

The factory economy

Home may be private, but the front door opens out of the living-room on to the street, and when you go down the one step or use it as a seat on a warm evening you become part of the life of that neighborhood.¹¹ Hoggart, 2008/1957, p. 37

In his seminal text, *The Making of the English Working Class*, E. P. Thompson¹² wrote, in extraordinary detail, about the linkages between working-class culture and civic identity in the large industrialized city. The rapid industrialism and urbanization of the early nineteenth century produced a class-consciousness and class relations that reinforced a sense of community and solidarity among the English working classes. As Thompson so famously explained, ‘class happens when some men [sic], as a result of common experiences (inherited or shared), feel and articulate the identity of their interests as between themselves, and as against other men whose interests are different from (and usually opposed to) theirs’.¹³ For Thompson, class was a historical relation ‘embodied in real people and in a real context’¹⁴; it emerges through a set of shared values and common experiences among the industrious classes in which workers, confronting exploitation and alienation under capitalist relations of production, create experiential and collective responses to the injustices of capital (a common consciousness of their situation).

For Thompson’s colleague, Raymond Williams,¹⁵ culture was invariably linked to the possibility of community, a sense of neighborhood, and a sense of place, as the commercial and social basis shifted from agriculture to commercial, the rural to the urban, and from the countryside to the city. Here, the industrial city held a symbiotic relationship with the working-class culture that it helped produce, serving as an incubator of political rights and democracy and

of the regimes of exploitation which produced class hierarchies. What began on the shop floors spilled out onto the streets of the industrial city, where the working proletariat led the early radical movement demanding political reform, resistance to political corruption and injustice, and the advancement of political and social rights. Indeed, it was the working classes who were the main carrier of democracy in industrial Britain. And cities themselves came to bear social meanings that associate them with these particular social groups; the industrial city became increasingly defined by struggles over workers rights and a locus of citizenship and claim-making by the masses.

Forging Pittsburgh

Like the English working-class districts of Manchester and Cardiff about which Thompson and Williams so passionately wrote, industrial cities in the United States during what Giovanni Arrighi often referred to as ‘the long Twentieth Century’¹⁶ similarly acted as loci of not only the conditions of production, but of *the modes of social and civic production which came to define life in the industrial era*. And perhaps no U.S. city came to define, and be defined by, the rationalized pathos and dirty technologies of the industrial era more than Pittsburgh. Uniquely situated at the confluence of three mighty rivers—the Ohio, the Allegheny, and the Monongahela—Pittsburgh emerged as a leading producer of glass, iron, and coal in the early years of industrial America: mills lined the banks of the rivers, burning furnaces framed the city skyline, and billowing smokestacks cloaking the horizon in a thick black fog.¹⁷

The American Civil War lent further impetus for Pittsburgh’s industrial boom. The sudden demand for rails, machinery, weapons, and ammunition brought unprecedented economic growth to the region, as industrial employment and capital investment in Allegheny County’s iron and

steel industries nearly tripled in the 1860s.¹⁸ The city's population similarly responded to the nation's increased demand for iron and steel: scores of Irish Catholic and German immigrants, as well as recently freed slaves, poured into the region to meet the demand for factory work, nearly doubling the city's population in the decade.¹⁹

The invention of the Bessemer and open-hearth process in the 1870s and 1880s, however, soon made steel faster and cheaper to produce than iron, which was at the core of Pittsburgh's economy. Such developments would have a marked impact on the city and its workforce: mechanization of metal production required fewer highly skilled workers to fashion metal into finished products. Edward Slavicks' social history of Pittsburgh's steel industry, *Bodies of Work*, concisely captures the influence the transition to machinery had on the industrial labor class: 'Where mills of the Iron City were filled with skilled workmen controlling discrete segments of the production process, the Steel City's mills were filled with greater numbers of semiskilled and unskilled workers operating machines and moving raw materials'.²⁰ The craft pride and relatively high wages associated with work in the iron mills gave way to routine tasks and meager wages of a mechanized workplace. The physical demands of the workplace changed as well, with industrial capitalists installing labor-saving machinery that saw the mechanization of the production process.

At the same time, increasing demand for steel placed extraordinary physical pressure on labor to maintain the increasing pace and scale of the nation's rapid industrial expansion. Furthermore, workers' repertoire of skills and manual techniques changed. Several tasks became replaced, including most notably the puddling process, and were instead replaced by regimes of integration and automation that required semi- or low-skilled labor. And machinery presented far greater threats for workers welfare (in the form of accidents in the workplace, physical or mental

disease, or gradual exhaustion). The dangerous conditions of steel-making came to reframe expressions and performances of rugged masculine physicality within the city. As Millman and Coyne put it, ‘every shift that a steelworker worked increased his odds of dying at the mill’.²¹ In *Working in Steel*, Craig Heron explains how this immanent danger articulated with performances and expressions of factory manhood:

That ever-present danger could breed fear in some steelworkers, but, for many, it posed that challenge to prove their manhood. Among the committed men in the industry, there was (and still is) a masculine pride in their ability to face the gates of hell.²²

Thus did the Iron City give way to the *Steel City* and the new world that emerged with it—an unfamiliar marriage of industrial organization and labor for those working in Pittsburgh.

By century’s end, Pittsburgh was booming; coal-mining operations in the surrounding area expanded, industrial capitalists moved their operations farther up and down Pittsburgh’s three rivers, and an increasing number of people were calling the Steel City home. With this unprecedented economic growth of the Pittsburgh’s industry came new unskilled and semiskilled occupations increasingly filled by migrant workers. From 1880 to 1930, a torrent of migrant workers streamed into the city and mill towns that lined the banks of the Ohio River.²³

Industrial manufacturing in the Steel City flourished for much of the next fifty years, as the city generated between one-third and one-half of the nation’s entire steel production. Two world wars, the expansion of transnational railways, the invention of the automobile and development of Fordist modes of production, and the rapid expansion of America’s large cities spurred Pittsburgh’s economic growth. Pittsburgh’s raw materials, steel, and manufactured goods were instrumental in feeding the assembly lines of Detroit.²⁴

Additionally, the combination of the unionization of mass production, new political realignments favoring strong social welfare systems, and sustained national prosperity after 1940

all contributed to Pittsburgh's post-war prosperity, equalized incomes and a developing if not prosperous middle-class lifestyle.²⁵ The city itself likewise underwent large-scale modernization to bring it in line with other major urban centers of post-World War II America: Civic leaders and urban planners began an urban revitalization program that included large-scale infrastructural development (including many new bridges, sewers, municipal works projects), new buildings and centers of commerce, and the preservation of culturally and socially important neighborhoods. In 1970, the city completed the 64-floor U.S. Steel Tower (still the tallest building in the city) and the multi-purpose Three Rivers Stadium, which was designed as a modern if plain structure to maximize efficiency²⁶ and served as the home to Pittsburgh's baseball (Pirates) and football (Steelers) franchises. The result of this new political economy defined by unionization, heightened Democratic polity, neighborhood stability, and closing income inequality had a profound impact on the quality of life and urban environment of/in Pittsburgh.

Post-industrial Pittsburgh

However, Pittsburgh's economic prosperity and infrastructural expansion would soon begin to stagnate. By the 1970s, Pittsburgh's economy, much like the broader U.S. economy, ceased to grow. A stagflation crisis hit on the heels of increasing global competition, outdated technology, hostile management and labor relations, lack of capital investment, and the OPEC price shock in 1973 which raised oil and gas prices at a shocking rate.²⁷ During the boom years of the 1950s and 1960s, U.S. economic expansion brought great short-run profits, but the sale of foreign products and sharing of patents and licenses to foreign enterprises helped to create their own future competition. Responding to the economic crisis, the U.S. economy moved away from the

strong social policies and demand side economics of the Keynesian welfare state, toward the alluring discourses of freedom and prosperity brought on by neoliberalism, pushing deregulation, privatization, outsourcing, and a general belief that the economy was self-correcting and was best if left alone. The crowning of Reagan's America brought with it the systematic dismantling of unionism and trade liberalization. Owing nothing to the communities that built up their profitable enterprises, corporations fled the unionized, highly taxed, and decaying industrial northeast for more business-friendly climates of the U.S. Sunbelt, South America, and Asia.

Pittsburgh's steel industry was among the hardest hit by these shifts: U.S. Steel Corporation closed fourteen mills across eight states (principally in Pittsburgh and Ohio), displacing 13,000 workers.²⁸ These factories were often reopened in emerging Asian markets due to the competitive advantages in the natural assets industries they offered (i.e., cheap labor and raw materials²⁹). By the beginning of the 1980s, newspapers contained daily stories announcing a plant shutdown, another thousand jobs disappearing from the community, and the frustrations of displaced workers who were unable to find work that would provide for their families. The demise of Pittsburgh's steel industry had a ripple effect as mines, factories, and ancillary industries related to steel production lost business and ultimately shut down. The Steel City became part of the rust belt, an assemblage of former manufacturing cities like Youngstown, Ohio, Peoria, Illinois, and Pontiac, Michigan.

The halcyon days of Pittsburgh's steelworker of iron, steel, and glass, are now merely a postscript. Of specific importance to our project, this transition had a profound impact on working-class families and the labor classes. The great transformation of Pittsburgh saw the city encounter a nearly 50 percent population decrease in the labor force, as workers went elsewhere seeking new jobs and less suffering.³⁰ Of note, the significant number of workers who left the

regional labor force were predominantly *younger* workers who comprised what Ramit Plushnick-Masti has called the ‘Pittsburgh diaspora’,³¹ as they headed mostly to the U.S. South and Southwest; those who stayed were far more likely to be older workers who had been displaced from their previous occupations and entered the ranks of the long-term unemployed.

As Pittsburgh shifted (willingly or otherwise) from productive investment in basic national industries into unproductive speculation, mergers and acquisitions, and foreign investments, its blue-collar labor force—built puddling iron in the workshops, and hardened in the blast furnaces of the steel mills—succumbed to the ergonomic chairs and climate controlled offices of white collar ‘thinkwork’ in the ‘knowledge economy’.³² What remains, however, is a lasting mythology of its working-class past—its long-forged history of honest work. Thus do we see the Pittsburgh of today—filled with gleaming skyscrapers (more than 150, of which 30 are at least 20 stories in height), art galleries and cultural centers (e.g., Phipps Conservatory; Heinz Hall; Benedum Center; Andy Warhol Museum; Frick Art & Historical Center; Carnegie Science Center; etc.), and brand new stadia (e.g., PNC Park; Heinz Field; CONSOL Energy Center)—routinely engaged in (*if not invested in*) the production and consumption of *nostalgic masculinity* represented by its industrial-era past.³³ And nowhere is this nostalgic masculinity performed more publicly and actively than in reference to the city’s football team, the Steelers.

The Steelers as Pittsburgh

The Steel Curtain

The coalescence of the mythologized steel-working symbolic and a prevailing working-class consciousness is perhaps made most praxical by the city’s football team, the Pittsburgh Steelers. Founded in 1933, the Steelers were at best an average team (record-wise) throughout the

franchise's first 40 or so years of existence, with only two post-season appearances prior to 1972. During the mid-to-late 1970s, however, the Steelers franchise emerged as an NFL dynasty, winning four Super Bowl championships in six years under the direction of NFL Hall of Fame Head Coach Chuck Noll (a record which still stands to this day). Even though the Steelers had an outstanding offensive unit that featured several future Hall of Famers (e.g., Lynn Swann, Franco Harris, John Stallworth, Terry Bradshaw, John Henry Johnson, and Mike Webster), it was Pittsburgh's vaunted 'Steel Curtain Defense' that became its patented hallmark. With an aggressive defense, the Steelers tough, brutish physicality earned them the distinction as the NFL's most physical team, best personified by the images of a toothless Jack Lambert and 'Mean' Joe Greene's moniker-defining deportment. Millman and Coyne have argued that the Steeler's physical style of play mirrored the material conditions of factory life and working class masculinity in Pittsburgh, stating that the team played 'in the spirit of the city in the 1970s: hard-nosed and relentless'.³⁴ As Maggie Patterson explained this twinning of team and city: 'Pittsburghers were looking for a story that encapsulates who they are, and the Steelers have become that story. People all over the world have latched onto that sense of blue-collar strength, and proving yourself through actions rather than rhetoric'.³⁵

It is perhaps prosaic to suggest that Sundays at the concrete fortress of Three Rivers Stadium were moments for the coming together of Pittsburgh's disparate labor classes around a common interest. But in point of fact, the stadium on cold December winters *was* very much that: *a physical space for an embodied celebration of a working-class life and industrial manhood*, as loyal Steeler fans adorned themselves in the garb of such supporter clubs as Franco's Army and Lambert's Lunatics, and waved their Terrible Towels. As Wright Thompson surmised in his essay on the cultural performance of the Pittsburgh diaspora in Houston, Texas:

That old city is an idea now, a place remembered by the people who left and the generation of Pittsburgh-Americans they've since raised. ... So they construct a sort of Renaissance fair for manufacturing America. They treat Pittsburgh in the same way their Italian ancestors treated Italy—a complex thing becoming simple, fighting assimilation, trying to keep a culture from diluting into nothing. What makes this unique is that they do it almost entirely by following a football team.³⁶

As Pittsburgh's post-industrial steel industry waned under the twin pressures of foreign competition and free-market trade, the Steelers became a stable symbolic body through which the city's 'blue collar' masculinity could be articulated in the crisis discourse of deindustrialization. It hastily became an imagined space for sharing in the collective struggles of laid-off workers from dormant mills in an economically and emotionally depressed region. What came to be known as Steeler Nation emerged as an 'imagined community'³⁷ through which Pittsburgh's geographically dispersed labor class could preserve their 'blue-collar' masculinity under 'threat' from corporate capitalism. And while Steeler Nation had no physical boundaries or official membership, its working-class eth(n)ic and image were omnipresent.

Outside the city, Steeler Nation became a collective configuration of hundreds of thousands of displaced Pittsburgh workers who had fled the city during the twilight years of Fordism. While they were in effect distanced from the stadium, the city, and the team they so cherished, they maintained a close symbolic connection to their historical roots through the media, celebrations as members of Black and Gold supporters clubs, and local Pittsburgh-themed sports bars. As former Super Bowl-winning Steelers coach Bill Cowher once stated, 'You can always take the people out of Pittsburgh, but you can't take Pittsburgh out of the people'.³⁸ Steeler Nation quickly emerged as one of the most popular and expansive fan bases in the U. S., whose 'members' gather ritualistically on Sunday afternoons to symbolically celebrate a memory of a

bygone milieu. In a short documentary by *NFL Films Presents* on Steeler Nation, Pittsburgh-area broadcaster Scott Paulsen opined:

When you're displaced, you look for something familiar. And I think so many people were displaced from the Pittsburgh area, that they sought out other folks that (they) were like. And that's why today you can go in any major city in the United States and find a Black and Gold Club. Every Sunday you can gather with people that are like you, good or bad, that speak the same language, and watch the Steelers.³⁹

Steeler Nation thus offered industrial laborers in other U.S. cities stable body for which they could self-identify, as they often share similar anxieties of job redundancy, 'forced relocation,' and a climate of eroding masculinity under the evolving phases of capital. The Steelers, therefore, became a powerful trans-spatial symbol of meaning to those in Pittsburgh, as well as to those nationally who longed for the working-class culture of industrial America's past.

More recently, the mediated Steelers have often been articulated to symbolic systems created around the city's, region's, and country's industrial past. Their run of three Super Bowl appearances in six years (2005-2011, winning titles in 2006 and 2009) once again made the team relevant on the field, and their footballing ethic has further crystallized their identity as America's 'blue collar' franchise. A new crop of football icons has emerged, and in the spirit of Lambert and Mean Joe Greene, each holds a powerful identity cast in the shadow of the Steelers' decidedly masculine ethic. Now a generation removed from the misery and uprooting of the collapse of big steel, today's Steelers invoke strong representations of a nostalgic masculinity, a longing for the working-class habitus of Pittsburgh's iron puddlers and steelworkers—what we might term an aspirational working-class identity⁴⁰ for the city's decidedly younger, white-collar generation, as well as those who comprise the wider Pittsburgh diaspora.

In the remainder of this article, we interrogate the production of three contemporarily confluent embodiments of post-industrial Steeler masculinity. As exalted performers of the toughest team, in the toughest sport, in the (historically) toughest city in American, each of these athletes has come to represent a particular configuration of masculinity in the context of 21st century work-life. In so doing, we suggest that these athletes frame cultural citizenship, determining the arcs of subjectivity across crystalline mediations of performance, identity, and embodiment. In other words, through the cumulative and ongoing discursive formations of these celebrity athletes we learn what it means to belong to Pittsburgh as an imagined, and increasingly re-spatialized, community.

Big Ben and [Tucker] Maxculinity

During the week leading up to the 2006 Super Bowl between the Steelers and Seattle Seahawks, pictures of the Steelers then-23-year-old star quarterback, Ben Roethlisberger, appeared on the prominent sports blog, *Deadspin*, in which he was posed with three young women while wearing a t-shirt with the saying ‘Drink Like a Champion’ printed on the front; he also appeared to be extremely intoxicated. According to *Deadspin*’s founding editor, Will Leitch, ‘One photo included a shot of Big Ben pouring a bottle of tequila down the throat of a lovely young lass’.⁴¹ Although the photos generated some interest in Roethlisberger’s off-field activities (especially since it was during a media-hyped Super Bowl week), they nonetheless did little to effect the public view of him in Pittsburgh at the time. If anything, Leitch suggests, they worked to *humanize* him:

These photos are consistently satisfying, not because they make Roethlisberger look like some bad guy, but because they make him look like a normal human being. The week of the Super Bowl, Roethlisberger was a supposedly handsome twenty-three-year-old millionaire having the

time of his life. There is absolutely nothing wrong with that. ... Nothing is ‘dirty’ about Roethlisberger drinking; it’s just real. It doesn’t make fans dislike him; it makes him more relatable.⁴²

And in fact, several months later, the very t-shirt he was wearing in the photos could be found available for purchase in Steelers merchandise stores in Pittsburgh, situated right alongside official team jerseys (of which his was the best-selling one in the league at the time [see Shelton⁴³]), sweatshirts, and other branded apparel.⁴⁴

As Roethlisberger’s career progressed and he saw increasing team and individual successes—most notably winning Super Bowl titles in 2006 and 2009 (as well as getting to but losing the Super Bowl in 2011), setting numerous team records for the quarterback position (including highest all-time winning percentage as a starter, 71.4%, better than that of former Steeler great and NFL Hall of Famer, Terry Bradshaw), and becoming known throughout the league for his on-field ‘toughness’ of being able to play with a high threshold of pain—so, too, did his off-field behavior increasingly become layered into his emerging celebrity persona. Which is to say, the easy-going quarterback was fast-earning a reputation not only as a talented football player *but also* as a hard-partying, liquor-swilling, motorcycle-riding (and crashing⁴⁵), ‘man of the people’.⁴⁶

Despite (or perhaps *because of*) this emerging narrative about his off-field exploits, Roethlisberger maintained his position as an iconic football player and marketing pitchman. In discussing his widespread appeal as a brand endorser, for example, Bob Dorfman of marketing firm Baker Street Parters characterized Roethlisberger in this manner:

He’s got a blue-collar, working-class appeal. He’d be perfect for any kind of product that gets the job done without glitz and glamour: burgers, trucks, power tools, home-improvement chains. He

doesn't have Tom Brady's glamour. He's not as good on camera as Peyton Manning. But if you're looking for a tough, hardworking guy, he fits the bill.⁴⁷

By early 2009, Roethlisberger was sitting on top of the NFL world, having just won his second Super Bowl title. However, in the summer of that year, allegations surfaced that he had raped a Lake Tahoe hotel employee named Andrea McNulty during a celebrity golf tournament several months earlier.⁴⁸ According to Gregg Rosenthal⁴⁹ of *NBC Sports*, Roethlisberger allegedly lured McNulty, who was a hotel concierge, to his room under the guise of a malfunctioning television. Once there, McNulty alleges she was blocked from leaving the room and raped by Roethlisberger. Upon informing the hotel's chief of security of the incident the following day, McNulty alleges that she was told she was 'overreacting' and that 'most girls would feel lucky to have sex with someone like Roethlisberger'.⁵⁰ The resulting lawsuit was settled out of court some two and half years later, for an undisclosed amount that was speculated to be as much as \$350,000.⁵¹

And thus appeared the first chink in his theretofore Teflon armor as the problematic off-field incidents continued to pile up: Less than a year later, at a bar in Milledgeville, Georgia (known as 'Millyvegas' due to its proximity to Georgia College & State University), Roethlisberger was once again alleged to have sexually assaulted a woman, this time by a 20-year-old college student who told police she had been assaulted in the locked bathroom of a bar.⁵² Although the investigation ended without criminal charges being filed, the NFL responded by suspending Roethlisberger without pay for the first six games of the 2010-2011 season (later reduced to four). NFL commissioner, Roger Goodell, justified the suspension on the following grounds:

My decision today is not based on a finding that you violated Georgia law, or on a conclusion that differs from that of the local prosecutor. That said, you are held to a higher standard as an NFL player, and there is nothing about your conduct in Milledgeville that can remotely be described as

admirable, responsible, or consistent with either the values of the league or the expectations of our fans.⁵³

Within the dynamics of hypermasculine (if not hypersexual) sport culture⁵⁴, and especially professional football, Roethlisberger's (alleged) sexual indiscretions should not necessarily be surprising. In fact, as Don Sabo and Ross Runfola noted more than thirty years ago in the introduction to their book *Jock: Sports & Male Identity*, 'violence and masculinity, in part created by sports, appear to reinforce misogynistic elements of male sexuality and may be related to the prevalence of rape and wife-beating'.⁵⁵

Yet although the Roethlisberger brand took a hit for his actions in the court of popular opinion, what is important to us is the extent to which Roethlisberger's actions feed into a prevailing model of hypersexual masculinity that, in the historical present, essentially excuses or erases—or in some quarters, even celebrates—such behavior because of his athletic acumen and standing as a supposed 'real man' in the sporting landscape. As CL Cole and Harry Denny have written,

The masculinity promoted through and on display in sport is (hyper)masculinized and heterosexualized through a series of practices embedded in a "politics of lifestyle" marked by the semi-public sexual exchange of a conspicuously displayed network of adoring, supportive female fans, girlfriends, and/or wives: it is a masculine lifestyle meant to be embraced, admired, envied, and consumed.⁵⁶

They further note that 'the relationship between sport and masculinity is always already complicated by race'.⁵⁷ In Roethlisberger's case, we can look to the way his whiteness mediates this relationship, how his mythical working-class hero status has seemingly been transformed into an aggrieved yet entitled frat-boy identity of the kind promulgated by author Tucker Max, who has created (or at least perpetuated) a niche market (i.e., 'fratire' or 'dicklit') that glamorizes

recklessness, binge drinking, sexual hedonism, and the objectification/exploitation of women⁵⁸—all terms that could be applied to Roethlisberger.⁵⁹

But of course, Roethlisberger's transgressions aren't unique to the historical present in which he finds himself. In fact, they are very much products of his time. For in reality, what is being glamorized in the writings of Max and the actions of Roethlisberger is a culture of rape, what the Women's Center at Marshall University defines as

an environment in which rape is prevalent and in which sexual violence against women is normalized and excused in the media and popular culture. Rape culture is perpetuated through the use of misogynistic language, the objectification of women's bodies, and the glamorization of sexual violence, thereby creating a society that disregards women's rights and safety.⁶⁰

It is perhaps not entirely surprising, then, that the city of Pittsburgh (and in fact, the larger Pittsburgh diaspora)—with its blue-collar milieu (real or imagined)—has (more or less) rebelled against him. As elucidated by Jack McCallum in his *Sports Illustrated* cover story 'The Hangover: Roethlisberger',

Throughout Pittsburgh there is strong sentiment that the Steelers should have parted ways with Roethlisberger, their two-time Super Bowl--winning quarterback, for behavior—ranging from civic boorishness to borderline criminality—that has deeply damaged a connection between the community and the family-run organization that has been built over 77 years.⁶¹

Which is to say, where he was once celebrated for his physical toughness, excessive drinking, and helmetless motorcycle riding—all outward signifiers of stereotypical masculinity—his recent boorish behavior and alleged sexual misconducts do not square up with the mythical construct of what it means to be a 'real man' in Pittsburgh: strong, hard-working, aggressive, perhaps even patriarchal, but also a down-home family man committed to his community.⁶² Or, put differently, where at once a certain kind of violence by Roethlisberger is celebrated if not

valorized within the nostalgic throes of Pittsburgh's blue-collar identity (i.e., violence toward his opponents, or even violence towards one's self⁶³), violence towards women or service employees is read as an affront to those very same working-class sensibilities of the community.

The Hitman

While the crosshairs of Ben Roethlisberger's mediated intersubjectivity have been fixed on his hypersexual masculinity, frat-boy persona, and working-class, Rust Belt roots—and specifically on his sexual transgressions, conquests, and incursive trysts—sport-media consumers have come to know his teammate, James 'The Hitman' Harrison, as the embodiment of a uniquely spectacular form of corporeal violence. The lynchpin of 'The Steel Curtain II' defense Harrison is often lauded as the 'hardest hitting' and 'toughest' player in the NFL. By his own admission, Harrison is a 'mean son of a bitch who loves hitting the hell out of people'.⁶⁴ During his career, Harrison has been involved in a number of on-the-field incidents which have only furthered cemented his reputation as one of the NFL's 'hard men'. His overly physical performances at the position of linebacker (long considered the most violent position on the football field) have become the stuff of both public revel and scrutiny. With regard to the former, Harrison has been selected to five consecutive Pro Bowls and was recognized as the *Associated Press* NFL Defensive Player of the Year in 2008.

Regarding the latter, Harrison has been fined more than any other NFL player for hits deemed to be too vicious in both intent and execution—most of which being interpreted as tackles that, due to their ferocity and physicality, were likely to create unnecessary injuries to the opponent. During the 2010 season alone Harrison was fined \$125,000, including a \$75,000 fine for a tackle on Cleveland Browns wide receiver Mohamed Massaquoi. During that season he

also drew media attention for hits to quarterbacks Vince Young, Jason Campbell, Ryan Fitzpatrick, and Drew Brees, and wide receiver Joshua Cribbs. He was suspended late in the 2011 season for what the NFL described as an ‘illegal hit’ to the Cleveland Browns’ Colt McCoy while attempting to tackle the quarterback in the open field of play.⁶⁵

While each of these incidents set both the so-called ‘blogsphere’ and ‘Twitterverse’ afire with rage-filled tirades both in support and condemnation of Harrison’s style of play, what is perhaps more relevant for our purposes here are the ways in which prevailing media narratives articulated with and against dominant framings of masculinity, race, and violence in football (and how that violence should be regulated). In numerous media constructs Harrison was often described as an ‘animal’ or a ‘thug,’ evoking a longstanding [sporting] lexicon grounded in racial stereotypes and racist diatribe.⁶⁶ During his career Harrison has been given the nickname ‘Silverback’, an allusion—according to rival fansite musings—to a term used to describe ‘the larger ‘buck’ or bigger undomesticated black male. Usually a parolee because his larger size from regular meals and lifting weights’.⁶⁷

For his part, Harrison has in many ways sought to challenge the NFL’s concentric formations of racist language and racial governance, while at the same time projecting a decidedly pro-violence—if not defiantly militaristic—masculine identity. The intersections of race and violent masculinity on and through Harrison’s footballing body are perhaps nowhere more apparent than in a now infamous July 2011 interview and video/photo shoot with *Men’s Journal*. In that issue, which was published following his heavily fined 2010 campaign, Harrison makes clear his views on the role of violence in American football: ‘Listen, you’re going to get hit if you play football,’ Harrison said. ‘If you’re out there, you’re going to get hit. If you’re scared, maybe you don’t

need to be out there'.⁶⁸ Reacting to the slew of fines he received the previous season, he mockingly posited: 'I don't want to hurt nobody.' He then continued:

I don't want to step on nobody's foot and hurt their toe. I don't want to have no dirt or none of this rubber on this field fly into their eye and make their eye hurt. I just want to tackle them softly on the ground, and if y'all can, we'll lay a pillow down when I tackle them so they won't go to the ground too hard.⁶⁹

Harrison then connects what he sees are inconsistencies in the league's governance of on-the-field violence with its long-established history of racial bias: 'I'm quite sure I saw [Clay Matthews] put his helmet on Michael Vick (an African American quarterback) and never paid a dime. But if I hit Peyton Manning or Tom Brady (both of whom are white) high, they'd have fucked around and kicked me out of the league.' To make his point, Harrison explained to *Men's Journal* that he 'slammed Vince Young on his head and paid five grand, but just touched Drew Brees and that was 20. You think black players don't see this shit and lose all respect for Goodell?'.⁷⁰

In the interview, Harrison goes on to question NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell's ability to assess the ethics and legality of on-the-field violence. He chides: 'What I tried to explain to Goodell, but he was too stupid to understand, is that dudes crouch when you go to hit them,' Harrison told *Men's Journal*. 'With Massaquoi, my target area was his waist and chest, but he lowered himself at the last possible second and I couldn't adjust to his adjustment. But Goodell, who's a devil, ain't hearing that. Where's the damn discretion, the common sense?'.⁷¹ In seeking to further undermine Goodell's authority on football matters (if not football masculinity), Harrison in the interview refers to the NFL Commissioner as 'Faggot Goodell' and alludes to the fact that he never played the game at an elite level.⁷²

The online edition of the article featured a video clip of Harrison in his home preparing for the interview and photo shoot, playing with his children, grumbling as make-up artists coif his pointed facial hair and spray his chiseled abdomen, and conspicuously adorning two championship rings on his hands. Later in the shoot Harrison—purposefully constructing his trademark scowl—is photographed brandishing his two favorite pistols. In the video, the photographer seems compelled to overdetermine Harrison’s muscularity and physique against the player’s arsenal, saying: ‘the guns look small in your hands, those are big guns.’ One journalist described the images this way: ‘the man is just plain scary. Harrison can take any random pose—say, standing against a black background with an FN Five-seven pistol and a Smith & Wesson 460V revolver across his naked, hypertrophied pecs—and make it look menacing’.⁷³ One might also argue that through the moving and still images generated during the episode, Harrison sought, or was made, to en flesh the sport-war nexus that has become both in popular media productions and in player-driven narratives.⁷⁴

Jennifer Hargreaves once wrote, ‘The appropriate discourse for the practice of power invested in the male sporting body in these contexts (e.g. football) is a military discourse of war and combat—of struggles, confrontations, strategies and tactics’.⁷⁵ In a similar vein, and specific to Harrison, many journalists and public commentators have pointed out that his relevance—as both the object of adoration and scrutiny—typifies ‘a certain hypocrisy regarding pro football’s gilded mayhem.’⁷⁶ More specifically, it has been argued that:

Roger Goodell wants us to think this angry, unapologetic, gun-toting jerk is the reason pro football is, on occasion, violent and unsafe. But the uneasy reality is that James Harrison doesn’t make the NFL dangerous. Football makes the NFL dangerous. And it’s dangerous on every play, not just those infrequent instances when Harrison gives some quarterback’s brain a bumper-car ride around his skull.⁷⁷

At a most basic level, we might surmise that Harrison's performative masculinity is constantly being strained by the shifting tectonics of morality and football violence. Looking back at Smith's⁷⁸ classification of player violence, for instance, we can see that the lines of acceptable and unacceptable forms of sporting violence are often blurry. In his now three-decade old typology, Smith explains that most physical acts can be classified into one of four types: brutal body contact (normalized bodily contact such as collisions, blocks, tackles, etc.); borderline violence (accepted forms of violence which, although often prohibited by the rules, are common in contact sport); quasi-criminal violence (formally and informally unauthorized violence that often results in injury); and criminal violence (acts obviously outside of what has been deemed acceptable in both sport and broader social contexts).⁷⁹

In spite of this and other contingencies, Harrison tells us something. In both the ways he is rendered and renders himself—on the field and in the media—Harrison has come to embody a series of tensions: tensions of autarky and governance; tensions of black identities against 'white governmentality'⁸⁰; tensions of sport militarism and sport marketism. At the core, then, Harrison's body comes to be seen as a violence wielding-projectile, positioned as what Kobena Mercer famously referred to as a 'muscle machine'—a racialized, corporeal weapon articulated to the twin systems of race and dehumanization. For 'violence is, after all, a relation between bodies'.⁸¹

And yet his body is also a site of resistance to the systems of governance brought about by the 'terrorizing white gaze'⁸². His blackness and his capacity for violence offer a generative convergence upon which the corporeal at once projects and obscures what Hargreaves refers to as a violent 'masculine style competitive sport' that 'has impelled men . . . to abuse and injure the body by, for example, over-training, attempting high-risk skill and endangering life by

misuse and diet manipulation, and ritualized brutality is built into the rules and structures of games such as American football'.⁸³ As such, we might surmise that Harrison's is a body of contradiction. His capacity for violence, and celebration thereof, is essential in producing a particular formation of football-hypermasculinity. In sport, 'masculine identity incorporates images of activity, strength, aggression and muscularity and it implies, at the same time, an opposite 'feminine' subjectivity associated with passivity, relative weakness, gentleness and grace'.⁸⁴

In short, we might argue that the male athlete's capacity for (acceptable forms of) violence is masculinizing. Using the body as a weapon, particularly in sporting contexts, 'the cultural meanings of sports violence and living with injury for many men is linked to ideological issues of gender legitimacy and power'.⁸⁵ And, likewise, as Michael Messner once explained, 'in many of our most popular sports, the achievement of goals (scoring and winning) is predicated on the successful utilization of violence...activities in which the human body is routinely turned into a weapon to be used against other bodies, resulting in pain, serious injury, and even death'.⁸⁶ Thus does Harrison's violent body occupy a place on both the right and wrong sides of power and subjectivity; a 'hard man' and a 'Silverback', a source of privilege⁸⁷ and accumulation and of subordination (to governance/exploitation).

Polamalu as the 99%

For the mythologized white, working-class masses of Steeler Nation, perhaps no player epitomizes the hardened attitudes and discourses of industrial Pittsburgh quite like Troy Polamalu. More than Big Ben or 'The Hitman,' Harrison, Polamalu is the player most readily associated with the Steelers' new millennial resurgence and recent Super Bowl success. On the

‘gridiron,’ Polamalu continues to cement his legacy as one of the NFL’s historic greats; he is a two-time Super Bowl champion, a seven-time NFL Pro Bowl selection⁸⁸, the NFL’s 2010 Defensive MVP, a member of the 2000s NFL All-Decade team, and projected by most pundits to be a first-ballot NFL Hall-of-Fame candidate upon his retirement. Known for a ferocious attacking style and intuitive play-making, Polamalu’s ravenous appetite for the ‘pigskin’ has become the hallmark of Steelers ‘Blitzburgh’ defense; an unprecedented athletic versatility that revolutionized modern defensive tactics. Off the field, Polamalu has emerged as one of the most visible, successful, and popular athletes in contemporary U.S. culture. Indeed, few athletes have become more recognizable than Polamalu, with his oft-described ‘exotic’ Samoan athletic body, punishing playmaking, and trademark shoulder-length curls.⁸⁹ Polamalu’s performance has established him as a particularly visible celebrity endorser, pitching such diverse products as Coca-Cola beverages, Nike cleats, Electronic Arts video games, and most notably Head & Shoulders shampoo.⁹⁰ A cursory glance at metrics attempting to quantify Polamalu’s celebrity status reveal his commanding market import:

- Polamalu’s #43 Pittsburgh Steelers jersey was the most purchased men’s and women’s NFL jersey in 2010.⁹¹
- The Davie Brown Index (DBI), measuring a celebrity’s ability to influence brand affinity and consumer purchases, places Polamalu 7th among all U.S. athletes in celebrity appeal and relevance.⁹²
- Polamalu ranks among the NFL’s elite in ‘Q score’ (4th) and ‘Positive Q score’ (2nd).⁹³
- *Forbes Magazine* listed Polamalu as the 6th most influential U.S. athlete in 2011, ahead of such notable athletes as LeBron James, Tiger Woods, and Peyton Manning.⁹⁴

Aside from his national appeal as a prominent media celebrity, we would argue that Polamalu holds a mythical place as a representative embodiment of *steelworker masculinity* in

Pittsburgh. Indeed, Polamalu's hard, physical exploits on the field are often mobilized to preserve appeal to the working-class imaginaries of Steeler Nation. After arriving in Pittsburgh following a highly-decorated intercollegiate career at the University of Southern California, Polamalu quickly became the (symbolic) fulcrum of a defense, a team, and a city that had long glorified steel-welding brawn and working-class toughness. As the defensive talisman on the toughest team, in the toughest sport, in the toughest city in America, Polamalu has become a totem of the city's steelworker ethos. Although he is officially regarded as a 'safety'—a position with a 'soft' connotation—Polamalu's unmatched blend of speed, size, and strength has refashioned conventional perceptions of the position. According to former Steelers coach Bill Cowher, 'He's a very unique player at his position. He combines the athletic ability to cover, the explosiveness to be a great blitzzer, he's an outstanding tackler and, on top of that, he's a very instinctual player'.⁹⁵ His dynamic athleticism places him anywhere on the field, often lining up against players twice his size. His aggressive playing style preserves the masculine ethic of Pittsburgh, framed around strong notions of grit, physicality, and masculinity. Discusses Polamalu's toughness, NFL Hall of Fame Quarterback Warren Moon argues that he could have played in any era:

Troy Polamalu is a throwback player. Tough, hard-nosed, does whatever is asked, throws his body around. He throws it around so much that he gets hurt and knocks himself out with concussions. But when he gets hurt, they have to hide his helmet to keep him off the field. He will give you everything he's got.⁹⁶

It is within the industrial echoes of Pittsburgh's past where Polamalu's physicality is [re-]made, a corporeal dialectic which he purposefully acknowledges (off the field, as well as on): 'You know, guys come in and names change, but the physical game stays the same... We have a reputation to uphold, you know, from the Pittsburgh Steelers before we were all born. In the '20s

and '30s'.⁹⁷ These examples and many others point to the ways in which Polamalu's physicality on the field articulates with a post-industrial class politics and rugged masculinity in the context of post-industrial Pittsburgh.⁹⁸

Polamalu has not only become highly politicized in his representational politics but also through his progressive political leanings off the pitch (which nicely align with the prevailing political leanings of the city, both historically and in the present). Among many examples was his recent criticism of the NFL's owners during the NFL's collective bargaining impasse in the summer of 2011. The owners, seeking expanding profits in an already burgeoning \$9 Billion per annum industry, used the primary negotiation tactic of a 'lock out' whereby the players were barred from team facilities, until their union representation surrendered a larger portion of league operating revenues. As Polamalu saw it, the owner's ploy to hold football hostage from the public in pursuit of profit maximization was an egregious abuse of power by the corporate elite. While much of the media and NFL fans reduced the prolonged labor struggle to the overly simplistic logics of 'millionaires vs. billionaires', Polamalu publicly eschewed such reductive thinking. As he saw it, it was yet another instance of class struggle between capital and labor and the authoritarian tendencies of the free market:

It's unfortunate right now I think what the players are fighting for is something bigger. A lot of people think it's millionaires versus billionaires and that's the huge argument. The fact is its people fighting against big business. The big business argument is 'I got the money and I got the power therefore I can tell you what to do.' That's life everywhere. I think this is a time when the football players are standing up and saying 'No, no, no, the people have the power.'⁹⁹

Polamalu's remarks are particularly salient when understood in relation to the context in which they were articulated; that is, at the apogee of the Occupy Wall Street movement (the global, anti-capitalist oppositional movement by ordinary individuals protesting prevailing

inequality, social injustice, and corporate greed of the financial sector). While NFL players are certainly well paid — although it must be mentioned that the average salary of an NFL player is \$500,000 for what amounts to a short career length of around 3.2 years relative to other athletes — Polamalu's denouncement of the old, rich, predominantly white NFL owners, and their profit maximizing motives, expresses a critical social consciousness to the subject group for which he represents/is represented to. He invokes the histories of Pittsburgh labor struggles, where the blue collar steelworkers and working-class communities unionized for higher wages and improved working conditions from the cold, heartless mill owner. It further cemented his status as a representational figure for the citizens of Pittsburgh who, like Polamalu, have witnessed firsthand the imbalanced power relations between capital and labor. As arguably the Steelers' most visible and popular player, Polamalu and his body cannot be divorced from the cultural and political histories which frame it; namely his articulation to the blue-collar ethos of the disenfranchised workers in Pittsburgh, and the influence of neoliberal politics for which athletes, as laborers fighting against 'big business,' find themselves located precisely within the crosshairs.

Even more recently, Polamalu has used his powerful status to endorse in a new politics of social justice and environmentalism. To wit, Polamalu was embroiled in controversy over a film recommendation he made on his official Facebook page for the anti-drilling documentary *Gasland*.¹⁰⁰ Set in Pennsylvania, the film investigates the ecological and environment consequences of natural gas drilling through fracking techniques, and has spurred one of the most fervent debates in the region for a while.¹⁰¹ Despite receiving much praise for his political activism from commenters on his Facebook post, this act has alienated him from some within the NFL faithful. His comments became fodder for the 'far right' after being featured prominently

on *The Blaze*, a conservative news and opinion website created by theo-conservative media personality Glenn Beck. Responses added to Polamalu's initial Facebook posting and in the comments section of *The Blaze*'s article, labeled Polamalu as: 'left wing trash'; and 'anti-capitalist'; having 'taken too many shots to the head'; and an example of yet 'another wealthy but angry black man living an elite life'.¹⁰² Commenters were further affirmed of Polamalu's 'liberal agenda' after learning of his appearance with President Obama in a 2009 public service announcement commercial for *NFL Play 60* and *United We Serve*, and his charity works helping (predominantly minority) youth populations in urban communities.¹⁰³

Polamalu's newfound political leanings, however subtle they may be, work to position him as an engaged cultural citizen in the context of neoliberalism. His identification to the Pittsburgh body politic is built upon his articulations of Pittsburgh's post-industrial class politics, both in the flesh as a hypermasculine performer on the pitch, and by espousing the politics of democracy and resistance in the face of authoritarian influences of the market, and those who exert strong ownership over it. This twofold dynamic is what has made him so beloved to the Steelers faithful, and that which brings his commanding market potential. If not, if his progressive politics were silenced, or worse they were explicitly conservative in their leanings, they would work to threaten his representation as a symbolic figure for Pittsburgh's working-classes. In some ways, then, his cultural citizenship off the field furthers his steelworker masculinity on the field, and thus his symbolic capital within Steeler Nation. While it might be convenient to reduce Polamalu's identification in the city of Pittsburgh as merely an effect of his masculine exploits on the pitch, his bodily discourses present a platform for articulating the working-class, pro-labor, pro-environment, progressive politics in the [post]-industrial city.

Coda: On cultural citizenship, football, and post-industrial manhood

Violence is an inescapable fact of modern life. And just as it was with Roman gladiatorial games held in the bread-and-circuses atmosphere of the Coliseum, so to do the vicious hits both dished out on others and inflicted upon one's own body by today's warring football players catalyze an all-consuming public around spectacular displays of hypermasculinity:

The *violence* of class conflict and the working-class lives it spawns.

The *violence* of sexual assault.

The *violence* of raw physicality.

The *violence* of sport.

The *violence* of everyday life.

In Roethlisberger, Harrison, and Polamalu, we see prominent iterations of such hypermasculine violence on display, all of which coalesce around (and in fact contribute to) our understanding of post-industrial manhood in the Steel City. And make no mistake about it, this version of manhood is always already screened through the lens of (an ethnic) whiteness, a whiteness that has flourished throughout Pittsburgh's history, dominated as it has been by German, Italian, Irish, Polish, and English immigrants (and more recently those from Croatia and Ukraine). Importantly, as John Kraszewski reminds us, 'Although Pittsburgh is made up of competing classes, social groups, and histories, the *Pittsburgh Steelers* render the region as a blue-collar European town'.¹⁰⁴

And thus is Harrison's blackness a commodified blackness, one given power through the stereotypical representation of aggressive, out of control black men—for his violence is accepted, celebrated, as violence in the service of the city, in the service of historical ideas of manliness, toughness, and violence *qua* violence. In this instance, race is both erased by the fan-

consuming-public and actively deployed by Harrison in service to the branding of his own celebrity. Polamalu, too, his flowing black locks and Samoan ancestry borne of Southern California, see his ethnic difference displaced through an active allegiance to the working-class/union politics embedded within the mythic social fabric of the democratic city. And Roethlisberger, once exalted for his ‘common man’ persona and hardscrabble ways, sees his celebrity succumb to the outward rejection of violence against women.¹⁰⁵

For many in the Pittsburgh of today, violence has become something else—no longer a physical violence of iron and steel mills, but a ‘violence’ of changing careerist anxieties (coupled with ~7% unemployment rate), of different modalities of masculinity brought about by the shift from blue-collar jobs to white-collar, knowledge-economy specialties, of the changing racial and ethnic dimensions of the city. Through it all, the Steelers remain emblematic of both a bygone era and the city’s present-day nostalgic longing for—if not performance of—that past. As the examples of Roethlisberger, Harrison, and Polamalu outlined above reveal, understanding the cultural citizenship of the city is more complicated than simply consigning it to a homogenous ‘working-class’ whiteness or politics, for such does not exist, save for the stories it continues to tell itself. {Messner, 1990 #6394}

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NOTES

¹ Reft, 'Steel Dreams and Rusted Nightmares', paragraph 4.

² Jim Russell, a western Pennsylvania-born geographer who studies geopolitics and the relation between migration and economic development. Quoted in Thompson, 'Displaced Steelers Fans', paragraph 30.

³ According to the University Center for Social and Urban Research at the University of Pittsburgh, the seasonally adjusted unemployment rate for the Pittsburgh Metropolitan Area reached an all-time high of 17% in 1982. By way of comparison, the nationwide unemployment rate at that same time was approximately 10%.

⁴ According to U.S. Census data, Pittsburgh's population decreased from an all-time high of 669,817 in 1930 to 423,938 in 1980, to 305,704 in 2010 (which was the population of Pittsburgh c. 1895-1900). This substantial decline in population is similarly mirrored in other industrial cities across the same time frame (e.g., Cleveland's population went from 900,000 in 1930 to roughly 400,000 in 2010; Detroit's went from 1.5 million in 1930 to 700,000 in 2010; Buffalo's went from 573,000 to 261,000).

⁵ Stevens, 'Pittsburgh Bemused', 21.

⁶ Millman & Coyne, *Ones Who Hit*, 15.

⁷ see Drucker, *Age of Discontinuity*.

⁸ Wexell, *Pittsburgh Steelers*, 1. This is quite an overstated claim in the age of 'NASCAR Nation'. see, e.g., Newman, J.I. and M.D. Giardina. *Sport, Spectacle and NASCAR Nation*.)

⁹ Ong, 'Cultural Citizenship'.

¹⁰ Ibid, 738.

¹¹ Hoggart, *Uses of Literacy*, 37.

¹² Thompson, *English Working Class*.

¹³ Ibid, 9.

¹⁴ Ibid, 8.

¹⁵ Williams, *Country and the City*,

¹⁶ Arrighi, *Long Twentieth Century*.

¹⁷ The city's rise as a manufacturing center was advantaged by its natural resources and geographic location. The entire southwest Pennsylvania region was built, quite literally, on coal. Thick slabs of coal protruded from the sides of the hills surrounding the city. For much of the nineteenth century, coal was used as an inexpensive fuel to heat homes, power transportation, and to run small workshops. The city also served as a main transportation hub for rivers and railroads and expedited the transport of materials to Pittsburgh's mills and the distribution of finished goods to the market. With its geologic and geographic fortunes, Pittsburgh became the manufacturing capital of industrial America. By the 1830s, Pittsburgh had already become the glass production capital of America as it began fulfilling rising western demands for glass, especially windows. By 1860, the city's mills had become the nation's leading producer of iron.

¹⁸ Couvares, *Remaking of Pittsburgh*.

¹⁹ Central to the production of iron and glass was the puddling, a necessary process involving the conversion of brittle pig iron into its more malleable and more perfect form. Puddling epitomized the sort of work done in the mills, it required an equal measure of skill, stamina, strength, and years of know-how. Although factory owners tried to mechanize the puddling process, nobody could replace the enormous amount of hard labor and judgment that were a vital part of the production process. Puddling could not simply be broken down into subordinate tasks as it involved the work of a single person from beginning to end. This irreplaceable skill gave the industrial craftsman of Pittsburgh considerable agency over the ownership and the regimentation of mechanized production. In a milieu when common labor earned little more than a dollar an hour, a craftsman earned as much as two to ten times that amount. (Ibid.)

²⁰ Slavishak, *Bodies of Work*, 18.

²¹ Millman & Coyne, *Ones Who Hit*, 19.

²² Herron, *Working in Steel*, 50.

²³ During that five-decade period, the population of Pittsburgh tripled, with immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe, or from the Mediterranean accounting for much of this dramatic increase. Of Pittsburgh's five hundred thirty thousand residents in 1910, one hundred and forty thousand (26.4%) were foreign-born. Combined with those American-born persons of foreign parentage, reflects more clearly the impact of immigration on the city's growth: 62.5 percent of Pittsburgh's population was either first- or second-generation Americans.

²⁴ The city also served as an integral part of the Arsenal of Democracy during World War II, providing steel, aluminum, ammunition, and machinery to support the Allies war efforts, including government-financed research and development, cost-plus military procurement contracts, and, after the war, demand for equipment to help revolutionize technologies of transport and communication

²⁵ The 'Great Compression' following World War II was primarily the result of the rise of union membership and power, raising average wages and reducing the gap between blue-collar work and higher-paid occupations and management. Workers were far better off in the 1950's than at any point prior in U.S. history and created a middle class society revolving around Pittsburgh's mills and factories. (Krugman, *Conscience of a Liberal*.)

²⁶ see Cagen and Vogel, *Creating Breakthrough Products*.

²⁷ This does not simply suggest that corporate managers are reluctant to invest, but only they prefer to purchase and acquire other companies to increase its capital stock, and are refuse to invest in basic industries.

²⁸ Bluestone and Harrison, *Deindustrialization of America*.

²⁹ Hinshaw, *Steel and Steelworkers*, 254.

³⁰ Bluestone and Harrison, *Deindustrialization of America*.

³¹ Plushnick-Masti, *Pittsburgh Remains an Anomaly*.

³² Indeed, the largest employers in the Pittsburgh of today are: the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center (47,000 employees); the University of Pittsburgh (11,000 employees); West Penn Allegheny Health System (11,000 employees); Giant Eagle supermarkets (10,000 employees); PNC Financial Services (8,000 employees); Bank of New York Mellon Corporation (6,900 employees); FedEx (5,000 employees); Highmark insurance (5,000 employees); and Carnegie Mellon University (4,700 employees). U.S. Steel, which once employed as many as 340,000 workers during WWII, currently employs roughly 5,000 workers in Pittsburgh (out of its 42,000 global employees).

³³ David Harvey explains that this shifting territorial logic—of a move toward a more ephemeral knowledge economy—‘is about trying to maintain the health and well-being of a particular space in the face of [the] capillary movement of capital moving left, right, and center, and everywhere’. He continues: ‘If the steel industry is collapsing and the shipbuilding is collapsing, what does somebody who is in charge of the territorial logic do? You say, “Well, maybe it’s convention centers and the convention business. Maybe it’s museums. Maybe it’s tourism, or something of that kind.” So the territorial logic is very much about trying to maintain the health and well-being of a particular place and space within this notion, which is very hard for anybody to control because capitalists decide they’re going to take their money from here and put it there.’ (Harvey, ‘Conversation with David Harvey’, n.p.)

³⁴ Millman and Coyne, *Ones Who Hit*, back cover. In their book, Millman and Coyne juxtapose the Steelers’ blue-collar, physical style of play with the cosmopolitanism of the Dallas Cowboys in a competition America’s hearts in the 1970’s. The Cowboys, with their shiny uniforms, beautiful cheerleaders, and trickery on offense reflected the slick, new money ways of the Texas oil-fields.

³⁵ quoted in Jubera, ‘Roethlisberger’s Road to Redemption’, 2011, 3.

³⁶ Thompson, ‘Displaced Steelers Fans’, paragraph 28.

³⁷ Anderson, *Imagined Community*.

³⁸ quoted in *Steelers Nation*, n.p.

³⁹ quoted in *Ibid*, n.p. This is true even in smaller cities, such as Tallahassee, Florida (with a population of ~180,000, making it the 128th largest city in the country), where two of the three authors of this article reside. Here the Steelers bar of choice is called Ray’s Steel City Saloon. The website www.steelersbars.com, has indexed 714 bars in the United States catering to Steelers fans (though not all of them are, strictly speaking, of the ‘Pittsburgh’ genre).

⁴⁰ We thank Justin Lovich for suggesting this phrase, and for conversation related to Pittsburgh.

⁴¹ Leitch, *God Save the Fan*, 32.

⁴² *Ibid*, 35.

⁴³ Shelton, ‘Big Ben’s Most Gripping Tale’.

⁴⁴ Leitch, ‘It’s Good to Be Ben’, 2006

⁴⁵ On June 12, 2006, Roethlisberger crashed his motorcycle (a Suzuki Hayabusa, called the ‘fastest production bike on the planet’) in downtown Pittsburgh, sustaining multiple injuries that resulted in a broken jaw, broken nose, and cracked skull. He was not wearing a helmet, and had made previous declarations about riding without one because ‘You’re just more free when you’re out there with no helmet on.’ Quoted in Myers, ‘Blow to Big Ben’, paragraph 9). Fans gathered at his hospital for a make-shift vigil following his accident.

⁴⁶ Maske, ‘Man of the People’.

⁴⁷ quoted in McCarthy, ‘Steelers Sure to Enjoy Spoils’, 4C. Media coverage of Roethlisberger continually portrays him in such a light, with common headlines reading ‘Steelers march on behind gritty Roethlisberger’ (Graves, ‘Steelers march on behind gritty Roethlisberger’); ‘Roethlisberger’s style: Tough as Steel’ (Forgrave, ‘Roethlisberger’s style: Tough as steel’); ‘Roethlisberger adds to his tough-guy legend in Steelers victory’ (*NFL.com Wire Reports*, ‘Roethlisberger adds to his tough-guy legend in Steelers victory’).

⁴⁸ see Schapiro, ‘Big Ben Sex Suit’.

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- ⁴⁹ Rosenthal, 'Complaint Gets Very Specific'.
- ⁵⁰ see Lupica, 'Truth and Lies', 51.
- ⁵¹ Florio, 'Roethlisberger Case Settled'.
- ⁵² The victim's account is included in the Georgia Bureau of Investigation's 572-page report of the incident, portions of which are available on The Smoking Gun website at <http://www.thesmokinggun.com/documents/crime/ben-roethlisbergers-bad-play>. In the course of its investigation, it was learned of another woman who alleged that Roethlisberger 'pulled down his pants in front of a young woman and forcefully put his hand up her skirt.' The woman declined to press charges.
- ⁵³ National Football League, 'Goodell Suspends Roethlisberger'. Such a suspension from Goodell, effectively under the auspices of the "NFL Personal Conduct Policy", was not without precedent: Adam 'Pacman' Jones was suspended for the entire 2007 season after numerous off-field infractions involving felony and misdemeanor charges; Tank Johnson was suspended for eight games of the 2007 season for unregistered firearms possession and other legal infractions; Michael Vick was suspended for several games after serving a prison sentence for his role in a dog-fighting ring; and Donte Stallworth was suspended for the 2009 season after pleading guilty to DUI manslaughter charges.
- ⁵⁴ see Connell, *Gender*.
- ⁵⁵ Sabo and Runfola, *Jock Sports*, p. xiii. See also Crosset, Benedict, & McDonald, 'Male Student-Athletes'; Welch, *Violence Against Women*.
- ⁵⁶ Cole & Denny, 'Visualizing Deviance', 128.
- ⁵⁷ Ibid
- ⁵⁸ Coleman, 'Fratire and Rape Culture'; Friedman, 'Tucker Max has Female Fans. Why?'.
- ⁵⁹ Max's most popular book, *I Hope They Serve Beer in Hell*, was a *New York Times* #1 bestseller, and made its Best Seller List each year from 2006 to 2011.
- ⁶⁰ 'What is Rape Culture?', Women's Center at Marshall University.
- ⁶¹ McCallum, *The Hangover*, p. 54.
- ⁶² As opposed to, for example, the way the city of Los Angeles continues to celebrate Kobe Bryant despite his alleged sexual misconduct in Colorado.
- ⁶³ Violence against other men and violence against one's self is two-thirds of what Michael Kaufman and later Michael Messner refer to as the 'triad of violence'; violence against women comprises the remainder of the triad. (Messner, *Taking the Field*.)
- ⁶⁴ Solotaroff, 'Confessions of an NFL Hitman', 2.
- ⁶⁵ Harrison even once body-slammed a stalker.
- ⁶⁶ see the work of Andrews, 'The Facts'; Andrews, 'Excavating Michael Jordan'; Carrington, 'Sport Masculinity and Black Cultural Resistance'.
- ⁶⁷ Chiefs Planet, 'To Reaper and Ultra'.
- ⁶⁸ quoted in Solotaroff, 'Confessions of an NFL Hitman', 3.
- ⁶⁹ Ibid.
- ⁷⁰ Ibid, 2.
- ⁷¹ Ibid, 4.
- ⁷² Harrison went on in the interview to call Goodell 'stupid,' a 'puppet' and a 'dictator,' and said that, 'If that man was on fire and I had to piss to put him out, I wouldn't do it. I hate him and will never respect him'. (ibid).
- ⁷³ Levin, 'James Harrison'.
- ⁷⁴ This militarization of sport space and discourse was perhaps best typified by two examples discussed by Samantha J. King. (King, 'Offensive Lines'). In the first, then-University of Miami football player Kellen Winslow, Jr., following a hard fought game against the University of Tennessee, exclaimed 'It's war. They're out to kill you, so I'm out there to kill them. . . . I'm a fucking soldier. Now get away from me or I'll go off' (quoted in Mumper, 'The NFL's New Turf', n.p.); or a year later when National Basketball Association player Kevin Garnett compared the stakes of an important upcoming game to war this way: 'This is it. It's all for the marbles. I'm sitting in the house loading up the pump, I'm loading up

the Uzis, I've got a couple of M-16s, couple of nines, couple of joints with some silencers on them, couple of grenades, got a missile launcher. I'm ready for war' (quoted in Lupica, 'Stern Turns Gun-Shy', p. 68).

⁷⁵ Hargreaves, *Sport Power and Culture*, 116.

⁷⁶ Solataroff, 'Confessions of an NFL Hitman', 3.

⁷⁷ Levin, 'James Harrison', 1.

⁷⁸ Smith, *Violence and Sport*.

⁷⁹ Of course, as Smith notes then and has continued to be the case since, where any given act of sporting violence sits within these categorizations is always contingent; on history, on prevailing social values and norms, on the conventions of governance and subjectivity. (Smith, *Violence and Sport*).

⁸⁰ Hesse, 'Reviewing the Western Spectacle'.

⁸¹ Connell, *Gender*, 94.

⁸² hooks, *Black Looks*.

⁸³ Hargreaves, *Sport Power and Culture*. 111.

⁸⁴ *Ibid*, 112.

⁸⁵ Young, 'Violence Risk and Liability', 392. The recent debates in the NFL over concussions, especially in the aftermath of several high-profile suicides (e.g., Dave Duerson, Junior Seau, etc) and a major lawsuit, is part and parcel with the discussion of violence, though one that is outside the purview of this article. (For more, see Morrison & Casper, 'Intersections of Disability Studies'; Leonard, 'The NFL and Concussions'.)

⁸⁶ Messner, 'When Bodies are Weapons', 203.

⁸⁷ Connell once wrote: 'Violence is not a 'privilege', but it is very often a means of claiming of defending privilege, asserting superiority or taking advantage' (Connell, *Gender*, p. 95)

⁸⁸ The NFL's version of an All-Star selection.

⁸⁹ It is well-known that Polamalu has not cut his hair in over ten years.

⁹⁰ As the story goes, Head & Shoulders' parent company, Procter & Gamble, took out a million dollar insurance policy from Lloyd's of London for his signature mane

⁹¹ (Rovell, 'Polamalu Rodgers Jerseys').

⁹² Dietsch, 'Media Circus'. Of note: Polamalu is the highest ranking 'non-white' athlete to appear on this list.

⁹³ DiRocco, 'Tim Tebow's Star'. An athlete's 'Q rating' measures a person's overall awareness in the general public, not merely sport fans. A positive Q score is the percent of the general public for which the person is viewed as one of their favorites.

⁹⁴ Van Riper, 'Most Influential Athletes'. A further breakdown of Polamalu's stardom from the *Forbes* piece is as follows: Influential: 21%; Awareness: 23%; Like/Like a lot: 64%; Dislike/Dislike a lot: 3%; N-score (endorsement potential): 165 (avg. athlete 14).

⁹⁵ quoted in Pedulla, 'None Quite Like Polamalu', c3.

⁹⁶ quoted in Hensley, 'NFL Any Era', n.p.

⁹⁷ quoted in Spector, 'Polamalu is Steelers Football'. n.p.

⁹⁸ Beissel and Newman make the case elsewhere that the markers of Polamalu's Samoan heritage – his long hair, soft spoken demeanor, deep spirituality, and embodiment of Fa'aSamoa) at once work to exoticize him to the Pittsburgh populace. (Beissel and Newman, 'Home and Away')

⁹⁹ quoted in Markazi, 'Players Have Cause', n.p.

¹⁰⁰ Schwartzel, 'Polamalu Praises Gasland'. In the past, Polamalu has made other recommendations of 'controversial' documentaries such as anti-corporate farming film *Food Inc.*, the Future of Food about the genetic engineering of food, *Tapped* which examines the role of the bottled water industry, *Waiting for Superman*, which calls for public school reform.

¹⁰¹ Polamalu joined other popular celebrities Mark Ruffalo, Fran Drescher, Debra Winger, and Scarlett Johansson who have commented on gas drilling (Schwartzel, 2012).

¹⁰² Kilmas, 'Polamalu Stirs Controversy', 1-2.

¹⁰³ The video can be found here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tXsoDx9s0j0>

¹⁰⁴ Kraszewski, 'Pittsburgh in Fort Worth', 146. (emphasis ours).

¹⁰⁵ Indeed, part of Roethlisberger's identity makeover involved a highly publicized wedding in which he was portrayed as putting aside his former ways, settling down, and starting a family.