

ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: STAGING THE (AMERICAN) NATION:
PRODUCTION PRACTICES AT THE 2003 LITTLE
LEAGUE WORLD SERIES

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Prior to 9/11/01 Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri controversially argued that corporate capitalism was subsuming the nation-state, thereby giving rise to global networks of power. However after the tragedy many have argued that there has been an resurgence of national sovereignty. The main contention is that the United States has tried to (re)assert its ideological dominance over the rest of the world by attempting to take unilateral control of the capitalist system. Surely the superiority of American culture is questionable at best, but with its considerable power over spectacular (sport) media events there exists a fear that if the United States portrays itself as 'inherently great' (Ferguson, 2004) the government can rationalize their struggle to maintain world-wide hegemony.

Through an interrogation of the production practices at the 2003 Little League World Series (LLWS) this project seeks to highlight one particular method that American popular media has used to privilege its culture over all others. After critical review of the tournament this undertaking found that the production and mediation of the LLWS was a dangerous attempt to (re)assert American cultural superiority. More alarming is the fact that both ABC and Little League Corporation exploit children for capital gain through the event. As such, this project endeavors to expose these practices in an effort to reveal how the United States media insidiously portrays itself as the world's dominant culture thus maintaining a breeding ground of hate for oppositional cultures.

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STAGING THE (AMERICAN) NATION:
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by

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Introduction: Addressing the continuing need for media production studies

Throughout the recent past, organized youth sport has taken hold in the American popular as “an estimated 25 million American children participate in youth sports” (Smith, 2000, www.y-coach.com), with millions more partaking around the world. On the global scale Little League Baseball is far and away the leading youth sport organization. In terms of sheer participation numbers, according Little League Corporation’s (LLCo¹) website (www.littleleague.org) nearly 2.7 million children participated in its organized leagues in 2003. Moreover, thousands of children around the world between the ages of 11 and 12 compete for the right to participate in the Little League World Series (LLWS²) in Williamsport, Pennsylvania, LLCo’s centerpiece event. The LLWS final tournament is broadcast worldwide by the American Broadcasting Company (ABC), and draws around 300,000 visitors yearly to the actual event (field notes, 2003).

As a global mediated event subjugated by an American media source, it can be said that the LLWS is an important site for mythical (re)creations of national sovereignty, and an integral piece of Richard Johnson’s (1986) *circuit of culture*. Johnson surmises that a mediated text like the LLWS is ensconced in a complex web of ideological interconnectivity formed through production, texts,

¹ Little League Corporation refers to itself with the acronym LLCo in most media documentation.

² Little League Corporation refers to the Little League World Series with the acronym LLWS in most media documentation.

readings (consumption), in addition to lived cultures, whereby each part (in)directly informs and is informed by all others. Further adhering to Johnson's line of thinking, significant forces involved in and through the current moment create important 'meaning(s)' during the production and consumption of the LLWS spectacle.

Past media production studies have supported the notion that a television program never simply airs 'what is happening' (Gruneau, 1989, p. 135) at an event, and that laborers creating broadcast spectacles produce specific narratives through which the reader/viewer can be informed (For examples see: Andrews, 1998; Gruneau, 1989; Gruneau et al., 1988; Hall, 1980, 1981; MacNeill, 1996; Silk, 2002). As such, production laborers possess the power to downplay other things that did happen, fabricate what did not, and generally shape a televised event to demonstrate a discourse for which the producer would 'prefer' the audience *decode* (Hall, 1980, 1981).

In what follows, and at the risk of making artificial divisions between production and consumption (Deacon, 2003), this project seeks to ethnographically explore the labor practices that took place during the 2003 LLWS. Through this investigation, and adhering to ideas presented by Butler (2002) and Kellner (2004), I will argue that in the post-September 11, 2001 moment American media sources, like the American Broadcast Company, (un)consciously staged the American nation as one that was culturally superior,

‘inherently great’ (Ferguson, 2004, p. 43-44), and the central hub of ideology through which all oppositional (national) ideologies were subsumed.

I further contend that the nation-staging process is an interruption in the capitalist Empire (Cocco & Lazzarato, 2002; Hardt & Negri, 2000; Silk & Falcos, Forthcoming). This being: insofar as where (American) national sovereignty was once being undermined by capitalistically influenced globalization, its dominion is now thrust to the forefront of popular imagination primarily through American media spectacles. Finally, I assert that events like the 2003 LLWS which blindly privilege American-ness only serve to create a dangerous situation whereby the United States insidiously and continuously perpetuates a divisive condition that breeds hate (Butler, 2002).

Locating the Project: A Brief History of the LLWS

As noted above the LLWS is organized by Little League Corporation and televised by the American Broadcast Channel, Entertainment Sport Programming Network, and Entertainment Sport Programming Network 2 (ABC³). The LLWS was first formulated in 1947 as a US-only event, while non-US “*International*”⁴ teams entered the competition four years later. Until 1958, when automatic berths were granted to teams from *Latin America* and *Canada*, *International* teams were forced to compete against teams from the United States

³ For simplicity I will now refer to these three channels as ABC since the producers of the LLWS were, for the most part, ABC Sports workers.

⁴ Though I realize that categorizing the non-US teams as *International* is Ameri-centric in its own right, I will do so for consistency between ABC mediation, LLCo documentation, and this research project.

in order to reach Williamsport (Van Auken & Van Auken, 2001).

Importantly, despite the addition of *International* teams to the LLWS, it was plainly obvious that LLCo felt that Little League was an activity/event meant to socialize young boys under a dominant American order. This notion was perhaps no more evident in early LLWS literature than through the following statement by Herbert Brownell Jr., attorney general of the United States, which appeared in the 1954 Little League World Series program: “The young Americans who compose the Little League will prove a hitless target for the peddlers of godless ideology” (in Van Auken & Van Auken, 2001, p. 64). LLCo has operated under slow-to-change, hyper-conservative, American unilateral ideals ever since.

For example, it only repealed its 23 year ban on female participation across the board in 1974, after losing several court decisions and appeals regarding the issue (Van Auken & Van Auken, 2001). LLCo then responded by placing a short-lived one year ban on all *International* teams in 1974 ‘for putting too much emphasis on winning’ (Van Auken & Van Auken, 2001, p. 175), even though Japan and Taiwan were the only *International* teams to have won the LLWS since 1958. In 1985, after an all *International* team final, the rules were changed to ensure that a team representing the United States would always play against an *International* team for the “*World Championship*” (Stanton, personal communication, 2004). Further, though *International* teams had been playing in Williamsport since 1952, it took 50 years for LLCo to start playing national

anthems other than the *Star Spangled Banner*, and even then they were abbreviated non-lyrical versions (field notes, 2003). Finally, as of 2003, not one of the 141 award winners found in the Little League Hall of Excellence was a non-US citizen (field notes, 2003; Van Auken & Van Auken, 2001).

Despite these hegemonic American (male) acts (Gruneau, et al., 1988), Little League Baseball became popular throughout the world, and the tournament expanded accordingly. What began as a four-team, single-elimination event in 1947 had transformed to the point that in 2003, 105 countries from around the globe competed in about 16,000 games over 45 days⁵ just to reach the LLWS tournament in Williamsport (Gowdy Jr., 2003). Upon arrival, the final 16 teams were split into four 'pools', two pools for teams from the *United States* and two *International*. Within the pools, the teams competed in a round-robin style tournament, and the top two teams from each pool advanced to a single elimination championship which eventually paired the prevailing team from the 'United States' bracket against the top squad from the 'International' bracket (a more detailed schedule is attached in Appendix A). During the portion of the 2003 LLWS played in Williamsport, a total of 32 games were played (26 televised by ABC), culminating in a 10-1 victory for the team from Tokyo, Japan which beat a team from East Boynton Beach, Florida.

Van Auken and Van Auken (2001) further note that ABC has owned the rights to broadcast the LLWS in some capacity since the early 1960's, making it

⁵ In contrast a Major League Baseball Season takes only 2,300 games to complete in about 180 days.

the longest standing relationship between a sporting event and broadcaster in United States history. This unique relationship began when the 1963 LLWS final game was aired on tape-delay, and it continued to be broadcast in this way until 1989 when ABC started to air it live. Expanded coverage of the LLWS began in 1992 after LLCo first changed the tournament to a round-robin format, and some preliminary *United States* bracket games were programmed on ABC.

The current broadcast format, in which many games from both the *United States* and *International* bracket are aired on all three channels, began in 2001 after the second major expansion of the LLWS tournament (The final event increased from 8 to 16 teams and from 7 to 10 days in duration). 2003 represented the highest number of LLWS tournament games aired on ABC's international broadcast with 26.

Further demonstrating the privileging of American-ness each of the six games not aired in 2003 were preliminary games from the *International* bracket. The expansion and spectacularization of the LLWS has been a boon for both LLCo and ABC. LLCo has a cash cow from which it can use to fund its leagues, tournaments, and social causes, while ABC receives a boost in its mid-August ratings (Stevens, personal communication, 2003). These ratings have become so high that the LLWS final actually outdrew game seven of the NHL Stanley Cup in 2002 (Stevens, personal communication, 2003). Furthermore, and consistent with the ideas suggested within many other production and spectacular event works (Baudrillard, 1991; Best & Kellner, 1997; Gruneau, 1988; Gruneau et al.,

1989; MacNeill, 1996; Silk, 1999, 2002; Tomlinson, 2002) the mediated LLWS is embedded in a dialectic relationship with society at-large.

(Sport) Media Production

Despite its ability to inform and be informed by dominant ideological themes in the current moment, Richard Gruneau (1989) has noted that sporting spectacles are considered entities with neutral political underpinnings or, worse yet, segments of culture that have nothing to do with wider social, political, and cultural issues. In response, more recent critical projects have positioned (televised) sporting events as integral elements in the transmission, (re)formation, and (re)creation of prevailing social values (Andrews, 1998; Billig, 1995; Gruneau, 1989; MacNeill, 1996; Silk, 1999, 2001, 2002).

Taking the aforementioned into account, Mary McDonald and Susan Birrell state that “narrative matters” (1999, p. 295), and implicate sport spectacle narrative(s) in (re)producing dominant, hegemonic, ideological beliefs, thoughts, feelings, and actions. As such, they:

advocate reading sport [narratives] critically as a methodology for uncovering, foregrounding, and producing counter-narratives, that is alternative accounts of particular incidents and celebrities that have been decentered, obscured, and dismissed by hegemonic forces ... (to) make visible the complex, historically specific, matrices of social inequalities that surround us. (1999, p. 295)

Following McDonald and Birrell’s way of thinking, it is at the intersection of production labor, political ideology, and multimedia discourse that popular American sentiment can be shaped (Preston & Kerr, 2001).

In the case of the 2003 LLWS, one of the preferred readings cultivated through the work of ABC production laborers was the “international pastime” (ESPN Radio, 2003; field notes, 2003; Lewis, personal communication, 2004). This rhetoric was initially formulated by the vice president of advertising and promotion at ABC, and included three commercials, two of which aired on television, and one on the radio (Gowdy Jr., 2003; Lewis, personal communication, 2004; Sandel, personal communication, 2003). The main narrative theme portrayed by these commercials was that the LLWS was the real ‘World Series’, because teams from Little League regions around the globe were participating in the event (ESPNRadio, 2003).

An American entity framing and narrating the 2003 LLWS, or baseball in general, as the “international pastime”, particularly in the post-September 11, 2001 context, could be seen as a progressive undertaking. As such, and following Hammond (2003), these claims of cultural diversity through American popular culture should initiate critical and questioning discourse. Providing further impetus to critically engage the 2003 LLWS is because it was marketed (at least partially) (Davidson, personal communication, 2003; Gaspar, personal communication, 2004; Sandel, personal communication, 2004) to, and simultaneously exploited children for capital gain.

Thus, the 2003 LLWS was a key site that the consumer received influential definitions of themselves and “others”, with which to base future relationships, ideas, feelings, and actions. However, to rely solely on a narrative

analysis of a sporting event would fall into the trap described by Deacon (2003) in which any reading of a (sport) broadcast is just one account of infinite interpretations of the event. Therefore, and in agreement with Silk (2002), a close relationship with production personnel is needed to “allow for a more detailed comprehension of the range of meanings made available to those who determined which meanings, stories, and narratives flowed to which specific markets” (p. 780). By creating a relationship with the production laborers, the researcher can thusly generate a more accurate depiction of the meanings intended through a particular event broadcast.

Further, in conjunction with noted sporting event production scholars Gruneau (1989), Gruneau, et al. (1988), MacNeill (1996), and Silk (1999, 2002) who have each called for additional work on production practices at/of spectacular sporting events, this project seeks to help fill the void in critical sport spectacle production studies by closely investigating the labor efforts and narrative construction during the 2003 LLWS. In so doing, I attempt to reveal the dominant modes of discourse at place in and through the event which, at the same time, contributed to and were a result of, the lived realities at that moment.

In what follows, using data gathered through a *micro-ethnography* (Wolcott, 1995) of the tournament, I will discuss the production of the 2003 LLWS spectacle and the ways in which the tournament was manipulated by dominant American ideologies. Throughout my argument, I will provide some brief examples of how US nationalist rhetoric became manifest in the (inter)national

broadcast of the 2003 LLWS as a direct result of ABC production practices.

Finally, by way of conclusion, I will situate the 2003 LLWS as a spectacle that has helped in the further intensification and (re)definition of America's colossal empire, and self-aggrandizing identity in the post-September 11, 2001 moment (Butler, 2002; Giroux, 2004; Kellner, 2004).

Method(s) of Inquiry

When reviewing the 2003 LLWS production and broadcast, rather than rely solely on a semiotic analysis of the spectacle, by "refus[ing] the dogmatic overtures that have often attended it" (Soar, 2000, p. 420), this discussion makes use of a *micro-ethnographic* (Wolcott, 1995) investigation of the event. A micro-ethnographic approach relies heavily on contextualized "verbal descriptions and explanations" (Hammersley, 1992, p. 161) of specific phenomena, obtained by participating in the lives of those involved with the event, studying what happens, taking note as to what is said and by whom, then posing questions (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995).

This approach is highly flexible and allows the researcher to better grasp and analyze the economic, political, and cultural intricacies underpinning the production of an international sporting event (Silk, 2002). Therefore, the project looks to reveal stories ABC and LLCo told through and about the 2003 LLWS, while also 'uncovering specific scenes, events, and meanings that may not have been revealed' (Silk, 2002, p. 776). Furthermore, by using a micro-ethnographic approach I hope to "demystif[y] [some of] the images that parade before our

lives and through which we conceptualize the world and our role within it” (Jhally, 1989, p. 86).

The daunting contingency in orchestrating a micro-ethnography, characterized by its short-lived but multifaceted nature, is the researcher’s ability to enter the empirical setting and become immersed in the phenomena or event quickly in order to obtain a thorough understanding of the empirical setting before it vanishes (Fetterman, 1989; Wolcott, 1995). Thus, gaining entrance into the research setting through key gatekeepers (Roulston, et al., 2003) is of utmost importance. Entrance to the LLWS was acquired by making contact with the director of media relations at LLCo, late in March 2003. He initially granted the researcher media credentials for the event, while, in order to reciprocate my entry into the setting, time was volunteered as a *quasi-intern*⁶ for LLCo prior to and during the tournament.

Initial physical entry into the research setting came during a visit to the Little League Headquarters in early June 2003 when I was granted a personal meeting with the entire media department, followed by a tour of the entire Little League complex. During the meeting, LLCo provided the ‘ground rules’⁷ that I

⁶ If and when there was a break in observing ABC’s production processes the researcher was expected to help the LLCo media department organise and secure credentials for incoming media members.

⁷ Though athletes at international events are usually accompanied by some protection it is important for the reader to understand that LLCo is extremely defensive toward access to its athletes since they are 11 and 12 year old children. Thus, while the researcher was allowed to roam most of the complex at will, entrée to the athletes in International Grove was highly restricted and only allowed in circumstances that LLCo felt relevant.

was to follow during the LLWS. Throughout this encounter, several casual introductory, unstructured interviews no more than 5 minutes in length were conducted with various workers at Little League (Fontana & Frey, 1994). Additionally, two unstructured interviews about an hour each in length were also conducted to gain rapport with and clarify assumptions about Little League and its media department members (Fontana & Frey, 1994). This introductory session also proved worthwhile in that it helped shed light on the unique power dynamic (Gruneau et al., 1988; Silk, 2002) between LLCo and ABC.

Through contacts gained during the first visit, access to ABC's production, editing, and graphics trucks was granted on a limited basis. These contacts elicited close long-term exchange with the research team, and, perhaps most importantly, the 'features crew'⁸, in addition to LLCo's entire labor force. Association was made with the production crew two days prior to the LLWS, facilitated by gatekeepers in LLCo's media and security departments (Silk, 2002). Moreover, preliminary engagement with the research setting helped immeasurably and allowed for a better directed strategic framework from which to focus and base the study (Fetterman, 1989; Morse, 1994).

Due to the longstanding relationship between LLCo and ABC few *sensitive texts* (Silk, 2002) exist between the two companies. In effect, the two entities have worked in tandem for so long (Van Auken & Van Auken, 2001) that

⁸ The features crew was responsible for all of the one- to two-minute shorts used to preclude games, as well as, 45-60, 15-second teases used throughout each broadcast to advance ABC's intended storyline(s).

they both held significant, yet nearly autonomous, authority over the production of the 2003 LLWS in that LLCo focused almost specifically on the organization and ABC on the televised communication of the event.

Thus, most sensitive communication between the two parties, often centering on gaining access to the particular areas for filming or relaying change of game time information due to inclement weather, was conducted through person-to-person conversations, over the phone, or on walkie-talkies. Despite the veritable lack of behind-the-scenes written text(s) available, several pieces of documentation that LLCo and ABC submitted as general press releases were made available to the researcher and analysed in order to clarify the dominant and sometimes taken for granted contextual underpinnings of the 2003 LLWS (Manning & Cullum-Swan, 1994).

In an effort to gain a more full understanding of the sensitive issues that were resolved verbally, several casual “off-the-cuff” interviews (Roulston, et al., 2003) were conducted with LLCo’s volunteer “uncles”⁹, security members, media and publications departments, ABC’s entire features production crew, researchers, the Lamade Stadium graphics team, the “A” announcing team¹⁰, as well as the Lamade Stadium game director, producer, and co-ordinator. These

⁹ Little League “Uncles” are almost exclusively male, Pennsylvania residents who volunteer their time to chaperone each of the teams that participate in the LLWS. There are two uncles provided for each team.

¹⁰ Gary Thorne, and Harold Reynolds were considered the more polished of the two long-term crews announcing the games at the LLWS, and, as such, were referred to as the “A” announcing team.

interviews ranged from short introductions, to length of game discussions, to day long intermittent person-to-person conversations which often provided answers to unasked questions (Fetterman, 1989).

As a result of this form of inquiry, the researcher was able to better understand the production practices and power relations shaping the 2003 LLWS, which are often hidden from the home consumer (Gruneau, 1989; Gruneau, et al. 1988; Jhally, 1995; Silk, 2002). The interviews were initially analysed following the *linking and comparing* method outlined by Bryman and Burgess (1994) to either further confirm or deny pre-existing interpretations of the LLWS production process.

When new emerging issues and themes (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995) came to the fore, more casual, semi-structured interviews (Fetterman, 1989) were conducted to clarify questions that had not been answered in the first phase of the study. Moreover four formal, semi-structured interviews, ranging 15 to 45 minutes in duration, were conducted with key actors (Fetterman, 1989) of LLCo and ABC. These interviews often centered on the dominant meanings ABC wished to advance through the production of the LLWS, and the distinctive relationship between LLCo and ABC. The formal interviews were audio and/or video taped, transcribed verbatim, and member checked for accuracy and clarity (Hanson & Newburgh, 1992; Roulston, et al., 2003). Total time in the field began a week prior to the LLWS, and ended the day after; though complete withdrawal

(Morse, 1994) from the site and communication with ABC and LLCo personnel continued for several ensuing months.

Following the event, the final broadcast of the entire 2003 LLWS tournament was viewed and analysed using a semiotic methodology advocated by Gruneau et al. (1988) in order to better grasp the preferred and dominant discursive practices driving the production of the LLWS. Additionally, in effort to achieve a more full understanding of the short-lived event, use of on-site audio and video taped observations, as well as digital photography was employed to help the researcher review and clarify dominant optical and aural patterns of communication (Fetterman, 1989) in operation at the 2003 LLWS.

Through interviews, field notes, and thorough review of the final production product the researcher was able to uncover a comprehensive account of what took place at the 2003 LLWS with which to refer to in the critical process. Further adhering to the methodological procedure used by Silk (2002), interpretations of the 2003 LLWS were then carefully ascertained by means of peer debriefing, audit trails, and member checking (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Hanson & Newburgh, 1992) to help uncover any “biases, clarify interpretations, and check the coherence and logic of the interpretations and conclusions” (Silk, 2002, p. 782). These actions elicited extra, new, and missing data which was utilized by the researcher in a manner that the researched parties of the production process agreed that a detailed, accurate, and analytical description of the 2003 LLWS was formulated.

By completing the directives noted above, the project looks to critically investigate the *preferred* and *competing* discourses (Hall, 1981; McDonald & Birrell, 1999; McRobbie, 1996) at work in and through ABC's mediated 2003 LLWS spectacle, which, in turn, lead to a "legitimizing and marginalizing [of] ideas and value systems" (Boyle & Haynes, 2000, p. 148). As such, and following Philip Schlesinger (1991, 1997), who notes the importance of locating culture and communications within the problematic of *collective identities*, this study seeks to challenge the idea that the 2003 LLWS was a source of progressive cultural exchange through careful explication of the production practices and televisual discourse(s) driving the LLWS spectacle.

Voices of Anonymity: (Re)inserting Hegemonic American Ideology Through 2003 LLWS Production Strategies

In their controversial book *Empire* (2000), Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri argue that the nation-state is being incorporated by the capitalist system. Specifically, Hardt and Negri surmise that as new global markets and circuits of production gain precedence in determining people's sovereignty the power of the nation(-state) becomes a secondary aspect in the hierarchy of capital (2000). They do acknowledge that while the rise of Empire removes ontological meaning from the United States it "certainly occupies a privileged position in the global segmentations and hierarchies of Empire" (2000, p. 384).

The result of this privileged position is that there still lies a belief, though in Hardt in Negri's estimation a false conviction, that America can seize

unilateral/hegemonic control of Empire's development. More recent work (notably an interview with Negri by Cocco & Lazzarato, 2002; Silk & Falcous, forthcoming) argues that 9/11/01 represented an interruption in the process of Empire. The change can be characterized as the United States slowing its relinquishment of power to capitalism while simultaneously being "forced to actively define its role within a dangerous and complex global environment" (Kellner, 2002, p. 152). Thus through the 9/11/01 disaster and, what Hardt and Negri admit is a privileged position in Empire, the United States as a nation-state still holds (held) the ability to assert considerable (ideological) power over its own people and the rest of the world. Further, and in accordance with Silk and Falcous, "the American (sporting) reactions to the events of September 11th, 2001 thus provide a rich conjecture from which to interrogate these hefty debates" (forthcoming, p. 6).

Keeping the (re)appropriation of American ideological and ontological hegemony through sport in the forefront, the ensuing discussion intends to provide a lens through which to unmask the "veil of anonymity" (Jhally, 1995, p. 86) that the event laborers are able to operate under while producing the 2003 LLWS (Gruneau 1989; Gruneau et al. 1988; MacNeill, 1996; Silk 2002). As such, in what follows one can see how the production strategies, practices, and transmission of the self-professed "greatest youth sporting event in the world" (field-notes, 2003; Gowdy Jr., 2003; Stevens, personal communication, 2003) became a medium through which popular US ideology was presented "as a vast

inaccessible reality that can [sic] never be questioned” (Debord, 2002, #12¹¹).

At the 2003 LLWS, there were two sets of producers, in-game and features. Through the feature and main production of the event, the producers were expected “to put (their) ears to the ground” (Charles, personal communication, 2004) in order to give the viewers “what they wanted” (Charles, personal communication, 2004) using pre-game ‘teases’, in-game stories and information about the teams, players, and Williamsport (field notes, 2003; Gowdy Jr., 2003). The in-game producers were Bob Sandel, from ESPN, and Michael Davidson, from ABC¹², both of whom headed a large team that included announcers, researchers, graphics creators, and camerapeople.

In contrast, producers Ian Charles (ABC) and Janice Anderson (ABC) headed a small, six-person features team that tried to advance the four specific narrative themes throughout the duration of the 2003 LLWS. According to Charles during the 2003 LLWS, the production crew’s:

Main goal is [sic] to basically tell great stories about the kids who come from all over the world to Little League World Series. You know you can have these great transitions and great flashes but if you don’t have a story, which you can tell throughout Little League you pretty much have nothing.

¹¹ In accordance with Kellner (2001), due to the differences in the many translations of *The Society of the spectacle*, when referencing Debord I will use numbered paragraphs from the text.

¹² Michael Davidson was the primary producer for the entire event, since Bob Sandel was only called on to produce when games were run at the same time. Moreover, Davidson produced all of the elimination round games.

Of important note is the idea that features are an integral part in forwarding specific narrative stories during sporting spectacles (Andrews 1998; Gruneau 1989; Gruneau, et al. 1988; and Silk 1999, 2001, 2002).

Similar to the statement Charles made above, Anderson twice affirmed this notion with her work on the 2003 LLWS:

JA: When we as features go into producing the teases we're not looking at the demographic, we're looking at portraying the event as realistically as possible. There's been a lot said about Little League going too corporate and (we) really wanted to bring it back to the kids so that families can relate to what kids go through *integrated with the stories we set out to tell*.

RW: So you're always telling a story?

JA: Oh yeah totally, *always*, that's the most important thing.
[italics added]

Importantly, one needs to understand that not only are the stories producers create significant in that they attempt to engage the viewer through an entertaining spectacle, but they also have the ability to 'create meaning' (Hall, 1980; Tomlinson, 2002).

To that point, many have written about the power that producers of a televised broadcast have over transmitting narratives set forth by advertising directives (Hall, 1972; Soar, 2000), notably in sporting event broadcasts (Gruneau, 1989; Gruneau, et al., 1988; Silk, 2002). Gruneau speaks to the authority production workers have in this situation with his statement that:

What is "shown" on television is always the result of a complex process of selection: what items to report, what to leave out, what to replay, and what to downplay. Television sports production also involves a wide range of processes of *visual* and *narrative* representation – choices regarding the images, language, camera positioning, and story line

required to translate “what happened” into a program that makes “good television” (1989, p. 134-5)

For the 2003 LLWS, based on post-production research from the 2002 LLWS and pre-production meetings before the event, the producers decided that ‘what the viewer wanted’ to see were “[great] moments’, ‘kids having fun’, ‘a day in the life of a Little Leaguer’, and, importantly for this project, the ‘international pastime’” (Anderson, personal communication, 2003; Charles, personal communication, 2003; Fisher, personal communication, 2003). The producers then went about framing these narratives using youthful, MTV ‘reality’-based filming techniques (Charles, personal communication, 2003). Following the event Stan Lewis, a marketer for ABC, provided the reasoning for which ABC chose to situate the 2003 LLWS as the international pastime:

Aside from it being an angle we’ve never taken, we figured that since it’s the Little League World Series, we could highlight that in the promotion. More often than not, a “World” championship in any major sport is actually just a U.S. Championship. This one is different, and since it’s a *U.S. team vs. a team from another country* in the finals, we wanted to bring that element to the fore. Furthermore, since there are so many Spanish-speakers in the U.S., we thought we’d have fun with “Take me out to the ballgame” (Sung in Spanish) in one of our executions.
[italics added]

On the surface this seems to be an innocent celebration of global interconnectivity, but Lewis does not take into account the fact that the LLWS is organized in such a way that a team representing the United States *has* to play a team representing a team from a region not located in the America. As such,

through this statement, Lewis implicitly suggests that 'World Championship' means that a team from America must be in the final game for it to *matter*.

Moreover:

RW: Why did you chose to go for the "International" angle rather than one that reflected baseball as the "American Pastime"? Particularly in light of the fact that, according to your production team, your targeted viewers are primarily American families who, in the post-9/11 moment, relish in patriotism and "things American".

SL: I think that's largely answered above. However, in light of the patriotism and "things American" angle, we really never let that enter our thinking. We're simply trying to make engaging, unique, likeable promotion(s) for our properties. We thought this would be something new and fresh. It's really that simple.

Thus, there never really was a concerted effort to promote the "international pastime" or cultural diversity so much, as to create something that its mainstream audience, 'men 18-49, and their families' (Gaspar, personal communication, 2004), would want to watch; thereby providing evidence that this event was meant to "'deliver' audiences to advertisers" (Gruneau, et al., 1988, p. 266) by helping post-9/11/01 American families redefine themselves as an ontological hegemon.

Upon reflection, surely if this event was meant to portray the "International Pastime" and celebrate cultural diversity rather than reaffirm America's position of power in the world, then the features producers should have been creating stories pertaining to the idea of sharing culture through Little League baseball. After hearing this suggestion, however, one producer replied:

P: Why would Americans (viewers) be excited about sharing its culture? Have you ever been outside America?

RW: Yes I lived in Europe for eight months.

P: People hate America. We're a selfish country. We have what everybody wants, and it doesn't seem like we'd share. We think our shit doesn't stink. We don't share. I mean England didn't jump up and down when the Beatles came to America. We're each stealing each other's hype.

Within that statement the producer insinuated that to give the viewers 'what they wanted' ABC production members necessarily had to break from the progressive politics of celebratory cultural diversity, and produce a narrative that reinforced nationalist sentiments that affectively observes America's cultural superiority.

While the features producers were working to create a coherent narrative through their filming, interviewing, and editing techniques, the in-game team researched the players, coaches, and participant's immediate family, as well as recorded 'baseball-relevant' statistics¹³ in further effort to build an "instant relationship" (field notes, 2003) between the home-viewer and the athletes. This information was gathered by ABC production workers who asked the same set of 20-25 questions to each player, while probing for 'unique and engaging stories' (Lewis, personal communication, 2004) that would capture their intended audience in team-by-team fashion during the days leading up to the 2003 LLWS broadcast (Anderson, personal communication, 2003; Charles, personal communication, 2003; field notes, 2003; Fisher, personal communication, 2003).

¹³ By baseball-relevant, I mean those statistics that are normally used to gauge a players effectiveness on the field like batting average, homeruns hit, runs batted in, earned run average, and strikeouts thrown.

Additionally, the in-game graphics creators built visual effects for use on game-specific information¹⁴, and the several on-field camera workers set up their locations around both the fields at the LLWS in such a way as to give a 'professional', yet 'youthful' feel to the spectacle (field notes, 2003; Wax, personal communication, 2003). Finally, the in-game production team was also in charge of giving the announcers information that they had gathered throughout the week, and conducted meetings helping to ensure that in conjunction with pre-production strategies like feature editing, advertisement, camera-use and positioning, and formulaic research questioning, a consistent *preferred narrative* would be presented to the consumer; one that supposedly celebrated the 2003 LLWS as the international pastime (field-notes, 2003; Charles, personal communication 2003; Gowdy, Jr.; 2003; Reynolds, personal communication, 2003).

Yet just a brief analysis of the powerful individuals who created the international pastime narrative reveals that it was not so much a progressive American television broadcast, but rather a (re)assertion of America as a colossal (Ferguson, 2004) nation-state. This resulted in an event that portrayed progressive internationalism as one that requires the United States to reach the final game for it to be a "World Championship", and the American popular as an entity that does not care about sharing culture because its 'shit doesn't stink'.

¹⁴ The current-game's score, inning, base runners, outs, and miles-per-hour the last pitch was thrown at.

Therefore, I further assert that the narrative strategy by the ABC production teams falls in line with Niall Ferguson's book *Colossus* through which he prods the American government and people to recognize the 'inherent greatness' (2004, p. 43-44) of US-led corporate capitalism so that it can become an imperialist empire; which, suffice to say, has little to do with the sharing of culture.

[Inter]National Feature Rhetoric

Up to this point, I have described the pre-production efforts that ABC undertook prior to the broadcast of the 2003 LLWS. However, and in accordance with Johnson (1986) and Deacon (2003) it is also necessary to depict the text the consumer received. As such, using a semiotic method advocated by Gruneau et al. (1988), I will describe some of emerging themes and striking elements found throughout the entire 10-day, 2003 LLWS broadcast; particularly game features, and announcer commentary.

While portraying the televised event in so few words, it is important to note that I am essentially a producer of text, and that what I decide to and to not show the reader will consequently shape how the tournament is represented here. Thus, while the following is an informed critical reading of the televised text informed by a micro-ethnography of broadcast labor practices and confirmed by the producers who transmitted it, this is still *a* reading (Deacon, 2003).

In the aforementioned, it was noted that the features producers (Charles and Anderson) at the 2003 LLWS worked to relay four different narratives,

including the “international pastime”. By using the following oft-repeated, professional strategies: scripting a storyline that was read during the opening *tease*¹⁵ by the lead announcer prior to each game, creating several short transition elements to be shown prior to, or during innings, in addition to forming short baseball fundamental teaching pieces the features producers felt they were able to forward those four narratives. Generally features were underscored by ‘emotive’ music, and highlights from previous games, to ‘inform the home viewer about the game’s participants, and excite them about the impending contest’ (Anderson, personal communication, 2003; Charles, personal communication, 2003; field notes, 2003). Thus the ultimate goal of the features crew was to get viewers to invest themselves enough to watch the event by making the “contest itself . . . the climax which resolves the curiosity and excitement built up over the day” (Gruneau et al., 1988, p. 272).

In a sense, the features producers’ job is easier to fulfill than the in-game producers, because they had near-total control over whom, or what, they were and were not taping. Further, rather than being forced to weave the “international pastime” throughout each tease, the features producers were directed by the in-game producers to “treat each game differently” (Anderson, personal communication, 2003), and provide a different script with a different angle “on a game-by-game basis” (Charles, personal communication, 2003).

¹⁵ A tease at the LLWS could be defined as the short 1-3 minute, highly emotive, introduction to each game aired on ABC.

Thus, while for some games the teases were expected to cultivate the “international pastime” narrative, but many others set about to achieve different directives, depending on what was decided during each day’s meeting.

Not surprisingly, the games that attempted to flesh out the cultural diversity present at the 2003 LLWS were ones that involved teams from the *International* bracket, where less prior-game footage was available¹⁶, and less was known about the participants. In contrast, the *US* bracket games focused more on the kids having fun, and the ultimate goal for each team. This provides yet more evidence that the international teams were present only as token participants for which the US champion would ultimately have to defeat to become ‘World Champion’.

In addition to the teases and short story ‘flashes’, the features crew worked with color commentators Harold Reynolds and Tom Candiotti, both former major leaguers, on a segment aired during each game on ABC called “Building Blocks”. These segments, which usually aired before or during the middle of the 4th inning¹⁷, showed the two men working with the young participants, teaching them and the home viewer some of the basic fundamentals of baseball. Nearly every one of the 2003 LLWS “Building Blocks” segments

¹⁶ Prior to the LLWS the regional championship games played in each of the eight United States Bracket regions aired on ESPN and ESPN2. There was no broadcast of any International Bracket regional finals.

¹⁷ LLWS games are 6 innings in length, and can end if one team is ahead by 10 or more runs one “hitting” inning for the losing team past halfway through the game. By putting the “Building Blocks” segments 3 ½ innings into the game, the producers ensured that they would air during each game no matter when it ended.

featured an American ballplayer, while far fewer involved *International* athletes, regardless of the teams participating in the game being broadcast. This was due primarily to availability and desire of athletes to participate, ease of verbal communication (since few of the announcers could speak/understand anything besides American-English), and, in many cases, the 'luck of the draw' (field notes, 2003).

Though there was no concerted effort by producers to displace non-American athletes during "Building Blocks" segments, comments made by announcers during the airtime certainly reflected the idea that the 2003 LLWS was meant for an American audience. An example of this situation occurred during a game between Willemstad, Curacao, Netherlands Antilles and Tokyo, Japan. During the "Building Blocks" segment, Harold Reynolds was working with two young players participating from Curacao to teach the audience how to communicate on a flyball in such a way as to prevent a collision. Instead of calling for the ball with the traditional "I've got it, I've got it", the two boys used *laga! laga!* (Meaning: "I've got it" in Papiamentu).

Harold Reynolds relayed that information to the home viewer leading to the following conversation between himself and Gary Thorne:

GT: Harold Reynolds and our LLWS Building Blocks

HR: *laga! laga!* (laughs)

GT: Speaking blocks (haha) *laga...laga*. How many languages do you speak?

HR: I speak ONE.

GT: Do you? (laughs)

HR: And that's it.

On the one hand, in the case above, the two announcers were speaking to the international nature of the event, but, in the end, their reactions privileged one way of communicating — American-English. This type of discourse between announcers during the production of the LLWS was typical, and provides further evidence that the event was predicated on American nationalist ideology. In addition to the “Building Blocks” shorts, pre-game features also helped implicitly promote the idea that American culture and ideology were more privileged at this event than the other countries participating.

For instance, the (false) notion of America being the hub from which all other cultures can operate on an even playing field was never more apparent than during a pre-game feature in the first round game between the teams representing *Latin America* (Altagracia, Venezuela) and *Mexico* (Mexico City, Mexico). Prior to the game, Magglio Ordoñez, a native Venezuelan, and an All-Star left fielder for Major League Baseball’s Chicago White Sox, had learned that some on the team from Altagracia came to the United States without shoes, gloves, or uniforms, and a single bat made out of a wood post (field notes, 2003; Gowdy Jr., 2003; Sandel, personal communication, 2003). Upon notification of the team’s economic disparity Ordoñez cut the team a blank check, and told them “to buy whatever they want with it” (field notes, 2003; Davidson, 2003). Though Ordoñez did not wish any fanfare for this deed, ABC “really wanted to play up” (Sandel, 2003) the act of charity through a feature, in an effort to show

the idea that the American-hosted 2003 LLWS was contested on a “level playing field” (Stanton, 2003).

Upon closer inspection, one can easily see how patronizing the idea that the LLWS was played on an equal standing to the team from Venezuela or for any team from the *International* bracket for that matter. For instance, few, if any, people inquired as to what happened to the relatively poor kids from Venezuela when they returned home. They may have some new cleats, gloves, and bats, but that says nothing of their current housing situation, educational system, and crime rate.

According to Mosher (2001), many of the kids representing the teams from the *Caribbean* and *Latin America* come to the tournament extremely underfed, and gain several pounds during their ten-day stay. Moreover, the young athletes’ hunger is compounded by the extreme jet-lag that many experience after the long trip to Williamsport (field notes, 2003). Thus, to claim that the event is played on an ‘even playing field’ falls further into the trap of looking at the tournament through a close-minded American perspective, and does not fully integrate the cultural diversity that the LLWS broadcast claimed to celebrate.

As the tournament wore on, through the pre-game features of US Bracket games, ABC completely disregarded the “international pastime” directive and unabashedly stated that the 2003 LLWS was “a piece of Americana” (Gowdy Jr.,

2003). In the Emmy-nominated *United States* bracket final pre-game feature,

Brent Musburger stated:

As time goes on here at Williamsport, the excitement moves from stepping on the field for the first time, to finally coming to the realization that you have a shot at representing *your* country in a Little League World Series Championship. It has come down to this, Massachusetts versus Florida and the *United States Championship* at stake. (Gowdy Jr., 2003) [italics added]

Here obviously Musburger, through careful word choices, is referring specifically to the American viewer in an effort to *interpellate* (Althusser, 1971), or speak to, their interests during the 2003 LLWS spectacle.

Conversely during the *International* Bracket final, announcer Dave Ryan told the viewers that the two teams participating came:

Across spacious oceans and desert lands, they have traveled to *their field of dreams*. Stories these twelve year olds bring back to their countries of great lessons learned. It's a story of a Russian team that won their first game ever, or a Venezuelan fisherman who sent his son with 4 dollars to play, or maybe even a story of love... We've all come to expect dominance from the *Far East*. When Japan defeated Mexico City, they earned their seventh consecutive trip to the *International* championship. So why has Japan been so successful? Maybe it is been the long practice sections, or *their* ideals of perfection, or maybe the answer is they love, and dream baseball as much as anyone...anywhere. Like the *Far East*, Curacao's heart also beats for baseball. Free willing *spirits* enjoying the warmth of Williamsport, and a passion of a great game. They came to the Little League World Series with a 6-foot *giant*, Tharick Martines, whose strong arm and 14 strikeouts once again earned them a birth in today's game. But without their one giant on the mound can they beat a giant of a team? But no matter what the outcome, they will return to their countries with stories to tell. But what makes *us* different is what brings the opposite ends of the world together. (Gowdy Jr., 2003) [italics added]

Again through these pre-game features, on the surface, the viewer was supposed to get a sense that the 2003 LLWS was uniting the world and/or celebrating cultural diversity, but ultimately one can see through the “international pastime” rhetoric and find that the tournament was for the enjoyment of American families; thereby further (re)asserting the United States position of dominance over the rest of the world.

[Inter]National Game Rhetoric

Final control over what was shown on the ABC broadcast of a 2003 LLWS game rested with in-game producers, Michael Davidson and Bob Sandel. Davidson and Sandel decided when and where features were inserted, what graphics were shown, which camera shots were used, and when to go to commercial break. They also had the ability to ‘lead’ the announcers with open-ended sentences to help fill empty air time, and forward narratives that may have been temporarily underdeveloped (field notes, 2003; Davidson, personal communication, 2003; MacNeill, 1996; Reynolds, personal communication, 2003).

However the announcers for each game, which consisted of the following two-man teams Brent Musburger — Harold Reynolds (US and World Championship Finals Broadcast), Dave Ryan — Harold Reynolds (International Finals Broadcast), Gary Thorne — Harold Reynolds (“A” Team), Dave Ryan — Tom Candiotti (“B” Team), in addition to on-field announcers Sam Ryan and Alvaro Martin, were “never told exactly what to say” (Reynolds, personal communication, 2003), and therefore held a significant amount of power in what

the home viewer 'got'. Thus, to paint a more complete picture of the 2003 LLWS broadcast, it is important to interrogate the themes that came from professional announcers who were speaking to and describing the graphics, features, and games themselves. In so doing, there were more indications that ABC's production practices eschewed its commercial claim of celebratory cultural diversity for a broadcast that intended to pander to dominant American ideologies.

For example, following the pre-game features noted above, ABC inserted a piece into each game, in which the players introduced themselves in American-English. Perhaps, when viewed in conjunction with the rest of ABC's production actions, this should not have come as a surprise, but it was still difficult to watch the players who could not speak fluent American-English be expected to phonetically reproduce their name for the final broadcast. Often, the young players from the *International* Bracket stumbled, stuttered, or otherwise spoke exceedingly slow when introducing themselves to the audience. Thus the production team was in a sense 'flatten[ing] cultural difference' (Williams, 1994, p. 377), and privileging American-English over all other forms of discourse in another; even in its international feeds¹⁸.

Furthermore, when the player introductions were played during the game, head announcers Gary Thorne and Dave Ryan tried to dignify what ABC

¹⁸ Lopez stated that very little was changed from the original broadcast to International broadcasts, except in the rare instances where they dubbed the announcers voices with announcers from the 'home country'.

forced the young athletes to do by commenting on 'how hard it must be to speak another language', and that 'they (the announcers) admired the children' for their efforts (Gowdy Jr., 2003). When viewed critically, one can see that this did little to forward the notion that the 2003 LLWS was an event that celebrated cultural diversity, not to mention that this was of no solace to the young boys and girl who had to endure the embarrassment. Moreover, by (re)appropriating Andrews (1997) argument on racial ignorance to that of international and/or cultural ignorance, "in doing so, [ABC] none to subtly reinforced the aspirations, achievements, and ascendancy of America's white middle class, which was [sic] celebrated either directly or indirectly in almost every facet of American popular culture" (p. 77), which in this case, is the construction of the 2003 LLWS spectacle.

Moreover, when describing the play-by-play action on the field, the announcers attempted to de-politicize what was happening on the field in such a way that it would be difficult to tell that there were different cultures being represented at the event. This was a point not lost on the producers at the event, who informed me that all the announcers are instructed to refer to the on-field play in this way (Charles, personal communication, 2003; Davidson, personal communication, 2003). However, not speaking to these cultural differences only served to heighten the (re)production of American dominance through descriptive and conversational commentary in and around the play-by-play action.

For instance, only one on-field announcer, Alvaro Martin, could translate from Spanish to English. Additionally, ABC employed no announcer who could, in real time¹⁹, do the same with Dutch, Japanese, Papiamento, or Russian; four languages used by teams that participated in the event. Therefore no announcer could accurately decipher exactly what was being said during substitutions, mound visits, coach-to-coach, and coach-to-player conversations. In lieu of having a Dutch, Japanese, Papiamento, or Russian translator present, ABC announcers were left to describe or continue speaking about what they thought was being said during these interactions while the feed was sent to the production vans for volunteers to interpret (Gowdy, Jr., 2003).

At one point during the *International* Final when a coach from the Netherlands Antilles was speaking to his pitcher, then yelling and shifting players in the field, Harold Reynolds asked “what do you think he was speaking Dutch, Spanish, or Papiamento” (Gowdy, Jr., 2003)? His counterpart announcer could not provide an answer and the home viewer was unable to actually understand what the coach was saying to his players. Several seconds later, after the relevance of the interactions had diminished significantly and play resumed, researchers provided a very rough estimation of what was said during the exchange; in this case that the coach said “keep the ball low and stay calm” (Gowdy Jr., 2003).

¹⁹ There were statements that translations were made in the production truck, but they were loose translations at best.

Surely having children and coaches that could speak several different and (to the typical American viewer exotic) languages at the 2003 LLWS was a fantastic element in showing the cultural differences present at the event. However, if it was ABC's goal to celebrate this difference, they certainly did not forward this notion by providing announcers that could only understand American-English and Spanish. Unfortunately what this did accomplish was the proliferation of the notion that the 2003 LLWS was an event intended for an American audience that would like to see their culture and ideologies privileged (Kellner, 2004).

More to the point, during games, nearly every graphic and logo used was a combination of red, white, and blue, thereby providing *banal nationalist* (Billig, 1995) reminders of where the event was being played (America), and for whom the event was being played (Americans). Graphics showing which teams participating in each particular game revealed the simplistic notions of national identity that Negri and Hardt (2000) say are fast disappearing. For teams playing in the *US* Bracket, an American Flag would follow the team name on the scoreboard, whereas for teams participating in the *International* Bracket, the country that they represented followed their team name.

This disregarded the ironic fact that only 1 team member for the team representing Saudi Arabia was actually a citizen of that country (13 were Americans, and 1 Canadian), and that the team from Guam consisted of American-English speaking athletes, who live under the rule of the United States

(field notes, 2003). Through that simple act, ABC graphics designers failed to recognize the world as networks of interconnectivity by privileging the nation-state as an organizing apparatus. A characteristic that, in accordance with Silk and Falcoux (forthcoming), is becoming even more prevalent in American sporting event broadcasts.

In the aforementioned, I have situated the 2003 LLWS as a spectacular event, which developed a particular narrative that superficially attempted to portray the United States as an internationally inclusive, aware, and welcoming nation-state that revels in cultural diversity. Michael Davidson (2003) illustrates the feeling with his statement:

The goals are so right (at the LLWS) for what goes on elsewhere you know ... in the world there's violence and drugs and everything else. This is what's good about a lot of things in life ... not just sport. And that family appeal that ... Little League has amongst their executive body and certainly amongst all their ...volunteers worldwide sort of permeates its way into our feeling about our crew here.

Surely, after reviewing the strategies and transmission of the event, one can see how Ameri-centric and myopic this view of the 2003 LLWS was.

Davidson has headed production at the LLWS every year since 1989 (Davidson, personal communication, 2003), while also working as the head producer for "World Series games, Super Bowls, Triple Crown horse races, and ...World Championship figure skating events" (Davidson, personal communication, 2003). Interestingly, through his leadership at the 2003 LLWS, ABC was nominated for two sports Emmy awards, one for production of the

entire event, and one for the production behind the *US Bracket Final* pre-game tease. These award nominations “are sort of a big deal” (Charles, personal communication, 2004), and granted on the basis of “other people in the field seeing what we (have done) and nominating us” (Anderson, personal communication, 2004). As such, it could be said that other media professionals aspire to (re)create the type of programming that ABC put forth at the 2003 LLWS; lending further credence to Douglas Kellner’s (2004) and Judith Butler’s (2002) stance that the American media post-9/11/01 has been highly un-critical of conservative-minded cultural events.

Conclusion: The Militarization of Youth

Regarding future work in this area, no more fertile ground may exist for critical readings of popular organized youth sport representations than the LLWS. Its popularity continues to grow world-wide, and, as such, a more thorough interrogation of how *hot nationalism* (Giddens, 1985) has now been rendered banal (Billig, 1995) through current American (youth sporting) spectacles should be pursued. Moreover, a deeper moral discourse on ABC and LLC’s use and exploitation of young children (mostly boys) to promote a distinctly hegemonic American (male) rhetoric to its viewers and attendees is also a necessary endeavor.

This is particularly true when, in the current moment, these entities are forcing children to act out conflicts of (inter)national ideology and sovereignty on the world stage. Surely “children offer a crucial rationale for engaging in a

critical discussion about the long-term consequences of current policies (Giroux, 2004, p. 210)”, and can perhaps bring the questionable nature of ABC and LLCo policies to the fore in hopes of enacting a more multilateral discourse.

Further, when introducing this project, I asserted that sport production/spectacle narratives are deeply embedded in a dialectic relationship with political, social, and ideological forces. After critically reading the information presented above, one can see that while ABC claimed to position the 2003 LLWS as multicultural, they quite clearly produced a program that reflected the (re)assertion of American cultural superiority in a manner that accurately reflects Niall Ferguson’s dangerous notion that the United States should celebrate its ‘superior’ nature (2004).

Finally, by way of conclusion, the LLWS is certainly capable of great cultural diversity, and could be an avenue through which children could inform the rest of the world how to peacefully co-exist²⁰. However, I feel that at the 2003 LLWS this great opportunity was lost on its organizing and mediating bodies in favor of a dangerous rhetoric that celebrated the United States as a dominant nation-state. Using the following statement by Henry Giroux I argue that there is a tendency by those cultural intermediaries (Featherstone, 1991) to create a

²⁰ As noted previously all the children bunk together in International Grove, with no parents besides the team coaches allowed whatsoever. Interestingly on the ABC broadcast, and in nearly all written documentation (Gala, 1990 being a key site of contestation) it is in International Grove where children learn to communicate and become friends with one another over their 10-day stay; oftentimes with the two teams reaching the finals becoming close friends. Further, with the rise of communications equipment, notably e-mail, and Instant Messaging these young children have been able to maintain relationships in later years.

preferred discourse that increasingly paints the United States in a blindly positive and uncritical light; particularly in the wake of 9/11/01:

This is a society increasingly marked by a poverty of critical public discourse, thus making it more difficult for young people and adults to appropriate a critical language outside of the market that would allow them to translate private problems into public concerns or to relate public issues to private considerations. This is also a social order that seems *incapable of questioning itself*, just as it wages war against the poor, youth, women, people of color, and the elderly. (2004, p. 206-7)
[italics added]

Somehow we need to bring Giroux's notion of the new society to light in popular mediated discourse in such a way as to facilitate a change in the way America represents itself and is represented. If not the corrupt nature of the United States-led capitalist system may only breed further violent reaction (Butler, 2002).

Appendix A:

United States Bracket

Pool A

East Boynton Beach, Florida
Saugus, Massachusetts
Tallmadge, Ohio
Richland, Washington

Pool B

Wilmington, Delaware
Eldridge, Iowa
Chandler, Arizona
Richmond, Texas

International Bracket

Pool C

Willemstad, Curacao, Netherlands Antilles
Glace Bay, Nova Scotia
Tokyo, Japan
Dhahran, Saudi Arabia

Pool D

Agana, Guam
Altagracia, Zula, Valenzuela
Mexico City, Mexico
Moscow, Russia

International Bracket Semi-Finals:

(Game 25) 1-seed Pool D vs. 2-seed Pool C;

(Game 27) 1-seed Pool D vs. 2-seed Pool C

United States Bracket Semi-Finals:

(Game 26) 1-seed Pool B vs. 2-seed Pool A;

(Game 28) 1-seed Pool A vs. 2-seed Pool B

International Bracket Championship:

(Game 29) Game 25 Winner vs. Game 27 Winner

United States Bracket Championship:

(Game 30) Game 26 Winner vs. Game 28 Winner

World Series Consolation Game:

(Game 31) Game 29 Loser vs. Game 30 Loser

World Series Championship Game:

(Game 32) Game 29 vs. Game 30 Winner

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Ethnography Notes

Four formal interviews were conducted prior to and during the LLWS, which were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Further, approximately 15 "off the cuff" interviews were conducted, and, in most cases, were video or audio taped. Any citation of these interviews has been noted with a name, year, and/or initials of the quoted party or primary source of field note information. Field Notes were taken on July 15th, 2003, and August 8th-25th in Williamsport, PA.