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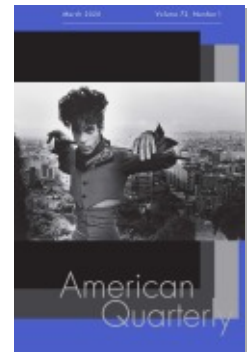
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Football Fantasies: Neoliberal Habitus, Racial Governmentality, and National Spectacle

Kellen Hoxworth

We pin our hopes to the sporting public.

—Bertolt Brecht, “Emphasis on Sport”

On September 22, 2017, at a political rally in Propst Arena in Huntsville, Alabama, President Donald J. Trump invited the assembled crowd to fantasize about American football:

Wouldn't you love to see one of these N.F.L. [National Football League] owners, when somebody disrespects our flag, to say, “Get that son of a bitch off the field right now, out, he's fired! He's fired!”¹

Trump's pronouncement troped on his ubiquitous catchphrase from the reality television program *The Apprentice*: “You're Fired.” Simultaneously, Trump performed his signature “You're Fired” gesture—a Brechtian “gestus” in which Trump embodies the “gist” of a business owner's sovereign authority.² Addressing his audience as a national assembly of “people like yourselves,” Trump slipped from second-person direct address to an indirect third-person declarative (“*He's fired!*”), interpellating his audience into a collective fantasy of wielding sovereign power over “those people taking the knee when they're playing our great national anthem.”³ Thus Trump articulated a desire to wield firing authority over “those people”—predominantly black professional football players such as former NFL quarterback Colin Kaepernick—who knelt during the national anthem in protest of racial injustices. Moreover, Trump indulged his unfulfilled fantasy of owning and managing an NFL franchise.⁴ In both fantastical projections staged in the Propst Arena sporting complex, Trump performed in the subjunctive mode as a fantasy owner of an NFL team.

A 2000 fantasy football advertisement posed a rhetorical question that bears an uncanny resemblance to Trump's football fantasy:

Have you ever watched a professional sporting event and thought you could do a better job than the people running the teams? Ever wondered what it would be like to be in charge of a team and have star athletes working for you? Fantasy sports allow you to do just that.⁵

This advertisement for fantasy sports outlined the dramaturgy of fantasy football, in which participants perform the persona of “owner” or “manager” who makes calculative decisions based on real-world statistics to produce the ideal football team. Sited on numerous competing internet platforms such as CBSsports.com, Yahoo!, NFL.com, ESPN.com, FanDuel.com, and DraftKings.com, fantasy football is a game in which participants assemble bespoke “fantasy teams” of professional NFL players. Each fantasy “owner” competes with others to manage the highest-scoring team—a competition determined by the actual performance of professional NFL players, whose statistical production (principally, yardage gained and points scored) accumulates to the fantasy participant who “owns” them. Throughout its dramaturgy, fantasy football transmits a neoliberal script in which individual participants inhabit the role of an owner or manager who assembles their fantasy teams by “drafting” actual NFL players. Thus fantasy football offers participants the opportunity to inhabit a neoliberal fantasy of agency, enterprise, empowerment, and market competition. However, as in Trump’s football fantasy, the fantasy participant’s “empowerment” attaches itself to a fantasy of expertise and managerial authority over the real, professional athletes that they “own” on their teams. Such football fantasies insistently touch on the intersections of race, capital, and politics.

Far from remaining bound to the realm of idle play, fantasy football has pronounced effects on sports fans, athletes, and broader political discourse. Soon after Trump’s rally in Huntsville, NFL cornerback Richard Sherman appeared at a press conference in the aftermath of a season-ending injury to his teammate Chris Carson, where he decried how fantasy football facilitated an alienated relationship between football fans and players. Sherman asserted,

I think a lot of people, a lot of fans out there have looked at players even less like people because of fantasy football. . . . You go and say, “Oh man, this guy got hurt.” You’re not thinking, “Hey man, this guy got hurt—he’s really physically hurt and he’s going to take time to recover and it’s probably going to affect his mental state and his physical state and now he has a long, rigorous rehab.” You’re thinking, “Oh, man, he’s messing up my fantasy team.”⁶

This critique linked the ways of thinking endemic to fantasy football to histories of dehumanizing racial management through which black athletic bodies appear as “human capital,” or what Michel Foucault terms “abilities-machines which will produce income.”⁷ That is to say, Sherman’s statement testified to Wendy

Brown's assertion that "neoliberalism is the rationality through which capitalism finally swallows humanity—not only with its machinery of compulsory commodification and profit-driven expansion, but by its form of valuation."⁸ Sherman's complaint outlined the ways in which fantasy football has habituated sports fans to the relational and evaluative practices of neoliberal thinking; simultaneously, Sherman joined a chorus of NFL players who have protested both fantasy football's commodification of athletic performance and Trump's racial fantasy of absolute sovereignty over black athletes.

These three scenarios trace the entanglement of neoliberalism, racial governmentality, and national spectacle in the contemporary US American sporting public. Building on emerging scholarship on fantasy football as, in Meredith M. Bagley's terms, a critical site for the disciplining of "a type of citizen/subject well suited and quiescent to neoliberal capitalism and its modes of living," this essay traces how such subjunctive play functions as a central site in the interanimation of neoliberal habitus and racial governmentality.⁹ Centrally, I analyze fantasy football as a structured performance constituted by embodied practices. The game of fantasy football furnishes participants with scripts of neoliberal governmentality through the habituation of neoliberal modes of thinking, the repetition of gestures of racialized modes of managerial governance, and the attenuation of politics through the reification of political sovereignty as a zero-sum economic game. In these everyday performances, predominantly white, male fantasy participants partake in the making and remaking of race by incorporating the calculative operations of neoliberalism into their daily lives, deriving pleasure from capitalist fantasies imbricated with racial projects of whiteness. Fantasy football—and its discursive incursions into professional football and sports fandom—illuminates the neoliberal "anatomy of national fantasy" and the capillaries through which such fantasies channel biopolitical investments and orientations of neoliberal thinking and racial governmentality throughout the national body politic.¹⁰

Performing Fandom

Bertolt Brecht pinned his hopes for an efficacious, socially oriented theater to the "sporting public." By contrast to his impression of docile, unthinking, bourgeois theater audiences, Brecht imagined the sports arena as a utopian community of savvy interpreters—"men and women of every variety of class and physiognomy, the fairest and shrewdest audience in the world."¹¹ The key differentiation between Brecht's cross-class utopia and the benumbed bourgeoisie was that the "sporting public" was the scene of "*fun*." Brecht thus

articulated what has become a commonplace of sports studies: sports fandom is a social site of affective intensities and, therefore, of political possibility.¹²

Sports scholars have drawn from several prominent Euro-American cultural theorists who, like Brecht, have offered their own inflection on this social model of sports spectatorship that figures athletic contests as the site of real, collective feelings. Notably, Johan Huizinga has theorized sport as a shared, affective ritual centered on what he calls *Homo ludens*, or man-as-player, in which play animates the “freedom” of affective “enjoyment.”¹³ As Huizinga further observes, *shared* affect is the fulcrum on which play reifies culture: play that “raise[s] the tone, the intensity of life of the individual or the group” becomes a cultural practice that underpins the ideological investments of that group.¹⁴ Studies of sports fandom translate such “play” from player-performer to fan-spectator, often drawing from Victor Turner’s concept of *communitas* to posit sports spectatorship as a site of “a deeper sense of commonality, one that transcends the normative order” by uniting fans through “kinesthetic empathy.”¹⁵ For instance, Michael Oriard’s influential *Reading Football* (1993) begins with a scenario in which a football fan invests in “moments of romantic possibility” that subtend numerous possible interpretations.¹⁶ These overlapping theorizations demarcate the “sporting public” as an arena for affectively intense and potentially cathartic performance, in which fans may experience transcendental contact with athletes and each other. From Brecht’s social utopian model to Oriard’s analysis of football as a palimpsestic “cultural text,” sports fandom appears as a social site of authentic affective experience premised on the “real acts” of athletic competition in contrast to the mystifications of theatricalized “spectacle.”¹⁷ Though this social model of sports emphasizes the affective intensities endemic to the “sporting public,” it reinscribes Brecht’s distinctive antitheatrical prejudice through the insistent distinction between theatrical fakery and the reality of sports.¹⁸ Instead of perpetuating this binary between the theatrical and the real, what might be gained by remembering that fantasies have real effects and that politics often relies on fantastical spectacle—that is, by taking seriously the entanglements of sports fandom as a performance and by analyzing the performances of sports fans?

Whereas Oriard’s foundational study offers a model of interpreting football as an assemblage of cultural *texts*, fantasy football scripts embodied *performances* that are simultaneously subjunctive (i.e., fantastical) and real. Therefore, I draw from fifteen years of firsthand experience in fantasy football as well as from emerging scholarship on the game to trace how contemporary football fantasies insinuate themselves throughout the capillaries of everyday life and

politics.¹⁹ Approaching fantasy football through a hermeneutic of performance allows us to trace how fandom comprises a panoply of performable actions beyond the ocularcentric modes of spectating, reading, and interpreting. This shift in methodology is necessary to trace how fantasy football performatively habituates fantasy participants to the practices and ways of thinking endemic to neoliberalism, tacitly remaking subjectivities in accordance with modes of neoliberal and racial governmentalities.²⁰ Here, I draw from Pierre Bourdieu's definition of "habitus" as "the *result of an organizing action*, with a meaning close to that of words such as structure; it also designates a *way of being*, a *habitual state* (especially of the body) and, in particular, a *predisposition, tendency, propensity, or inclination*."²¹ Fantasy football participants' organizing actions of player evaluation and statistical quantification rehearse neoliberal "governmentality"—Michel Foucault's term for the disposition of rational, calculative governance of neoliberal capitalism.²² By playing fantasy football, participants rehearse neoliberalism as "a set of 'intellectual techniques' for rendering reality thinkable and practicable"—techniques that produce neoliberal knowledges and subjectivities.²³

The ludic practices of fantasy football also habituate sports fans to modes of governmental thinking about race under neoliberal capitalism. Though fantasy participants do not possess any actual legal power over "their" players, fantasy football scripts embodied acts of what Foucault calls "biopolitics," wherein fantasy participants subjunctively manage actual athletes according to the logics of calculative reasoning.²⁴ Through these actions, fantasy football participants familiarize themselves to what David Theo Goldberg terms "racial governmentality." As Goldberg notes, though the term *governmentality* summons associations with bureaucratized knowledge and institutional state structures, governmental rationality permeates everyday life and ways of thinking, making race into a social reality that is lived intimately.²⁵ Racial *governmentality* is an everyday practice—an embodied way of thinking that orients subjects toward modes of self-fashioning and affective relationality that reproduce race not in government documents but through the biopolitical management of intimate lifeworlds.²⁶ In fantasy football, predominantly white, male participants animate fantasies in which they make sovereign decisions over their assembled fantasy teams of mostly black, male athletes. Thus fantasy football play reanimates deeply embedded and enduring tropes of US American racial governmentality. As a form of "fun," fantasy football exemplifies how the subjunctive modality, often theorized as a space of freedom and play, habituates subjects to racial neoliberalism.

By scripting repeatable actions of calculation, enumeration, and evaluation, fantasy football supplements—and, often, supersedes—social practices and fantasies of football fandom. Here, “script” refers to Robin Bernstein’s incisive analysis of everyday, embodied interactions with games and other playthings as structured enactments that habituate players to affective and ideological orientations.²⁷ In her study of children’s dolls and games, Bernstein defines a script as “a dynamic substance that deeply influences but does not entirely determine live performances.”²⁸ Though scripts are not wholly determinate of performers’ actions, they circumscribe a narrow range of potential choices for engagement: to play the game, one must choose from a limited set of possible actions.²⁹ Fantasy football’s scripts interpellate fantasy participants into new subjectivities through the rehearsal of neoliberal, racial governmentality—a performative process of habituation that exceeds participants’ conscious or intentional choices.³⁰ In this way, fantasy football exemplifies how neoliberalism “operates through performative utterances, and in doing so brings its ideology into material form.”³¹ Fantasy football’s embodied practices and its scripted ways of thinking embed themselves in everyday life, animating fan subjectivities far beyond football stadiums and the “arena” of fantasy football.

Neoliberal Fans and Their Football Fantasies

Fantasy football emerged in the 1960s as an informal pastime among sports industry professionals such as league officials and sports journalists.³² From these early articulations, fantasy football offered participants a leisure activity that reinforced the modes of thinking necessary to apprehend the sport in terms of statistical quantification. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, internet media companies such as Yahoo! made fantasy football accessible and navigable for popular participation, enticing everyday football fans to indulge fantasies of owning and managing teams. The emergence of smart devices and fantasy sports apps have further facilitated fans’ constant engagement with fantasy football.³³ Between 2005 and 2017, the number of online fantasy sports participants in the United States and Canada increased from about eleven million to over forty million, with white (90 percent) men (70–80 percent) a significant majority.³⁴ Fantasy football is by far the most popular form of fantasy sports; it is a significant phenomenon marked by numerous cultural productions, such as the fantasy-football-centered television program *The League* (2009–15) and the *Onion*’s fantasy football satire *Tough Season* (2013–14). How, then, has fantasy football habituated fans to new ways of thinking about sports and to attendant transformations of the everyday politics of the national sporting public?

Many fans primarily engage with football through the mediation of fantasy football rather than through the live or mediated broadcasts of sporting events.³⁵ To accommodate the enumerative desires of fantasy football participants, NFL organizations compete with fantasy football for the attention of fans who attend actual football games, as exemplified in the Jacksonville Jaguars' 2018 announcement that the two of the team stadium's video boards would broadcast the NFL Red Zone channel during games, specifically so that fans would be able to monitor fantasy football statistics.³⁶ Similarly, televised NFL games mimic the broadcast practices of financial reporting by featuring live statistical updates on scrolling chyrons at the bottom of television screens.³⁷ In response to its growing popularity, the National Football League has incorporated fantasy football into its marketing and revenue strategies. In September 2019, the NFL authorized DraftKings as the official daily fantasy sports (DFS) and sports betting partner of the league.³⁸ These new league strategies signal how the NFL has attempted to accommodate fantasy football's transformation of fandom.

Whereas popular impressions of football fandom summon fantasies of mass affect, fantasy football's neoliberal practices have attenuated many public forms of sociality, reorienting fan affect from fantasies of collective experience (*communitas*) to individualized enterprises of competitive team management. The game requires fantasy participants not (only) to engage with athletic competitions as live, kinesthetic events but (also) to analyze football as a numbers game that prizes individual athletes' statistical production. Fantasy football scripts several requisite actions for fantasy participants who "must actively select their 'lineups' on a weekly or daily basis [. . . and who] also actively check the status of their chosen players because of injuries and potential matchups that may favor them."³⁹ Beyond these requisite actions, fantasy participants often conduct additional research into football statistics, consulting information from fantasy football "experts" in order to refine their judgments and strategies in accordance with prevailing wisdom.⁴⁰ Each fantasy owner-manager assembles a fantasy team as a customized, personal enterprise, investing in individual players and delinking football fandom from ties to specific professional teams and/or their sporting publics.⁴¹ On an intimate level, fantasy football displaces social fantasies of football fandom as a *sensus communis* of fellow feeling; instead, the game fosters antisocial orientations of the "sophisticated common sense" of neoliberal management in which fantasy participants value the atomized data and individual statistical products that athletic events generate in the form of box scores.⁴² Fantasy football shifts fan orientations from multiple interpretations, significations, and affective investments into a singular technocratic

orientation that measures athletic significance through statistical quantification. Though fantasy football may supplement (without supplanting) preexisting fan loyalties, the game's constitutive practices encourage participants to transfer attachments from favored teams or players toward "owned" players. Thus fantasy football promotes a privatized model of fandom defined by agential choice, market competition, and sovereign authority in which fans become participants vying for the zero-sum end of victory over one's peers. Fantasy football manifests a "league" made up of competing individuals who are in league with one another in forging a consensus around the national, neoliberal order of things.

Fantasy football orients participants away from collective emotional experiences and toward the neoliberal affects of "empowerment," "control," "self-achievement," and the privatized pleasures of "psychological ownership."⁴³ As Michael Serazio notes, "Self-esteem and satisfaction are tied together, at least in some small measure, with skillfully sizing up football talent."⁴⁴ The emphasis on "skill" as the differentiating factor of successful and unsuccessful fantasy participants exemplifies the neoliberal logic in which the performance of the owner-manager persona reinforces the player's neoliberal "self," rewarding the fantasy participant with the derivative pleasures of enjoyment, esteem, and empowerment.⁴⁵ Such pleasures, as Barbara Cruikshank notes, are constitutive of the disciplinary structures of neoliberal governmentality and the workings of its power relations—the apparent innocuousness of such self-affirming affects belies "the difficulty of distinguishing subjectivity from subjection."⁴⁶ Fantasy participants generate feelings of enjoyment by practicing managerial governmentality in order to win their fantasy leagues.⁴⁷ As a fantasy owner-manager, "Nick," reports: "In fantasy, it's different, because if you win, you almost puff your chest out and say, 'I won; these were my decisions.'"⁴⁸ Through fantasy football's economy of derivative pleasures, fan sociality becomes a zero-sum game wherein competition for "personalized pride" trumps empathetic relationality.⁴⁹ The resultant affective transformation of the sporting public gives credence to Huizinga's theorization of play as a site for the reification of "physical, intellectual, moral or spiritual values" insofar as fantasy football habituates participants to the values of neoliberalism—namely, its denial of communal sociality and its promulgation of autonomous sovereignty and its self-interested desires.⁵⁰ As a laboratory for the remaking of fandom as a mode of entrepreneurial investment in human capital, fantasy football animates the intensified privatization of public enterprises and the attendant "undoing [of] the demos" that neoliberalism facilitates under the sign of individual empowerment.⁵¹

Fantasy participants not only enjoy the affective pleasures of ownership and management but also habituate themselves to the logics of fantasy football, which emphasizes the quantitative over the qualitative, measurement over interpretation, effectiveness over empathy. The statistical quantification that underpins fantasy football has emerged alongside contemporaneous shifts in professional sports. In the early twenty-first century, NFL owners and managers have returned to the nineteenth-century imagination of football articulated by founding figure Walter Camp, who viewed football players through a Taylorist lens of scientific labor management, divided between strategically oriented, intellectual managers (e.g., quarterbacks) and unthinking, physical performers (e.g., linemen).⁵² By contrast to Camp's fantasy of the football field as "the ideal training ground for a managerial elite" and for the entrainment of athletes into specific roles within Taylorist systems of labor, contemporary NFL owners and general managers and coaches position themselves on the sidelines as the managerial class who supervises and maximizes the performance of athletic labor on the field.⁵³ Thus twenty-first-century NFL organizations have adopted "advanced metrics" to quantify the athletic performance of individual players, valuing athletes for their statistical output, which is measured through an ever-increasing technical array of calculative mechanisms. Such technical devices reorient spectatorial interpretation from ephemeral acts of athletic performance to the managerial cultivation of "real" data that can be generated from such performances.

In its fantasies of twenty-first-century football team ownership, fantasy football shifts the subject of football fandom from the athletic laborers on the field to the fantasy participant who "plays" as the statistically minded owner-manager of actual athletes by practicing neoliberal managerial techniques of risk management and avoidance.⁵⁴ The pleasurable performance of the "owner-manager" persona offers fantasy participants a mode of play that performatively constructs subjectivity through what Tom Boellstorff calls a structure of "identity-producing interactions."⁵⁵ Drawing from Foucault's analysis of "technologies of the self" or "modes of training and modification of individuals, not only in the obvious sense of acquiring certain skills but also in the sense of acquiring certain attitudes," Boellstorff traces how virtual fantasies engage with "forms of techne turned inward to shape selfhood."⁵⁶ By playing out their football fantasies, participants engage in fantasy football's derivative economy of enjoyment, both subjunctively and performatively habituating themselves to neoliberal, calculative thinking practices.

In its most intensified form, fantasy football dispenses altogether with the "league" framing and its quantum of social relationality, relying instead on

market rationalities and competitions as the sole connection between fantasy participants. Daily fantasy sports gaming platforms—such as FanDuel and DraftKings—construct individual contests between fantasy participants in a model of market-driven war of all against all. DFS promotes the gamification of fandom as an extractive enterprise: individual fantasy participants pay an entry fee to compete in free market fantasy football competition. In what is now a multibillion-dollar industry, fantasy participants generate revenue for corporate platforms by channeling popular fantasies of sovereignty (DraftKings) through legalized gambling in a banal form of casino capitalism.⁵⁷ DFS presents an intensification of the game's financializing logics, as financial speculator and DFS maven Tommy Gelati observes:

I'm a day trader. So, you're just day trading athletes rather than day trading, you know, individual stocks and or companies. The charting's the same. You know, it's the same—same premises, same concepts: a lot of data, a lot of analytics.⁵⁸

Corroborating Gelati's testimonial, Jim Cramer, the host of CNBC's financial advice television program *Mad Money*, attests, "The lessons and discipline of the typical fantasy league are incredibly useful when you're picking stocks," as fantasy football models techniques of portfolio diversification and risk management.⁵⁹ David Harvey could hardly have offered a better example of the permeation of financial thinking throughout the embodied practices of late capitalism when he described neoliberalism as "the financialization of everything."⁶⁰

By scripting investments in the statistical quantification of sports, fantasy football entrains fans to evaluate athletic performances as quantifiable data. Sports knowledge/power shifts from a fantasy of social, affective, and kinesthetic experience to a rationalist utopia of economic governance, with attendant shifts in affective orientation from the corporeal and ephemeral to the mediated and extractive. By performing as owner-manager, the fantasy sports participant remakes *Homo ludens* into the model of the calculative rationality of *Homo economicus*—the entrepreneurial self who functions as a "market actor" by making decisions on purely rational economic bases.⁶¹ The play of sport becomes an economic game. In this mode, the entrepreneurial subject no longer enjoys sociality as a public good; rather, "he produces his [*sic*] own satisfaction."⁶² Fantasies of collective experience give way to the fantastical facticity of quantifiable statistics; shared affect yields to pleasurable derivatives. This is the arena of *homo ludens sicut oeconomicus*—man the player as the economic manager of human capital—a playful, financialized subject who derives their

very subjectivity from their capacity to derive capital from their self and from the performance of others.⁶³

Football's Racial Fantasies

Fantasy football's constitutive scripts of neoliberal subjectivity also rehearse distinctly racialized modes of governmentality. Between 2005 and 2017, fantasy football participation grew fivefold, yet nonwhite participation increased minimally (from 6 to 10 percent of total participants).⁶⁴ These asymmetrical racial demographics suggest that fantasy football's scripts are particularly attractive to white participants and that race and racial fantasies are integral to fantasy football's appeal. What, then, are fantasy football's racialized scripts, and how has fantasy football functioned as a site for the making and remaking of race through habituated practice?

Fantasy football competition begins with ownership. Whereas previous fan activities such as memorabilia collection allow individuals to possess commodity objects as metonyms of star athletes, the scripts of fantasy football require participants to subjunctively "own" professional football players. Fantasy football habituates fans to fantasies of ownership in which they may draft, trade, buy, sell, promote, demote, and release ("fire" or "cut") athletes. If fantasy football entrains participants in neoliberal financial investment strategies, then it follows that fantasy participants increasingly relate to professional football players through market logics as commodities in which they are financially invested and over which they exercise economic rationality. The "owner" persona facilitates a gendered and racialized fantasy that "allows men to experience the social power that predominantly White, male owners of professional sports teams possess on a daily basis."⁶⁵ The affective rewards derived from fantasies of agency, empowerment, control, and authority trope on modern sports' hidden transcripts of "white masculinist fantasies of domination, control and desire for the racialized Other."⁶⁶ Through the subjunctive performances constitutive of fantasy ownership, predominantly white, male participants elicit and enjoy real affective pleasures of control and domination. Fantasy football's scripts of racial governmentality entice participants to invest themselves in such white, masculinist fantasies and ways of thinking.⁶⁷ In other words, if the fantasy of fantasy football is one of empowerment, then this "empowerment" arises largely through the dominant relationship of mostly white, male fantasy participants over the predominantly black athletes who constitute their fantasy teams.

Crucially, fantasy football's rehearsal of biopolitical techniques transmits scripts of racial governmentality by reanimating fantasies that do not explic-

itly mark race as a determining factor; yet these fantasies revitalize embedded transcripts and starkly racialized scenarios. In other words, fantasy football is an arena of what Eduardo Bonilla-Silva terms “color-blind racism” in which “the increasingly covert nature of racial discourse and racial practice” rearticulates latent racial scenarios, relations, and social formations.⁶⁸ These covert racializing scripts intimately structure scenarios of bodily measurement, evaluation, and commodification. Centrally, in a process modeled on the NFL draft, each fantasy owner competes with others over “rights” to real players and their potential performance. A fantasy owner drafts professional players, obtaining exclusive ownership rights to that player and their statistical profile. Fantasy participants imagine themselves as absolute sovereigns of their teams and “their” drafted players—there are no contracts that require the consent of actual athletes, who are granted no control over their fantasy “rights.”⁶⁹ Fantasy owners, rather than view professional athletes as agential actors who may negotiate their contracts, imagine “their” players as value-producing investments. In fantasy football drafts, participants evaluate professional athletes for their potential human capital to be derived from their on-field performance. In this way, the fantasy draft is a simulacrum of the real NFL draft and its precedent event, the NFL scouting combine. At the combine, scouting experts literally measure athletes, calculate athletic potential and potential risk, and produce data to evaluate potential draftees.⁷⁰ Thus fantasy participants act out the behaviors and orientations of NFL owners, concerning themselves intimately with their players’ potential to perform, their physical aptitudes, and their health—practices that reproduce the biopolitical techniques of player evaluation endemic to the NFL combine and draft.⁷¹

In a vital example of the everyday transmission of racial scripts, many fantasy football leagues stage “auction drafts” in which predominantly white male fantasy participants vie over ownership rights to athletic black bodies. As Michele Elam notes, the NFL combine’s calculative techniques of measuring predominantly black athletic bodies reproduce scenarios of chattel slavery and its spectacular slave auctions:

It is, after all, primarily the draftee’s flesh that excites financial interest. They are reduced to the sum of their parts—legs, arms, muscles, and sinew all evaluated and savored for their potential to perform—and to the calculation of their statistical profile.⁷²

Like the NFL spectacles that it imitates, the fantasy auction draft restages the slave auction as a paradigmatic scene of the primitive accumulation of racialized human capital that appears as almost but not quite human chattel.

Fantasy football drafts do not reproduce the dramaturgy of these scenes of subjection by staging explicit exhibitions of black flesh for purchase.⁷⁴ Rather, the requisite actions of fantasy football compel fantasy participants to inhabit “forgotten but not gone” performance genealogies of acquisitive whiteness by surrogating white plantation owners.⁷⁵

Though scholars have demonstrated the many ways that black athletic bodies have subtended popular sports—as in Ben Carrington’s excellent analysis of “*sporting racial projects*”—fantasy drafts are unique insofar as they script actual performances in which predominantly white participants engage in embodied rehearsals of racial ownership.⁷⁶ Specifically, the embodied dispositions and orientations of fantasy participants at auction drafts echo the evaluative economies of antebellum slave auctions wherein

being a “good judge of slaves” was a noteworthy public identity [. . . within] a world of manly one-upmanship in which knowledge of slaves’ bodies was bandied back and forth as white men cemented social ties and articulated a hierarchy among themselves through shared participation in the inspection and evaluation of black slaves.⁷⁷

Often hosted in US American dens and living rooms, fantasy drafts bring home such racial scenarios, whereby they unwittingly cite and reenact such spectacles, which were immortalized in the climactic scene of Dion Bouicault’s *The Octoroon; or, Life in Louisiana* (1859). As Joseph Roach observes, Bouicault’s nineteenth-century racial melodrama brought “the scene of slavery home to the domestic sphere” by staging the confrontation between white suitors over the ownership of the tragic mulatto, Zoe.⁷⁸ In the twenty-first century, the scripts of fantasy drafts reanimate such dramatic scenarios of racial ownership, with predominantly white US American men gathering to wager against one another over the absent presences of real black bodies mediated as statistical databodies for derivative pleasures.⁷⁹

If fantasy drafts conjure the slave auction and scripts of racial ownership, then fantasy football also summons a central concern of the plantation economy: the “management of slaves” and the “management of negroes,” which, as David Roediger observes, were the topics of “the first systematic management publications in the United States.”⁸⁰ As Thomas Patrick Oates demonstrates, fantasy football offers participants the opportunity to practice “vicarious management” over professional players.⁸¹ Importantly, the racial investments of fantasy football participants do not end with the conclusion of the draft or with fantasy ownership. Once fantasy football participants “own” an athlete’s “rights,” they may—and according to the competitive logics scripted by fan-

tasy football, they should—monitor and calculate the statistical production of their “owned” athletes.⁸² In other words, the fantasies of fantasy football script imaginary relations of power in which participants rehearse biopolitical orientations, calculative techniques, and practices of surveillance. Throughout the football season, fantasy owners reenact the dispositions and behaviors that constitute “the relationship of whiteness to capital and to management.”⁸³ Central to this scenario of racial governmentality, fantasy participants take on the persona of general manager, surveilling their players’ performances, maintaining the productivity of their teams, and making executive decisions about which players will provide the fantasy team with surplus value and which are disposable. Thus football fans increasingly relate to sports through a diffuse set of actions and orientations structured by the “rubric of pleasure, paternalism, and property.”⁸⁴ Such operations imbricate their fantasy play with the historical operations of US American sports fandom and labor management as racial projects of whiteness. Through these practices, fantasy participants performatively *re-claim* a “lost” position of white male expertise and control over predominantly black athletic bodies.⁸⁵

Paradoxically, in the most banal yet extreme cases, fantasy football contributes to US American racial projects when fantasy participants slip beyond the subjunctive to exercise discipline over actual athletes. For instance, as Meredith Bagley notes, the desire for fantasy participants to “coach” professional players is common enough that fantasy football advertisements frequently stage scenarios in which fantasy participants offer their expertise to actual athletes, “set[] performance standards,” and thereby “emphasize the power [of] these fantasy coaches.”⁸⁶ Whereas fantasy football advertisements enact these scenarios as a farce, fantasy participants often act out such scenes of managerial discipline over “their” athletes. The managerial behaviors associated with coaching—such as motivational strategies ranging from affirmation to heckling—require contact with actual athletes. Social media platforms facilitate such contact, whereby fantasy owners message professional athletes in a no-longer-subjunctive performance of neoliberal biopolitical management and wherein fantasy owners enact actual scenes of racial subjection.

Many examples of the collision between fantasy management and real athletes arise in relation to the precariousness of professional athletes’ health. For instance, after injuring his hamstring prior to the 2011 NFL season, star running back Arian Foster posted a photograph of his MRI to Twitter.⁸⁷ Fantasy “owners” contacted Foster via Twitter to express their displeasure that, due to his actual injury, he would not be “performing” on their fantasy teams.⁸⁸ Foster’s case is hardly unique: fantasy participants frequently harass star players on

social media. As Jimmy Sanderson notes, fantasy participants frequently “send[] messages to athletes via social media (primarily Twitter) when athletes fail to ‘deliver’ a satisfactory number of points for a fantasy sports participant.”⁸⁹ In 2013, a fantasy football participant sent multiple death threats to New York Giants running back Brandon Jacobs, including a message stating, “FULFILL MY ORDERS STATED IN THE PREVIOUS TWEET OR THAT’S YO LIFE BRUH AND IM NOT PLAYING.”⁹⁰ Through such messages, fantasy participants attempt to “symbolically manipulate athletes who, in a sense, play for [them].”⁹¹ While most fantasy participants do not exhibit such fantasies of violent domination, many participants attempt to incentivize actual athletes through social media messages celebrating their contributions to participants’ fantasy teams.⁹² Though these may appear to be “positive” social interactions, they also demonstrate a self-interested mode of managerial thinking, in which fantasy “owners” paternalistically praise athletes in “exchange” for the benefits derived from the athletes’ actual labor. In acts of discipline and incentivization alike, fantasy participants articulate underlying investments in professional athletes as biological beings whose value arises solely through the accumulated data derived from their performance.

Such investments signal concern not over fellow citizens but over “owned” players who either become value-producing, dependent human capital or, in failing to do so, become valueless and disposable.⁹³ Foster’s well-being became a primary concern of his fans because the “owners” perceived their sudden lack of knowledge/power over their “owned” human capital. Similarly, the fantasy owner attempted to discipline Jacobs into a better performance by acting as an absolute sovereign who could claim power over Jacobs’s life and death. As such, fantasy owners attempt to coax—and even to threaten—actual athletes to “work for” their fantasy teams. Thus fans reorient themselves toward athletes and their performances as governable biopolitical “things,” slipping beyond role-playing as a fantasy owner into the performative identity of a sovereign “owner.”⁹⁴

Racial Neoliberalism as National Spectacle

Fan orientations resulting from such performative enactments of fantasy football’s neoliberal and racial scripts are not limited to the arena of sports, fantasy or otherwise. Rather, habituated scripts travel far beyond the boundaries of football stadiums and digital media where they animate broader discourses at the intersections of race, sports, and politics.⁹⁵ Neoliberal techniques of economization and financialization have had profound effects on football

fandom and intersecting political discourses. As the fantasy owner-managers of their own fantasy teams, participants habituate themselves to a position of sovereignty over others. Yet this fantasy is not one of political sovereignty but one that remakes all governance in the mode of economic sovereignty.⁹⁶ Instead of the political sovereignty guaranteed by the state or a king, fantasy participants ensure their subjective sovereignty through the economic dictates of the ROI (return on investment). In this well-rehearsed confusion of sovereignties, sport and politics alike become intensified fields of competition for derivative value extracted from others. Anyone who fails to perform—to direct their behavior toward the production of human capital and the return of the sovereign owner’s investments—becomes disposable. Nonproductive human capital—dead weight—must be eliminated to reinvest in productive stock. The ROI is dead; long live the ROI.

At this juncture of death and economic value, let us return to President Trump’s gestural performance at the Huntsville rally. If fantasy football functions as a primary arena for the rehearsal of neoliberal politics and its fantasies of agency and enterprise through absolute sovereignty, then this fantasy effectively was reanimated in Trump’s central gesture. Trump’s *gestus* played on the habituated football fantasies of his neoliberal, privatized public, in which the central fantasy is to act as a sovereign over oneself and one’s interests. Trump’s invocation of the authority of the Huntsville sporting public over “those people” signaled the slippage from neoliberal apparatuses of quantification to the football’s latent scripts of racial governmentality. The assembled crowd indulged in a fantasy in which they might manage the bodies and “conduct[] the conduct” of “those people,” such as Colin Kaepernick.⁹⁷

In August 2016 Kaepernick inaugurated a national spectacle in his embodied, public protest of police brutality and structural violence. In his protest, Kaepernick mobilized his position as a contemporary avatar of the transhistorical figure of “the black athlete” as a critical presence within the national sporting public by refusing to stand for the national anthem, citing gestural vocabularies of black resistance and refusal such as the Greensboro sit-ins, Rosa Parks’s refusal to stand on a Montgomery bus, and Tommie Smith and John Carlos’s black power salutes at the 1968 Olympics, among many others.⁹⁸ In response to early criticisms of his protest, Kaepernick refashioned his embodied gesture by kneeling—rather than sitting—during the anthem to perform respect for military service members and veterans. Kaepernick articulated the intentions motivating his protest:

I am not going to stand up to show pride in a flag for a country that oppresses black people and people of color. To me, this is bigger than football and it would be selfish on my part to look the other way. There are bodies in the street and people getting paid leave and getting away with murder.⁹⁹

Kaepernick invoked ongoing social justice movements such as #BlackLivesMatter (#BLM) and articulated his protest in terms of civic responsibility rather than personal grievance. By staging a spectacle in support of civil rights within football's extant mass spectacle, Kaepernick positioned these values as critical concerns for the national sporting public.

Kaepernick's protest inaugurated an ongoing counterdiscourse among NFL players who also have resisted the NFL's code of player conduct and its racialized systems of labor. Following Kaepernick's exclusion from the league after the 2016 season, numerous NFL players such as Eric Reid, Michael Bennett, Marshawn Lynch, Brandon Marshall, Kenny Stills, Robert Quinn, and Albert Wilson repeatedly restaged Kaepernick's protests.¹⁰⁰ These spectacular enactments of resistance reached their apogee in coordinated responses to Trump's statements in Huntsville, wherein NFL players throughout the league reperformed Kaepernick's embodied gestures during the national anthem. As unruly bodies, these athletes transgressed the NFL code of conduct to redirect public attention toward political struggles for racial justice.

Collectively, these professional football players made spectacles of their black bodies outside the frames of athletic performance and statistical production, laying claim to their political rights rather than their economic value. Such tactics shifted popular discourse from football stadiums—in which athletes are coded as laborers productive of value rather than rights-bearing citizens—and into the public arenas in which they make their political claims. Many acts of protest have been antispectacular, refusing the discursive frames perpetuated through the NFL's commoditization of the "spectacle of the black body."¹⁰¹ For instance, the day after refusing to attend a Super Bowl celebration at the White House (to which President Trump belatedly disinvited the team), Philadelphia Eagles' safety Malcolm Jenkins held an interview in which he refused to speak and instead performed silently. In lieu of verbal responses, Jenkins presented a poster with the written statement: "You aren't listening." Then Jenkins presented several additional posters that publicized facts and statistics about racial inequities in the carceral system, state violence against black civilians, and bail reform.¹⁰² Jenkins's performance thus slipped beyond the frames of national spectacle that structure neoliberal modalities of football fandom. Other NFL players have elaborated similar tactics, turning to

alternative venues to stage their acts of resistance and refusal: in the *New York Times*, at postgame press conferences, on the sidelines, and, in response to new league rules prohibiting sideline protests, in stadium entry tunnels. Such protests signal that, for professional athletes, their performance on the field of athletic play—subsumed by national spectacle and mediated as statistical data—no longer functions as an effective site for their political advocacy as rights-bearing citizens. Moving off the field and into nonspectacularized sites of public discourse, such performances of athletic resistance reclaim the social fantasy of the sporting public as a political arena.¹⁰³

Yet Trump's gesture, pointedly staged in a sporting arena, embodied a fantastical counterclaim that reimagined the national sporting public as a private, corporate sphere, wherein subjects lack political rights. Trump's fantasy of firing a protesting athlete inaugurated a public contest over the bodily comportment of US American citizens articulated in business logics. As Lauren Berlant observed in 2012—four years prior to Trump's election to the presidency—his “You're Fired” gestus signals how neoliberal governmentality has trumped national political common sense. Berlant writes that “‘You're fired!’ expresses the fantasy of agency being sold by the right as the scene of the experience of democracy. Everyone a sovereign!”¹⁰⁴ Inviting his audience into a fantasy of agency in which they could vicariously enjoy the sovereign authority of a football owner—the very fantasy animated by fantasy football—Trump reimagined athletes not as citizens but as employees of the state. As their boss, Trump claimed the authority to conduct their conduct on and off the field. He declared, “NFL should change policy!” and successfully compelled the league to “set a rule that you can't kneel during our National Anthem!”¹⁰⁵ Throughout the week following the Huntsville rally, he reiterated his declarative performative on Twitter:

If a player wants the privilege of making millions of dollars in the NFL, or other leagues, he or she should not be allowed to disrespect . . .
 . . . our Great American Flag (or Country) and should stand for the National Anthem. If not, YOU'RE FIRED. Find something else to do!¹⁰⁶

Trump's gesture imagined all football players as docile subjects whose only value derives from their athletic performance; any economically nonproductive action that they take in any arena—such as the assertion of political sovereignty—was reimagined as a firing offense.

Within this frame, President Trump's gestus marks a continuity in fantasies of the NFL and its sporting public as white properties.¹⁰⁷ In Steven Thrasher's

terms, Trump's enactment of fantastical authority drew from the habituation of "sports fans to see large black men as physically intimidating but also controllable under the right conditions."¹⁰⁸ Spectating on this performance, members of the sporting public may indulge their own habituated football fantasies in which they perform actions on others' actions and thereby enacting their sovereign will on the wealthiest, most physically imposing black bodies in the US American public sphere.¹⁰⁹ Such fantasies have been actualized in spectacular fashion. In a paradigmatic enactment of NFL owners' management of players' conduct, Kaepernick was effectively banned from the league.¹¹⁰ Kaepernick has been subjected on the public scaffold in a disciplinary spectacle that threatened other NFL players with a ban that would similarly terminate their employment and, therefore, the viability of their human capital. A significant portion of the ensuing public discourse has affirmed owners' absolute authority to discipline player conduct. The year after Trump's incursion into the sporting public, the NFL's political crisis transmogrified into an issue of management and labor. Though the players' protests compelled the NFL to invest one hundred million dollars in social justice organizations, the translation of racial justice into monetary compensation raised questions among players and critics alike.¹¹¹ By responding to a political crisis with charitable donations, the NFL acted out how the national fantasy of neoliberal governmentality reimagines all politics as economic: civil rights become labor policies and cash transfers; freedoms become conducts; and economic sovereignty reigns absolute.

Thus Trump's *gestus* did not inaugurate but, rather, reaffirmed modes of racial governmentality rehearsed in fantasy football—most centrally, the fantasy that white owners ought to exercise their managerial authority to cast out black athletes who fail to conform to the extractive logics of ROI, and that fan-spectator-citizens should cheer the restoration of racial rule as good business practice. Trump's *gestic* enactment evidently satisfied the expectations of the attendees at the Huntsville rally, who responded with abundant affective enthusiasm channeled through more than fifteen seconds of continuous applause followed by chants of "U-S-A! U-S-A!" Bespeaking the "national-utopian fantasy" of unity through chants democratic, the Huntsville crowd enunciated their spontaneous assent "within which individual and collective fantasy become, nationally, embodied."¹¹² No longer a space for fantasies of socially invested *communitas* in which fans might identify with athletes (however ambivalently), the demotic field of sport becomes the domain of business where racialized laborers are expected to just do their job.

In this national spectacle, the social fantasy of the sporting public reappears, differently. The amassed crowd's affective enthusiasm highlights a central irony

of the neoliberal transformation of the sporting public. Trump's rally marks a return to the social fantasy of politics replete with the communal affective intensities of race and nation, which contrasts sharply with the privatizing dispositions of ownership and management endemic to neoliberal fantasies. Despite this apparent contradiction, this scene of mass affect symptomizes the workings of fantasy football's scripts on a national scale, in which individuals project themselves as rationally minded, disinterested managers of racial subjects while simultaneously engaging in a collective phantasmagoria of neoliberal, racial governmentality. Here, the social utopia of the neoliberal sporting public coheres not around the promise of civil rights underwritten by national law but around the fantasy of economic "laws" as that which either guarantees or proscribes individual freedoms. In this way, neoliberal football fantasies facilitate a reconciliation between a central paradox of US American political life by weaving together individual self-interest with national-utopian affect.¹¹³ The relays between fantasy football and Trumpian politics thus trace the intimate ways that fantasy binds together neoliberal subjectivities and racial formations. Moreover, these scenarios signal an urgent need for radical articulations of the sporting public that apprehend the phantasmatic as a constitutive and generative force in forging new subjectivities, socialities, and possible futures.

Notes

- I wish to thank Mari Yoshihara, the *American Quarterly* editorial board, and the anonymous reviewers for their feedback on earlier drafts. I also would like to express my gratitude to Rebecca Chaleff for her theoretical insight and critical generosity.
1. C-Span, "President Trump Remarks at Senator Strange Campaign Rally," 44:47–54, September 22, 2017, www.c-span.org/video/?434480-1/president-trump-campaigns-alabama-senator-luther-strange&start=2662.
 2. Brecht defines "the social gest" as "the mimetic and gestural expression of social relationships prevailing between people of a given period" (*Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*, ed. and trans. John Willett [London: Methuen, 1964], 139). The translator of this passage, John Willett, defines Brecht's important term: "'Gestus' . . . means both gist and gesture; an attitude or a single aspect of an attitude, expressible in words or actions" (42).
 3. C-Span, "President Trump Remarks," 47:14.
 4. From 1983 to 1985, Trump owned the New York Generals of the United States Football League before the league disbanded. In 2014 Trump failed to purchase the Buffalo Bills organization.
 5. Frank M. Shipman, "Blending the Real and Virtual: Activity and Spectatorship in Fantasy Sports" (paper presented at the Fourth Annual Digital Arts and Culture Conference, Providence, RI, April 1–9, 2001), 4, www.csdl.tamu.edu/~shipman/papers/dac01.pdf. Quotation from "SportsLine.com Inc. to Offer All Fantasy Products Free of Charge," CBS Sportsline, July 20, 2000, about.sportsline.com/releases/freefant.htm. This link is no longer viable.
 6. Quoted in Brady Henderson, "Richard Sherman: Players 'Don't Care about Your Fantasy Team,'" ESPN.com, October 2, 2017, www.espn.com/nfl/story/_/id/20891284/richard-sherman-seattle-seahawks-many-nfl-players-soured-fantasy.

7. Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978–1979*, ed. Michel Senellart, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 229; see also Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution* (New York: Zone Books, 2015), 35–41.
8. Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 44.
9. Meredith M. Bagley, "Coaching Neoliberal Citizen/Subjects, Fulfilling Fundamental Fantasies: Cultural Discourse of Fantasy Football," in *Sports and Identity: New Agendas in Communication*, ed. Barry Brummett and Andrew W. Ishak (New York: Routledge, 2014), 281. See also Nickolas W. Davis and Margaret Carlisle Duncan, "Sports Knowledge Is Power: Reinforcing Masculine Privilege through Fantasy Sport League Participation," *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 30.3 (2006): 244–64; Thomas Patrick Oates, "New Media and the Repackaging of NFL Fandom," *Sociology of Sport Journal* 26.1 (2009): 31–49; Andrew Baerg, "Draft Day: Risk, Responsibility, and Fantasy Football," in *Fantasy Sports and the Changing Sports Media Industry: Media, Players, and Society*, ed. Nicholas David Bowman, John S. W. Spinda, and Jimmy Sanderson (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2016), 99–119.
10. Lauren Berlant, *The Anatomy of National Fantasy: Hawthorne, Utopia, and Everyday Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).
11. Bertolt Brecht, "Emphasis on Sport," in *Brecht on Theatre*, 6–9, at 6.
12. Daniel L. Wann, Merrill J. Melnick, Gordon W. Russell, Dale G. Pease, *Sports Fans: The Psychology and Social Impact of Spectators* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 31.
13. Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*, trans. R. F. C. Hull (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1949), 7–8.
14. Huizinga, 48.
15. Jeffrey O. Segrave, "Sport as Escape," *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 24.1 (2000): 68; cf. Victor Turner, "Liminal to Liminoid in Play, Flow, and Ritual: An Essay in Comparative Symbolology," *Rice University Studies* 60 (1974): 53–92; Daniel Larlham, "On Empathy, Optimism, and Beautiful Play at the First African World Cup," *TDR: The Drama Review* 56.1 (2012): 25.
16. Michal Oriard, *Reading Football: How the Popular Press Created an American Spectacle* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 2.
17. Oriard, 17, 9.
18. On "antitheatrical prejudice," see Jonas Barish, *The Antitheatrical Prejudice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981); see pp. 455–57 for Brecht. Antitheatrical prejudice is prevalent in sports fandom, reporting, and scholarship; see, for instance, Natalie Alvarez, "Foul Play: Soccer's 'Infamous Thespians' and the Cultural Politics of Diving," *TDR: The Drama Review* 60.1 (2016): 10–24.
19. Between 2003 and 2017, I participated in fantasy football leagues with family, friends, co-workers, acquaintances, and strangers, primarily at Yahoo! and ESPN.com.
20. Baerg, "Draft Day," 102–4.
21. Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 214n1.
22. Michel Foucault, "Governmentality," in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in the Art of Governmentality*, ed. Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, and Peter Miller (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 87–104.
23. Nikolas Rose, "Governing 'Advanced' Liberal Democracies," in *Foucault and Political Reason: Liberalism, Neo-Liberalism and Rationalities of Government*, ed. Andrew Barry, Thomas Osborne, and Nikolas Rose (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 42.
24. Foucault, *Birth of Biopolitics*.
25. David Theo Goldberg, *The Racial State* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002), 105.
26. On the intimate work of racial governmentality in remaking "race" throughout US American history, see David Kazanjian, *The Colonizing Trick: National Culture and Imperial Citizenship in Early America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 89–138; and Tavia Nyong'o, *The Amalgamation Waltz: Race, Performance, and the Ruses of Memory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 76–94. These studies outline racial governmentality, respectively, as a discourse of calculative political rationality and as a mode of managing sexuality, both of which are constitutive of US American articulations of race and nation.
27. Robin Bernstein, *Racial Innocence: Performing American Childhood from Slavery to Civil Rights* (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 69–81.
28. Bernstein, 71.
29. Bernstein, 77.

30. On the related function of digital gaming as a mechanism for scripting neoliberal subjectivity, see Andrew Baerg, "Governmentality, Neoliberalism, and the Digital Game," *symplok* 17.1–2 (2009): 115–27.
31. Shannon Steen, "Neoliberal Scandals: Foxconn, Mike Daisey, and the Turn toward Nonfiction Drama," *Theatre Journal* 66.1 (2014): 2. On neoliberalism's dense entanglements with performance and performativity, see also Lara D. Nielsen and Patricia Ybarra, eds., *Neoliberalism and Global Theatres: Performance Permutations* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); Nicholas Ridout and Rebecca Schneider, eds., "Special Consortium Issue: Precarity and Performance," *TDR: The Drama Review* 56.4 (2012); Judith Hamera, *Unfinished Business: Michael Jackson, Detroit, and the Figural Economy of American Deindustrialization* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).
32. Shaun M. Anderson and Nicholas David Bowman, "The Origin of Fantasy Sports," in *Fantasy Sports and the Changing Sports Media Industry: Media, Players, and Society*, ed. Nicholas David Bowman, John S. W. Spinda, and Jimmy Sanderson (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2016), 5.
33. Anderson and Bowman, 6–8.
34. Lee Rainie, "Online Sports Fantasy Leagues," *Pew Internet and American Life Project*, June 17, 2005, www.pewinternet.org/2005/06/17/online-sports-fantasy-leagues/; Fantasy Sports Trade Association, "Industry Demographics: 2017," accessed August 23, 2018, fsta.org/research/industry-demographics/; Anderson and Bowman, 9. Compared with demographics of NFL fans, white male fans are overrepresented among fantasy football participants, while black fans and female fans are underrepresented.
35. Mujde Yuksel, Mark A. McDonald, George R. Milne, and Aron Darmody, "The Paradoxical Relationship between Fantasy Football and NFL Consumption: Conflict Development and Consumer Coping Mechanisms," *Sport Management Review* 20.2 (2017): 202.
36. "Fantasy Football," 2018 Fan Guide, accessed August 22, 2018, www.jaguars.com/stadium/fanguide. My thanks to Sean Bartley for alerting me to this practice.
37. Bagley, "Coaching Neoliberal Citizen/Subjects," 282.
38. "NFL Makes DraftKings Its Official Daily Fantasy Sports Partner," *MarketWatch*, September 27, 2019, www.marketwatch.com/story/nfl-makes-draftkings-its-official-daily-fantasy-sports-partner-2019-09-27.
39. John S. W. Spinda and Paul M. Haridakis, "Exploring the Motives of Fantasy Sports: A Uses-and-Gratifications Approach," in *Sports Mania: Essays on Fandom and the Media in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Lawrence W. Hugenberg, Paul M. Haridakis, and Adam C. Earnhardt (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2008), 189–90.
40. Spinda and Haridakis, 191.
41. Fantasy football therefore presents a contrast to social-affective models of fandom cultivated by football's "imaginative geographies" of team, nation, region, and neighborhood. See Jeffrey Montez de Oca, *Discipline and Indulgence: College Football, Media, and the American Way of Life during the Cold War* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2013), 93–112.
42. Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 35.
43. Yuksel et al., "Paradoxical Relationship," 202.
44. Michael Serazio, "Virtual Sports Consumption, Authentic Brotherhood: The Reality of Fantasy Football," in *Sports Mania: Essays on Fandom and the Media in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Lawrence W. Hugenberg, Paul M. Haridakis, and Adam C. Earnhardt (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2008), 238.
45. See Bagley, "Coaching Neoliberal Citizen/Subjects."
46. Barbara Cruikshank, "Revolutions Within: Self-Government and Self-Esteem," in Barry, Osborne, and Rose, *Foucault and Political Reason*, 248.
47. In their empirical study of fantasy sports participation, Nicholas D. Bowman, Jessi McCabe, and Tom Isaacson note that "participants in fantasy sports leagues saw the game as a challenge and competition more so than a friendly gathering of sports fans" ("Fantasy Sports and Sports Fandom: Implications for Mass Media Research," in *Sports Fans, Identity, and Socialization: Exploring the Fandemonium*, ed. Adam C. Earnhardt, Paul M. Haridakis, and Barbara S. Hugenberg [Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2012], 264).
48. Quoted in Yuksel et al., "Paradoxical Relationship," 203.
49. Yuksel et al., 203.
50. Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 48.
51. Brown, *Undoing the Demos*.

52. Oriard, *Reading Football*, 43–47.
53. Oriard, 50.
54. Baerg, “Draft Day.”
55. Tom Boellstorff, *Coming of Age in Second Life: An Anthropologist Explores the Virtually Human* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 120.
56. Michel Foucault, “Technologies of the Self,” in *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault*, ed. Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutman, and Patrick H. Hutton (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), 18; Boellstorff, *Coming of Age*, 120.
57. These forms of sports betting were officially legalized nationwide by the 2018 Supreme Court ruling in *Murphy v. National Collegiate Athletic Association*.
58. Real Sports with Bryant Gumbel, “Ep. 210 Web Clip: Daily Fantasy,” HBO, September 23, 2014, 00:37–00:48, www.hbo.com/real-sports-with-bryant-gumbel/episodes/0/210-episode/video/ep-210-web-clip-daily-fantasy.html.
59. Quoted in Elizabeth Gurdus, “Cramer Uses Fantasy Football to Teach Investors the Cardinal Rules of Diversification,” CNBC.com, August 15, 2017, www.cnbc.com/2017/08/15/cramer-uses-fantasy-football-to-teach-investors-how-to-diversify.html.
60. David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 33.
61. Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 31.
62. Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978–1979*, ed. Michel Senellart, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 226.
63. My thanks to Kyle Bogue for his assistance with this Latin translation.
64. During the same period, female participation has increased at a much more significant rate (from 2 to about 30 percent), suggesting that maleness is a less significant identity marker than whiteness in fantasy communities (see Davis and Duncan, “Sports Knowledge Is Power,” 248; Anderson and Bowman, “Origin of Fantasy Sports,” 9). Fantasy football’s demographic composition of nonwhite participants and their modes of subjunctive engagement with the game’s racial fantasies warrants further study; these dynamics are, however, beyond the scope of this essay.
65. Davis and Duncan, “Sports Knowledge Is Power,” 252; Bagley, “Coaching Neoliberal Citizen/Subjects,” 285. Roughly 90 percent of NFL owners are male and 97 percent white, which correlates positively to the composition of fantasy participants.
66. Ben Carrington, *Race, Sport, and Politics: The Sporting Black Diaspora* (London: Sage, 2010), 4.
67. Davis and Duncan, “Sports Knowledge Is Power,” 261–62; Oates, “New Media,” 43; Bagley, “Coaching Neoliberal Citizen/Subjects,” 285.
68. Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *White Supremacy and Racism in the Post–Civil Rights Era* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2001), 12, 94.
69. The 2008 US Supreme Court refused to review the decision of the US Court of Appeals, Eighth Circuit, in *C.B.C. Distribution and Marketing Inc. vs. Major League Baseball Advanced Media, L.P., et al.*, leaving in place the ruling that fantasy sports companies (and, by extension, fantasy participants) retain rights to the unlimited use of actual professional athletes’ names, identities, and statistical profiles without the players’ consent.
70. Thomas Patrick Oates and Meenakshi Gigi Durham, “The Mismeasure of Masculinity: The Male Body, ‘Race’ and Power in the Enumerative Discourses of the NFL Draft,” *Patterns of Prejudice* 38.3 (2004): 309–10.
71. Brendan Dwyer and Yongjae Kim, “For Love or Money: Developing and Validating a Motivational Scale for Fantasy Football Participation,” *Journal of Sport Management* 25.1 (2011): 71.
72. Michele Elam, *The Souls of Mixed Folk: Race, Politics, and Aesthetics in the New Millennium* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011), 169. See also Oates and Durham, “Mismeasure of Masculinity.”
73. On how black athletes navigate the sports industry as a “new plantation,” see William C. Rhoden, *Forty Million Dollar Slaves: The Rise, Fall, and Redemption of the Black Athlete* (New York: Three Rivers, 2006); and Billy Hawkins, *The New Plantation: Black Athletes, College Sports, and Predominantly White NCAA Institutions* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010). By contrast to these insightful studies, I focus on how predominantly white fantasy football participants act out racial fantasies.
74. Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).
75. Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 31.

76. Carrington, *Race, Sport, and Politics*, 66.
77. Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 137.
78. Roach, *Cities of the Dead*, 218.
79. This is not to say that only white men reanimate such scenarios but that fantasy football participants—including contingents of white women and people of color—revivify latent scripts constitutive of transhistorical racial projects of whiteness structured on the inclusive rituals of white, male homosocial bonding. Indeed, in Boucicault's *Octoroon*, the white heiress Dora Sunnyside bids on Zoe during the slave auction, tracing precedent modes of white, female participation in such scenarios.
80. David R. Roediger, *Class, Race, and Marxism* (London: Verso, 2017), 102. Simone Browne similarly offers a revisionist genealogy of surveillance studies, situating transatlantic systems of enslavement as key sites in the elaboration of disciplinary and sovereign practices of "racializing surveillance" (*Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness* [Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015], 50–57).
81. Oates, "New Media," 31. As Oates notes, fans may engage in similar practices through video games, such as in the "owner mode" of the *Madden NFL* series; by contrast to fantasy football, these video games script simulated modes of ownership that are not premised on the actual performance of NFL players.
82. Bowman, McCabe, and Isaacson, "Fantasy Sports and Sports Fandom," 257, 262.
83. Roediger, *Class, Race, and Marxism*, 71.
84. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 4.
85. Davis and Duncan, "Sports Knowledge Is Power," 262.
86. Bagley, "Coaching Neoliberal Citizen/Subjects," 289.
87. Arian Foster (@ArianFoster), Twitter, August 31, 2011, 4:56 a.m., twitter.com/arianfoster/status/108870701972324352?lang=en.
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89. Jimmy Sanderson, "'It Was All Your Fault': Identity and Fan Messaging to Athletes at the Intersection of Fantasy Sport and Social Media," in Bowman, Spinda, and Sanderson, *Fantasy Sports and the Changing Sports Media Industry*, 198.
90. Quoted in Ebenezer Samuel, "NY Giants RB Brandon Jacobs Slams Fantasy Football after Getting Death Threat on Twitter," *NY Daily News*, October 24, 2013, www.nydailynews.com/sports/football/giants/jacobs-rips-fantasy-football-owners-death-threats-article-1.1494661.
91. Davis and Duncan, "Sports Knowledge Is Power," 252.
92. See Sanderson, "'It Was All Your Fault,'" 204–5.
93. Foucault, *Birth of Biopolitics*, 229; see also Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 35–41.
94. Foucault, "Governmentality," 93–95.
95. See Oates, "New Media"; Davis and Duncan, "Sports Knowledge Is Power"; Serazio, "Virtual Sports Consumption"; Bagley, "Coaching Neoliberal Citizen/Subjects."
96. Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 108.
97. Foucault, *Birth of Biopolitics*, 186.
98. On "the black athlete," see Harry Edwards, *The Revolt of the Black Athlete* (New York: Free Press, 1969); and Carrington, *Race, Sport, and Politics*, 2.
99. Quoted in Steve Wyche, "Colin Kaepernick Explains Why He Sat during National Anthem," NFL.com, August 27, 2016, www.nfl.com/news/story/0ap3000000691077/article/colin-kaepernick-explains-protest-of-national-anthem.
100. Kaepernick's kneeling protest was re-enacted throughout other professional and amateur sports leagues, most prominently by women's soccer star Megan Rapinoe and the WNBA's Indiana Fever, Los Angeles Sparks, and Minnesota Lynx.
101. Carrington, *Race, Sport, and Politics*, 108.
102. Jonathan Valania, "Malcolm Jenkins: You're Not Listening," YouTube, June 6, 2018, www.youtube.com/watch?v=T0DZ4-GFwjs; Malcolm Jenkins (@Malcolm Jenkins), June 6, 2018, 12:05 p.m., twitter.com/MalcolmJenkins/status/1004439164073529345.
103. Eric Reid, "Eric Reid: Why Colin Kaepernick and I Decided to Take a Knee," *New York Times*, September 25, 2017, www.nytimes.com/2017/09/25/opinion/colin-kaepernick-football-protests.html; Doug Baldwin, Anquan Boldin, Malcolm Jenkins, and Benjamin Watson, "President Trump, Here's Whom You Should Pardon," *New York Times*, June 21, 2018, www.nytimes.com/2018/06/21/opinion/trump-pardon-nfl-players.html.

104. Lauren Berlant, "The Trumping of Politics," *Supervalent Thought* (blog), September 2, 2012, 11:44 a.m., supervalentthought.com/2012/09/02/the-trumping-of-politics/.
105. Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump), Twitter, September 24, 2017, 3:25 p.m., twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/912080538755846144.
106. Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump), Twitter, September 23, 2017, 11:11 a.m., twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/911654184918880260; Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump), Twitter, September 23, 2017, 11:18 a.m., twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/911655987857281024.
107. Rhoden, *Forty Million Dollar Slaves*; Hawkins, *New Plantation*.
108. Steven W. Thrasher, "Super Slaves: Breeding and Controlling the Modern Black American Male through Sports," *Radical History Review* 125 (2016): 174.
109. Michel Foucault, "The Subject and Power," in *Power: Volume 3: Essential Works of Foucault, 1954–1984*, ed. James D. Faubion, trans. Robert Hurley (London: Penguin, 2002), 341.
110. Since the beginning of the NFL player protests in 2016, Kaepernick has been unable to secure new contracts from any NFL team. In October 2017 Kaepernick filed a grievance with the league, alleging that the teams colluded against signing him; in February 2019 Kaepernick and fellow protester Eric Reid reached a settlement with the NFL, thereby ending the legal dispute ("Colin Kaepernick, Eric Reid Settle Grievance Cases against NFL," ESPN.com, February 15, 2019, www.espn.com/nfl/story/_/id/26004715/colin-kaepernick-eric-reid-settle-grievance-case-nfl). In November 2019 Kaepernick received an invitation from the NFL to participate in a workout, ostensibly to earn a new contract with an NFL team. After numerous disputes between the NFL and Kaepernick about the conditions of the workout, the event was canceled. Kaepernick performed admirably in an independent workout. Nevertheless, he has remained unsigned by any NFL organization (Adam Scheffer, "Sources: NFL Teams Haven't Called Kaepernick since QB's Nov. 16 Workout," ESPN.com, November 23, 2019, www.espn.com/nfl/story/_/id/28149508/sources-nfl-teams-called-colin-kaepernick-qb-nov-16-workout).
111. Michael Harriot and Stephen A. Crockett Jr., "NFL Players Just Sold Kaepernick's Protest for \$100 Million: Are They Sellouts or Heroes?," TheRoot.com, November 30, 2017, www.theroot.com/nfl-players-just-sold-kaepernicks-protests-for-100-mil-1820866749?utm_source=theroot_facebook&utm_medium=socialflow.
112. Berlant, *Anatomy of National Fantasy*, 17.
113. In this conclusion, I am revising for the neoliberal present some of the conclusions about the US American "anatomy of national fantasy" that Berlant traces in her study of Nathaniel Hawthorne, wherein she defines the "American utopian promise" as one that "by disrupting the subject's local affiliations and self-centeredness, national identity confers on the collective subject an indivisible and immortal body, and vice versa" (*Anatomy of National Fantasy*, 49).