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We are the 'Who Dat' Nation: city identity, narratives of renewal, and football fandom in New Orleans public realm

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We are the 'Who Dat' Nation: city identity, narratives of renewal, and football fandom in New Orleans public realm

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
in
Urban Studies

by

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Abstract

Research often frames the relationship between sports and the city in terms of economics as researchers debate the costs and benefits of using public subsidies to build stadiums, retain professional teams and host mega-events. However, people assign symbolic or intangible values to their home sports teams that cannot be measured through economic frameworks. My research examined the ways in which urban residents create value around their home professional sports team that other researchers dismissed as hard to measure. Using the New Orleans Saints as a case study, this research incorporated interviews, questionnaires, content analysis and participant observation to provide greater access to the meanings people associate with the experience of being a Saints fan.

After Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans in 2005, Saints fans used their team to build a narrative of renewal and deliver messages about city recovery. These meaningful local narratives reinforced a feeling of connectedness to the city and created collective identities among diverse urban residents. The Who Dat Nation created a sense of fandom that existed outside the confines of the publicly funded stadium on game day as people encountered indicators of Saints fandom through everyday lived experiences. Through shared experiences surrounding Saints football, fans fostered public sociability and meaningful relationships across social differences. In addition, the findings outline ways in which locals embraced NFL hype and the commodification of professional football while also engineering local cultural adaptations to the economic dimensions of sport.

Through the story of the Saints in New Orleans, we can see sport spaces as a combination of symbolism and practice where sporting and urban affiliations are interrelated in complex ways through the construction of identity, culture, and commercialism. This dissertation presents spaces of sports fandom as places of empowerment to challenge, renegotiate, and rethink difference where sport spaces embody constructions of race, urban place, gender and identity. This study shows how spaces of sport fandom can be spaces to negotiate a sense of community identity and foster repetitive civil interactions. This provokes discussion on the extent to which sport fan activities influence changes in social interaction across race and gender differences.

Key words: urban studies, cities, sports, collective identity, public space, fandom, football

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In 2005, I was an employee of the New Orleans Saints football team. Eleven days after Hurricane Katrina made landfall, I found myself in Charlotte, North Carolina with all the members of the Saints team and staff. A private bus took all of us to the hotel where the football players would stay the night before playing against the Carolina Panthers the next day. As I exited the bus, I saw a pathway of ropes set up to guide players into the hotel. Dozens of Saints fans lined each side of the pathway to welcome the football team and get a glimpse of the star players. I remember looking at those fans and hearing one man yell out towards beloved Saints player Deuce McAllister, “Deuce, Deuce! I lost everything. I don’t have anything but at least I have you.”

Our current understanding of the sport-city relationship cannot explain what I saw that day. While leisure and recreation have always played a social role in urban life, the connections between cities and professional sports have mostly been understood in terms of economics or politics. The growing business of men’s professional team sports in the latter part of the twentieth century formed an economically problematic relationship between professional teams and their home cities. Local governments shelled out millions of dollars in public subsidies to attract and maintain professional sports teams and stadium facilities. Economists continuously conclude that the economic benefits generated from sports teams and facilities are far lower than advertised and do not justify the vast amounts of public subsidies invested in professional sports. Yet cities continue to support sports projects and find value in having a home team. However, the non-economic values that sports teams can provide to a city have often been dismissed by scholars as hard to measure.

Although sports may enhance city image and foster civic pride but, even those concepts do not fully explain how city residents experience and assign value to their home football team. The connections between sports fans and their home teams develop in meaningful ways that

transcends the game itself. On game day, a woman dons a sports jersey not only as an outward celebration of support for her team but also to feel connected to other fans and a sense of community larger than herself. The loyalty to the home team represents a feeling of loyalty to the city the team represents and broader concepts of home.

In the case of men's professional sports, most people experience the games as spectators rather than athletes. However, athletes are often the unit of analysis in sociological studies that advance our understanding of how sports can build collective identities, bridge social and cultural divides, and contribute to either inclusionary or exclusionary social practices. More research is needed on the practices and experiences of sports fans within city contexts. The city provides a setting that combines both economic and social activities. It becomes increasingly difficult to clearly separate economic value and social value as post-industrial cities invest in cultural entertainment commodities. Promoting a positive city image through entertainment developments, such as professional sporting events, is thought to stimulate tourist-oriented economic development. Missing from our understanding of sports and urban development is how local people experience these entertainment commodities. Looking at how city people interpreted the value of their home team and created meaningful experiences around football provided a critical missing piece.

The case study of the Saints in New Orleans examines the intangible qualities that other researchers have called hard to measure. Through an ethnographic approach this research incorporated various data collection strategies to uncover the importance of professional sports to urban residents. Participant observation provided a basis for conceptualizing the setting and documenting how people engage with football both during events and in daily city life. Content analysis of news articles, interviews, and an internet questionnaire captured narrative arcs and illuminated a multiplicity of voices describing, in their own words, the value of Saints football. The strengths of this multi-dimensional qualitative approach include greater access to the

meanings people associated with being a Saints fan and data that revealed the complexity of relationships and connections engendered by Saints fandom.

The man standing outside the team hotel, calling out for Deuce McAllister was desperate to feel connected to something New Orleans when Katrina ousted him from his home. This extraordinary time in Saints and New Orleans history highlights the deep bond that forms between a professional sports team, their home city, and the people who call that city home. Through this telling of the story of the Saints in New Orleans, we are able to interpret sport spaces as a combination of symbolism and practice where sporting and urban affiliations are interrelated. While the local narratives of Saints football reflect symbolism and practices that tell a story unique to the context and setting of New Orleans, the story shows that urban identity and social relationships are negotiated through sport spaces. This study shows how spaces of sport fandom can be spaces to negotiate a sense of community identity and foster repetitive civil interactions. This provokes discussion on the extent to which sport fan activities influence changes in social interaction across race and gender differences. Sport spaces embody constructions of race, urban place, gender and identity.

This dissertation presents spaces of sports fandom as places of empowerment, spaces to challenge, renegotiate, and rethink difference. Differences in gender, differences in race, and differences in national and local interpretations of commercialized sports are all directions for connecting the symbolism and practices of sport spaces to larger social implications. My approach challenges the reproduction of sport spaces as something homogenous that fits neatly into dominant discourses of power. Even as practices transcend particular differences, acknowledging the heterogeneity within a collective leads to greater understanding of how identities are negotiated. The findings in this study challenge the view of sport spaces as homogenizing agents where a focus on the multiplicity of voices that comprise the collective illuminate ways to appreciate differences without erasing them. This study highlights how collective identities of sport fandom can be used in powerful and meaningful ways. I also put

forth a cautionary tale where we cannot be complacent in allowing the appearance of a collective of sports fans to mask less visible voices and undermine tougher questions of social justice. Sport spaces present a paradox where they can simultaneously hold contradictory meanings of hope and despair, unity and division, inclusive and exclusive practices, and national and local forms of commodification. Looking at the symbolism and practices, the everyday lived experiences and social interactions leads to a richer understanding for the meanings and values connected with sport spaces. Sporting and urban affiliations are interrelated in complex ways through the construction of identity, culture, and commercialism. The city as a research site provides history, sociability, economics, space and place. This approach fleshes out the heterogeneity that comprises a collective of sports fans and seeks to appreciate those differences rather than marginalizing and rendering invisible those who engage in sport in 'non-traditional' ways. This framework guides the analysis presented in the following chapters through thick description and scholarly reflection.

Throughout the history of professional football in New Orleans, racial narratives have played a role in interpreting sport spaces. Chapter 4 describes New Orleans efforts to lure an NFL team in a time of racial segregation throughout America in the mid-1960s to provide evidence that mixed-race sporting events did not occur completely harmoniously or without controversy but rather reflected the complex racial issues of the times in which they occurred. New Orleans had a historical pattern of challenging racial segregation or integration through sporting events and venues. Describing the steps New Orleans took in acquiring and building the Saints football team provides background information for readers on the subject and describes the setting of the selected case study. This initial chapter guides the overall framework of the dissertation project by discussing football team history in terms of events, politics, and developments rather than in terms of touchdowns, coaching staffs, and game wins and losses. The storyline of the Saints in New Orleans reflects real people and events where the cultural power of the Saints lies in the ability to reflect the broader social conditions in which

they are situated. Embedded in politics and reflective of racial discourse, this chapter shows how Saints football has always been more than just a game.

The narrative continues with Chapter 5 dedicated to the time period from Hurricane Katrina in 2005 through the Saints winning Super Bowl XLIV in 2010. Focusing on this time frame reveals a narrative of renewal embedded within the story of the Saints in New Orleans. New Orleanians generated recovery messages and circulated those among themselves. At the same time, marketed messages that promoted a certain city image of vibrancy were delivered to outsiders. Both types of messages contributed to creating a narrative of renewal around Saints football as images of the Superdome as the epicenter of disaster were replaced with images of the Superdome as a space for football victories. When the Saints football team returned home from Hurricane Katrina's exile to once again play in the Superdome in 2006, the game served as a vehicle for delivering hopeful messages about the recovery of New Orleans. These messages of recovery continued as New Orleans was swept up in the excitement surrounding the Saints first Super Bowl win in 2010. These important Saints events were something experienced by New Orleanians that served as both an outlet for a mix of emotions and a symbol of something positive regained for New Orleans. The role of Saints football in New Orleans recovery told a story about the possibility of what a sports team can mean to a community where the central emotional connection that binds people to the team transcends economic value.

In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, tension blanketed the city and New Orleanians were dispirited as they realized how hard it was going to be to overcome a myriad of obstacles in lengthy rebuilding processes. Using Saints football as a space to negotiate racial narratives and speak about relevant concerns continued in the time frame surrounding Hurricane Katrina, the recovery of New Orleans and the Saints first Super Bowl win. People used the Saints successes and a shared sense of euphoria to tell stories about greater community cohesion, and the ability of New Orleanians to transcend what appeared to be deep racial divides. When

asking fans what they liked about watching professional football, most of them start talking about the athleticism and competition and strategy of the game itself. When asked about the Saints, people start talking about community, about meaning something more than football, and about feeling connected to the city of New Orleans. At the same time, contradictions existed between these narratives and structural class and racial outcomes that lead to an uneven post-Katrina recovery process. Within this extreme case, sport spaces become a platform to discuss the extent to which a collective urban identity and shared positive experiences can heal a community.

Moving beyond the extraordinary circumstances of the Saints winning their first Super Bowl season a few years after Katrina devastated New Orleans, Chapter 6 documents the ongoing experiences of Saints fans and the creation of the imagined community called the Who Dat Nation. The Who Dat Nation emerged not just as a collective of Saints fans but also as a symbol of a people connected in support of New Orleans. Sports spaces became realms within which city residents could assert a sense of community cohesion and collective identity. Fans emphasized the importance of football to interact or build relationships with others and participate in a collective positive experience. Saints fans recognized these positive experiences as something that had the ability to transcend social barriers, particularly race. Descriptions of how fans interact while watching football reveals indicators of collective identity among diverse urban residents. Rather than defining the Who Dat Nation as a homogenous public group, this research found a multiplicity of voices that reflected different experiences among a diverse urban population.

Exploring fandom in public spaces provided the opportunity to conceptualize how the presence of a professional sports team shapes urban social interactions and city spaces in more subtle ways than the analysis of sports spectacle usually considers. Even though the duration of a football game provided a time for people to gather together to build relationships, the more mundane ways that Saints symbols were woven into daily life generated a sense of

community among strangers. New Orleanians reaffirmed collective identity through the pervasiveness of Saints images throughout the city during everyday routines of city life. Social impacts are not limited to mega-event analysis.

Despite the ability of Saints football to create a collective identity and provide a means for human interaction, the public spaces within which fan activities occur are not free from social structuring. To better understand both inclusionary and exclusionary practices among Saints fans, Chapter 7 explores Saints fandom in the public realm. This study focuses on the spaces of sports fandom, rather than sport spaces where people participate as athletes. As Saints fans gathered in public places during football games, city spaces transformed to create pockets of sociability where urban residents could interact in a positive way despite their social differences. Descriptions of the stadium, the neighborhood bar, city streets, and other public places reveal nuanced fan behavior where fans chose to experience Saints games in ways that were compatible with their urban identities and lifestyles.

This approach frames fandom as a performance or the practices of those who experience professional sports. Fan practices and activities extend beyond game day, beyond sports stadiums, and beyond team attachment. This approach shifts the discussion of sports fandom from team attachment and knowledge of the game to one that incorporates fan practices and activities into core definitions of fandom. Observing what people did throughout city spaces to engage in sports fandom gives a more accurate picture of fan activities and more robust understanding of the practices that lead to team attachment and how the team is integrated into the city.

Although much fandom literature defines fandom through its masculinity, when I looked at spaces of sports fandom across the city, they were populated by both men and women where both genders talked similarly about their attachments to the team. Contradictions exist between how I observed women constructing fan practices and team attachment and traditional definitions of fandom. My conceptualization of fandom allows for a look at how gendered

constructions of fan behavior permeate sport spaces. Even though sport fan spaces were populated by women, assumption remained about the gendered nature of sports fandom. Sport spaces have a history of being characterized by hegemonic struggles over whose leisure activities count more than others, situated within a wider social and historical context of structured inequality. This chapter challenges assumptions about the gendered nature of sports fandom by conceptualizing fandom as incorporating multi-faceted practices of behavior where all fan practices can be valued. Looking at the neighborhood bar or the city streets as spaces of fandom begins to give voice to those who do not conform to the 'traditional' roles of male, working class fans upon which fandom literature was built.

Chapter 8 reinserts economic value into the discussion of the importance of professional sports to urban areas. American sports, and particularly NFL football, are highly commercialized institutions. Despite the symbolic or emotional power attached to the Saints brand, Saints fans continue to list economics as a reason why they think the Saints are important for New Orleans. Although, the ways in which Saints fans discuss economics showed that fans understood economic value on a much smaller scale than macro-analysis used in determining traditional city-wide economic impacts. Fans adapted to the commercialism and commodification of sport in ways that are meaningful to them. Although the Saints are an NFL team, a product with a national identity, the Who Dat Nation represents a football phenomenon that values local culture and local forms of expression. Saints fans and New Orleanians carved out numerous ways of turning Who Dat into a commodity to create value for themselves. How the Saints fit within city culture can be interpreted as dualistic in nature where on one hand there is evidence of highly commercialized activities and on the other hand people express themselves in unique ways. Rather than taking a dualistic stance, this research explored a multiplicity of messages and perspectives by looking at adaptations of commercialism in fan culture. The ways locals embrace NFL hype and the commodification of professional football while at the same time

engineering local cultural adaptations to the economic dimensions of sport reinforces the complexity of relationships and connections facilitated through Saints fandom.

The extraordinary situation presented by using the case of New Orleans during a time period when the city was recovering from Hurricane Katrina and the football team went on to win their first Super Bowl made this an extreme case study. The distinctiveness in this case is the recovery situation when people needed ways to feel connected to their city. Prior to the Saints winning season in 2009, people built a shared culture around Saints football and used this to reinforce feelings of connectedness to the city in a time when this was desperately needed. This case study engages important debates about connections beyond the economy between sports franchises and urban citizens, the gendered nature of sports fandom, and how the contribution of the Saints to a narrative of renewal in post-Katrina New Orleans enlightens our understanding of collective identity. The concluding Chapter 9 offers reflection and suggestions on how sports can be used in further academic discussions and future studies that are interdisciplinary in nature. Sports are a significant part of American culture yet, less is known about the nature and significance of sports within the everyday life of great cities. We can reflect on how sport operates in urban settings. Eitzen (2006) presents sports as a paradox where sport is inherently contradictory. Within this framework, sport spaces can unite social classes and racial groups while also reinforcing the barriers that separate groups. In the realm of sport fandom we find that these barriers, whether real or perceived, are permeable. Sport spaces are socially constructed where people can negotiate meanings and values. Using the Saints in New Orleans as a case study we can reflect on how sport operates in urban settings. This research provides a platform to take discussions about the sport-city relationship into new directions by moving the literature towards an understanding of how sport is experienced in everyday life and social interactions.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Although the NFL, the New Orleans Saints and the Superdome appear frequently in the mass media, cohesive academic research about what this professional sports team means to the city of New Orleans is lacking. Literature that intersects urban studies and sports studies reveals debates over public subsidies for stadium building; the role professional sports can play in urban development, and the prevalence of growth machine theory in evaluating the sport-city relationship. Sports economists continuously conclude that the economic benefits generated from sports teams and facilities are far lower than advertised and do not justify the vast amounts of public subsidies invested in professional sports. Yet cities continue to support sports projects.

Growth machine theorists unpack how city mayors and stadium boosters promote sports projects as growth catalysts that benefit the city as a whole in order to obtain public subsidy for the private accumulation of wealth. The threat of team relocation coupled with the monopoly status of professional sports leagues pressured cities to invest public funds into infrastructure development to attract or retain professional teams. Scholars discuss urban commodities in terms of having both exchange values and use values. While sports economists and growth machine theorists clearly articulate the exchange values of professional sports teams and facilities, pinpointing use values of professional sports in American cities remains more elusive.

Literature that relies heavily on economic considerations does not provide enough ways of understanding the more social or cultural connections between sports and their home cities. Pulling in strands of literature about mega-events, sports fandom, collective identities, and sports as either a global or local cultural product provide a foundation for interpreting the relationship between cities and their home teams.

While sports economists dismiss the economic impacts of sports as insignificant and growth machine theorists dismiss the symbolic benefits of sports as mere promotional tools used by stadium boosters, literature that frames urban places as grappling with post-industrial

forms of consumption suggest that city image and place competition are important factors in urban development. Urban development literature emphasizes the idea that many post-industrial U.S. cities turn to the development of cultural commodities in order to stimulate a tourist economy, revitalize an urban area, and create an enhanced city image. While some authors focus on a type of social cost-benefit analysis in order to understand how sports facilities or mega events impact urban life, other authors focus on potential changes to local culture resulting from cultural redevelopment strategies. The extent to which culture becomes transformed into something that is commodified and consumed raises questions about whether authentic, local culture can survive amongst such developments and whether these projects contribute to social inclusion or exclusion. Although NFL football exemplifies a commodified cultural spectacle with the power to propel a city's image, studies on how people are experiencing and creating value as spectators of home football games in the United States have not been empirically tested.

Outside of the U.S. professional sports model, numerous studies unpack world football (soccer) or cricket to explore the cultural significance of sports. In focusing research on football (soccer) fans, Giulianotti (2002) suggests "the social and cultural impact of a club is always more relevant to local supporters than its unstable economic impact" (33). Collective identity literature suggests that sports have the power to unite people across social barriers and build place-related collective identities at a magnitude that matters to entire nations. For example, the narrative of cricket reflects struggles and hopes in creating new race relations and identities for the post-apartheid South African nation (Vahed 2006). International narratives surrounding mega-events, fandom and collective identities reveal that sports bond people to each other and specific places in significant, powerful, and complex ways. However, the possibility that spectators of NFL football could produce these types of culturally powerful narratives within United States cities has not been explored through in-depth qualitative analysis. This literature review navigates through economic evaluations of professional teams in the United States and

cultural evaluations of international sports events to gain an understanding of the impacts and importance of professional sports to a city.

Sport and the Industrial City: historical perspectives

The development of organized sport and the evolution of the modern urban American city are intertwined (Reiss 1988; Wilcox and Andrews 2003). Enthusiasm for recreation developed rapidly as the United States shifted from a rural-agrarian to an urban-industrial society. According to Somers (1972), numerous factors related to urban life stimulated a boom in leisure-time activities in the second half of the nineteenth century. These include “a reduction in the work-day, a rising standard of living, growing concern for the public’s physical and mental well-being, and the decline of puritanical notions concerning the value of recreation – all aspects of the new urban-industrial society- were essential to the growth of sports and other amusements” (Somers 1972: vi). The rise of commercialized professional spectator sport marks a significant development in American athletics (Reiss 1988). Once sport became a popular urban leisure activity, businessmen recognized the potential for profit by promoting sporting events to urban crowds accustomed to paying for entertainment (Reiss 1988).

A brief look into the history of commercialized sports in America reveals a relationship between gambling, sports, and politicians that worked in tandem to define sports as a profit-making spectacle. Organized and sanctioned gambling transformed leisure activities into commercialized sport. The first close documented relationships between city politicians and sport entrepreneurs surrounded sports gambling and sanctioning events such as boxing or horse racing (Reiss 1988). Machine politicians became a dominant force in boxing as they either owned major indoor arenas or protected their owners; used their influence to secure the legalization of prize-fighting; and had the clout to pull off fights (Reiss 1988, 172). During the first 30 years of professional baseball, nearly half of team owners and stockholders were urban politicians – making it difficult to separate private and public interests (Pelissero et al 1991).

Somers (1972) suggests certain aspects of New Orleans culture fostered the rise of sports in New Orleans between 1850 and 1900 more successfully than other cities. For example, the willingness of local politicians to bend the law made New Orleans an ideal place for the rise of early urban sports. Riess (1989) credits New Orleans as generating the first successful efforts to put horse racing on a profit-making basis. In addition to New Orleans political culture, Sunday was an important day for leisure in New Orleans (Somers 1972: 10). While other, more religiously conservative American cities were opposed to the idea of holding sports or recreation on Sundays, New Orleanians embraced leisure as an important part of their way of life (Somers 1972).

Socially, sports exemplified an approved mode of entertainment that provided an escape from the ills of city life, although the sport experience differed among social classes. The rise of industrial capitalism showed widening income levels, substantial differences in discretionary time, and diverse social values which resulted in different leisure opportunities for different social classes and influenced the development of urban sport along class lines (Riess 1988). Many groups tried to cope with the new urban-industrial society by forming sub communities based on status, such as the formation of yacht clubs and golf clubs for the upper-status group (Rader 1977). Baseball clubs provided both a means by which its members could distinguish themselves from the urban masses and a setting for forming interpersonal relationships with men of similar social standing (Rader 1977). Teams recruited professional baseball players from men with sufficient leisure time to develop proficiency in the sport, where a majority were white collar workers (Riess 1980).

In addition to sub communities based on class, Rader (1977) explores the history of nineteenth-century sports clubs and finds the acculturation by distinctive ethnic groups. According to Rader (1977) "sport clubs, as one type of voluntary association, became one of the basic means by which certain groups sought to establish sub communities within the larger society" (356). Through sports, ethnic group identities were created and sports became a

vehicle of social mobility for immigrants in America (Riess 1980; Rader 1977). Riess (1980) points out that prize fighting has always been regarded as an important source of mobility for poor young men because boxing was regarded as something violent that only men with no alternate life chances would consider. "Boxing fit in well with the experiences of many indigent ghetto lads since fighting was a functional skill in their dangerous neighborhoods and good pugilists served as community heroes and role models" (Riess 1980: 295). These concepts of using sports for social mobility, group identity creation, and escaping city ills remains important today, although the way in which they are applied has changed. Pastime images of white immigrants in America participating in baseball as an integrative enclave to achieve social advancement have been replaced with *Hoop Dreams*, where basketball is framed as the vehicle of social mobility for African-American men living in inner-city poverty. This dominant narrative continues to influence perceptions about the meaning of urban sport culture in the United States (Cole and King 2003).

Public Investments in Stadiums: economic benefits?

Organized sport implies commercialized sports, where the contemporary relationship between sports and the city has largely been framed by economic considerations. Much of the conversation focuses on trying to come to terms with the fact that many professional sports teams and facilities, especially in the United States, are heavily subsidized with public dollars despite studies that show a negative economic impact from facility construction (Austrian and Rosentraub 2002; Baade 1996; Crompton 2001; Delaney and Eckstein 2003; Johnson 1996; and Rosentraub 1999).

Research emerged in response to the sports stadium construction boom occurring throughout the 1990s when nearly half of the professional sports teams in the United States were either playing in a new facility or making plans to build one within a few years (Noll and Zimbalist 1997). Interest in stadium construction stemmed from the fact that almost all facilities

for professional sports are increasingly subsidized by state and local governments. They do not rely solely on private sources such as the team owners themselves.

Tax and debt are the two basic sources of revenue available to state and local governments. A popular mechanism for financing stadiums involves borrowing and issuing bonds. Imposing taxes could include local sales taxes on items such as cigarettes, taxes on tourist commodities such as hotels and cruises, or regional taxes. For example, regional taxes were used to build Miller Park, where a tax was imposed on Milwaukee and the surrounding five-county area (Leeds and Allmen 2001: 216). Baltimore built two facilities using funds from a state lottery however, this is not a widely used funding source (Leeds and Allmen 2001). The details regarding funding sources remain unique to each contract between a team and their host city.

Different forms of taxes or debt financing have significantly different impacts on subgroups of the population. For example, Cleveland applied a sales tax on tobacco, or sin tax, to raise revenue for funding (Leeds and Allmen 2001: 214). This not only taxes the local community but also the burden of this tax falls most heavily on poor and minorities who may be less likely to enjoy the benefits of a new ballpark (Leeds and Allmen 2001: 215). Employing regional taxes or taxing tourist commodities tries to shift the burden of revenue away from the local community. Debt financing allows a city to impose some of the burden of constructing a new facility to future generations. However, these future generations could be stuck with a bill for a facility that their sports teams have already abandoned (Leeds and Allmen 2001: 218).

Advocates of stadium building projects justify public subsidies by arguing that facilities and teams provide positive gains to the local economy. Constructing a major sporting facility is said to create new jobs, provide free publicity by turning a city into a 'major league' destination, attract new businesses, and gain additional tax revenue through lease payments on the building (Noll and Zimbalist 1997). Academic researchers sought to evaluate these economic impact claims and define an appropriate way of looking at the costs and benefits of sports teams and

facilities. Four main benefits that remain topics of inquiry include (1) additional revenue; (2) new job creation; (3) attracting new businesses; and (4) creating the image of a major league destination. The first two economic benefits – creating additional revenue and new job creation – are overwhelmingly refuted through economic studies. However, the other two benefits - the ability of a sports team to attract new businesses to a downtown core and creating the image of a major league destination remain topics of debate.

First, researchers remain skeptical about the ability of a sports team to generate additional revenue. Noll and Zimbalist (1997) found that the expected revenue generated from a new stadium is often overstated. Many teams pay rent on their facilities however, cities do not generally profit from constructing facilities and renting them to franchises because the leases on stadiums usually favor the teams. For example, some teams only pay a token \$1 per year rent on stadiums (Leeds and Allmen 2001: 191). Many argue that new dollars for the area are not in fact generated and the same amount of money would be reallocated to other entertainment venues if not for the presence of a professional sports team (Noll and Zimbalist 1997). Rosentraub (1990) calls this the substitution effect. Similarly, Baade and Dye (1990) argue that the fundamental issue in measuring economic benefit is the extent to which the stadium causes a net increase in area activity rather than a mere redistribution of the same level of economic activity. Swindell and Rosentraub (1998) point out that adding a sports team merely changes the mix of recreational options competing for consumers' discretionary income.

Secondly, researchers question claims regarding new job creation. Two issues surrounding jobs include whether or not sports teams create jobs for an area and what type of jobs are created. Baade (1996) remains skeptical of claims that sports facilities can revitalize a downtown area and thinks that measuring real income and job creation is the correct way to measure the economic impact of sports teams. His evaluation shows that the types of jobs induced by stadium activity are low-wage and seasonal and that any future growth will be concentrated in low-income jobs (Baade 1996). According to Baade (1996), because the

professional sports industry is small relative to a city's economy, finding a city in which professional sports is statistically significant in increasing per capita real income is unlikely.

In a more recent study, End and Davis (2010) conducted a quantitative study indicating that an increase in the winning percentage of a local NFL franchise increases the real per capita personal income of the city. The authors explain these results based on psychological impact studies that show a positive relationship between team identification and psychological health (End and Davis 2010). End and Davis (2010) argue that sporting victories could indirectly account for improved job performance. "If a sports teams performance influences judgments of personal competencies, mood, self-esteem, and so on, one could argue that it is possible that the outcome of a sporting event may influence one's performance at work" (End and Davis 2010: 40). Although these authors find positive economic benefits of having a winning NFL team, they warn that their findings do not justify public spending on a stadium. Similarly, Baade and Sanderson (1997) point out that the cost involved in creating these jobs through public subsidies also merit attention.

Despite the nuances of how each study approaches economic impact, the overwhelming conclusions report that the economic benefits of sports teams and facilities dip far lower than advertised and sometimes even produce a negative economic impact. These findings remain valid whether measuring benefits for the local neighborhood, for the city, or for the entire metropolitan area in which a facility is located (Noll and Zimbalist 1997). Sports are not the only problematic large scale urban development projects. Flyvbjerg (2003) addresses the performance paradox- where many urban development mega-projects have strikingly poor performance records in terms of economy, environment, and public support. Flyvbjerg (2003) finds cost-benefit analyses, financial analyses and environmental and social impact analyses to be contested, misleading, and dishonest. "Mega-project development is currently a field where little can be trusted, not even – some would say especially not – numbers produced by analysts" (Flyvbjerg 2003: 5).

Similarly in sports, the results of an economic impact study can vary based on who is conducting the study and what their motives are (Noll and Zimbalist 1997; Rosentraub 1999; Delaney and Eckstein 2003). Rosentraub (1999) critiques the multiplier effect and shows that the equations economists choose to measure spill-over benefits can vary greatly and produce vastly different results on economic impact. The multiplier is a number used to calculate economic activity. For example, if the multiplier is 2.5, “that means for every \$1 the community spends building a new stadium, it will experience an added \$2.50 in related economic activity” (Yost 2006: 172). If a stadium proponent prepares an economic impact report, a higher multiplier will show a greater bottom-line economic impact, and can therefore be used as a tool to gain support for publicly funding stadiums. Delaney and Eckstein (2003) call these advocacy studies - economic reports commissioned by teams, growth coalitions or local governments to push their own agenda instead of studies aimed at finding the truth. Similarly, Flyvbjerg (2003) reminds us, as an important policy implication, to not trust cost estimates presented by infrastructure promoters and forecasters.

A third benefit of sports developments – attracting new businesses to a downtown area – is not straightforward to calculate because the concept is often tied into broader urban revitalization schemes. Rosentraub (1997) divides sports policies implemented for downtown development into two broad categories- “those based on team and local concerns to revitalize a small area of a city and those based on the creation of an export industry for a region” (180). The objective of the first uses a new facility to jump-start development in a downtown area, assuming that by attracting large crowds a downtown area will encourage investment in related entertainment facilities such as bars, restaurants and shopping. In turn, corporations will hopefully be attracted back to the urban core with higher-income families in tow. Rust Belt cities, such as Baltimore, Cincinnati, Cleveland, and Detroit, as well as Sun Belt cities like Dallas, Phoenix, and Houston attempted this kind of sports policy (Rosentraub 1997).

Rosentraub's (1997) second category of sports development policy involves creating an export industry for a region. "Within this perspective the focus is on the development of facilities that can be used to host events that attract people from outside a region" (Rosentraub 1997: 181). Rosentraub (1997) describes the creation of an export industry as one where sports become a component of a larger recreational business that includes not only games played but also national and international concerts, meetings and conventions.

As articulated by Rosentraub (1997), "since it is by now obvious that teams and facilities have a very small economic impact, and since new proposals for facilities stress the role of sports venues in maintaining the centrality of CBDs, the appropriate question to consider is whether teams and the facilities they use influence the use of urban space" (183). Rosentraub (1997) suggests facilities that are well-integrated into an urban framework possess potential for influencing development patterns, although little is known about the impact of sports franchises and facilities on the use of urban space. To help fill this gap, Rosentraub (1997) conducted a comparative study of 'sport cities' to find out if downtown was revitalized by slowing suburbanization. The study was limited to an assessment of changing residential population and job locations. Main focus was placed on outcomes in Indianapolis, as a city that has aggressively implemented sports related downtown development programs. "The very clear intent of Indianapolis's downtown development efforts, of which the sports strategy was the centerpiece, was to stabilize if not increase the number of jobs in the downtown or core area, and to reestablish the area as a competitive residential location" (Rosentraub 1997: 196). The research admits that more studies will be needed to make any final conclusions about sports facilities ability to reverse suburbanization trends but, warns that even though sports are important to people, this "does not make it an economic engine for development nor an elixir able to reverse or slow suburbanization and the decentralization of activities from downtown areas" (Rosentraub 1997: 206).

Chapin (2004) examines Baltimore's Camden Yards and Cleveland's Gateway to assess whether or not urban redevelopment was catalyzed in these two cities by identifying physical changes to the district surrounding each sports project. Chapin (2004) found that public investment in the Camden Yards sports complex did not lead to a dramatic transformation of the western edge of downtown and cannot be considered a successful urban redevelopment catalyst. Baltimore's experience "indicates that district redevelopment is not guaranteed by massive investments in a sports project" (Chapin 2004: 207). "In contrast, Cleveland's experience indicates that sports facilities can play a role in urban revitalization efforts and catalyzing district redevelopment in the form of hotels, residences, and retail businesses" (Chapin 2004: 207).

Chapin's (2004) and Rosentraub's (1997) studies situate investments in sports infrastructure as a smaller part of overall urban redevelopment strategies and look at changes that occur to urban space over time. However, these studies still focus on revitalization mainly in terms of economics. These economic frameworks for evaluating the impact of sports on an urban area are unequipped to understanding a fourth benefit of professional sports teams – the ability to create an enhanced city image.

Debating the value of elevating a city's image to 'major league' status is more complex than debating the multiplier effect or evaluating the types of jobs that a sports team or stadium contributes to an urban area. Researchers, such as Baade and Dye (1988) call an enhanced city image an 'intangible' benefit. Baade and Dye (1988) describe the negotiations leading to public funding for a sports franchise as a four level, hierarchical process. First, disagreement erupts on the direct revenue projected on stadium income reports. If these reports fail to support stadium plans, stadium proponents boost the multiplier effect showing an increase in area income and sales. Failing this, proponents introduce the idea that big-league sports attract new businesses to a downtown area. Failure to produce or convince decision makers with these economic arguments opens up debate about the intangible benefits of stadium building projects

(Baade and Dye 1988: 38). Some intangible benefits that a city could receive from the presence of a professional sports team include, creating civic pride, symbolizing a high quality of life, and attracting worldwide media attention leading to an enhanced image of the city. However, these intangibles are often dismissed as hard to measure.

Despite the ambiguity surrounding 'intangible' benefits of having a professional sports team and the mounting evidence against the advertised economic benefits of hosting sports teams, events or facilities, public subsidies continued to pour into stadium construction. The anthology of writers who composed *Sports, Jobs, and Taxes*, reach two conclusions about why expensive stadiums continue to receive subsidies. One has to do with local politics and the other involves the bargaining power that sports teams now enjoy because of their scarcity.

Political Economy of Urban Sports: growth machines, team relocation, and questions of value

In unpacking the role of local politics and understanding the bargaining power that sports team owners use to command public support for their private clubs, scholars turn to growth machine theory to explain why vast amounts of public subsidies support sports projects despite opposition (Schimmel 2001; Delaney and Eckstein 2006; Meder and Leckrone 2002; Bennett and Spirou 2006; Rich 2000). Schimmel (2002) suggests that the sociology of sport makes significant contributions to the development of the growth machine perspective and remains highly influential as a way to conceptualize urban change. Regime politics or governing coalitions refer to the informal relationships between government officials, key business leaders, and other city stakeholders that form and shape the direction of public policy making. Logan and Molotch (2007) point out that key actors in urban areas strive to generate growth for their metropolis, which includes growth-driven public works projects such as sports stadiums. In the pro-growth city, growth in general is taken as a measure of urban success, almost no matter how it is achieved (Logan and Molotch 2007).

In the case of sports projects, scholars remain concerned with the way that growth coalition members are able to gain support for professional sports teams and facilities despite mounting evidence that economic benefits dip far lower than advertised. Wilson (1994) frames this problem by saying, "the real issue with sport franchises is how local elites are able to get public sanction and subsidy for the private accumulation of wealth" (Wilson 1994: 261). Growth machine scholars unpack what motivates coalition members, especially mayors. Burd (2003) points out that "mayors are among the most enthusiastic sports boosters" (53). Wilson (1994) explains, "city officials believe that hosting a sport franchise bestows 'major league' status on their city, generates revenues and jobs, and boosts civic pride" (Wilson 1994: 238). Furthermore, "mayor and media are quick to conclude that sports victories reduce tensions in race, ethnicity, class and politics" (Burd 2003: 54). In essence, growth coalition members frame sports as a public good.

Wilson (1994) explains that even though teams may be privately owned, they are viewed as providing a public good. Having begun as purely private ventures, sport franchises have gradually assumed many of the characteristics of public institutions. However, approaching sports as providing a public good for the city as a whole ignores the idea that different people are affected differently by investment decisions. For example, Wilson (1994) questions the framing of sports as a public good for all to enjoy and points out that "largely missing from this debate was the question whose welfare was most affected by the location of franchises and the competition for them among municipalities. In other words, class politics hardly figured in these debates at all" (Wilson 1994: 261). "Publicly funded stadia remove property from the city's tax rolls, resulting in millions of dollars of lost revenues that might otherwise go to help the city's working class citizens" (Wilson 1994: 261). Ingham and McDonald (2003) also remain skeptical of the idea that sports bring benefits to the city as a whole. In their view "city managers, in their role of entrepreneurs of the public interest and speaking on behalf of the community as a whole,

repress and exploit communities of locality in the interests of the dominant corporate groups” (Ingham and McDonald 2003: 24).

Despite these questions of social justice, growth coalition members continue to support investments in professional sports teams and facilities. Hackworth (2007) finds that cities keep investing in financially problematic developments because the inevitability of neoliberalism portrays the selling of cultural assets of a particular place as the only option for struggling regions. City officials see such efforts as ‘natural’ responses – promote business, downsize government, and privatize resources on high-profile spaces” (Hackworth 2007: 170). With sports stadiums, the scarcity of men’s professional league teams creates a unique competition between cities that influences the decision making process in doling out public subsidies for these public-private investments.

While pro-growth theory provides one way of explaining why costly sports projects receive support, it does not necessarily address the uneven power relationships between coalition members as it applies to specific characteristics of the sports industry. The power relationship between sports team owners and the city emerges as a central theme in literature that explores franchise relocation (Euchner 1994; Delaney and Eckstein 2006; Pelissero et al 1991; Johnson 1983).

Wilson (1994) marks the 1980s as dominated by sport policy debates over the issue of franchise relocation. The relative scarcity of professional sports teams forces cities into bidding wars whenever a team comes available through expansion or the termination of a lease. The monopoly power of the professional sports leagues results in cities feeling pressured to invest public dollars to keep their teams or cities investing heavily in infrastructure to attract teams. Monopoly leagues, such as the National Football League, maximize their profits in part by creating competition among cities for teams. Rosentraub catalogues the increasing values of professional sports teams over the last couple of decades and equates this rise in value to an incentive for teams to move from city to city (Rosentraub 1999). Some academics warned that

new stadiums seemed destined to intensify the intercity competition for teams and to diminish further the prospect that cities can profit from building a stadium (Baade and Dye 1990). Essentially, the monopoly status of major league franchises lures cities to compete for them. Euchner (1993) raises concerns about the monopoly power of sports and is sympathetic to cities being vulnerable to the threat of team relocation (Euchner 1993).

Some scholars remain convinced that social benefits serve merely as a promotional and political tools in order to generate support for stadium building projects despite negative outcomes (Delaney and Eckstein 2003; Euchner 1993; Ingham and McDonald 2003; Lipsitz 2002). According to Ingham and McDonald (2003), "the threat of relocation plays a large role in the blackmailing of urban centers with regard to stadium improvements" (28). Given the escalating costs of either obtaining or retaining a professional sports team, Wilson (1994) questions why cities would continue to compete for major league franchises. He concludes, "the reason is that franchise location and movement is not a purely economic issue. The benefits thought to accrue to a city from hosting a franchise are less tangible, but sooner or later they will be invoked in defense of a city's spending tax dollars to attract or even attain one" (Wilson 1994: 263).

Ingham and McDonald (2003) point out, "the economically and politically powerful with access to important signifying systems such as the media are able to mobilize the politics of nostalgia, drawing upon romanticized versions of community, just as they recreate enticing images of community in order to attract private and public investments" (24). This statement communicates the idea that stadium boosters create images of community and evoke nostalgia to gain public support for stadium investments. To illustrate the heightened frenzy surrounding sports politics, Wilson (1994) says, "like so many other principally symbolic, emotion-laden issues in politics, the debate over the role of public authorities in professional sports reaches the point where rational debate is no longer possible, where to be against the franchise is to be against progress, pride in one's community, and economic development - in short, against being

American" (Wilson 1994: 263). However, relying on this application of growth machine theory and focusing on what coalition members may be thinking or doing does not resolve the idea that a sports team or facility can hold value for a city and its residents.

The Post-Industrial City: revitalize through cultural entertainment development

While regime theorists focused on mayors or other actors promoting sports to tax payers as a vehicle for creating an enhanced city image, literature that frames urban places as grappling with post-industrial forms of consumption suggests that city image and place competition are important factors in urban development. Many authors agree there is a shift in the way problems of urban life are being talked about as cities respond to an economic shift away from industrial capital (Harvey 1990; Fainstein 2001; Flyvbjerg et al 2003; Frieden and Sagalyn 1989; Zukin 1995; Logan and Molotch 2007; Smith 2008). Post-Fordist and postmodern forms replace Fordist means, techniques, and social relations of production. Cities, rather than relying on the consumption of goods emphasize the consumption of experiences and pleasure (Harvey 1990). Consumption, rather than production becomes the center of urban life. Harvey (1990) says, "the relatively stable aesthetic of Fordist modernism has given way to all the ferment, instability, and fleeting qualities of a postmodernist aesthetic that celebrates difference, ephemerality, spectacle, fashion, and the commodification of cultural forms" (156). These cultural forms of commodities take shape as tourist-oriented urban revitalization strategies that emphasize entertainment and the development of cultural infrastructure such as art galleries, convention centers, or sports stadiums.

One of the main benefits attached to professional sports teams is their ability to create an image of the city as a major league destination. In looking at the role of sports in the urban economic shift away from industrial capital Smith (2001) reports that, "sport epitomizes a new era and new direction for cities suffering a post-industrial identity crisis" (127). He means that sporting developments in cities are often motivated by the desire to forge a new city image

(Smith 2001). Smith (2001) recommends that more unstructured interviewing is needed in order to understand different layers of city image enhancement led by sports developments. The two scales of image that Smith (2001) describes as important involves understanding whether the holistic image of the city was changed or whether the image of the city as a sport tourist destination was crafted.

Gotham (2002) examines Mardi Gras in New Orleans and uses the concepts of commodification and spectacle as a basis for understanding the rise of the tourism industry, place marketing and the transformation of cities into entertainment destinations. One emphasis of his inquiry involves place marketing or place promotion. He points out that, in many cities, tourism has become a main strategy of urban revitalization as local governments try to 'sell' the city to potential 'consumers' (Gotham 2002: 1736).

Sports mega-events become the unit of analysis in many studies that try to understand the impacts of sports on urban areas in terms of creating spectacles on a scale that both projects city image to the world and has benefits or consequences for the host city. "Mega events are large scale cultural (including commercial and sporting) events which have a dramatic character, mass popular appeal and international significance" (Roche 2000: 1). According to Hall (2006), "mega-events, otherwise referred to as hallmark or special events, are major fairs, festivals, expositions, cultural and sporting events which are held on either a regular or a one-off basis" (59).

Sports mega-events emerge as central elements in place competition (Hall 2006). Hosting mega-events and building the required infrastructure to host mega-events is seen as making a contribution to economic development. The ability to attract an event is regarded as an indicator that a city can compete (Hall 2006). While World Fairs are declining in importance as hallmark events, sports mega-events are growing in significance for urban and regional growth and place competition (Hall 2006). They have assumed a key role in urban tourism promotion and wider urban development strategies (Hall 2006). Mega-events are an "extremely

significant component of place promotion because they may leave behind social, economic and physical legacies which will have an impact on the host community for a far greater period in which they took place” (Hall 2006: 59).

Whitson and Macintosh (1993) recognize that civic competition changes with the increased mobility of capital. “These developments have increased the stakes of the competition among cities to be centers of cultural significance and have increased the importance of civic image in competitions for other kinds of growth (Whitson and Macintosh 1993: 223). Whitson and Macintosh (1993) examine “the role that the pursuit of hallmark events and of major league sports franchises has played in the growth strategies of western Canadian cities” (221). Sports franchises do create opportunities for the local business sector and in addition, many officials and business leaders genuinely perceive the sports franchise as a cultural resource that helps sell civic identity and community involvement (Whitson and Macintosh 1993). Although positive media exposure matters in a material way to business and political leaders, it is possible that the shared sense of hosting the Olympics can also matter to the middle and working classes (Whitson and Macintosh 1993).

Tranter and Keefe (2004) question the “accepted wisdom (or perhaps myth) that large-scale event tourism benefits cities, regions and local communities” (171). They examine motor racing events in Canberra, Australia and recognize that even though these events provide an entertainment spectacle and a cultural experience previously unavailable in the city, the motor races exhibit a range of negative impacts. Tranter and Keefe (2004) are not convinced that positive economic benefits from increased tourism and social benefits of civic pride and a vibrant city image are fully realized. Negative impacts from the event include increases in alcohol-related problems from beer advertising and consumption, negative road safety messages, noise and air pollution, and disruptions to commuters and visitors. To describe the negative impacts in a more philosophical sense the authors find that allowing a motor racing event, with its associated merchandising and advertising, “subordinates social justice to

corporate welfare; subordinates democracy to corporate power; subordinates ecological sustainability to supposed economic development based on event tourism; and subordinates planning to commercial interest” (Tranter and Keeffe 2004: 185).

Rather than performing cost-benefit analyses of the social impacts of major sporting events, some authors remain concerned with the potential changes to local culture as a result of cultural or entertainment redevelopment strategies. Gotham (2002) finds that “urban leaders and economic elites have attempted to strategically deploy Mardi Gras imagery and advertising to refashion the city into a themed landscape of entertainment and tourism” (1752). Scholars question how these themed landscapes change local culture. Zukin (1995) shows how notions of culture – as ethnicity, aesthetic, and marketing tools – are reshaping urban places and conflicts over revitalization. Controlling the production and use of space can decide who can do what, be where, and when. This practice reveals marked differences such as gender, race, or disability.

Concerned with social costs and benefits of urban development projects, Fainstein’s (2001) assessment of the redevelopment of Times Square reveals a kind of paradox about outcomes for improving the quality of life. In New York, she saw a ‘Disneyfication’ of an area that was once genuinely diverse and sentiments about wanting to get rid of the poor (Fainstein 2001: 134). As a result, Times Square remains a place of mass entertainment that is both safer and more expensive than it was 20 years ago (Fainstein 2001: 135). When Frieden and Sagalyn (1989) examined the development of shopping centers, they found that downtown developers reached for the elite – “they aimed at improving public taste rather than satisfying it” (59).

Friedman et al (2004) focus on the Oriole Park at Camden Yards complex in Baltimore. The aim of their study is “first, to illustrate the manner in which cities have used sport amenities as important components of broader urban redevelopment initiatives and, second, to explicate the potential consequences of such policy decisions for city inhabitants” (Friedman et al 2004:

119). The authors explain that improvements have been made to Baltimore's urban core such as, replacing the industrial blight in Camden Yards and gentrifying some neighborhoods. However, they view Oriole Park at Camden Yards as a redevelopment façade that does not actually solve any problems for urban residents such as increasing feelings of safety, access to health care and better schools (Friedman and Silk 2004). Similarly, Hall (2006) contends that sports mega-events detract from investments in other projects such as education that would have more long-term economic and social benefits to citizens (Hall 2006).

The potential change to local culture that results from the creation of themed landscapes also takes the form of tensions between the global and the local. One common interpretation of the economic and cultural forces of globalization is that global forces lead to standardized or homogenous forms of development where the global spectacle is highly contrived. Stevens and Dovey (2004) challenge this notion and examine the urban riverfront in Melbourne to show that "a postmodern landscape of contrived spectacle, where playful urban life is simulated, choreographed and consumed can also be the site of many forms of unplanned and unstructured activity"(351). Stevens and Dovey's (2004) case study of the Melbourne waterfront shows that a range of unexpected or spontaneous social activities occur even in a regulated landscape. They find a "surprising paradox: a formulaic, spectacular, economically instrumental space gains new and authentic uses and meanings... everyday urban life continues to evolve in response to the excesses of global spectacle" (Stevens and Dovey 2004: 364). Stevens and Dovey's (2004) research suggests that observing how people actually use urban spaces, rather than how these spaces are intended to be used by developers or corporate elites, reveals complex uses and meanings which develop around spectacles.

Exchange Values and Use Values: searching for the preciousness in commodities

Scholars grappling with the public subsidy debate surrounding professional sports clearly separate the economic impacts of sports (such as revenue generation and job formation)

from the intangible benefits of sport (such as civic pride and enhanced city image). The intangible benefits are not only dismissed as hard to measure, but also dismissed by regime theorists as mere promotional tools used by stadium boosters to gain public support and financing. However, in a post-industrial urban society that has shifted towards cultural redevelopment and promoting an entertainment or tourist economy, the so-called 'intangible' benefit of city image becomes a key indicator of economic viability. Rather than being separated from economics, the ability to create a 'major league' urban identity becomes intertwined with place promotion and larger strategies aimed at urban revitalization in the face of global forces. Zukin (1995) talks about the rise of the symbolic economy, which is a "symbiosis of image and product, the scope and scale of selling images on a national and even global level, and the role of the symbolic economy in speaking for, or representing the city" (8). Within this framework, it is possible that creating and promoting a city image through sports means more to shaping a city than regime theorists would have us believe.

In different ways, Zukin (1995), Fainstein (2001) and Stevens and Dovey (2004) look at how people are actually experiencing restaurants, Times Square, and riverfront spectacles in order to engage in the discussion about the social and cultural significance of commodified urban spectacles. How people are actually experiencing the professional sports teams in their home cities is missing from the sport-city literature surrounding public investments in stadiums. One way to clarify the debate over the value of sports teams can be framed in terms of exchange value and use value. According to Logan and Molotch (2007) the distinction between the use of real estate for human activity and for market activity is called the difference between use value and exchange value. "An apartment building, for example, provides a 'home' for residents (use value) while at the same time generating rent for the owners (exchange value)" (Logan and Molotch 2007: 2). Logan and Molotch (2007) view the simultaneous push for both goals as being "inherently contradictory and a continuing source of tension, conflict, and irrational settlements" (2). Fainstein (2001) reminds us that developers focus on maximizing

exchange value where “policies toward property development have aimed more at stimulating economically productive activities than at enhancing the quality of life for residents” (2).

Ingham and McDonald (2003) suggest that exchange and use value can be key concepts in unpacking the sport-city relationship. “This confrontation between abstract surplus and exchange value definitions and social use-value definitions of sport and sporting space may lie at the heart of the private/public, capital/community contradiction that civic ideologies of urban boosterism (“We are a major league city, so invest here!”), trickle-down effects (sport franchises create jobs—albeit, we note, low-paying, part-time jobs with no health insurance or pensions), and the magical creation of community as a whole seek to mystify” (Ingham and McDonald: 28).

The literature surrounding the economic impact of sports facilities, growth machines, and team relocation all offer ways of understanding and measuring the exchange value of professional sports. However, understanding the use value of sports is not as straightforward to understand and measure. In reference to use value, Logan and Molotch (2007) point out that “places have a certain *preciousness* for their users that is not part of the conventional concept of a commodity” (17). Even though this preciousness or use value exists for professional sports, it is often dismissed by researchers as hard to measure. In addition, when concerned with the city and how sports fit into the fabric of urban places, this use value must be understood as it connects to places, rather than a placeless notion of sport benefits. Logan and Molotch (2007) emphasize the importance of place in their discussions of use value even when identifying places as commodities. “The stakes involved in the relationship to place can be high, reflecting all manner of material, spiritual, and psychological connections to land and buildings” (Logan and Molotch 2007: 18).

Bale (2003), a leading scholar in creating sports geography concepts, uses the term ‘topophilia’ to describe ties between people and the material environment and to capture peoples love of place. Bale and Moen (1995) use several metaphors to explore actual stadium

spaces such as framing stadiums as sacred places; stadiums as sites of visual pleasures; stadiums as home to players and fans providing an advantage over visiting teams; stadiums as tourist places; and stadiums as masculine spaces to promote mens' culture. While Bale (1993) provides ways of dissecting what the stadium symbolizes for different groups of people, finding the use value of sports also involves understanding what the team symbolizes for different groups of people. Pinpointing the use value of a sports team could mean finding out the certain *preciousness* for users as Logan and Molotch (2007) call it or looking more at how people actually experience the professional sports teams and facilities in cities. To begin developing an understanding of the social and cultural significance of sports it is necessary to recognize the contributions of sociological literature about sport in society.

Collective Identities: fandom, consumers and 'glocal' conflicts

Far from the debates over the economic impacts of sports, much has been contributed to the understanding of sport in society. Viewing sport as a microcosm of society permeates many approaches to making sense out of the importance of sports. Issues including racism, violence, gender stereotypes, social mobility, student athletes, youth development, sub-cultures, morality, and community participation have all been explored through an analysis of sport in our lives. Though this list is not exhaustive, it serves as an example of the variety of ways in which scholars have tried to arrive at an understanding of the meanings of sports in society. It is possible to believe that soccer explains the world (Foer 2005) and Michael Jordan exemplifies all the complex elements that define late modern America (Andrews 2001). Sports highlight not only the ways in which sports reflects social issues but also argues for the power of sports to promote positive changes in smashing through barriers, particularly racism (Lapchick 2001, Harrison 2001). Sport has been explored in paradoxical or dualistic ways – where sport can unite or divide, be healthy or destructive, be expressive or controlled (Eitzen 2006). According to Eitzen (2006), sports mirrors the human experience, mirrors the larger society, combines

spectacle with drama, and fulfills the human desire to identify with something greater than oneself.

Muhammad Ali wrote, “For all that sports are and claim to be – entertaining, brawny, commercial, tough, competitive, fulfilling – they are still a catalyst for human interaction” (in Lapchick 2001: xi). In order to channel all this possibility for human interaction into a framework that makes sense at the intersection of sport studies and urban studies, the concepts of collective identity and fandom illuminate ways of understanding how people create meaning and importance around sports. While many studies focus on athletes - the members of a team – in order to explore collective identity, fandom offers an opportunity to unpack how collectives of spectators create meaningful experiences around sports teams. Whether athletes, fans, or sporting events serve as the unit of analysis for research projects, common themes emerge in collective identity literature including: uniting people across social barriers; building place-related identity; and conflict between local identities and global forces. The studies selected for this literature review follow these three themes in various ways and seek to show *how* collective identities are formed through sports and suggest *why* collective identities are important.

Perhaps Geertz’s (1972) famous evaluation on how cock-fighting reflects Balinese culture was one of the first ethnographic accounts of how engaging in a sporting activity becomes an important reflection of a community and its culture. In a desire to understand Balinese culture, Geertz spent about as much time looking into cockfights as he did witchcraft, irrigation, caste, or marriage (Geertz 1972: 417). “Its function, if you want to call it that, is interpretive: it is a Balinese reading of Balinese experience, a story they tell themselves about themselves” (Geertz 1972: 448). He found that cockfighting is not just about watching cocks fight and gambling money is not just about money, but rather an expression of Balinese social hierarchies. The cockfight provided a commentary about the collective existence of Balinese people.

One approach to explaining collective identities involves stressing the importance of collective identity over individual identity, especially as it pertains to grassroots participation in sport (Glover and Bates 2006; Ogden and Hilt 2003; Atencio and Wright 2008). Glover and Bates (2006) are interested in community action and assume an “individuals’ willingness to engage in activities for the sake of their community depends on whether they define themselves in terms of their collective identity as opposed to their individual identity. Glover and Bates (2006) conduct an exploratory case analysis of a small group of African-Americans who established a neighborhood baseball league to foster a greater sense of community in neighborhood youth. The authors connect the idea of nostalgia (for loss of community) to the formation of grassroots sports organizations and conclude that grassroots organizing at the core of urban revitalization attempts are perhaps driven by nostalgia (Glover and Bates 2006). The study found that collective identity was a driver of collective action.

Ogden and Hilt (2003) define collective identity as involving “the absorption of cultural traits by an individual in the formation of self-identity” (213). In looking at a cultural shift in the African American community away from baseball to basketball, Ogden and Hilt (2003) show four factors tied to collective identity that influence African-American youth’s preference for basketball – encouragement by authority figures to pursue basketball, basketball’s portrayal as a form of expression and empowerment, the abundance of black role models in basketball, and the perception of basketball’s influence on social mobility. While Ogden and Hilt (2003) construct a theoretical overview of basketball and the African American community, Atencio and Wright (2008) are more specific and conduct an ethnographic study of four young black men in a local basketball park of a Northeast American city. Atencio and Wright (2008) examine pickup basketball and find that local young, black men created masculine hierarchies and are able to determine access to neighborhood parks and dictate codes of behavior. Basketball existed as a point of entry from which the young men could create spaces of meaning and value in their lives

in neighborhoods where they had extremely constricted social and educational opportunities because of poverty (Atencio and Wright 2008: 277).

These three studies use collective identity as a theoretical basis for describing how the community in each study creates meaning and value through sport experiences. Glover and Bates (2006), Ogden and Hilt (2003), and Atencio Wright (2008) focus in different ways on the collective identity of young, black, American men. Walseth (2006) parts from this pattern completely and unpacks the identities of young, Muslim women. Walseth's (2006) study illuminates the idea that collective identities can be multi-faceted with contradictory layers. Walseth (2006) uses the term 'identity work' to "emphasize the fact that identities are under constant challenge and attack" (76). Walseth (2006) focuses on the collective identities of ethnicity, religion and gender to illustrate patterns between young Muslim women's involvement in sport and physical activity and their ethnic and religious collective identities. Among those who regard religion as a more important source of identity than ethnicity, being physically active is seen as important because of Islam's health aspects. On the other hand, women who position themselves within the framework of their ethnic identities are not as interested in sport because doing sport is not seen as a respectable feminine trait (Walseth 2006).

In another study that focuses on female athletes, Pelak (2005) suggests "the analytical tool of collective identity formation is particularly well suited for examining how interactions, symbols, and structures at the micro and macro levels contribute to constructing imagined sporting communities" (74). Pelak (2005) examines women's netball and finds that netball athletes and administrators are contributing to nation building in post-apartheid South Africa by constructing new collective identities across historical racial boundaries. The conclusions of this study echo a common narrative in sport sociology – that playing sports unites teammates across socially constructed barriers, with a particular focus on racism.

This tendency to focus on the athletes themselves dominates sports studies. However, most people experience professional sports as spectators, not athletes. Studies on sports

fandom are a way to try and understand how people - as spectators, not participants - are making sense of sports, rather than how the athletes or the sport itself mirror society or create identity. Nash (1997) warns that trying to conduct studies on leisure and fans in particular is problematic because it is difficult to identify and make collective assumptions about a group as diverse as a crowd of football (soccer) fans. In addition, Fox (2006) finds that “while much has been written about the production of holiday and sporting events, less has been said about the creative ways in which their audiences consume them” (217). Making sense of sports fans and how they are interpreting what they are experiencing has come to the attention of many authors (Bale 1993; Giulianotti 2002; Clark 2006; Jones 2008; Hughson 2000; Kraszewski 2008; Stone 2007).

A cornerstone for understanding sports fandom stems from the production of much ethnographic analysis about football hooligans (Armstrong 1998). Armstrong (1998) deconstructs the European football hooligan to produce a detail-rich description of a unique subsection of male, working class culture. Dissatisfied with previous research approaches to hooliganism, which strive to create an anti-violence agenda, Armstrong (1998) uses a case study of the Blades, a football hooligan group, to examine the meaning of hooligan for the participants in that group. The football hooligans define themselves through various group practices (drinking alcohol, social bonding, semi-calculated violence, chanting, or watching a football match) in public spaces (bars, football arenas, and the streets or grounds surrounding football matches). Armstrong (1998) finds the identity and activities of hooligans transcend the sport itself, creating an identity that combines youth culture with ideals of masculinity. Armstrong (1998) finds that hooligan groups are actually groups of urban resource networks - young men who are not driven by violence but interested in a desire for good memories, shared information networks, and material or emotional networks of sociability – whose “primary purpose of gathering is to feel good by creating an elite masculine entity” (Armstrong 1998: 243).

As evidenced by the focus on football hooligans (Armstrong 1995), and as noted by Clark (2001) "fandom activities are mainly a male domain" (Clark 2001: 495). Recognizing that research has tended to ignore female fans, Jones (2008) interviews female fans at men's football (soccer) matches in order to construct a profile of female fandom. She finds a tension between fan identities and gender and observes that women sometimes downplay their gender identities to reinforce their fan identities. Jones (2008) discovered three ways in which women respond to sexism at football (soccer) matches- they express disgust at abuse and redefine female fandom to exclude abusers; they downplay sexism; or they embrace gender stereotypes, arguing that femininity was inconsistent with authentic fandom and that abuse was a fundamental part of football (Jones 2008).

While Jones (2008) tries to further classify women into different fan types, other authors try to classify fans into different categories as a result of the increased commodification of sport (Giulianotti 2002; Lee 2005; Horne 2006). Horne (2006) stresses the importance of understanding how consumer culture shapes fan identities. Culture becomes transmitted on a global scale, manipulated by the media, to the extent sports fans, viewers and participants are seen as consumers in the sports industry (Horne 2006). How people consume sports paraphernalia becomes a factor in identity creation. The growth of the global market for sports clothes, equipment, or footwear has been associated with consuming goods for symbolic purposes rather than use purposes as a basis to establish group identity (Horne 2006). For example, as Manzenreiter (2006) explores the connections between World Cup soccer and identity creation in Japan, he emphasizes the importance of uniforms and costumes as an indicator of collective identities. "What makes uniforms distinctive is that they are a material culture marker that identifies and places social actors in various hierarchies, units and categories" (Manzenreiter 2006: 146). "At the sports spectacle, uniforms help to structure the chaotic mass of participants and construct a symbolic order within the space-time of the event" (Manzenreiter 2006: 147).

Lee (2005) and Giulianotti (2002) identify different categories of fans within the masses based on varying degrees of affinity for the team or sport. Lee (2005) finds that the spectacularization of sports changes fandom where media coverage expands fandom to include new categories of people and generate new fan experiences. He argues that without the media, "it is difficult to conceive of how more than 3 million Hong Kong residents, many of who probably did not have much knowledge about soccer, would not otherwise have become at least spectators of the Real Madrid games, through television" (Lee 2005: 207).

While Lee (2005) suggests the massive media coverage of World Cup games changes fandom by creating entirely new fans, Giulianotti (2002) finds that global consumerism threatens to temper the fervor of people most intensely connected to teams. Giulianotti (2002) conducted a study in which he examines "the impact of footballs commodification on spectator identities relative to their association with professional football clubs" (26). He outlines four types of spectator identities: supporters, followers, fans, and flaneurs (Giulianotti 2002). "The classic supporter has a long-term personal and emotional investment in the club...traditional supporters are culturally contracted to their club" (Giulianotti 2002: 33). The follower follows what is going on with the club, players, managers, and other football people. The follower learns of developments with the football club of particular interest to him through the electronic media (Giulianotti 2002). "The fan develops a form of intimacy or love for the club or its specific players, particularly its celebrities" (Giulianotti 2002: 36). The football flaneur is more of a cultural consumer, a diametric opposition to the classic supporter (Giulianotti 2002). Giulianotti (2002) uses these differing degrees of support for a football club to suggest a structural relationship between the types of spectators and to warn against the forces of global consumerism that seek to convert classic supporters into flaneurs.

In contrast to Giulianotti (2002) who views consumerism as a threat to sport supporters identities, Wheaton (2000) shows that "in seemingly market-driven cultural spaces, sub cultural communities expressed in their own terms, a sense of subcultural authenticity and localized

resistance to ‘conspicuous consumption’ and materialism” (Wheaton 2000: 270). Wheaton (2000) argues that sport can be used as an expression of personal identity while at the same time in commodified form, sports is sold as a style of life. Wheaton’s empirical work suggests “that for at least some section of society, we have increased freedom to ‘play with’ our identities and that such postmodern identities may increasingly be constructed from the images and practices of consumption and leisure” (Wheaton 2000: 270). Horne (2006) reminds us that “sport may be both a commercial spectacle and used as a means of resisting commercial values” (5).

How identities evolve in response to global consumerism also applies to place-based collective identities. Place-based collective identity involves both how people experiencing sports express connections to specific places and how sports are able to create identities for specific places. Even as early as the nineteenth-century, mass sporting spectacles may have been an aspect of a search for city-wide, regional, or even national communities (Rader 1977). Clark (2006) uses ethnographic data collected at Scunthorpe United Football matches to demonstrate that chants and songs have become an integral part of constructing place-related collective identities. He finds that although what it means to be ‘Scunthorpe ‘til I die’ will vary from person to person, “the symbolic act of singing this chant transforms the potentiality of difference into the appearance of similarity” (Clark 2006: 500). Waitt (2001) pulls together the ideas of spectacle and social polarization to “explore the extent to which Sydneysiders, increasingly polarized by socio-economic status, were united by the prospect of hosting the 2000 Olympics” (249). Maingard (1997) finds that the 1995 Rugby World Cup contributed to the invention of the South African nation “by creating spectacles of diverse cultural identities for both television viewers and audiences in the stadiums” (27).

The role of sports in building a national identity has been widely documented (Riordan and Kruger 1999; Riordan and Kruger 2003). Although Beer (2009) does not focus on sports, he provides evidence that that urban spectacles, specifically commemorative events, present

narratives of nationhood. Beer (2009) explores spectacular events marking Australian national holidays to conclude that in cities, spectacle remains an ongoing aspect of urban governance and the continuing spatial production of nationalism. Fox (2006) examines both national holidays and sports events. Using participant observation data, Fox (2006) finds that National holiday commemorations and international sporting competitions provided the current generation of students in Romania with organized platforms for the collective expression and experience of national allegiances. "Football supplied the drama and television provided the conduit for virtually connecting large numbers of students in the heightened awareness of collective belonging" (Fox 2006: 231). According to Fox (2006), "it is sports, not holidays, dancing peasants, or nationalist politics that ignites the passions of students in the public experience and expression of collective allegiances" (231). These findings suggest that sports not only provide a platform for expressing nationhood, but can also ignite groups of people in experiencing meaningful collective identities.

As global consumerism carries commercialized, professional sports teams and products across national borders, the common narrative of using sport to build national identity changes. Levermore and Millward (2007) link sports to more fluid notions of pan-European identifications, rather than building collective identity through territorial based notions of the nation-state. When these authors refer to pan-European identities, they are talking about a sense of belonging to Europe. This research presents the possibility that collective identity can exist on a continental scale, rather than asserting national allegiance. The authors are concerned with "the extent to which official identities and unofficial 'sense of belonging' to Europe may be developing through sport" (Levermore and Millward 2007: 147). Three official measures designed to promote European identity through sport include declarations by the European Union that emphasize the role sport has to play in forging identity and bringing people together, the European Year of Education through Sport, and the use of symbols in sporting events such as the display of national flags and anthems (Levermore and Millward 2007). However, the authors find that an

emerging sense of 'Europeanness' has little to do with official attempts. Rather, the sense of belonging to Europe that emerges through sport appears to be developing through unofficial, "people-centered cultural familiarity and shared forms of transversal identification building amongst (and led by) Europeans" (Levermore and Millward 2007: 156). The authors recognize there are many ways in which a sense of belonging to Europe can be conceived and that various forms of sport – from club football (soccer) to the UEFA Champions League – can be involved in the process of shaping a multi-layered pan-European identity.

Levermore and Millward (2007) present a positive view of creating identities across national borders within Europe where people serve as active participants in creating a sense of belonging. However, globalization changes the notion of the nation-state because it refers to forces based on integration across national spaces (Harvey and Houle 1994). When crossing national borders opens onto a global scale, narratives surrounding the importance of sports in creating national identities present globalization as a threat to local culture. Jarvie (2006) points out that the assertion is often made that global sport has eroded local sport. This conflict "represents a view about sport, culture and society advocating the protection of the local, regional or national against the global" (Jarvie 2006: 126). "A further contemporary facet of the argument is that within an increasingly global sporting community in which diversity of choice is dictated by the marketplace, there is a need to protect and value the diversity of our sporting communities and traditional sporting cultures" (Jarvie 2006: 126).

Harvey and Houle (1994) view major sporting events as ideal vehicles for multinational firms to penetrate world markets, contributing to the commodification and homogenization of cultures. "The so-called world complexes and events are designed according to highly homogenized concepts, and thus blur local distinctiveness" (Harvey and Houle 1994: 340). In many cases, this sport monoculture is viewed as *American*, where Americanization presents the threat to local culture.

Scherer (2001) conducted a case study of the Winnipeg Jets, a National Hockey League team that relocated away from Canada into Phoenix, Arizona. The goal of Scherer's (2001) study "is to analyze the complexity of the global-local nexus and locate the social construction of a Canadian national identity through an examination of specific narratives produced within a local setting" (Scherer 2001: 211). He found a diverse and complex set of relationships emerging between the socially constructed meaning and value of the Jets and Winnipeg's local and global identity. Fans remarks surrounding the teams move to the United States express both how hockey has come to define Canadian identity and a disdain for Americanization. "Fans and the local media were quick to equate the move of the Jets to Phoenix as further evidence of the Americanization of Canadian culture" (Scherer 2001: 219).

Falcous and Maguire (2005) investigated fans at local basketball games to address the migration of North American players into English basketball. Considering the interaction between sports labor migrants and host cultures, the authors explored the interplay among labor migrants, the consumption of English basketball, and local fandom (Falcous and Maguire 2005). On one hand, fans valued the skill level of American players and appreciated their contribution to team success. On the other hand, the authors found fan skepticism towards migrant's commitment to the community and found wider concerns regarding US domination and the marginalization of local players (Falcous and Maguire 2005). "Broader concerns regarding the welfare of the national game and fears of Americanization operate largely in negotiation with the immediate realities of local meaning and leisure identities" (Falcous and Maguire 2005: 150).

Brown (2007) describes the opposition of Manchester United fans to the corporate takeover of their club when U.S. millionaire and owner of the Tampa Bay Buccaneers NFL team, Malcolm Glazer became the new owner of the Manchester United Football Club. This account of local fan culture highlights the conflict between different types of Manchester fans both before and after the take-over. Brown (2007) suggests the rejection of the Glazers by fans highlights a "love the team, hate the club" distinction (630). In this case, local, place-based fan

culture struggles to resist commercialized interests. The studies by Falcois and Maguire (2005) and Brown (2005) both highlight the complexity of the local consumption of global sports contoured by local identities and affiliations, yet operating within wider political, economic, and cultural dynamics.

NFL Cities: the American sports culture

While many place-based cultural studies have been produced on world football (soccer) using World Cup games as a quintessential unit of analysis for unveiling the importance of sports on specific cities, nations or regions, less about contemporary American culture is understood in this way. Martin and Reeves (2001) gather empirical evidence to show that American football in general and the Super Bowl in particular are globally insignificant relative to soccer, rugby, or cricket World Cups. However, Americans remain dismissive of soccer and continue to hail the Super Bowl as the ultimate sporting event. Although sports news media sometimes feels ubiquitous and permeates American society to the extent that we think we know how people are experiencing urban sports, there remains a lack of scholarly, empirical evidence that taps into the cultural significance of NFL football as experienced and interpreted by different groups of United States sports fans. However, Kraszewski (2008) and Lindquist (2006) offer insights into the significance of American football.

Kraszewski (2008) examines “how sports fandom fits into the nexus of late capitalism, displacement, and identity in the United States” (140). He raises the issue that traditional forms of community have eroded as society becomes more mobile with the decline of primary industry and the increase in service sector work. Kraszewski’s (2008) case study of Pittsburgh Steelers fans living in Fort Worth, Texas contends that “this endearing story speaks to a primary function of sports fandom in contemporary America: it allows displaced populations to negotiate home and home identities” (140). Kraszewski (2008) gathers data at local bars finding that “one of the most organized attempts for sports fans to reconnect with home occurs in American ‘football

bars” (141). He argues that people view moving to a different part of the country as ‘traumatic to their identity’ and offers sports fandom as a way for people in the United States to rekindle lost local identities (Kraszewski 2008: 141).

Lindquist (2006) examines Ohio State football game day, including a focus on the Ohio State Marching Band, to show how college football enacts aspects of a national American identity in terms of shared experiences and expressions grounded in local affiliations. He finds that Ohio State football fans embrace a national identity and cultural ideology, while at the same time finding opportunities for the expression of local affiliation through dress, song, and movements (Lindquist 2006). “Scenes on the field and among the band refer repeatedly to efficient and innovation corporate goal attainment, individual skill, and determined boundary expansion and defense, using symbols and forms that highlight the national aspects of these success narratives – even as these cultural performances are presented as distinctly local traditions” (Lindquist 2006: 474). These organized forms of cultural displays help to both articulate and maintain distinct identities. “Group identity is claimed by means of specific, structured interactions such as those that comprise an Ohio State game day” (Lindquist 2006: 476).

Conclusion

NFL football is the dominant sport in the United States however, academic studies on how fans experience and build meanings around their local NFL teams is extremely limited. The contemporary relationship between men’s professional sports and cities within the United States has largely been framed by economic considerations. The literature shapes concise arguments against using public subsidies to build sports stadiums and relies on growth machine theory to bridge a gap between sports studies and urban studies. However, there remains the possibility that sports teams could be worth more than economic value to a city and its residents in ways that are powerful and meaningful even in a highly capitalistic United States culture.

World football (soccer), rugby, and cricket have been used as lens to understand the impacts that sport can have on a community. Studies surrounding football (soccer) portray teams as powerful tools for creating collective identities and solidifying national identity, locality, and pride. Within these narratives, the social and cultural impacts of sports are clearly more important to people than any economic cost or benefit. Culturally focused literature on collective identities, sports fandom, and understanding how global forces are shaping the conversation surrounding cultural developments in cities offer clues for developing a contemporary understanding of the relationship between sports and the city.

Urban development literature asks questions about how entertainment developments shape our cities, with an increasing interest in the development of commodified cultural forms. Sports serve as an example of these commodified cultural forms but, we know little about how people are actually experiencing them. According to Vertinsky (2004), “with the continued acceleration of globalization, the contexts in which we think about sport, and the narratives we have woven about the places and spaces of our sporting past, are all coming under question as we try to understand a world we have not experienced before” (8). Although we are trying to understand a world we have not experienced before, the city remains a compelling site for understanding how new narratives are unfolding around sport, culture and society. As new narratives unfold that give us a greater understanding about city life – economically, culturally, and socially - the new narratives surrounding sports can be an important part of understanding how sports need to be resituated within urban society.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

Research Questions

In what ways do professional sports matter at a city-wide level?

- In what ways does a professional sport home team matter to urban residents?
- Why is professional football important to urban residents?
- How do narratives surrounding professional sports home teams portray city images and create city identities?

In what ways are professional sports a part of the culture of cities?

- How is local culture expressed through a professional sport home team?
- With whom and how do people experience professional football?
- How do the venues where people watch football games impact their experiences?
- How do collective identities form between spectators during football events and why are they important?

The Case Study Research Design

This study utilized the case study research method. Creswell (2009) describes case studies as “a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher explores in depth a program, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals” (13). “In general, case studies are the preferred method when (a) ‘how’ or ‘why’ questions are being posed, (b) the investigator has little control over events, and (c) the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within a real-life context” (Yin 2009: 2). To build new understanding about the sport-city relationship, this dissertation examined the Saints NFL team (sport) and New Orleans (city) as the cases for contributing to the broader topic of urban sport culture. The Saints 2009-2010 season, which resulted in New Orleans first Super Bowl win and an eruption of human interaction and enthusiasm from city citizens, provided an ideal case study for articulating the “use value” of a professional sports team. Further participant observation conducted throughout the 2010-2011 season provided an opportunity to capture fans recent memories and witness how people experienced Saints

football throughout the course of a normal NFL season. Paired with historical accounts of the Saints and the Superdome in New Orleans, the narratives gathered completed the storyline of the Saints in New Orleans whose trajectory arches from inception to Hurricane Katrina to a Super Bowl winning season that ignited a city.

Data Collection Strategies

With the case study method, researchers collect detailed information using a variety of data collection procedures over a sustained period of time (Creswell 2009: 13). The case study method provided the necessary freedom to use multiple data collection strategies in order to paint a more complete picture of what the Saints mean to New Orleans. Using multiple data collection strategies strengthened the research as each type of data offered distinct yet complementary insights.

Documents and Audio-Visual Material:

Content analysis of local media stories surrounding the Saints provided a strong platform for forming initial concepts to answer the research questions and for providing qualitative evidence to support the phenomenon being studied. Performing content analysis of *Times-Picayune* newspaper articles written about the Saints between August 2009 and February 2011 established public narratives surrounding the Saints. This time period captured two full NFL seasons, including the time period for conducting field research as well as the growing excitement surrounding the New Orleans Saints between August 2009 and March 2010 during what turned out to be the Saints Super Bowl winning season. Gathering the *Times-Picayune* articles was a continuous process where I read a hard copy of the paper each day and kept any articles pertaining to the New Orleans Saints. I gathered over 240 print newspaper articles about the New Orleans Saints spanning a 16 month time period. The amount of Saints news coverage during this time far exceeded 240 articles but, I excluded typical sports news reports that covered point scores and game recaps. The 240 Saints articles included in my analysis

covered a wide range of stories relating to the Saints that focused on topics beyond the game itself.

Words and phrases from each article were entered into a spreadsheet organized around emerging themes about what the Saints meant to New Orleans. The public narratives gleaned from Saints news coverage provided a basis for developing preliminary themes for analysis. As the data analysis process continued, some of these themes were expanded upon to answer the research questions, while others with less relevance were discarded. The daily process of scanning hard copies of the *Times-Picayune* and entering data into the spreadsheet continued through the end of the Saints 2010 season.

Although the *Times-Picayune* was the primary news source for content analysis, hard copies of additional publications were also collected and analyzed. Publications distributed from the NFL media center in Miami during Super Bowl XLIV to attending members of the media were collected. These included quotes and transcripts from Saints players and coaches' interviews, press releases promoting Louisiana, and miscellaneous memos. These documents were analyzed to establish the official NFL narratives surrounding the Saints. However, closer investigation of what Saints players said in these interview transcripts revealed messages that reflected the views and opinions of New Orleanians rather than an NFL created narrative.

In addition, I read books specifically about the New Orleans Saints which offered historical details and narratives from non-academic sources that were not captured in the literature review section. The following publications about the Saints, the Superdome, or the Superdome during Katrina helped complete the narrative of the history of the Saints and described the background information and setting of the selected case study:

- Bartlett, Bert. 2010. *A Tale of Two Seasons: Katrina and a Super Bowl*. Write2Grow.
- Dilberto, Buddy. 2001. *When the Saints Came Marching In*. Pelican Publishing
- Donnes, Alan. 2007. *Patron Saints: How the Saints Gave New Orleans a Reason to Believe*. New York: Center Street.

- Dixon, Dave. 2008. *The Saints, the Superdome, and the Scandal*. Pelican Publishing.
- Duncan, Jeff. 2010. *From Bags to Riches*. Acadian House Publishing.
- Harris, Paul. 2008. *Diaries from the Dome: Reflections on Fear and Privilege During Katrina*. New York: Vantage Press
- Scaffidi, Steve. 2010. *Ain't Dat Super*. Xlibris Corporation.
- Vollen, Lola and Chris Ying. 2006. *Voices From the Storm*. McSweeney's.

I collected video documentation of public gatherings at the Saints Super Bowl parade in New Orleans during Mardi Gras 2010, the Buddy D Dress Run in 2010, and the streets of New Orleans from Uptown to the French Quarter the night of the Saints Super Bowl win. These videotapes were examined to gather evidence to answer the research questions including (but not limited to): how people interacted in public spaces; what people did when they gathered for Saints events; what costumes or uniforms people wore. In addition, over 150 photographs were taken during participant observation throughout the 2010 Saints season.

Observations through Field Research:

I conducted participant observation through one NFL season, 2010-2011. Eight regular season Saints home games and eight regular season away games provided sixteen opportunities for participant observation in a natural setting. The Superdome, both inside during home games and the area outside prior to the game, provided a natural setting for observing people engaged in Saints football. I secured season tickets for the 2010-2011 Saints season which allowed me access into the Superdome. However, the realm of Saints fans extends beyond those who were able to access the Superdome on game-day. To fill this gap, eight regular season away games provided opportunities to observe Saints fans who gathered in New Orleans locations outside of the Superdome. People tended to gather in public places in New Orleans, especially bars or restaurants, to watch away games. Different public sites throughout New Orleans where Saints fans gathered were selected to conduct participant observation during away games. Sports bars or local bars were strategically selected based on neighborhood location to include a cross-section of New Orleanians who gather to watch Saints

games. On game days, I observed the following: (1) costumes or outfits worn at the games (2) the 'Who Dat' chant or other markers of collective action (3) how people interacted in public spaces (4) who people watched the game with (5) what types of conversations arose about the Saints (6) descriptions of the setting.

Other researchers who used ethnographic methods in sports bars for gathering data on sports fans offered guidance for this type of field research (Kraszewski 2008; Weed 2006).

Kraszewski (2008) conducted research in Steelers bars by becoming both an observer and an active participant. He cited Weed's (2006) ethnography of spectators of the 2002 World Cup in British pubs as influencing his ethnographic approach:

Here Weed did not administer surveys or blatantly announce his presence as an academic in the pub. Rather, he immersed himself in the environment and had a twofold approach to taking notes: (a) writing down observations inconspicuously on backs of napkins, cigarette boxes, and toilet paper; and (b) going home and translating those field notes into an extensive ethnographic diary. This approach allowed Weed to document the nuances of participant behavior, analyze the events through diary writing, and not mark himself as an outsider there to study the spectating process. (Weed 2006 quoted by Kraszewski 2008: 142).

During Saints games, I gathered field notes by spending more time as a participant than as an observer. According to Creswell (2009), with the participant as observer, the observation role is secondary to the participant role. Formally, I was an observer and researcher. However, I was also a jersey-wearing person in a public place, ready to experience Saints game-day. I did not conceal my role as a researcher however, it was not necessary to formally introduce my researcher role before observations could take place. Lofland and Lofland (1995) remind us that in a big crowd of people gathering for an event, it is not realistic or necessary to warn everyone that they are being observed by a social scientist. During participant observation, I did tell people that I talked to that I was doing a research project for UNO about Saints football when it made sense to do so.

In addition to jotting notes during participant observation, I composed detailed journal entries immediately after each Saints game recapping observations in as much detail as recent memory allowed and reflecting on my experiences in order to complete detailed field notes. According to Lofland and Lofland (1995) “the prime sources of data are the words and actions of the people you are interviewing or observing” (70). The research journal provided documentation of observations made about how people are experiencing Saints games in public settings.

Interviews:

Using grounded theory as a basis, research participants who have lived through the phenomenon are therefore the experts on what is being studied (Auerbach 2003). Interviews were formally scheduled away from Saints game days. Semi-structured, face-to-face, one-on-one interviews were audio taped and transcribed. An interview guide was used to help structure the interview and ensure consistency in the type of data being collected.

Initial interview subjects were identified using purposive, snowball sampling. Scherer (2001) conducted “purposeful sampling” during a case study of Winnipeg and the Winnipeg Jets to gather locally produced narratives in actual local settings. In his study, interview subjects were selected both through snowball sampling and through an analysis of local newspapers identifying people connected with the Save the Jets campaign (Scherer 2001). Although many New Orleanians could be appropriate interview subjects, not every person in New Orleans is a Saints fan and would not necessarily have something to say about the meaning of Saints football in their lives. It was necessary to identify interview participants who could speak to the subject matter. Different approaches to contacting interview participants included:

1. An initial phase of (2) one-on-one interviews with acquaintances already known to the researcher who experience Saints games in some capacity. These initial interviews served as a test drive for interview questions and offered insights for improving the interview guide before administering it to a larger sample.

2. Snowball sampling involved asking each of the initial interview participants to recommend candidates for this study as well as a way to contact them. This technique generated interview participants that live in New Orleans that were not already known to the investigator.
3. Approaching people during field research and asking them to participate in this study offered another way to find interview subjects. However, after conducting field research at several football games, I found the football game-day environment poses difficulties in establishing enough rapport with strangers to be able to invite them to meet with me for a one-on-one, in person interview. This challenge required using snowball sampling after identifying a few initial participants.
4. Saints themed blog sites or Saints themed social networking pages offered a way to contact a large number of people and invite them to participate in this study. The Saints forum on NOLA.com and the Facebook pages for Who Dat Nation and NolaNative.com are the three web pages where I posted invitations to take a brief survey and participate in interviews. People who completed the web survey were given the option to leave information, such as an email or phone number, and indicate that they are willing to be contacted for an interview. No one responded to a Craigslist invitation to participate in interviews.

These interviews contributed in-depth, qualitative information that was exploratory in nature, about the meanings and importance of Saints football to select New Orleans residents. Random sampling was not realistically possible or appropriate in developing the research agenda. Interviews provided an opportunity to gather information about Saints football followers in their own words and to introduce narratives about the impacts of professional sports on an urban area, rather than testing on a random sample of people a pre-determined list of potential impacts of professional sports. Purposive, snowball sampling allowed for the inclusion of diverse participants in the study. Selection of fans included fans with different levels of affinity for the

team, as well as different genders, races, and ages. I completed 10 in person interviews with Saints fans. The interview participants included six women and four men. Two interviewees identify as African-American and eight interviewees were white. I did not ask interviewees for their ages but, the age range was from early thirties to late fifties.

Internet Questionnaire:

Access to Survey Monkey paired with free on-line social networking sites, provided a platform for gathering opinions from a larger sample at relatively little to no cost. A ten question internet survey collected data from more people than one-on-one interviewing through snowball sampling allowed. People were invited to participate in the survey through New Orleans and Saints specific online forums including the Saints forum on NOLA.com, and facebook pages for Who Dat Nation.com and NolaNative.com. Targeted websites included:

1. The local news site NOLA.com has a Saints Fan Zone forum which is promoted as “a place for Who Dats to talk Saints football” <http://www.nola.com/forums/saints/>. This was an easily accessible way to invite people interested in the Saints to click on a link and take the web survey.
2. The Facebook page for Who Dat Nation is a Saints themed website where I could post a message at any time that would be viewable to any “friends” of that facebook page. Who Dat Nation was “liked” by 30,362 people at the time I posted the survey. I also posted the survey link on NolaNative.com a facebook page that is not Saints specific but rather posts content on all types of New Orleans social events that are open to the public.

Posting a URL link with an invitation to participate in survey research about New Orleans Saints fans on these sites accomplished the task of targeting people who were interested in Saints football in some capacity. A carefully crafted questionnaire included filters and open-ended questions in order to obtain good results and minimize survey errors. This type of web

survey generated data that was exploratory in nature and provided narratives from a larger number of people than interviewing allowed.

The primary motivation for administering the survey was to assist in finding people willing to participate in interviews. However, the surveys ended up providing valuable and insightful information about what people like about Saints football and why they think it is important for New Orleans. The survey contained several open ended, short answer style questions. The survey respondents provided rich answers to these questions in their own words. While some provided short phrases, others input whole paragraphs. The content in these survey responses ended up being as rich as the information obtained from other data sources, including interview transcripts. Although surveys generally fall under quantitative research and are used to generate data that can be used in statistical analysis, the internet questionnaire that I administered garnered more qualitative data.

Forty five people completed the survey. One question asked for demographic information but survey takers were not required to leave a response. I understood that some people would not necessarily be comfortable sharing information such as annual income or age especially since the proceeding question gave them the option to provide their contact information to participate in an interview. 28 women took the survey, 16 men, and one did not report their gender. Of the survey takers 33 reported their race as white, 7 African-American, 1 Creole, 2 Hispanic and 2 did not respond. At the intersection of gender and race the survey included 22 white women, 4 black women, 1 Hispanic woman, 11 white men, 3 black men, 1 Creole man, and 1 Hispanic man. The ages of survey takers ranged from 27 to 60 years old. The average age was 39, with a median of 38 and a mode of 40. The average annual income reported by survey takers was \$61,162 with a median of \$50,000. The self reported annual income ranged from a low of \$0 to a high of \$200,000.

Data Analysis Procedures

Content analysis of gathered documents, observations, and answers to internet survey questions were qualitative in nature providing narrative themes. The basic steps in data analysis involved organizing data into patterns and themes, and then attempting to explain these themes. According to Lofland and Lofland (1995), “analysis is the product of an inductive and emerging process in which achieving order is not simply a mechanical process of assembly line steps” (181). However, Creswell (2009) sees the data analysis process as following a somewhat linear, hierarchical approach in design – though allowing for a more interactive approach in practice. My data analysis approach moved in a hierarchical pattern from specific, raw data up to broad, interpretation of the meanings of themes and descriptions – while still understanding that there was room for inductive reasoning and emerging patterns.

Content analysis of the *Times-Picayune* articles from August 2009 through March 2011 revealed public narratives that were categorized into themes. Given that the 2009 season resulted in an unprecedented winning season and was a unique time period in Saints history, hundreds of news articles were published about Saints football. Not only did this increase the quantity of news articles published but also changed the nature of information available. Instead of Saints news articles focusing only on the wins, losses, and game statistics that are normally found in the sports pages, articles were published on a large variety of Saints related topics that reflected what fans were experiencing throughout the season. Instead of being secluded to the sports section, Saints articles popped up in the money section, living section, and often graced the front page. Information that I originally thought I would only be able to get at by interviewing people was being hand delivered to me daily by the *Times-Picayune*.

The data found in the *Times-Picayune* was categorized based on emerging themes and organized into a spreadsheet database. This step represented the initial coding process. Once these codes were established, the process of cataloguing bits of data (quotes, images, behaviors) into categories established on the spreadsheet became part of the analysis process.

Lofland and Lofland (1995) distinguish between initial coding and focused coding. During focused coding the researcher decides which codes are being used more than others. This begins the process of selecting codes that need elaboration, while other codes are collapsed or dropped entirely (Lofland and Lofland 1995).

The answers to the internet questionnaire assisted greatly in the focused coding process. The survey takers responses to open ended questions solidified the following ideas: that economics are somehow important; people think the Saints are important in uniting the city particularly across racial barriers; the Saints provide a connection to the city and sense of renewal; watching games with other people or family and friends is what people enjoy most about watching football. The survey responses helped illuminate the idea that people responded differently when I asked about “football” than when I asked a question about the “Saints.” Sports fans responding to the internet questionnaire listed traits such as athleticism or game strategy when I asked what they liked about football. When they answered questions about why the Saints are important they listed traits such as community, meaning something more, and a connection to the city of New Orleans.

The field research journal provided more detail rich data than I had originally anticipated and greatly assisted in the writing analysis process. Doing participant observations at various neighborhood bars influenced the analysis in a different way than if I had chosen only one sports bar to attend throughout the season or if I had limited field research to only game day in the Superdome. Conducting participant observation at various locations throughout the city provided greater insight into how sports are connected to city culture by allowing me to see the link between sports fandom and public spaces. Participant observation provided detail rich descriptions about what people are actually doing as part of the game day experience rather than relying solely on how people talk about Saints football.

These categories were then connected up to broader theoretical concepts that are of interest to this dissertation: how local culture is expressed through professional sports and in

what ways professional sports matter at a city-wide level. Creswell (2009) says making an interpretation of the data is a final step in data analysis. “In this way, authors suggest that the findings confirm past information or diverge from it” (Creswell 2009: 189). The literature review reflected several ways in which the impact of sports in our lives can be interpreted. Although the data analysis process allowed several ways to interpret themes, in order to make this research project manageable and able to be completed, data coding and analysis stayed focused on a limited number of categories to answer the research questions that could be organized into coherent chapters for the final dissertation product. A key component of data analysis was to address and reconnect findings back to the cross-disciplinary strands of urban development and sports studies literature.

Clarifying Limitations: the researchers role and generalizing results

Since qualitative research is interpretive research, inquirers should reflexively identify their biases, values, and personal background (Creswell 2009). My perceptions of the Saints and NFL football have been shaped by my personal experiences as a fan, an employee of NFL teams, a resident of New Orleans, and a researcher of sport in society. Within these different roles, I have witnessed attachments to the New Orleans Saints that cannot be explained within the current literature on sports studies or urban studies. As an employee of the Saints organization from 2003 – 2006, I convinced local business to buy sponsorships and luxury suites, witnessed the decision-making processes of Saints management, and experienced the Superdome on game-day as a place of work. As a resident of New Orleans, I begged for the Saints to be a symbol of hope for post-Katrina New Orleans. Since 2007, I have been able to enjoy the Saints simply as a fan, although as a woman, I do not fit the profile of typical fandom studies. These experiences with the Saints and New Orleans left me convinced that the relationship between fans and their home team goes beyond perceived economic impact. My knowledge of the sports industry coupled with a concern for social justice enhances my

sensitivity to the fact that many voices are overlooked in the dominant narratives surrounding men's professional sports in the United States. During my research, particular attention was paid to seeking out ordinary peoples' diverse experiences surrounding the Saints. Although every effort was made to ensure objectivity in research, my role in the research process shapes the way I view and understand the data and the way I interpreted my experiences. From a philosophical research standpoint, I believe reflexivity adds strength to this project.

Qualitative research is interpretive and reflexive in nature and care must be taken to clarify bias. According to Creswell (2009), "self-reflection creates an open and honest narrative that will resonate well with readers" (192). In addition, "good qualitative research contains comments by the researchers about how their interpretation of the findings is shaped by their background" (Creswell 2009: 192). As both a researcher and someone who already had personal opinions and emotions regarding the value of the New Orleans Saints, I needed to remember to trust in my judgment and be forthcoming about how my background shaped my interpretations of the data.

One purpose of this dissertation research was to collect data from the perspective of fans or urban residents rather than following in the footsteps of studies that focus on the athletes themselves or rely on interviews from political and industry leaders. With sports increasing seen as a global phenomenon, sports fandom transcends geographic boundaries where Saints fans can be found almost anywhere in the world. However, in addition to the Saints, New Orleans has been chosen for the case study. Since the research questions are concerned with the ways that sports matter at a city-wide level from the perspective of urban residents, the population for this study was mostly limited to the New Orleans geographical area. Participant observation took place in New Orleans public places. The multiple data collections strategies implemented allowed for different types of people to be included in this study based on age, race, gender, income levels, sexuality, place of residence, level of affinity

for the team. However, this study cannot generalize results to categories of people based on demographic traits.

Although this dissertation seeks to outline the possibilities of what a professional sports team could mean to its host city, the intent of this qualitative research was not to generalize findings to cities other than New Orleans. In actuality, describing how certain aspects of the Saints use value remain unique to context, setting, and individuals or small groups is one strength of this project. Creswell (2009) reminds us that “the value of qualitative research lies in the particular description and themes developed in context of a specific site” (193). This research shows why the Saints are important to New Orleans. Although, the findings offer insights for how to conceptualize the sport-city relationship in ways that would help guide future analysis of other specific sports teams, fans, and their home cities.

The results of this study are presented in a descriptive, narrative form. Thick description became the vehicle for communicating a picture of the use value people assign to their home, professional football team. The narratives that emerged from the data analysis tell the contemporary story of the New Orleans Saints. Seeking out authentic voices – those of fans, those of people gathering in public places – painted a picture of the value that people attach to having an NFL team in their city. This story is situated alongside narratives created through public media and academic literature in order to interpret in what ways the story of the New Orleans Saints diverges or conforms to current notions of the sport-city relationship. This research addresses the possibility that the sport-city relationship stretches beyond economical and political frameworks, and shows how local culture and urban identities are socially constructed and made meaningful by ordinary people through urban sport.

CHAPTER 4: WHEN THE SAINTS CAME MARCHING IN: The rise of the NFL and the history of the Saints in New Orleans

On November 1, 1966 New Orleans elite gathered in the Pontchartrain Hotel for a press conference announcing that a National Football League franchise had just been awarded to the city of New Orleans. The date, on All Saints Day, marked the birth of the New Orleans Saints but the day did not mark the beginning of the relationship between professional football and the city of New Orleans. One must look at least six years earlier to understand how the aspirations of a young professional football league and the actions of city boosters brought New Orleans to become an NFL city. Beloved sports teams are riddled with symbolic value but what they symbolize is emblematic of the current events and social structures within which they are located. The thematic elements surrounding New Orleans efforts to attract an NFL team- politics, race relations, economic development, and city image- reverberate throughout the history of the team's tenure in New Orleans. What these elements symbolized and why they were important to New Orleanians reflected the current affairs and realities of American society around them. New Orleans had a historical pattern of challenging racial segregation or integration through sporting events and venues as they became an NFL city.

Professional Football in America: forming the National Football League

In the early 1960s, professional football leaders pushed for business and political reforms that would lead to the creation of the modern day NFL. Revenue sharing and national television contracts formed the cornerstone of the financial success of the NFL. In 1960, NFL commissioner Pete Rozelle created a model for professional sports based on the principal that a club's individual interests would be better served by cooperating with each other rather than competing financially. Rozelle convinced large-market team owners that sharing television revenue would mean financial stability throughout the league and success for everyone rather than disparities between large-market and small-market teams. The previous model relied on

each club securing individual television contracts. In 1960, team television deals ranged from \$75,000 for Green Bay to \$175,000 for the New York Giants (Oriard 2007). In order to establish this profit-sharing idea, which held a potential national TV contract as its key piece, the league would have to bypass antitrust law. Rozelle “secured the future of the NFL” when his lobbying won congressional approval of the Sports Broadcasting Act in 1961 (Oriard 2007: 12). The NFL became free to implement a revenue sharing model centered around a singular television contract, rather than encouraging local teams to secure individual contracts.

Despite the NFL's success in passing the Sports Broadcasting Act, the American Football League (AFL) still existed as a rival league. Between 1962 and 1965, football players saw a dramatic rise in salaries as the NFL and the AFL competed to obtain the best talent. Caught in a bidding war that would upset the financial balance the NFL desired, the two leagues sought a merger. The AFL-NFL merger required Congress granting the NFL an antitrust exemption because the merger would violate antitrust law at the expense of the football players, who would no longer be able to pit the rival leagues against each other in bidding for their salaries (Oriard 2007).

Louisiana politicians Senator Russell Long and House Majority Leader Hale Boggs attached the antitrust exemption to a budget bill and pushed it through Congress on the promise that New Orleans would be awarded the next NFL franchise. Congress passed the bill on October 21, 1966 solidifying the creation of the modern day NFL (Oriard 2007). Eleven days later the NFL announced that New Orleans would be awarded the next NFL franchise.

Oriard (2007) correctly points out that the ability of the NFL to win congressional approval to operate outside of antitrust laws, sealed the role of the government as “a powerful enabling, but non-profit-sharing, partner” to the NFL. The uneven power structure continues to provoke scholars to critique the local government relationship to professional sports teams in their home cities. Scholars overwhelmingly conclude that the economic impact for home cities does not outweigh the public subsidy costs of acquiring and retaining professional sports teams

and stadiums (Baade 1996; Crompton 2001; Delaney and Eckstein 2003; Johnson 1996; Rosentraub 1999). The intention of the NFL had always been to maximize profit for a small number of member teams. Improving economic conditions for host cities was not the core mission of the NFL, despite the contested arguments surrounding the potential economic impact of hosting men's professional sports.

In order for the NFL to achieve and maintain a high level of financial success the number of franchises would have to be limited and controlled, rather than operating on a free competition system where any city could have an NFL team. Therefore, in order to get viewers to turn the television to pro football, people would have to be fans of the league, rather than a singular city team (Oriard 2007). This understanding sparked the NFL to fiercely promote the league brand. The Super Bowl was created to further market the entire league as opposed to individual teams. Infusing the NFL brand with elements of patriotism became the driving force behind marketing the national product. Rozelle intended the Super Bowl to be an advertisement for NFL football, investing the game with 'traditional American values' (Oriard 2007: 22). Rozelle called it, "a conscious effort on our part to bring the element of patriotism into the Super Bowl" (Oriard 2007: 22). NFL commissioner Paul Tagliabue shared this view of the Super Bowl and called it "the winter version of the Fourth of July celebration" (Oriard 2007: 23).

The cultural power of the NFL circulates around the ability to use football to tell compelling stories. "Unlike other forms of popular entertainment, NFL football is real – the players actually do what they appear to be doing – yet at the same time it is a creation of the media, and it generates some of the most powerful fantasies in our culture" (Oriard 2007: 14). The NFL, advanced by the creation of NFL Films, emphasized storytelling. NFL Films is a television and film production studio owned by the NFL. It is the branch of the NFL created to document and archive games. Inserting narratives around football was an intentional act by NFL Films but, Americans are culturally programmed to seek out these stories. The stories of professional football are romantic, melodramatic, epic, and mythic, usually with playful or

humorous interludes. NFL films crafted these dramas through slow motion or tight close-ups of players, and editing montages for a distinct purpose. “Any football fan could name several [storylines] off the top of his or her head – the traditional-rivals story, the bitter-enemies story, the wounded-hero story, the Cinderella or Ugly Duckling story, the son-challenging-the-father-story, and so on. These stories, unsurprisingly, are versions of the oldest and most-repeated narratives in the Western world” (Oriard 2207:27).

Despite the confines of a scripted, unified league narrative, teams were stamped with individual characteristics and located within cities with their own unique cultures and histories. Locating an NFL team in New Orleans involved locating the Saints within the social and cultural context that is New Orleans. Instead of an archetypal fairy tale told through the lens of football, the storyline of the Saints in New Orleans reflected real people and events, where the cultural power of the Saints lies in their ability to reflect the broader social conditions in which they were situated.

New Orleans, an NFL city: 1960 - 2005

Before the Saints, a great football tradition had already been established in New Orleans. Tulane football was a national powerhouse in collegiate football from the 1920s through the 1950s. Since its inception in 1934, the Sugar Bowl was the nation’s leading intercollegiate game with Tulane Stadium as the site for college football’s National Championship. And in 1960, Tulane stadium was a far better facility than anything in professional football. Community leaders wanted to attract professional sports to establish New Orleans as a major league sports town. This reflected a developing trend after World War II, when professional sports leagues spread out of Northeastern and Midwestern Rustbelt cities and into Western and Southern areas where population and economic changes increased demand for high-profile entertainment (Martin 2006: 120). In 1961, New Orleans mayor Chep Morrison announced his intent to create a Mayor’s Major League Sports Committee to build a

new baseball stadium near Lake Pontchartrain in order to push New Orleans toward this major league goal. Dave Dixon, who later became known as the father of the Superdome, told the mayor that baseball was the wrong sport and outside of the city center would be the wrong stadium site, as New Orleans was clearly a football town (Dixon 2008). In 1962, Dixon established the New Orleans Pro Football Club, Inc. and led efforts to attract professional football to New Orleans. At the time, both the AFL and the NFL existed as professional football leagues for New Orleans to consider.

New Orleans hosted professional football team exhibition games to gauge local support for professional football. In August 1962, a preseason American Football League (AFL) game was played in City Park stadium. A 31,000 person crowd attended that game and 20,000 people pledged to buy season tickets if a professional football franchise came to New Orleans (Dixon 2008). A survey taken in the mid 1960s by national television consultants Frank Magid & Associates showed that 94% of the people in the area supported efforts to bring New Orleans into the National Football League. Encouraged by this level of support, the members of New Orleans Pro Football Club targeted six entities that would need to be recognized in order to bring professional football to New Orleans. These entities were Tulane University, the people of New Orleans, the Sugar Bowl committee, the African American community, top local TV and radio stations, and the *Times-Picayune* newspaper (Dixon 2008: 42). The African-American community stood out as a conspicuous group on this list because African-Americans were listed as a separate category from the people of New Orleans. At the time this list was created, the driving issue in preparing New Orleans to become a professional football town was racial integration.

New Orleans was itching for a professional football team during a time of complex segregation-integration issues across the country. Like most other American social institutions, sports were influenced by a 'separate but equal' doctrine manifested from the 1896 *Plessey v Ferguson* case. The Supreme Court reversed this decision in 1954, when the *Brown v Topeka*

school segregation case led the Supreme Court to declare that separate but equal was inherently unequal. However, between 1954 and 1956, Southern politicians passed many race statutes that further strengthened de facto Jim Crow customs. Louisiana legislators ratified twenty-three new constitutional amendments including a 1956 statute forbidding race mixing in social and sporting events. Although these laws effectively banned all interracial contact of public accommodations, Souther (2003) portrayed the racial ban on sporting events as 'particularly offensive' to African-Americans and even more detrimental to New Orleans promoters' hopes of expanding the city's tourist trade than banning interracial jazz clubs in the French Quarter. This ban on interracial mixing at Louisiana sporting events reversed national progress that had been made in the decade prior as African-Americans began breaking color barriers in professional sports. Ross (2000) documented African-American athletes participating in football prior to the 1954 Supreme Court decision and argued that "sports set the tone for America to begin integration off the field" (Ross 2000: 2).

In 1946, ten years prior to the 1956 Louisiana statute banning mixed race sporting events, the Los Angeles Rams ended a twelve season ban on black players in the NFL by signing Kenny Washington, the first African-American to play in the NFL since Joe Lillard and Ray Kemp in 1933 (Lapchick 2008). On a national level, the black press considered the reintegration of football one of the top stories of 1946 and, "many black Americans believed that desegregation on the sports field would promote the spirit of equality in other aspects of American life" (Ross 2000: 96). Louisiana seemed to be moving in the opposite direction of progress in race relations. This racial intolerance threatened the status of Sugar Bowl as the nation's premiere college sporting event. The Sugar Bowl ranked second only to Mardi Gras in the number of visitors it attracted to the city (Souther 2003).

Souther (2003) described the early 1960s as a time when municipal leaders were worried about wounding the city's image with negative publicity surrounding segregation and therefore focused efforts on desegregating tourist-oriented facilities. To test the level of

community support for racially integrated sports in New Orleans, in 1963 a double-header exhibition game featuring the Chicago Bears and the Baltimore Colts was played in an effort to desegregate Tulane Stadium. Tulane University's stadium, located on private property, rendered it exempt from racial segregation laws that governed public stadiums. At \$8 per ticket, the 1963 exhibition game was the highest price football ticket in America for an exhibition game. For the first time in Louisiana history, professional football was played in front of a mixed-race crowd. Seats were sold on a first come, first served basis:

I watched this historic ticket-selling drama from six feet away-the first desegregated sports event in the history of the Old South – and our young lady handled the situation perfectly. She showed the ticket chart, and then stated the words, 'first come, first served.' At that moment our (African-American) visitor asked, 'You mean I can sit anywhere I want?' Our young lady answered affirmatively, at which point our 'colored' football fan mumbled, 'Alleluia' (Dixon 2008: 48).

Hot summer weather settled over the 52,000 people in the stadium. During the game, the rain poured, the field flooded, and the game was delayed for two hours while people sought refuge under the stadium. Organizers feared a race riot but, no such thing took place. According to Dixon (2008), the people of New Orleans would not have reacted negatively to desegregating football games during this time. Dixon said, "when our little group integrated Tulane stadium in 1963 we ran into very little resistance – maybe 2 telephone calls; no threats" (Dixon 2008: 40). According to Souther (2003) this game boasted black attendance of more than thirty percent and was perhaps the most integrated professional football game ever held before or since in the South (Souther 2003).

At the time this exhibition game was held in New Orleans, professional football in general was experiencing a period of *reintegration* rather than integration, as blacks and whites participated in sporting events together prior to the Jim Crow era. In comparison to other Southern states, New Orleans had been described as moderate or even liberal in race relations prior to the adoption of state statutes banning interracial sporting venues. For example, Somers

(1972) and Riess (1989) portrayed New Orleans sports facilities in the 1800s as being an exception to the pervasive racial segregation found in other southern urban areas. Somers (1972) described New Orleans horse racing courses in 1871 as admitting black fans to any part of the track except the members' and ladies' stands, which were also closed to most white spectators. These mixed-race sporting events did not occur completely harmoniously or without controversy, but rather reflect the complex racial issues of the times in which they occurred. They serve as evidence that New Orleans has a historical pattern of challenging racial segregation or integration through sporting events and venues.

The 1963 racially integrated exhibition football game was staged to show the NFL that the people of New Orleans could be ready to accept professional football. The social environment seemed ripe for bringing professional football to New Orleans, but racial segregation laws of Louisiana as they existed in 1960 remained a barrier to attracting the NFL to this city. According to the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Louisiana bans on mixed seating, breathing the same stadium air, and mixed competition were now regarded by federal courts as unconstitutional. However, these laws needed to be struck from federal court in New Orleans. With \$6,000 in cash secretly tucked into his pocket, Dave Dixon held a meeting with local black leaders to convince them to assign one of their lawyers to go before the federal bench and represent this cause (Dixon 2008). After agreeing that a \$2,000 fee would help entice this group to take action, Dixon flipped the cash onto the table and the plan was set in motion. Dutch Morial, who would later become mayor of New Orleans, was the young lawyer who represented the matter and got the laws struck down, without much fanfare, by summary court judgment (Dixon 2008).

Although laws had been passed, progress in city-wide integration was slow. For example, mixed-race meetings at the popular restaurant Antoine's were still being conducted in private rooms rather than out in the main dining room. NFL commissioner Pete Rozelle sent one of his assistants to check out New Orleans "racially" (Dixon 2008). With the increase in both

African-American athletes and spectators in professional football, New Orleans would have to demonstrate it could accept players, spectators, and media without regard to race. However, accounts showed that professional football players experienced racism off the field as they traveled with their teammates to competitions in southern cities. Souther (2003) shared the following story about the exhibition game that was supposed to show that New Orleans had eliminated enough racial barriers to support professional football:

Across town, Clem Daniels, a standout black player for the Oakland Raiders, stood with some teammates outside the Roosevelt Hotel, waiting for a taxi to the French Quarter. Although six cabs had lined up along University Place, the street that runs in front of the hotel, the drivers all left their cars to avoid serving the black players. After much frustration, Daniels recalled, "Finally we stood in the middle of the street and a cab stopped rather than run us down." Upon reaching the famed Bourbon Street, Daniels and his friends found themselves mocked, insulted, and turned away by bouncers (Souther 2003:711)

Souther (2003) focused on the struggle for equal access to public accommodations to demonstrate tourism's impact on the direction of racial change in New Orleans. However, this story exemplified how black athletes were treated in host cities at this time of contested racial spaces.

Despite the level of progress New Orleans had shown in racial integration at this time, Dixon (2008) believed he had convinced the NFL that New Orleans racial climate was progressive enough to support the increasing national affinity for African-American athletic talent. However, a major political hurdle still existed before New Orleans could become the next pro football city - the NFL would have to choose New Orleans over other competing cities to win the next franchise. New Orleans politicians used their legislative muscles to take advantage of the current dilemma facing the commissioner of football – how to legally merge the NFL and the AFL into one league. Louisiana Congressman Hale Boggs and Senator Russell Long pushed the AFL-NFL Antitrust Exemption Bill through Congress on the promise that if they did so, the NFL commissioner would immediately award a franchise to New Orleans. Dixon (2008) reported

the following conversation taking place between Hale Boggs and Pete Rozelle one-half hour before the final vote in Congress:

'Hale, the NFL is very, very appreciative of what you are doing. I just can't thank you enough.' Hale instantly questioned, 'What do you mean you can't thank me enough? New Orleans gets an immediate franchise in the NFL. Isn't that our deal?' The commissioner replied, 'I'm going to do everything I can to bring it about.' Pete's reply was certainly no franchise commitment. Very disappointing, but predictable. With that Hale turned abruptly, seemingly rushing back to his office, mumbling, 'The vote is off!' Pete caught up to Hale with two giant strides, turned him around gently, and said, 'It's a deal, you can count on it!' (Dixon 2008: 70).

Praising Boggs political savvy in this situation, Dave Dixon said, "with that merger, the people of our city made near billionaires out of all NFL owners... the NFL owes New Orleans, big time" (Dixon 2008: 69).

On All Saints Day, November 1, 1966 commissioner Pete Rozelle announced that the NFL's 16th franchise would go to New Orleans. New Orleans paid a \$50,000 franchise fee to create the New Orleans Saints. Tulane University pledged to permit a professional team to use its 82,500 seat stadium as an interim facility until one dedicated to Saints football could be built. Within days after the announcement awarding an NFL team to New Orleans, Dixon was lobbying the state to establish a commission empowered to levy a hotel occupancy tax in metropolitan New Orleans and use the proceeds from finance bonds for a Superdome Sports Stadium (Dixon 2008: 81).

September 17, 1967 marked the first Saints kickoff in front of a sellout crowd of 80,879 against the Los Angeles Rams at Tulane Stadium. Archbishop Hannan delivered a famous prayer that many of the 80,000 in attendance still remember:

Prayer for Our Saints by Philip M. Hannan, Archbishop of New Orleans

God, we ask your blessing upon all who participate in this event, and all who have supported our Saints. Our heavenly father who has instructed us that the 'saints by faith conquered kingdoms....and overcame lions,' grant our Saints an increase of faith and strength so that they will not only overcome the Lions, but also the Bears, the Rams, the Giants, and even those awesome people in Green Bay.

May they continue to tame the Redskins and fetter the Falcons as well as the Eagles. Give to our owners and coaches the continued ability to be as wise as serpents and as simple as doves, so that no good talent will dodge our draft. Grant to ours fans perseverance in their devotion and unlimited lung power, tempered with a sense of charity to all, including the referees.

May our beloved 'Bedlam Bowl' [Tulane Stadium] be a source of good fellowship and may the 'Saints Come Marching In' be a victory march for all, now and in eternity.

This humorous prayer marks the beginning of New Orleanians creating a distinct fan culture surrounding Saints football.

Nine years after the NFL announced awarding the Saints to New Orleans, the Louisiana Superdome opened on August 3, 1975 as a 52 acre, 269,000 square foot home to the New Orleans Saints. The original plan started as a \$35 million, 55,000 seat stadium to be built in New Orleans East. It was completed as a 71,000 seat stadium in Downtown New Orleans at a cost of \$163 million. Built as a venue for conventions, sports events, and other large-scale attractions, the Superdome was another component in the renewal of downtown New Orleans and the civic area that had begun in the 1950s (Kingsley 2007). Like many American cities, post-World War II New Orleans was marked with a declining business district. Lewis (2003) described the construction of the Superdome as an anchor in an expensive and controversial plan to gradually reverse downtown decay. The Dome served as a barrier against blight on the Northern end of Poydras street to encourage investment from there to the Rivergate complex at the southern tip of Poydras by the Mississippi River (Lewis 2003). "The Dome would rise twenty-seven stories above the old railroad yards and be altogether the most visible thing in New Orleans – perhaps in the whole South" (Lewis 2003: 93).

The Superdome emerged as both a physical and symbolic icon of New Orleans downtown redevelopment. Lewis (2003) described the Dome as "a symbol of the fundamental change in New Orleans psychology from the old days when the city was run by a handful of old-timers, whose status was confirmed by membership in one of the elite 'krewes' – the secret societies that ostensibly organized Mardi Gras parades and ball, but additionally organized New

Orleans's formal and informal government. The old, closed conservative city was open for business" (Lewis 2003: 93).

Starting with the momentum of New Orleans capturing an NFL franchise in 1966, the new stadium was described as the "final piece to its 'big league' puzzle" and the last jewel in New Orleans 'big league' crown (Martin 2006: 128). The physical characteristics of the building covered 13 acres and reached 27 stories forming the world's largest steel constructed room (Chafin 1975). Reports marveled at the size and innovative technology contained within this structure. One historian remarked, "what was extraordinary about the stadium was the Babylonia scale of the whole thing...altogether the most visible thing in New Orleans" (Lewis 2003: 93). Historical accounts described the building of the Dome as a symbol of the 'new, New Orleans' (Lewis 2003). The local paper listed the buildings total economic impact over the first 10 years at \$2.6 billion. They said, "no urban renewal project in the history of the area beneficially impacted the surrounding area more than the mushroom that rose on Poydras Street" (*Times-Picayune* January 23, 2010).

Through the years, Saints football developed into its own cultural phenomenon throughout New Orleans. In addition to the normal wins and losses associated with sports, the Saints and the Superdome remained intimately connected to city life and brewed stories of 'Aints', VooDoo curses and 'Who Dats'. Urban legend spun tales of a cursed Superdome and some speculated that the building plopped right on top of the old Girod cemetery, possible burial ground of VooDoo Queen, Marie Laveau. One account of this gravesite said, "abandoned for years, its iron caskets and bones were tossed up by excavation gear in the early 1970s as the crews moved in to build... the Superdome" (*Times-Picayune* September 12, 2005). Water-cooler talks pinpointed the Saints football team as the main target of the curse, whose losing streaks were supernaturally linked to the ground upon which the gridiron lies. In the 1980s, continuous losing streaks led frustrated fans to don brown paper bags over their heads as a symbol of shame, and proclaim their team better deserved the name, "Aints". In contrast, the

“Who Dats” emerged, eager to show support for the Saints. On game-day the Superdome housed hard-core Saints fans – the Who Dats – named for their football chant, “Who Dat? Who Dat? Who Dat say dey gonna beat dem Saints?” As the years ticked by, New Orleanians continued to foster this strong local fan culture surrounding the New Orleans Saints.

Nearly 20 years after the inception of the New Orleans Saints, Tom Benson flanked by Governor Edwin Edwards announced that Benson had signed a deal to purchase the Saints for \$64 million. The current value of the franchise in 2009 was estimated by Forbes to be around \$942 million (*Times-Picayune* December 18, 2009). In 2001, Tom Benson inked a deal with Louisiana Governor Mike Foster which resulted in a 10 year lease agreement where the State would subsidize \$187 million over the length of the term. This guaranteed the Saints an annual subsidy starting at \$12.5 million and escalating to \$23.5 million in the final few years of the deal (Duncan 2010). Like other cities housing professional sports teams, New Orleans and the state of Louisiana were being forced to keep up with the rising growth of the NFL.

Since the creation of the modern day National Football League, professional football saw tremendous growth not only in terms of financial value, but also as an American cultural preference. Baseball was America’s pastime. An information packet distributed by the NFL to credentialed members of the media attending Super Bowl XLIV in February 2010, was titled “NFL: America’s Choice.” This press packet contained several points of information about the National Football League compiled mostly from NFL records and Nielson Media Research but also from the Harris Poll and ESPN Sports Poll. The information boasted that professional football moved ahead of baseball as the fans’ favorite for the first time in 1965. In addition, professional football gained in popularity more than any other sport since 1985. The National Football League is America’s most popular sports league, comprised of 32 franchises that compete each year to win the Super Bowl, which the NFL Super Bowl’s media center boasts as the world’s biggest annual sporting event. According to the Harris Poll on American attitudes toward sports, the NFL has been the most popular sport in America for more than four decades.

During the 2009 season leading up to the Saints Super Bowl win, professional football was the favorite sport of more people (31 percent) than the combined total of the next three professional sports- baseball (16 percent), auto racing (8 percent) and men's pro basketball (6 percent). The Harris Poll also found that NFL football was the favorite spectator sport among women. They estimated 375,000 women attended NFL games each weekend and more than 45 million women watched NFL games on television.

According to NFL and Nielson Media Research compiled in the Super Bowl XLIV press packets, the 18 most-watched programs in TV history were all Super Bowls. Not just sports programs, but all television programming. NFL viewership was 116 percent higher than other prime-time programming. Among sports, the NFL attracted more viewers than America's other popular men's professional sports leagues (Super Bowl XLIV press packet).

By 2005, the growth of the NFL into a cultural and financial powerhouse left Louisiana struggling with its role as the enabling, yet non-profit benefiting partner of the NFL. Despite the growing success of the NFL and the steep price Louisiana was paying to retain a team, by 2005 the team had never sold out the capacity of the Superdome on a season ticket basis.

In 2004 and 2005, the Saints organization had a very poor relationship with the New Orleans public. The local papers documented sour relationships between Saints owner and State officials as the public subsidy deal became more of a burden to fund. Years of losing seasons coupled with poor internal team management disheartened Saints fans and could be seen through a lack of ticket sales to home games. Impending local television blackouts of games plagued the 2004 season due to lack of attendance requirements at individual games. Although, NFL marketing reports often ranked Saints fans among the most loyal in professional sports. This honor was due to their rate of attendance at games when stacked up against number of losses throughout the teams' history.

Friday night, August 26, 2005 was the last game the Saints would play in the Louisiana Superdome during the 2005 season. When Hurricane Katrina struck New Orleans, the Saints

football team fled to a temporary home in San Antonio, Texas. They played 3 'Home' games in the Alamodome in San Antonio and 4 'Home' games in Tiger Stadium at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge. Like the rest of the world, the members of the Saints football team watched the destruction of New Orleans from the sidelines.

As Hurricane Katrina's wind and waters poured down upon New Orleans, the Superdome became known as the "shelter of last resort," as documented by thousands of media accounts. In the weeks following Katrina, the Superdome stood as an emblem of all that went wrong. According to Kingsley, "the popular symbol that had communicated pride in the city's progress now became a symbol of civic failure" (2007: 721). When discussing the Superdome in the immediate aftermath of Katrina one person said, "the dome is wrecked, and it is a place known for misery right now. But it can be refurbished. Its rebuilding can be a hopeful sign to the hundreds and thousands of residents who have been scattered across the region by Hurricane Katrina" (*Times-Picayune* September 5, 2005).

Between September and the end of December in 2005, the newspaper articles regarding the Superdome sound like a sad child begging, as editorial writers plead for the return of the New Orleans Saints to their home city. Fans were enraged at the possibility that the Saints could relocate permanently to San Antonio, Texas. They directed their anger towards Saints owner Tom Benson, marking Katrina rotting refrigerators with the spray painted words, *Tom Benson Inside*. At the time, comparing Benson to the disgusting, rotting, stench and maggot filled contents of the refrigerators was the ultimate insult. Questions about the future of New Orleans tied into questions about the ability of the city to recover enough to support major league sports. Sentiments arose such as "only time will tell if the city that care forgot will become the city that sports forgot" (*Times-Picayune* December 31, 2005).

In January 2006, NFL commissioner Paul Tagliabue announced that the Saints would return to New Orleans. The Superdome would be transformed, ready to host football again in 2006. During this time, Tom Benson transformed "from a community villain to a community

hero” by acquiring coach Sean Payton, quarterback Drew Brees, and running back Reggie Bush. The Saints returned to play in the Superdome- repaired from Katrina damage- on Monday night September 25, 2006. In New Orleans, people refer to that homecoming game as ‘that Monday night game.’ The Superdome was filled to capacity as the Saints sold out of season tickets for the first time in franchise history. Three years after the Saints returned to New Orleans, Saintsmania swept across the region as excitement rose over a winning 2009 season culminating in New Orleans first Super Bowl victory. The 2009 NFL season was the most-watched season in two decades. Not only had the Saints returned to New Orleans following the Hurricane Katrina disaster, they were enjoying success beyond any the team had ever seen.

The fifty year history of the Saints organization in New Orleans spanning from 1960 through 2010 introduces how the Saints fit into the larger urban framework of life in New Orleans. While most sports team histories focus on coaching tenures, star players, and great defeats and triumphs on the playing field, this case presents the history of the Saints as a player in the political, economic, and social events taking place in the city and larger society around them. The history of the team coincides with the history of the city in which it lives. The year 2005 marked a new tone for the story of the Saints where Hurricane Katrina sparked a narrative arc that extended throughout the Saints relationship with New Orleans. Before, the Saints story was one of the growing business of professional sports, focused on cultivating fans and situated within a historical context of city race relations. For the Saints and for New Orleans, Hurricane Katrina in 2005 and the handful of tumultuous years that immediately followed began to consume their story. People in New Orleans talk about events in their lives as happening either pre-Katrina or post-Katrina. Like all of New Orleans, the history of the Saints had been split into a pre and post Katrina dichotomy. Therefore, the following chapter focuses on the Saints organization between 2005 and 2010 from Hurricane Katrina until the Saints first Super Bowl win.

CHAPTER 5: FROM SHELTER OF LAST RESORT TO WHO DAT SPORT: How New Orleans built a narrative of renewal around Saints football

A piece of artwork hangs on the brick wall of The Corner Bar in New Orleans French Quarter. Instead of a standard canvas, the artist used a wooden door- presumably from a New Orleans home- as the medium for his brush strokes. The word KATRINA scrolls along the bottom of the door in shades of watery blue. The word SAINTS arches across the top of the door in ceremonious black and gold hues. Below the black and gold words WORLD CHAMPS, a replica of a New Orleans historical building marker is covered with what some locals refer to as “the Katrina Cross” or “Katrina tattoo.” Following Hurricane Katrina, a ubiquitous symbol spread across the city as every house in New Orleans bore spray paint in the shape of an “X” indicating the house had been inspected by a search and rescue group. The artist used orange spray paint in his interpretation of the Katrina Cross on this piece of artwork. Along the left side of this door, a rendition of the Lombardi Trophy – the prize for winning the Super Bowl – rests on top of a pile of crawfish. Mirroring this, along the right side of the door is an image of the green New Orleans street car that runs along St. Charles Avenue. This one colorful piece of artwork captured visually the extent to which New Orleanians intertwine Hurricane Katrina and the Saints into a narrative of renewal.

As this painting suggests, in the years following Katrina, the Saints became an integral part of New Orleanians consciousness about the city’s renewal. Talk of Hurricane Katrina infiltrated New Orleanians stories about Saints football. In 2005, the Superdome became the worldwide symbol of the Hurricane Katrina disaster. When the Saints football team returned to the Superdome in 2006, this symbolism transformed into one of hope. As the Saints played that Monday night game in the Superdome, it became a powerful symbol that what was broken could be repaired- a symbol not just of football and the Dome but, of the renewal of New Orleans. This rebirth was not only attributed to the physical repair of the Superdome but rather

one of the spiritual renewal of the city people. This narrative began prior to but intensified during the Saints Super Bowl winning season.

When the Saints won the Super Bowl in 2010, the narrative arch reported over and over in the national media sounded as follows: A Hurricane swept through New Orleans leaving the city and their beloved football team in ruins. Coach Sean Payton and Quarterback Drew Brees swooped in as saviors that would place New Orleans hopes and dreams on their shoulders as they lead their football team and their city to victory. The Saints rescued a city and region from despair. Although the Cinderella story claimed by the national media sounded somewhat simplistic, the nuances of how New Orleanians experienced and described Saints football moments revealed that they created meaningful local recovery narratives from the Saints success.

The Saints were used as a vehicle to deliver messages about New Orleans recovery after Katrina both as marketing messages to promote a positive city image to outsiders and as a way for New Orleanians to deliver messages inward to themselves. The local narratives formed around the role of Saints football in New Orleans recovery reflected real emotions and experiences for city residents that manifested into messages that New Orleanians told about themselves and about their home city. People talked about regaining something lost and using the Saints to show a commitment to New Orleans. Although sport spaces may seem like unlikely places to construct meaningful post-disaster recovery narratives, Vale (2006) reminds us that an emphasis on symbolic milestones, such as restoring architectural landmarks or resuming celebratory events are a common theme for post-disaster recovery. The Saints returning to New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina serves as a significant symbolic milestone that helped heal the New Orleans community and helped them feel recovered.

Sport and urban development literature often emphasizes the power of sports to promote an enhanced city image to a national audience. The experience in New Orleans shows that 'promoting an enhanced city image' is too simplistic to explain the complexities of how

different outlets produced and delivered sometimes contradictory messages about New Orleans recovery. On one hand city images were marketed messages delivered to a national audience in order to promote the idea that New Orleans was recovered enough to be a vibrant place for tourists. The value in this type of messages had economic implications as the Saints are part of the tourism based economy on which the city relies. On the other hand, there were messages created by New Orleanians for New Orleanians about the city's recovery. These fostered a narrative of renewal rooted in real emotions and experiences where the Saints were a symbol of hope that helped with the psychological and emotional aspect of city rebuilding. Regaining the tradition of Saints football was something that helped New Orleanians feel reconnected to their home or feel like they were getting back to their old selves. City residents were not concerned with projecting these messages of recovery to an outside audience but rather fostering a message amongst themselves that said "we can recover" and "we are a city people that has the perseverance" to do so.

Both the marketed city images and the messages that New Orleanians fostered amongst themselves contributed to creating the narrative of renewal. Good or bad, sport spaces had the ability to reflect what was happening in the city in a particular moment. The messages delivered through the Superdome demonstrated this complexity as the Dome delivered a negative image of the city in the days during Katrina and a positive image of the city as the Saints returned to play football. Sport spaces will not automatically deliver an 'enhanced city image' but rather continue to be a space that reflects situational relevance. In addition, there exists contradictions in using Saints football to deliver messages about city recovery. Even though city rebuilding after disaster thrives on the power of architecture and celebratory festivals to symbolize recovery, "the downside of such an emphasis is that dominant symbols can be allowed to mask the less visible parts of the city, especially as marketed to outsiders" (Vale 2006: 156).

The Superdome experienced rebuilding and recovery at a rapid pace, which was in direct contrast to the neighborhoods surrounding it and the citizens struggling to rebuild their

lives years after the storm made landfall. This reality does not undermine the fact that the narrative of renewal was powerful and real in helping New Orleanians feel recovered but rather underscores the complexity of how questions of social justice can be negotiated through sport spaces. The Superdome was an important symbolic space for transforming negative images into positive ones. Narratives speaking inwards and outwards can be contradictory as they can obscure, in this case, the terrible experience of Katrina even as they offer hope and healing to the community.

The Shelter of Last Resort

The legacy of the Superdome changed in 2005 as Hurricane Katrina targeted New Orleans. Breaking news from the *Times-Picayune* on August 27, 2005 reported the following message, “Nagin said the city would open the Superdome as a shelter of last resort for evacuees with special needs. He advised anyone planning to stay there to bring their own food, drinks and other comforts such as folding chairs, as if planning to go camping.” The reality did not resemble camping in any way. As Hurricane Katrina’s winds and waters poured down upon New Orleans, the Superdome became known as the “shelter of last resort,” as documented by thousands of media accounts. It was first uttered as a matter-of-fact statement from the lips of the mayor and within days that phrase morphed into an emotionally charged statement that conjured up a variety of intense meanings.

Analyzing local news stories published the week Katrina made landfall revealed different metaphors used to describe the Superdome during this buildings time as a negative icon for New Orleans. On August 29, 2005, the *Times-Picayune* referred to the Dome as “ground zero,” marking the Superdome as the epicenter of the Hurricane Katrina disaster. Describing the scenario in the Superdome started out somewhat mild in the local media, only hinting at the inadequacy of conditions inside. “The Dome was set up as a divided safe haven, with one side of the facility for the disabled and medically ill, where food and water and emergency personnel

were plentiful. For the masses of residents, however, there was the other side, where all that was provided was a concrete stadium built for athletes and spectators” (*Times-Picayune* August 29, 2005).

Words and phrases used in the media to describe the Superdome included, “a sprawling building meant more for touchdowns than emergencies”, “safe haven”, “makeshift shelter”, “ a place to ride out the storm”, “tightly guarded by young men and women in Army fatigues”, and “last resort” (*Times-Picayune* August 29, 2005). As the days clicked by the language used to describe the conditions in the Superdome became more intense. According to reports, “more than 25,000 refugees were housed in the sweltering Superdome, saying that the Dome was filthy and smelled bad” (*Times-Picayune* August 30, 2005). Later that same day, Louisiana’s “most famous roof began to fail” as Hurricane Katrina ripped holes in the roof of the Superdome and left the “CDB landmark in tatters” as the Superdome’s “iconic curved roof” was stripped away (*Times-Picayune* August 30, 2005). Language used to describe the Superdome became darker, more vivid, and more intense. No longer describing the scene as a safe haven or shelter, the media began describing this place as an intolerable refuge. According to news reports, “The Superdome resembled a scene from the Apocalypse... a hellish environment of short tempers, unbearable heat and the overwhelming stench of human waste” (*Times-Picayune* September 1, 2005). Four days later, all of these intense images inside the Superdome came to a screeching halt in news stories as the city and the Dome were emptied. Almost eerily, the news reported in a matter of fact tone, “by early evening the Superdome was expected to be empty” (*Times-Picayune* September 3, 2005). The idea of an empty Dome and empty city was silent and sad.

Limited oral histories exist documenting what the experience was like for those in and around the Dome in the days following Katrina. These accounts suggested that the lived experiences were much worse than any tidbits news reporters provided to the rest of the world to consume. The people seeking shelter inside the Superdome were trapped surrounded by a

sickening stench and suffocating heat with no food and water for several days. Through publications of recorded interviews with people who were in the Superdome in the aftermath of Katrina, these stories described an intensely grueling and terrifying experience. Those inside described the Superdome as a prison, with the people inside being held at gunpoint, rather than a shelter from the storm. “We thought we was going to a shelter, but it was more of a prison” (Owens from Penner and Ferdinand 2009: 144). Another man wrote, “what began as a place of rescue had turned into Alcatraz Prison. We could not leave. We could not escape the horrific odor of human waste that spread throughout the building” (Harris 2008: 31). People described the extensive search of their belongings upon entering the Superdome as one way of illustrating the prison-like management of the shelter. “As we were waiting in the incredibly slow line, some of us were amazed that here we were going in to a homeless shelter and they were thoroughly searching us as if we were criminals” (Harris 2008: 17).

A common theme that ran through each account of being in the Superdome involved people fearing for their lives, believing they would be murdered at the hands of the military personnel occupying the Dome. One man said, “I believe with all my heart the military was going to kill us” (Penner and Ferdinand 2009: 145). The militarization of disaster response continued to criminalize New Orleanians. “People were forced out by gunpoint. People think that the rescue mission was not a military mission, but this was a military operation. People with guns telling you what to do, when to do it, where to stand, what not to do. Everywhere” (Vollen and Ying 2008: 245).

As evacuees faced these external forces, their internal stories and experiences reflected a sense of community and family support. One overwhelming similarity between accounts of being in the Superdome focused on people relying on each other, helping each other out, and sticking together. “Everybody was trying to hold each other up. If it wasn’t for just everybody trying to pull together and save each other, then a lot more of us would have died. We all we had” (Penner and Ferdinand 2009: 145). The idea of creating tiny, support communities was

evident in another first-hand account of someone stranded in New Orleans after Katrina who said, “when individuals has to fight to find food or water, it meant looking out for yourself. But when these basic needs were met, people began to look out for each other, working together and constructing a community” (Bradshaw and Slonksy 2005). Constructing a sense of community was important for New Orleanians within this dark and desperate situation.

Racial disparities in New Orleans came screaming to the forefront as the country watched images of New Orleans citizens trapped inside and around a building that had been meant for football. A single image of the people in the Superdome made one reality very clear - the majority of people left stranded in New Orleans during Katrina were African-American and poor. “You could count the white people in the rest of the Superdome on one hand. I say 99 percent black and poor. I know everybody else feels like we weren’t in a major city in America, our country” (Penner and Ferdinand 2009: 144).

In the months that followed, these images of what took place in the Superdome became connected to larger concepts surrounding Hurricane Katrina including racism, poverty, failed government response and the militarization of disaster management. As described by activist author Michael Eric Dyson, “tens of thousands of poor citizens in New Orleans were thrust into chaos and calamity in shelters of last resort inside the Superdome and convention center... “filth and feces, stench and urine, hunger and hopelessness, anarchy and anxiety, and darkness and death polluted the air as the stranded, largely poor exiles were crammed into unforgiving spaces that reeked of unrelieved horror for up to five days” (Dyson 2006: 71). As Dyson (2006) described the Superdome, he pointed out that it was a scene of a people whose government had forsaken them.

The Dome stood as an emblem of all that went wrong. “New Orleans now had a new word for what happens to people unlucky enough to fall into the hands of the people purporting to save them: domed. As in ‘I just got domed,’ or ‘if the police knock on your door, don’t answer, ‘cause you might get domed.’ To be domed is to be herded into a domed sports building – the

Superdome, the Astrodome, the Maravich basketball arena at Louisiana State University – for your own safety” (Lewis 2005). The mighty Superdome, “the popular symbol that had communicated pride in the city’s progress now became a symbol of civic failure” (Kingsley 2007:721). As one author pointed out, if our television screens in the aftermath of Katrina showed the city’s neighborhoods and destroyed homes, the most compelling image of a single building was that of the Superdome (Kingsley 2007: 724). The Superdome as a space of meaning and memory delivered city images to a national audience but as the ‘shelter of last resort’, these were not positive city images. On the one year anniversary of Katrina, the Superdome became the most used image in the news media (Kingsley 2007). Sport spaces do not automatically deliver an ‘enhanced city image’ but rather continue to be a space that negotiates and projects city images that are relevant in particular moments to reflect the larger social context within which they are situated.

Since those horrible days in 2005, the Superdome has been refurbished and transformed from a symbol of despair to a symbol of hope. Once an emblem of all that went wrong, the Superdome has since been used as a symbol of success in recovery. There exists contradictions in using Saints football to craft and deliver messages about city recovery. Even though city rebuilding after disaster thrives on the power of architecture and celebratory events to symbolize recovery, these symbols can mask less visible parts of city recovery (Vale 2006: 156). Those who were in the Superdome during Katrina continued to live with the trauma they experienced and are unlikely to be the same people occupying the seats of the Superdome on Saints game day. Years later, many were traumatized repeatedly when they could not come back to New Orleans or returned to find their neighborhoods irreparably changed. Five years after Katrina, New Orleans still had 43,755 blighted homes or empty lots throughout the city (*Benchmarks for Blight*, www.gnocdc.org). The Superdome was important symbolically but the messages can be contradictory as they can obscure the terrible experience of Katrina even as they offer hope.

The scene inside the Superdome during Katrina was one that brought poverty, racism and failed government response to the forefront. The outrage towards these injustices faded too quickly as a commitment to rectify these wrongs disappeared. In the immediate aftermath of Katrina, national news coverage pumped story after story across America about the plight of New Orleans. Across the country, as people far removed from the storm tired of hearing stories from New Orleans, the term 'Katrina fatigue' was coined. Katrina fatigue sent a message that people outside of New Orleans no longer cared or refused to accept the breadth of social injustices linked to disaster response and recovery. New Orleanians were trapped in the reality of a slow, tortoise-like pace of recovery.

However, the Superdome experienced a different trajectory. The need to transform the Superdome from the shelter of last resort during Hurricane Katrina into a symbol of hope for the recovery was strong. Because of the desperate circumstances within the Dome during Katrina and the Dome serving as an emblem of all that went wrong, that particular space carried powerful symbolism. The failed response to Katrina exposed already present, deep racial divides among New Orleans residents. The militarization of disaster response painted the picture of a national government numb to the human rights of its own citizens, particularly when they are poor and African-American. These larger, structural problems that permeated the state of American society came to the forefront in an unlikely place - a venue that was meant for football. Lapchick (2005) reminded us that "in race tumultuous times, it is not easy to find ways to build a bridge to close the gap between various racial groups. New Orleans in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina forced America to confront race and poverty in ways we have not been able to do in recent years" (1). The Superdome remains as a powerful icon on New Orleans landscape that can remind us of both the injustices made visible by Katrina and victories won for city recovery.

Football offered a platform for changing the narrative where stories of winning replaced stories of failure and people could talk about something that united people across races instead

of divided them. One did not have to be present in the Superdome in the days surrounding Katrina to mourn the condition of the city and feel heartbreak for the plight of fellow humans. A tremendous sadness blanketed the city after Katrina and the citizens of New Orleans were looking for something, anything, to feel positive about. They found a common rallying point when the Saints returned to play football in the Superdome on September 25, 2006. No commitment to eliminate racism and structural disparities gained the same momentum as rallying around Saints football.

They're Home, There's Hope

“For the past year life has been defined by what has been lost. Tonight in the Superdome life will be defined by something regained” (*Times-Picayune* September 25, 2006). The psychological hold the Superdome, as the shelter of last resort, held over the city needed to be changed into something that offered hope instead of symbolizing despair. For the Saints organization and for the Superdome, out of disaster came opportunity. According to NFL commissioner Paul Tagliabue, this was a chance to make the Dome better.

The physical presence of the Superdome in downtown New Orleans had been significant since its initial construction. Especially in post-Katrina New Orleans, physical spaces took on such an important meaning within the narrative of renewal. Every restaurant re-opening or neighbor's porch light turning on was a small victory. The magnitude of the Superdome both physically and symbolically gave it a city-wide significance instead of stringing together small victories. If one bar re-opening was a sign that one block could recover then something as big as the Superdome re-opening was a sign that the whole city could recover. Lofland (2007) mentions the grief felt by people when some of their favorite places no longer exist. Post-Katrina New Orleans was a hyper-extreme example of this loss.

The Superdome restoration project was unprecedented in American stadium history. A Katrina exhibit in the Superdome showcased large picture posters whose captions offered the

following statistics about the scope of repairs the Superdome required. Water from the storm invaded the 2,000,000 square feet of interior space causing damage to ceilings, walls, floors, electrical equipment and scoreboards. The Superdome management group had nine months to complete \$187 million in renovations. The scope of the project included replacing 800,000 square feet of ceiling tile, 700,000 square feet of sheet rock, and 1.6 million square feet of flooring. Crews hauled away 4,000 tons of debris, ripped out 1.6 million square feet of carpet and pumped 3.8 million gallons of water out of the stadium garages. Suites, concession areas, and club lounges were all gutted and completely rebuilt. Repairing the Superdome's iconic roof involved replacing 440,000 square feet of metal decking, atop a 270 foot roof with a severe slope. The \$32 million roof job was completed in 144 days and has been described as the world's largest re-roofing job.

The newly repaired Superdome with its gleaming white roof contrasted with the majority of its surroundings, as the rest of the city did not enjoy the same swift recovery. Although this contradiction existed, it did not undermine the psychological and emotional importance that New Orleanians attached to their experiences with the Saints return to New Orleans. In a speech delivered to students at the University of New Orleans, Doug Thornton, the executive director of SMG, the management company that operates the Superdome said he knew if they failed to get the Dome ready and failed to have the Saints game on September 25, 2006, it would have changed the city's history. Quoted in Donnes (2007) book on the Saints, Thornton offered the following insight:

I think we all knew that not rebuilding the Dome would be a huge psychological blow to the city. It would have taken a while to tear it down, so it would have sat right there in downtown New Orleans, abandoned and in ruins. You can see the Superdome from almost every direction when you come into the city. What do you think it would have done to the heart of the people if it had just sat there rotting? And then, if it did come down, what would be here? For a long time there'd be nothing: just a big, gaping hole in the middle of the city (Donnes 2007: 46-47).

The narrative of renewal surrounding Saints football was rooted in real emotions and experiences for New Orleans people that were symptomatic of a local football culture and sense of fan community that was present in New Orleans before the Dome re-opened after Katrina.

On Monday night September 25, 2006 the Saints returned to play in the Superdome for the first time since Hurricane Katrina. For the first time in franchise history, the Superdome was sold out for the entire season. The press box was so full of credentialed media that overflow media members were set up in the arena next door. The night was anticipated to be a seminal moment in the recovery of the city and in the history of the Superdome. As described in the local paper, "The Saints return to their home field to play a nationally televised football game that has come to embody the rebirth of one of America's most beloved cities. And while many parts of New Orleans and the surrounding area still bear the deep scars of the horrific damage inflicted more than a year ago by Hurricane Katrina, tonight's party against the Atlanta Falcons provides a welcomed respite from the often depressing grind of everyday life for those who call this area home" (*Times-Picayune* September 25, 2006).

Thousands of fans, even those without game tickets, swarmed to the festivities taking place around the Superdome. Free concerts and The NFL Experience, which includes inflatable games for young people to play, attracted crowds to the areas outside the Superdome. Individual game tickets were being sold on the streets for prices inflated beyond \$1,000 for a single ticket. Overshadowing the concerts and football festivities was the idea of coming home to something positive in a time when much of New Orleans focus had been about all the things that had been lost – homes, loved ones, neighborhoods. This event was a way to connect displaced people with their home. One man who talked about the importance of that game shared the following experiences:

That's when I became a season ticket holder. It was not until then really. I never missed a Saints game on TV at least and went to a lot of them but never had I been a season ticket holder until 2006 or 2005, whatever it was. It was post-Katrina. I don't believe that the Saints saved the world and saved New Orleans after Katrina but that game back did mean something to me. I was sitting in Tupelo, Mississippi wondering if I should get a

job at Best Buy and wondering if I was ever going to come back to New Orleans for real. I mean it was serious consideration for all of us. When I did get back to the house, I was living with my roommate and my mom was staying with us because her house was wiped out and I just remember seeing on TV that they had signed Drew Brees. So they hadn't drafted Reggie Bush yet but they had signed Drew Brees and the reason we got season tickets was for that game. I haven't missed a Saints game since then.

U2 and Green Day, the star musical talent performing during the game, moved Saints fans to an emotional mix of passion, sadness, and hope with their rendition of the punk song *The Saints Are Coming*. Goose bumps covered the skin of those listening with the soft opening lyrics, "there is a house in New Orleans they call the Superdome." Tears streamed down cheeks upon hearing the words, "I cried to my daddy on the telephone how long now until the clouds unroll and you come home." By the time the drum beats hastened and the guitars amplified to belt out the repeated mantra, "the Saints are coming, the Saints are coming," fans shook in a frenzied excitement. For months afterwards, I would hear that song pop up on cell phones of New Orleanians who had downloaded it for their ring tone.

People who talked about that Monday night game have trouble finding words to describe what they were feeling. One interviewee said, "Oh yeah, it was a huge deal. It was like a huge deal. I think I might have cried for it. I can't even tell you why I have so much emotion about it. There's just a lot of emotion that's involved with it that's uncontrollable and there's some weird place that I can't even tell you where it's from."

The intensity, joy, and magnitude of the Saints being back in New Orleans was real for the people in the city. Interviewees who recalled their experiences at Saints games talked about how the first game back in the Superdome meant more to them and was more important to the people of New Orleans than when the Saints went on to win the Super Bowl a few years later. One man said, "I went and it was the coolest sporting event I've ever been to in my life. I didn't go to the Super Bowl but even if I had gone to the Super Bowl - and I refer to the Saints Super Bowl as *the* Super Bowl- so even if I had gone to that, you still will never match that same feeling because it wasn't just a football game." When watching Saints games, "that tingling

feeling going up your spine;” that feeling grew more pronounced after Katrina, according to several fans (*Times-Picayune* April 3, 2010). One interviewee succinctly said, “being around here in 2006 I think was kind of something special.”

With that explosive football game, the Saints solidified themselves as a symbol of renewal. “It would be an extraordinary moment full of symbols: New Orleans rising from the dead, in prime time on your TV set, at the very spot in the days following Katrina where a nation had watched horrible scenes of a city swimming, of its people begging for help” (Dixon 2008:7). Headlines such as “They’re Home. There’s Hope,” splattered across national media pages to describe the Saints and called the Superdome “the prettiest vision in a city so desperately in need of beauty” (*Sporting News*, September 29, 2006). While giving a lecture to students in a sport management class at Tulane University, elected official Arnie Fielkow said, “the first Saints game back in the Superdome truly served as a catalyst that sparked the rebuilding of New Orleans.” That game was a mega-event that served as a vehicle for delivering messages about the recovery of New Orleans. But, it was also an event experienced by New Orleanians that served as both an outlet for a mix of emotions and a symbol of something positive regained for New Orleans.

Places can be thought of as especially meaningful spaces, rich in associations and steeped in sentiment (Lofland 2007). Firey (1945) argued that pieces of the built environment can matter to people in a symbolic or sentimental way. Firey’s (1945) work contributed to the idea that places should be evaluated based not only on what they might do to the natural environment, but for what they might do to communities. The Superdome descriptions – both positive and negative – offered a description of how spaces are emotionally meaningful. Lofland (2007) found holes in sociological literature saying it did not contain, for example, any articles about ‘grieving for the lost barbershop’, or detailing the destruction by redevelopment of well-beloved bars (65). However, she says that the scant literature that does exist on the links between people and particular public spaces contains strong suggestions of the emotionally

meaningful nature. Katrina offered an opportunity to fill in this hole in the literature by looking at the Superdome. The Superdome, as an icon of city progress, was lost for awhile after Katrina like so many things in New Orleans. The Superdome is what Lofland (2007) would describe as a memorialized locale, which are small pieces of the public realm that, because of the events that happened take on, for some set of persons, the aura of 'sacred places' (65). For the Superdome and New Orleans this included both the negative sacred aura of the Dome as shelter of last resort and the positive sacred aura of the Dome as a place for football.

Without being prompted by interview questions, each interview participant in this study talked about Hurricane Katrina as they talked about being a Saints fan. One way in which New Orleans residents interpreted this idea of renewal was using the Saints to feel connected to New Orleans post-Katrina. One interviewee described her decision to buy season tickets as a way of showing she was "coming back to New Orleans with a vengeance" after Hurricane Katrina exiled her to Baton Rouge for six months. Both interviewees and residents quoted in the local paper mentioned that they bought Saints season tickets to show their commitment to New Orleans after Katrina (*Times-Picayune* April 4, 2010). News stories depicted the Saints fan who lost everything in Katrina but refused to get rid of his season tickets (*Times-Picayune* September 10, 2010).

One interviewee said, "the steam, the momentum of coming back and rebuilding had kind of worn off and people were realizing how tough it was going to be. And right then, it [the Saints returning to New Orleans] was something that made everyone feel better." One man who became a Saints fan when he moved to New Orleans in 2006 said he thought having the Saints in New Orleans lifted peoples morale and made people happier. He explained that morale boost might have kept people here who might have left or not come back to New Orleans. He said of post-Katrina New Orleans in 2006, "it kind of sucks here but I'm happier now so I'm going to stay. And seeing people happier might attract other people." The local paper talked about Saints games in post-Katrina New Orleans saying, "just milling around,

soaking it in, being a part of it because there was better than being home, because home might be a trailer a gutted house or a slab” (*Times-Picayune* November 11, 2009).

One survey response explained how the Saints were important to New Orleans because they gave people a renewed faith in the city, especially post-Katrina. “After Katrina, the Saints gave me hope that we as a city could scrape, scratch and claw our way to the top. Attending the first home game back in the dome showed that as a city we are a family first and everything else comes second.” Another respondent explained, “they are our Saints. When nobody thought we could make it past Katrina, we did. Nobody ever gave them credit as a football team and they earned it.” One interviewee said, “there was a lot of judgment here then. I remember people talking in the news about the Saints playing a game. And everyone was like ‘why are the Saints playing? The cities been devastated what are they thinking?’ You know but really people needed something to normalize their lives a little bit. And something positive to join in with one another.”

The Superdome served as a place and space for negotiating messages that that spoke inwards to New Orleans residents and outwards to those watching New Orleans events through the lens of broadcast media. In addition to symbolic relevance, celebratory sports events offered a place to engage in real experiences and interactions with other people who wanted to feel attached to New Orleans and attached to each other. Three years after the Saints returned to play that Monday night football game in the Superdome, the football team gave New Orleanians another reason to come together and celebrate. The story of the Saints as a symbol of renewal intensified during an unprecedented winning season in 2009, resulting in the Saints first Super Bowl victory on February 7, 2010. The events surrounding the Saints Super Bowl win offered an extreme example of people seeing community cohesion through a shared positive experience.

We Have Endured the American Nightmare, It's Our Turn to Live the American Dream

Figure 1: Here lies Vera



A makeshift memorial on the corner of Magazine Street and Jackson Street in New Orleans paid tribute to three monumental events in New Orleans history: Hurricane Katrina, the BP oil spill, and the Saints first Super Bowl win. This demonstrates the importance to which New Orleanians elevated Saints football.

In the days after Hurricane Katrina, a makeshift grave appeared on the corner of Magazine and Jackson streets in Uptown New Orleans. Beneath a modest wooden cross, outlined with stacks of bricks, and covered with a white sheet, the black spray painted words *Here Lies Vera* and *God Help Us* rested as a heart-wrenching reality of Hurricane Katrina. Vera Smith was killed by a hit and run driver on a Tuesday night after Hurricane Katrina made landfall. Her body lay in the street for four days while officials were too overwhelmed with

Katrina's destruction to provide help. Neighbors decided to bury her themselves, covering her with a sheet and crafting a make-shift grave out of bricks. This temporary grave site went on to become a spontaneous memorial bearing a large iron cross, small offerings from neighbors, and a sign bearing Vera's name along with the date August 29, 2005. It stood as a remembrance of tragic events during Hurricane Katrina. After the Saints won the Super Bowl, Vera's memorial was joined by a new memorial structure. It was one that paid tribute to the New Orleans Saints Super Bowl victory. A year later, a third structure completed the scene as a memorial to the BP oil spill, an event which had devastating effects on the region. The BP oil spill occurred in April 2010 when an oil rig explosion caused oil to flow into the Gulf of Mexico for three months. The explosion killed eleven people and sent an estimated 4.9 billion barrels of crude oil into the Gulf. The gushing oil caused extensive damage to marine habitats and the Gulf's fishing and tourism industries. Including an altar for Saints football in this trifecta of informal monuments served as powerful evidence of the level of importance in which New Orleanians place Saints football.

The Saints addition to this makeshift memorial was established after the 2009 season culminated in the Saints first Super Bowl win on February 7, 2010. The Super Bowl winning season intensified a narrative of renewal already present surrounding Saints football and put positive messages about New Orleans recovery back into the national spotlight. This time period also offered sports related events where people could experience a shared sense of euphoria and collective engagement. During this time period, as the Saints crept towards a 13-0 season record, the excitement surrounding Saints football could be seen all over New Orleans. Throngs of fans would line up along Airline Highway to welcome the winning team back from games played on the road. An Orleans Parish Civil District Court judge ordered a trial delay in light of the Saints trip to the Super Bowl. A small church sign that displayed inspirational messages read, 'Jesus is undefeated and so are his Saints.' Saints chaplain Reverend Tony Richard scripted a playoff prayer for the Who Dat Nation. Saints themed songs infiltrated the local radio as the winning season prompted various musicians to create a new slew of Saints

songs. It seemed a newly authored Who Dat song would be playing on the radio every week. The song *Halftime* that became an anthem for the Saints players in 2009 played on a continuous loop in one local Walgreens. One person standing in line said they never get tired of hearing that song.

While pushing a shopping cart through the grocery aisle, instead of hearing daily specials, shoppers would hear Saints score updates being broadcast over the speaker system. On any Sunday morning in 2009 when the Saints played, every cashier in Rouses supermarket donned a Saints jersey instead of a standard company shirt. Instead of usual recess at a local elementary school, the students and faculty raised a Saints flag in the schoolyard and second-lined their way to the playground (*Times-Picayune* September 16, 2010). Oschner hospital distributed onesies printed with the words “Where Saints fans are born” to any babies born at Oschner hospital over the weekend the Saints played in the Super Bowl (*Times-Picayune* February 7, 2010). One person even put a Saints jersey on a fan being buried in her coffin (*Times-Picayune* February 5, 2010). This time period was an extreme case of Saints fans coming together where Saints symbols and the idea of the Who Dat Nation spread into what seemed like a city-wide phenomenon. The heightened hype associated with the winning season highlighted how Saints symbols and the idea of a Who Dat Nation transcended the game itself and were pervasive in everyday experiences outside of game day and outside the confines of the publicly funded stadium. At this time, the euphoria worked to heal the community, give people a positive shared experience and build an essence of collective identity.

The local news writers published every Saints related story they could think of, splattering Saints news across the front page, the living section and the money section before covering the traditional sports section of the paper. Articles about topics such as the dire condition of health care in Louisiana were squeezed to the margins to make way for a front page feature on how to scream and cheer louder and longer in the Superdome. Saints fans scrambled to get copies of the local newspaper when they published a Super Saints edition.

After the Saints won the NFC Championship game, some homeowners awoke to find their daily paper stolen from the front lawn. A 75 cent copy of the paper was selling on e-bay for over \$10. "Mondays Saints edition marked the first time the newspaper faced demand so strong that it had to go on two additional printings. It will likely be the largest street sales edition in the newspapers history" (*Times-Picayune* January 27, 2010).

Even people who do not particularly care for the game of football were drawn into the celebrations around New Orleans and the shared joy they could feel being around other people who were excited about the Saints. Long time Saints fans coined the term 'New Dat' to describe newly created Saints fans attracted by the best season in franchise history. People flocked to New Orleans to watch the Super Bowl because they had to share in the communal Who Dat spirit. All had access to the spirit of the Who Dat Nation. It seemed that not only were the Saints a regional team but, were attracting people from all over the country to root for the Who Dat Nation. One woman said, "everybody wants the Saints to win because they represent this city which is like this gigantic underdog in the nation."

During the week of January 24, 2010 Superdome employees painted the NFC Championship logo onto the field for the first time in team history in anticipation of the Saints, Vikings matchup. Some called the NFC Championship game the most exciting sporting event in New Orleans history. The Saints want to win the game to stake their claim as the best in the NFC but, the storyline surrounding them was that they were playing for something more. They were playing for a fan base that had been faced with disappointments throughout team history. "They'll be playing for the 10-year-old boy who wears a Reggie Bush jersey in sandlot games at Harrell Playground. They'll be playing for the Black-and-Gold-crazed teacher at Trist Middle School in St. Bernard. They'll be playing for the senior citizen who just completed rebuilding her house in the 9th Ward that Hurricane Katrina pummeled" (*Times-Picayune* January 24, 2010).

It is difficult for Saints fans to find words to describe their feelings about the NFC Championship game played in New Orleans at the Superdome. The local newspaper requested fans to write in playoff pep-talks for publication. Here is a poetic selection from one Saints fan:

Katrina could not stop us; we fought to come home. Corruption could not stop us; we fought to expose it. Dallas did not really stop us; we fought back valiantly. Any other team that comes to the Dome will see a city and a team that refuses to be defined by others. The naysayers may have forgotten who we are, because they did not know us to begin with. We will define who we are. We are New Orleans. When others count us out, we Finish Strong (*Times-Picayune* 2009).

These words illustrate the messages that Saints fans delivered inwards that were about having an identity as a New Orleanian. It was a city identity about the character of city people.

Rather than focusing on each Saints win as just a big football game, the people of New Orleans felt a joy, some called it magic, and talked about how there was a feeling in the air and something positive in the atmosphere. As New Orleans residents talked about the Saints winning season, they chose this football team to represent them, to deliver a message about their hopes and dreams for their community. The ubiquitous media coverage of big time NFL events did not create this hype but rather was a reflection of a collective feeling experienced by the New Orleans community.

This city-wide explosion of positive emotions was evident as New Orleanians spent weeks reveling in the Saints victories, with the Super Bowl itself being only one of many days of celebrations. A two week period of celebrations surrounding the Saints first Super Bowl appearance included the NFC Championship game in the Superdome, Saints players riding in a Mardi Gras style parade, a New Orleans style jazz funeral, and even men parading in dresses. These events coincided with annual Mardi Gras celebrations. One interviewee said, "That's something I will never forget, that feeling of those two weeks. Since Katrina and all that. You know? It's weird; it really did have a good effect on us and especially in '06. That made a big difference in peoples' morale. Oh my god did it."

One New Orleans style event that highlighted the city-wide celebrations over the Saints was the Buddy D Dress Run. On January 31, 2010 hundreds or maybe even thousands of men (and women) suited up in dresses and paraded through the streets of downtown New Orleans. This spectacle took place because beloved local sportscaster Buddy Dilberto, more commonly referred to as Buddy D, vowed he would walk through the streets of the French Quarter wearing a dress if the Saints ever made it to the Super Bowl. Although Buddy D died in 2005, thousands of New Orleanians gathered as either dress-wearing participants or spectators to honor Buddy D's promise and celebrate the Saints first Super Bowl appearance. Quirky parades that call for community participation are a common sight in New Orleans. From costumed pub crawls to more reverent second-line parades, these participatory walks through neighborhood streets are ingrained in New Orleans culture. However, the large number of people who showed up to stand on the sidewalks and watch something as seemingly frivolous as the Buddy D Dress Run was astounding.

All types of people turned out for this event – white men with graying hair and beards, women instigating the Who Dat chant, two tiny children in pink coats waving Saints flags, a Latino man wobbling in his high heel shoes, a dog wearing a tutu, a black man with a Mohawk in a wheelchair with a Saints blanket draped around his shoulders. Even a few minutes of video from this parade showed men, women, young, old, black, white, Latino, Asian, disabled, and able bodied – all together in a crowd of black and gold. Who Dat chants proliferated, as well as amateur vocal versions of *When the Saints Go Marching In*. People danced, cheered, snapped pictures, waived black and gold flags, sipped beers or cocktails, and twirled gorgeous black and gold parasols dripping with feather boas.

Amid this euphoria, while walking down the street in a gold sequined dress and long blonde wig, one man rhetorically asked, “who wants to move from New Orleans now?” Doubts about whether to return to New Orleans post-Katrina -whether or not to stay and face the mammoth task of rebuilding, whether to move somewhere easier -was a personal decision that

residents had spent the past few years asking themselves. For this wig-wearing man to rhetorically and somewhat comically address this serious issue in the midst of this unlikely event underscores the reality that the emotions New Orleanians felt during these Saints events were intertwined with their ideas about what it takes to feel recovered. A local editorial writer covering this event explained this concept in another way by saying, "I realized what an utter triumph this parade represented – not only for the Saints but for our city itself. After almost five years of struggle to break Hurricane Katrina's psychological chokehold, New Orleans is finally getting back to abnormal" (*Times-Picayune* February 2, 2010).

When Super Bowl day finally arrived, several venues were prepared to host formal or informal Super Bowl watch parties. Press releases flying out of the Super Bowl offices in Miami, named Miami, the host city of Super Bowl XLIV, the best place to watch the game. New Orleanians disagreed. The local New Orleans paper anticipated that even though the game was being played in Miami, the real party would take place in New Orleans. Saints fans agreed it would be a special night in New Orleans. Mass screenings for the game in New Orleans- such as in the arena, Superdome, or even small local movie theaters would not be possible as the NFL said that would violate copyright laws. After Saints fans packed the local Prytania Theater in Uptown New Orleans for the NFC Championship game, the theatre owner received cease and desist letters from the NFL (*Times-Picayune* February 1, 2010). Venues all around New Orleans from hotels, to clubs, to large block parties weighed whether or not to let the NFL stance on mass viewings deter their Saints Super Bowl party plans. Despite this legal technicality, plenty of local places- from daiquiri shops, to boutique hotels, to Bourbon street bars - offered gathering spots for Saints fans to watch the game together. People wanted to watch Saints football surrounded by fellow New Orleanians.

Intermingled with the more routine weekly worship services, parishioners attending Sunday morning church that day whispered prayers for their football team. The final Mardi Gras parade of the day, whose start time had been moved up hours earlier than normal to

accommodate the Super Bowl, finished rolling in the early afternoon. In different corners of New Orleans, people put on their game day outfits that consisted of anything from Saints jerseys to home-made black and gold costumes. One woman I saw wore a shimmering, black and gold leotard complete with tassels. A tiny, sequined top-hat perched on her head. This concoction resembled a trapeze performer's circus costume.

I met some friends at a bar on Magazine Street before proceeding to a Super Bowl watch party at someone's house in the Irish Channel neighborhood. The bartender applied sparkly, gold make-up across her eyelids and then offered the small pot of gold dust to the other women sitting at the bar in case they wanted to increase their visible team spirit. The bartender said she was relieved we were there. She was afraid no one was going to come into the bar because they would all choose to stay home around a private TV or a more intimate Super Bowl watch party. All over town people huddled around television sets as the Saints embarked on their first ever Super Bowl journey.

People watched the game from bars or living rooms collectively clapping, cheering, holding their breath, and praying. The party I attended had separate rooms for different types of Saints fans. One TV was reserved for those who were really serious and uptight about watching every action of play in the game. The other room held a big screen TV and was more relaxed for people who wanted to do a little more socializing while watching the Super Bowl. A kitchen full of help yourself, pot luck food separated the two rooms. Two men decided they were going to do a Tequila shot every time the Saints scored. One woman passed around a pillar prayer candle similar to the ones found in local Voodoo shops. A picture of Drew Brees was scrolled around the glass tube, rather than a traditional Catholic Saint. This woman made everyone touch the candle for good luck before setting it prominently on the coffee table. Saints fans expressed their fandom in different ways but everyone came together to collectively root for the Saints.

As soon as the game clock ran down to zero, and people were certain the Saints had just won the Super Bowl, people burst away from the televisions and out into the streets. Cheers erupted all over town as people made their way through the streets, migrating towards the French Quarter. It seemed as if everyone ran out into the streets to share their joy and excitement:

It had to be shared. It was almost as if it didn't happen unless you saw other people's reactions to it. It had to be proven that it happened. We had to go interact with other people to make sure it happened. Yeah. I don't know that we ran out into the street. I think we kind of levitated out to the street. I don't know that I could have not gone out into the street after both those things [NFC Championship win and Super Bowl win]. It's inexplicable.

The local paper described the atmosphere in New Orleans that night as the “Who Dat celebration of a lifetime” and quoted a fan as saying “we figured if we are going to do it right we are not going to sit in front of a TV with six people. We had to be on Bourbon Street” (*Times-Picayune* February 4, 2011). People danced on top of cars, stuck unmoving in lines of traffic pointed towards downtown. People on the streets high-fived people hanging out of car windows. I watched one man clamor onto every porch along a single block and kiss every woman standing in her doorway. His friend shouted out with a chuckle, “You can’t just go around kissing every ones mama!” Crowds of people standing outside bars were so massive, they effectively blocked off streets to vehicle traffic. One police car rolled up to an overflowing corner bar and turned on his lights as a warning. In contrast, another police car drove by the same bar, waving a Saints T-shirt out of his trooper window and honking. One woman who explained the scene as she experienced the Super Bowl said,

Oh my god. It was incredible. The energy that night. It was madness. It was like a ghost town (in the French Quarter) because everybody was glued to some kind of TV. But then as soon as everyone knew we won it was like mad spillage out into the streets. People were crazy. Grown men were crying. I remember that the most. Men who were strangers to each other were embracing each other and hugging like crazy people.

One Saints fan explained why she ran out into the street after the game saying, “because I couldn’t contain myself and neither could the bar. There was not enough room in the

bar to contain me and my excitement. I wanted to high five everybody that I possibly could. It's that transfer of energy thing. I had it. Everybody else had it." Another woman described her experiences and feelings on Super Bowl day:

We watched it in the warehouse district at a friend's condo and then we walked into the quarter and I have never seen – I mean it was bigger than Mardi Gras down there, but it was locals – and it was the most amazing thing I have ever seen. You're on Bourbon Street and you're being pushed and shoved and there's so many people trying to move through and not a single fight. Not a single harsh word. Everybody was loving each other. It was more amazing than anything I have ever seen. This city and the Saints – I can't, I mean – I'm speechless most of the time because it is just so amazing to me.

One woman watched the Super Bowl with the group of people that she sits with inside the Superdome on Saints game day. She described her Super Bowl experience:

We got together with our section out in Lakeview. We had two big screen TVs in the house to watch it and we were all dressed up. We had a really good time and it just felt right because we all got together. [when the Saints won] We ran out into the street screaming and yelling and then jumped in our cars and went flying down to Finn McCool's. They were screaming and carrying on in there and having a parade in and out of the bar, through the front door, back out into the streets, through the back door. We decided, a group of us hailed a taxi and he got as close to the Quarter as he was willing to get and he dropped us off literally in the projects. And so here's this little gaggle of people that just got dropped off and we just saw a bunch of people headed out of the projects headed to the Quarter. And we said hey can we all band together and go into the Quarter with our own little parade here and we were swept up with them and oh my god. It was truly, truly the city of love. I mean there was so much happiness and so much joy and it was the truest moment of New Orleans ever coming together.

Super Bowl night marked a moment that suspended fear of strangers and replaced that distrust with something that felt like a loving outburst that demonstrated city unity. Personal spaces could be invaded beyond normal circumstances as strangers hugged and kissed each other. Cars parked in the middle of streets as their passenger got out and danced on top of the vehicles. The French Quarter streets were extremely crowded with people, but there were no harsh words, no incidents of violence, only displays of love, joy, and communion.

The communal euphoria continued beyond Super Bowl night. New Orleans welcomed their championship football players home from the Super Bowl in Miami with a special parade. A Mardi Gras style parade carried the Saints players and staff members through downtown New

Orleans. An outpouring of people descended upon downtown to be a part of this celebration. The magnitude of people making their way into New Orleans prompted a local reporter to say, “Tuesday’s Saints parade triggered a Hurricane evacuation in reverse”, where the streets stood bumper-to-bumper with cars making their way into the city (*Times-Picayune* February 10, 2010). This comment exemplifies how New Orleans directly contrasted the joy surrounding Saints events with the sorrow from Hurricane Katrina. Another article explaining the positive atmosphere New Orleans was experiencing used the words, “folks, we’re experiencing a period of non-stop category five euphoria” (*Times-Picayune* August 10, 2010).

In the hours before the Super Saints Parade, from the top of Interstate 10, looking towards Uptown, one could see droves of people walking towards downtown to secure a parade-watching spot. Along the parade route, streets, sidewalks and the balconies above overflowed with people. The balconies, dripping in traditional purple, green and gold Mardi Gras decorations also displayed large black and gold Saints flags. This Super Saints parade resembled a Mardi Gras parade with *more*: more people condensed into a small area, more flashing camera lights from the crowd, more excitement. One spectator explained that it was so much more exciting to see all the Saints players together on a Mardi Gras float rather than traditional parade riders. People were giddy with excitement at the idea of catching beads or a plush football from Saints Quarterback Drew Brees. A DJ set up near the parade belted out a play on words, “Welcome to Drew Orleans, LaBreesiana,” as Drew Brees approached on top of a float carrying the Saints offensive line.

In addition to this parade event, New Orleanians had their own ways of celebrating the Saints success that were embedded within local cultural practices. Saints fans staged a funeral for the ‘Aints.’ The Aint’s tradition started in the 1980s when losing seasons caused embarrassed Saints fans to cover their heads with brown paper bags and nickname their losing team the Aints. For the second line funeral, fans carried a fake, black and gold coffin with the words *Aint’s No More* scrolled across the sides. They carried this coffin through New Orleans

streets, symbolizing the burial of the teams losing history. This second line of Who Dats featured jazz musicians and fans wearing homemade shirts and toting brown paper 'Aints' bags to lay to rest. A horse-drawn hearse completed the New Orleans style procession to bury the brown paper relics. As fans paraded through the Treme neighborhood into Faubourg Marigny, this second line provided another moment to reflect upon what the Saints meant to New Orleans. As one woman explained, "it is beyond words how this city has come together in the last couple of weeks – more so than, I don't know, even after Katrina" (houmatoday.com, *In New Orleans, Saints fans stage funeral for the Aints*, 2/22/11).

The Saints return to the Superdome in 2006 and their Super Bowl victory in 2009 served as events where New Orleanians reveled in a mix of emotions. The months of excitement surrounding the Saints winning season in 2009 offered positive experiences that brought New Orleanians together. This extreme situation and shared positive experiences created an idea of city-wide unity surrounding the Saints. Throughout this time people paused to reflect on life in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina and how Saints football played a role in recovery.

Believe, Believe, Believe: the role of Saints football in New Orleans recovery

In 2006, Spike Lee directed a Hurricane Katrina documentary about the devastation of New Orleans due to the levee failures titled *When the Levees Broke: a Requiem in Four Acts*. Lee produced a follow-up documentary about New Orleans recovery in 2010 titled *If God is Willing and the Creek Don't Rise*. The opening scene featured actress Phyllis Montana LeBlanc reciting a passionate monologue all while wearing a white, number 88 Saints jersey. The first several minutes of the documentary showed scenes of Saints fans from the Super Bowl in Miami as the song lyrics "Black and Gold to the Super Bowl" kept cadence in the background. Saints player Deuce McAllister said this game was important for the city of New Orleans. Politician Condoleezza Rice described the scene as a chance for New Orleans to come together and say the city is back. Archbishop Gregory Aymond talked about the Who Dat spirit and New

Orleanians being a people of perseverance. All of these scenes took place in Spike Lee's documentary.

Jumping to a video shot of crowds partying in the French Quarter, Lee's documentary captured someone saying "this city needs this more than anything. It's a rebirth." Another person in the crowd commented that "when you're down it's good to have something to rally around." The smiles and tears that he saw at the Super Saints parade made all the tears four years before worth it. Radio host Garland Robinette said he had never seen anything like it. Another fan commented that the Saints represented what's been happening in the city where they got behind but didn't lose faith and give up. They could win.

These scenes from the documentary reflected themes about the role of Saints football in New Orleans recovery. Fleshing out the different ways in which New Orleanians interpreted the role of Saints football in the recovery of New Orleans requires building upon a collection of messages from various sources. Different types of messages emerged where both outward and inward messages were delivered about New Orleans recovery. On one hand city images were marketed messages delivered to a national audience in order to promote the idea that New Orleans was recovered enough to be a vibrant place for tourists. On the other hand, there were messages created by New Orleanians for New Orleanians about the city's recovery. These fostered a narrative of renewal rooted in real emotions and experiences. From fans to football players, coaches to television anchors, newspaper articles to documentaries- any number of information outlets linked the Saints football team to New Orleans recovery and built upon each other to ingrain a narrative of renewal surrounding Saints football in New Orleans.

The Saints became instrumental in the story of New Orleans recovery because they are intimately connected to the city and represent New Orleans. This connection to place lies at the heart of why people talked about sports teams and events as meaning more to them than just a game. Illustrating this idea, one woman said, "they are so much more than a football team. They are part of the city, and they give hope and joy to lift up the fans." As one New Orleanian

described Saints football she said, “it’s less about the actual game and more about the indomitable spirit of the city behind the team” (*Times-Picayune* January 26, 2010). The paper reported that “the rest of the NFL is playing football. The Saints are waging some kind of crusade. They’re playing not just for themselves, but for a city, region, and fan base desperate for spiritual renewal” (*Times-Picayune* November 30, 2009).

As the Saints became a championship team, the narrative of the Saints as a symbol of spiritual renewal for the post-Katrina city was delivered to national audiences. Standing in the Superdome after the NFC Championship game in 2010, Saints coach Sean Payton delivered a speech saying, “This stadium used to have holes and it used to be wet. It’s not wet anymore. This is for the city of New Orleans” (*Times-Picayune* January 25, 2010). This narrative reached the top ranks of American leadership when the winning Super Bowl team visited the White House where president Obama told the Saints, “this team took the hopes and dreams of a shattered city and placed them squarely on its shoulders” (*Times-Picayune* August 10, 2010).

Both the marketed city images and the messages that New Orleanians fostered amongst themselves contributed to creating the narrative of renewal. Saints football players were able to tap into the essence of New Orleanians inward messages and deliver something more than a packaged marketed image during their Super Bowl interviews. This underscored the prevalence and importance of how these narratives helped heal the community in numerous ways. The scope of the audience tuning in to New Orleans football included the standard hype associated with the NFL’s annual Super Bowl. In this case, the Saints football players themselves served as messengers for explaining to the national media how their team meant something for Saints fans and the recovery of New Orleans. NFL press conferences held during Super Bowl XLIV captured messages from Saints players. The NFL media center set up in the city hosting the Super Bowl every year involves a flurry of information sharing and provides a hub for disseminating press releases. The throngs of hungry credentialed media members crave interviews with the players and coaches to spend their days and nights broadcasting messages

about the game of football. Super Bowl press conferences usually ask players questions related to the football game itself such as, how they are going to prepare for their opponents offensive line or how many turnovers have been a result of pressure from the defensive line. In addition to talking about the details of football, Saints players interviewed by the media in Miami prior to Super Bowl XLIV talked about the idea of the Saints playing for the people of New Orleans. The media asked questions about the city, the team, and Katrina - which is an abnormal type of question in the Super Bowl environment. In addition, Saints players talked about the importance of playing this game for a people who had been through so much turmoil, even when they were not asked directly about Hurricane Katrina.

When talking about his teammates feeling pride in New Orleans, center Jonathan Goodwin said, "it's a special place, and the fans are like no other. All the time they're telling us we inspire them, and they inspire us. It's definitely a great bond between the city and the team" (Super Bowl XLIV press conference February 3, 2010). Goodwin was asked if coming to New Orleans post-Katrina was a concern:

Definitely after the storm coming down there, me and my wife had some concerns. But coach Payton and Loomis and those guys did a good job of telling us that the city would come back, and we could be a part of helping the city come back. That was something that really interested me. I believed in the city of New Orleans. Fortunately the city is fighting back and improving each and every year.

This player latched on to the idea of the team being able to help the city come back. His comments reinforced the city-team connection and reinforced the narrative that this connection can be used to help the city recover. This narrative was so strong that cornerback Tracy Porter mentioned Hurricane Katrina when asked by the media prior to Super Bowl XLIV on how special it feels as an NFL player to be at the Super Bowl. Porter could have talked about how being at the Super Bowl was a personal honor or important for his career as a professional player. Instead, his thoughts turned to the people of New Orleans and how they have endured since Hurricane Katrina:

It is definitely very special to be here. The turmoil with Hurricane Katrina along with the struggles the Saints have had since they have been in existence and not ever making it to the Super Bowl. It is a feat all in its own, but nothing will be more special than to win the trophy and bring it back home (Super Bowl XLIV press conference February 4, 2010).

These football players acknowledged the symbolic meaning of the game and recognized that New Orleanians had feelings of post-Katrina recovery linked to the Saints participation in the Super Bowl. Saints safety Darren Sharper shared his thoughts on the connection between Saints football and New Orleans:

I don't think that can be stated enough. The fact of what we have done for the city, the community, New Orleans and the whole state of Louisiana and even going beyond that with the Saints fans, people who have been displaced out of New Orleans and have not had a chance to come back. This season has meant a lot for all of them. It's meant a lot for us to be able to touch their lives and bring a little bit of happiness to them. Besides the fact of what they went through with Hurricane Katrina, but beyond that and before that, what they've gone through with this organization and struggles that they've had. Us playing for the community can never be understated (Super Bowl XLIV press conference 2/1/10).

Sharper touched upon the idea that Saints football helped displaced people connect with home when he mentioned that the team's success touched the lives of people who had been displaced out of New Orleans and had not been able to return. This need to feel connected to New Orleans was particularly strong during this point in Saints and New Orleans history because of the fact that Katrina had displaced so many people. Within American culture, football serves as a particularly effective way for people to feel connected to home. Kraszewski (2008) conducted a case study of Pittsburgh Steelers fans living in Fort Worth, Texas and found that "one of the most organized attempts for sports fans to reconnect with home occurs in American football bars" (141). He argued that people view moving to a different part of the country as 'traumatic to their identity' and offers sports fandom as a way for people in the United States to rekindle lost local identities (Kraszewski 2008: 141). The need to rekindle a connection with New Orleans was particularly strong after the Katrina disaster. Prompted by the storm, city residents were forcibly and physically removed from New Orleans. There existed a great need

to be reconnected with New Orleans and Saints football served as a platform for creating this feeling of connectedness to New Orleans.

During a Super Bowl XLIV press conference Quarterback Drew Brees talked about this Super Bowl's impact on New Orleans considering the effects of Hurricane Katrina:

It is important for not only the people in New Orleans, but I think the people around the country because you do understand how much it means to that community and what they've been through. Our success as a team over the last four years, but especially this year, has been tremendous just in regards to giving so many of the members of that community hope and lifting their spirits. There is still a lot of work to be done there in regards to the rebuilding and the recovery post-Katrina. There are still a lot of people in some pretty dire straits. For us to be able to have the success we're having, it just does so much for that community as far as bringing everyone together. There's a bond that we have with our fans – between our organization and our fans – that's truly special. This has been, obviously, a storybook season for all of us – a 13-0 start and a lot of firsts. It was our first time to host an NFC Championship game and the first Super Bowl appearance in the 42 year history of the organization, so we have a lot to play for. We don't look at it as extra pressure. We look at it as a sense of responsibility, and we really gain strength from our fans from the 'Who Dat?' nation and from the people of New Orleans, just knowing that their spirit is with us (Super Bowl XLIV press conference February 1, 2010).

Part of this message reflects the idea that it was important for outsiders to understand something about New Orleans. Residents wanted their sports team to deliver messages about their identity, not a simplified version of promoting a positive city image.

Within this speech, Brees also recognized the importance of the Saints in giving the community hope and uplifting their spirits. The idea that the Saints gave the community hope and uplift was an important factor in New Orleans recovery. One man interviewed in the paper explained this phenomenon by saying, "throughout the buildup of the Super Bowl, people kept saying 'believe, believe, believe.' This is what keeps people rebuilding their houses; the belief that the city will come back. The Saints are a symbol of this" (*Times-Picayune* February 9, 2010). One man talked about how having the Saints back and winning gave him the momentum to start gutting his Katrina-soaked house:

Like I said, my old house is just twenty feet from the trailer. I had so much adrenaline built up after the first game that I had to do something, so I went in the house and started

hauling stuff out. We had been waiting for weeks for the guys to come get this stuff out so we could get some work done, to start rebuilding in there. Well, I guess thanks to the Saints I at least got the trash out of my house (Donnes 2007: 101).

Defensive tackle, Sedrick Ellis answered a question about the team providing hope for the New Orleans area after the Hurricane:

It's really great to be in that atmosphere with those people who have gone through so much with the storms and the things that hit down there, and still have the gumption and the pride to live the way they do every day is amazing. I'm definitely proud to be a part of that and it really means a lot (Super Bowl XLIV press conference February 1, 2010).

Ellis's comments about Saints fans having pride and gumption reflects another message that New Orleanians wanted delivered through their football team. The Saints success allowed New Orleanians a chance to tell the world that they are people who can persevere, who are resourceful and can rebuild. New Orleanians did not just want their city's name in the national media, they wanted the Saints and the NFL to deliver messages that said something positive about New Orleans character. One Saints fan explained this idea about the NFL being able to deliver important messages about the city:

I think a lot of people misunderstand New Orleans and by coming to New Orleans for the NFL, if for no other reason they're coming for the NFL, and that's a way to get them here and to maybe understand what our city is about because there is still all this Katrina backlash five years later, almost six, and it's pretty hurtful to me as a citizen and born and raised here person. Yeah. There's a lot of ignorance about our city and if by having an NFL team, which most of the rest of the world can understand. They can relate to sporting affiliations and by coming to New Orleans, our quirky city as fabulous as it is, people will finally get it. If it takes sports to get it, to get us, to come here, so be it.

Reporters asked head coach Sean Payton about the city of New Orleans and the team rebuilding together:

The relationship with the fans I think is unique. There is a city that really has been very close to this team through a lot of hard times. After Katrina, when the Saints were able to get back and play in the Super Dome, certainly there was some symbolism that evening. I think playing good football and giving them something to be proud of is important. With as visible as many of our players are in the community, and many of them are just because of the logistics of where they live, I think all of those things make it positive and make it pretty special (Super Bowl XLIV press conference February 5, 2010).

Payton saying it is important for the community to have something to be proud of is a reflection of how New Orleans needed a narrative of success, pride, and winning to replace a narrative of losing and failure. Television producers inserted footage of flood ravaged streets into national telecasts of Saints football games. The images of disaster juxtaposed against images of sports victory. There was a conscious effort to rebuild and rebrand the Superdome after Katrina and use that symbolic space to project winning narratives. But, there were also messages connected with winning in the Superdome that New Orleanians could use for themselves as bragging rights directed at outsiders. New Orleans could use the winning narrative around football to regain an assertion that their city was a vibrant place. This was important as a marketed message aimed at tourists but, it was also important for residents who had been hurt being told in the days after Katrina that perhaps their home, their city wasn't worth rebuilding.

When the Saints won the Super Bowl, New Orleanians were able to boast that not only could they recover from Hurricane Katrina but they could rise to the top. This message was an important component for the recovery narrative surrounding the Saints winning status. One news article describing the mass celebrations around New Orleans for the Super Bowl said, "more than four years after Hurricane Katrina wrecked this city, severely damaged the Dome and left unprecedented damages, some questioned if New Orleans would ever recover, let alone party like this" (*Times-Picayune* January 25, 2010). The Super Bowl is the ultimate height in professional football performance. Linking this achievement to New Orleans status helped fuel a new narrative. It sent the message that not only could New Orleans rise out of the despair and destruction wrought by Hurricane Katrina, but rise to an ultimate height.

For many New Orleanians, their enduring struggle was not in the immediate days during Katrina but rather with roadblocks faced in a rebuilding process that stretched on for years. Immediately following this disaster, New Orleans received outside criticism that the city should not be rebuilt. Not only were people going through the physical motions of rebuilding their

homes and businesses but they were also struggling to prove that they had a right to rebuild, a right to exist. One woman explained how important she thought the Saints were for showing the world that New Orleans is a vibrant community:

It has really, I think brought the city together. It's brought a sense of hope for us as well as I think the rest of the country when they saw we won the Super Bowl or that we had our sporting teams come back. That's what gets a lot of people from other parts of the country and other parts of the world to come in and see that New Orleans is viable. But for us it means more to me, more to us, than just a sporting event. It means the people are seeing New Orleans as a fabulous place to be. And that we're back and we're not under water.

So much was lost in Katrina and the people of New Orleans clung to their football team as something that they had regained for themselves and for the city. Rumors about the Saints permanently moving to San Antonio following Katrina intensified the feeling that the football team was something else almost lost in the storm. The feeling that the Saints belong to the people of New Orleans strengthened the association between the team and the city. New Orleanians acted possessive towards their football team and expressed a feeling of ownership over it. For example, a couple of New Orleans Saints signs hung in the airport. Below the black and gold football helmet rested the bold words OUR Saints," where the word OUR is capitalized and underlined as if to prove a point to the throngs of visitors arriving at New Orleans airport. One survey response said the Saints are important to New Orleans because "the particular history of the team's losses and wins has endeared them to New Orleanians. They're ours, so we love them no matter what." People become possessive over their home team rooted in a connection to place. The Saints represented what was happening in the city where rooting for the Saints became a way to root for the city itself. Because the Saints are intimately connected to the city of New Orleans and represent the city, they became instrumental in New Orleans recovery.

As people expressed what Saints football means to them, the narrative of renewal continuously resurfaced contrasting the euphoria of Saints victories with the devastation from Hurricane Katrina. People connected with their football home team as a way to connect with

their city. This need to connect to the Crescent City became especially powerful in the unique period in New Orleans history after Hurricane Katrina. Residents continued to talk about Hurricane Katrina as they talked about what it means to be a Saints fan and why the Saints are important for New Orleans. The messages delivered about New Orleans recovery through Saints football represented not only individual fans emotions but also a collective of New Orleans people.

The narrative of renewal and messages about New Orleans recovery show how a sense of community or collective identity with the Saints is strong and contributed to a narrative of renewal that united New Orleanians around rebuilding the city after Katrina. Ever since the Saints played their first game back in the Superdome after Katrina in 2006, the team fueled a spiritual renewal for city people. The NFL and other media outlets latched on to the Cinderella story of the Saints, where winning the Super Bowl concluded their narrative arc as “a Katrina story with a happy ending” (*Times-Picayune* September 16, 2010). However, the storyline of the Saints in New Orleans extends both before and after Hurricane Katrina and the Saints Super Bowl win did not mark the end of recovery for New Orleanians.

The idea of a city identity became important outside of the Hurricane Katrina context as I looked at the ongoing experiences of Saints fans and face to face interactions among those gathering in public places to experience Saints fan activities. The imagined community of the Who Dat Nation is a symbolically and socially constructed sense of comradeship where people imagine affinity and communion despite a lack of face to face contact. However, the Who Dat Nation is also a space for collective engagement where fan spaces offer a mechanism for face to face interaction.

Rather than the Saints Super Bowl win concluding the narrative about Saints football in New Orleans, it opened the door to understanding how New Orleanians continue to build collective experiences around Saints football. It opened the door for the emergence of the Who Dat Nation.

CHAPTER 6: WE ARE THE WHO DAT NATION: collective identity and interaction among football watchers

What is a Who Dat? The simple answer is that Who Dats are Saints fans. They were nicknamed from a chant heard at football games in New Orleans that goes, "Who Dat? Who Dat? Who Dat say de gonna beat them Saints." Rather than remaining reserved for hard core fans, the Who Dat phrase spread across New Orleans as countless people turned their attention towards a winning Saints team. This was a time when people needed to feel connected to their city and to other people. Saints fan practices and developing the Who Dat Nation was one way this occurred. The ability to use Saints football as a way to connect with other people is important beyond the framework of post-Katrina recovery.

The Who Dat Nation united diverse urban residents under a collective identity that represented the city of New Orleans. Lofland (2007) said "there is no question but that the connections that humans forge between themselves and places are somehow coupled to the connections they forge between themselves and other humans in those places" (65). The Who Dat Nation offered both an identity about being New Orleanians and a way to engage with other urban residents through Saints football.

The Who Dat Nation developed as a symbolic or imagined community that fostered ideas about community cohesion that helped people feel connected to place and to each other. In addition, the Who Dat Nation involved real interactions between people. The collective experience of watching Saints football carved out spaces for interacting with socially diverse people in a positive way. Both the idea of the Who Dat Nation and the interactions feed off of each other and strengthen one another. This is reinforced on game day and also outside of game day in the more mundane aspects of daily life. Fan practices extend beyond game day, beyond sports stadiums, and beyond team attachment. Behaviors that were fostered through game day rituals became woven into everyday lived experiences.

New Orleanians used association with Saints football to interact and build relationships in an urban environment characterized by segregated social patterning. The collective experience of watching Saints football carved out spaces for interacting with socially diverse people in a civil and positive way. Fan practices created a 'cosmopolitan canopy' to which everyone had access through fandom. Anderson (2011) created the term 'cosmopolitan canopies' to describe city places where people are able to interact cooperatively and gain an appreciation of others' differences:

This ethos of getting along, as well as the tremendous growth in immigration, has given rise to the emergence of what I call cosmopolitan canopies – settings that offer a respite from the lingering tensions of urban life and an opportunity for diverse peoples to come together. Canopies are in essence pluralistic spaces where people engage one another in a spirit of civility, or even comity and goodwill. Through personal observation, they may come casually to appreciate one another's differences and empathize with the other in a spirit of shared humanity. Under the canopy this sense of familiarity often breeds comfort and encourages all to be on their best behavior, promoting peaceful relations. Here, racially, ethnically, and socially diverse peoples spend casual and purposeful time together, coming to know one another through what I call folk ethnography, a form of people watching that allows individuals informally to gather evidence in social interactions that supports their own viewpoints or transforms their commonsense understandings of social life. In this context of diversity and cosmopolitanism, a cognitive and cultural basis for trust is established that often leads to the emergence of more civil behavior. (Anderson 2011, xv)

Cosmopolitan canopies formed around Saints football that fostered the type of cooperation and understanding that Anderson (2011) described as being important for civic engagement. While giving a lecture at Tulane University, Anderson repeatedly called the cosmopolitan canopy "an island of civility in a sea of segregation." The cosmopolitan canopy was a diverse space, civil space, and could be inclusive. The Who Dat Nation developed in a way that contained both symbolic relevance and practices of engagement. Anyone had access through fan practices. Sport spaces are fluid where the Who Dat Nation was a space to speak about relevant concerns. Racial narratives became a part of the recovery narrative as people recognized the ability of Saints football to provide shared experiences that united diverse urban residents regardless of race. The desire to see racial unity was a significant issue in this time

period. Sport spaces offered a platform to negotiate the ideas of race and unity through face to face interactions. The following descriptions of how Saints fans experienced game day demonstrated how the cosmopolitan canopy manifested among those who gather to watch Saints football.

The game day experience

The Rendezvous bar held so many patrons, maneuvering across the crunchy floor required a polite shuffle so as not to knock into anyone. The Saints preseason game would kick-off in about 45 minutes. The lone billiards table that consumed a majority of the floor space in this small bar, usually full of activity on any other night had been covered with a crude wooden plank so people could set down their drinks or lean on the surface without ruining the green felt. A small plastic baby doll, painted shimmering gold perched on a pub table in front of a man with sandy colored hair and freckles, a loyal Rendezvous bar regular. This fat, almost Buddha-belly-like baby doll somewhat resembled an oversized king cake baby. A king cake baby is a small, plastic doll no bigger than a quarter that is hidden inside the festive King Cake pastries— a popular Mardi Gras treat. When I asked about the gold baby, the man matter-of-factly replied, “it’s the touchdown baby.” This odd little doll would get hoisted into the air and rubbed by those near it in the bar in celebration of Saints touchdowns throughout the game. This gold baby was one Saints fans good luck charm. Other items passed around groups of Saints fans ritualistically to bring the team good luck have included a glowing pillar candle bearing Quarterback Drew Brees’ image and a homemade VooDoo doll fashioned to resemble a member of the opposing team. As I looked around the room, few people wore Saints jerseys, but many people donned Saints T-shirts from local New Orleans shops.

Figure 2: Fleur-de-lis



This window display in a French Quarter shop showcases several fleur-de-lis necklaces as well as black and gold fleur-de-lis items that suggest affiliation with the Saints football team. The fleur-de-lis symbol has many meanings worldwide stemming from French monarchy. The fleur-de-lis is a symbol for the city of New Orleans. The New Orleans Saints have had the fleur-de-lis logo on their uniforms since 1967.

These locally produced shirts managed to avoid infringing on NFL copyrights while still providing wardrobe options for Saints fans with displays of black and gold fleur-de-lis, football uniform numbers, or implying favorite football player names with slogans like KREWE DU DREW (for quarterback Drew Brees) or SHOCK IT TO ME (for tight end Jeremy Shockey). Completely different looking people could be seen wearing identical Saints shirts. A small, dark-skinned man in skinny jeans sporting a Mohawk hairstyle with tribal piercings in his ears and nose wore the same Saints T-shirt as a young, well-polished, white girl who looked like a Tulane

University student. Saints fans crowded the bar area, some sat on coveted bar stools while others craned their necks to get a glimpse of the TVs stationed around the room.

Some people trickled out onto the sidewalk and scattered themselves along Magazine street to continue chatting, drinking, and socializing. The Balcony Bar down the street from the Rendezvous was less crowded. Even though the game had started, one could still come by a place to sit down. Most people watched the Saints game with the friend group they arrived with, protective of the limited bar seating. One man protectively put a hand down on an empty barstool to reserve it for a friend rather than welcoming a stranger. After the Saints scored a touchdown, one stranger talked to me because he found it amusing that we had both been cheering for a football player named Beaver. While watching the football game action, touchdowns, scores, or other good plays provoked strangers to interact. Clapping, cheering, high-fiving, or booing a referee all happened simultaneously among game watchers throughout the course of the night. These game moments gave people a cue that it was socially acceptable to interact with the people around them, especially if they also wore your sports team colors.

Wearing black and gold Saints clothes indicated cohesiveness among an otherwise diverse group of people. Whether jerseys, T-shirts or costumes, everyone, even the people working at the bar, wore Saints gear. One girl behind the bar wore a gaudy black and gold sequenced dress more fit for a beauty pageant than slinging beer. Several T-shirts paid tribute to the Saints with wording such as 'Breesus is my homeboy', 'Bree Peat' and 'WWBD? What Would Breesus Do?' One woman wore a black shirt that read 'Qui Ca?' in gold letters, translating the phrase Who Dat into a French Cajun language. Everywhere I looked, I saw a variety of outfits, all in black and gold. A trio of men in elaborate costumes posed for pictures. One was the Gris Gris man, a fan whose consistent wearing of an elaborate costume to the Superdome earned him a place in the 2010 Super Saints fan calendar. His friend dressed like coach Sean Payton and looked the part with a whistle hanging around his neck, a clip board

tucked under his armpit, a logo visor resting across his forehead and a Motorola headset covering his ears.

One man with a scraggly, graying beard sat quietly at the bar, sipping one Bud Light after another and craning his neck to watch every Saints play. He wrapped his own koozie drink holder around each beer bottle. Bringing your own drink holder to a bar or festival is not an uncommon practice in New Orleans, a city where open containers of alcohol in public places are allowed. He stood out from the rest of the bar crowd in the sense that he seemed to be one of the only people there by himself, rather than with a small gathering of friends. In a full bar he was completely surrounded by other people and surrounded by their conversations. However, he seemed mostly content to watch the game rather than talk to anyone around him. About two feet away from this lone creature, three or four women occupied neighboring barstools. They watched the game but they talked to each other too, leaning in close, putting their lips right next to the others ear so their words would not be lost in the loud, dark environment. This bar was loud with noise from the TV. This coupled with a murmuring flow of people who grew increasingly unaware of their own decibel levels as alcohol lubricated their social senses. It was impressive that anyone could meaningfully converse in such a roar of constant sound. Periodically, a woman with a high-pitched, throaty voice led the multitudes of people in the Who Dat chant – *Who Dat, Who Dat, Who Dat say de gonna beat dem Saints?*

When the Saints played at the home in the Superdome, 73,000 spectators wedged themselves into stadium seats to watch the game. The stadium seats were so close to each other that when everyone was seated there was no way to avoiding touching the people that sit on either side of you. When everyone stood to cheer, I was forced to take a step back, leaning against the folding stadium seat as the back of my knees press against it. The two men on either side of me were so close, their shoulders almost touched each other, leaving no room for all three of us to fit side by side. The seats and hallways in the Dome were always crowded to the point of restricting movement. Despite these intrusions into personal space, Saints ticket

holders enjoyed the atmosphere in the Superdome. They wore costumes, cheered for their team, taunted fans of the opposing team, drank beer, high-fived each other, and - only in New Orleans - they stand up and get drunk.

“Stand up and get drunk” are the repetitious lyrics in the song *Halftime* by the Ying Yang Twins. The Saints players adopted this song as a sort of team anthem in 2009. Since then, Who Dats have been seen dancing, wiggling, throwing their arms in the air and swaying their hips and rocking their shoulders back and forth whenever this song belts over the Superdome loud speakers. Whenever the Saints scored a touchdown, fans jumped to their feet when they heard the first few beats of this song as their cue to celebrate the winning Saints team. Seeing tens of thousands of fans reacting to this song in unison can be comical. Saints fans that I talked to said they never tire of hearing this song. It played on the radio, popped up at dance clubs, and covered the streets during tailgate parties.

The night before one Saints game, I warned a few out of town guests visiting New Orleans that when in the Superdome they would be expected to ‘get drunk’, meaning they would need to stand up from their stadium seats and dance with other Saints fans when the song *Stand Up and Get Drunk* played over the loud speakers. They informed me after the game that they had a woman sitting in their section displaying her personal ‘get drunk’ dance. She gladly shared her dance moves with them after each touchdown or celebratory football moment to indoctrinate them into the Who Dat Nation. Interactions between strangers are more common in spaces under the cosmopolitan canopy.

In the moments leading up to the first kickoff, music blared and a voice boomed over the loud speakers announcing Saints star players. The team ran out of an inflatable tunnel set up in the end zone and skipped through a line of cheerleaders waving their shimmering, gold pom poms. Small blasts of fireworks shot up from the field as Saints fans stood, clapped, cheered, and whistled. During pre-game and halftime, entertainment elements replaced the players on the field giving fans a constant stream of sensory stimulation throughout the duration of the

football production. During one game, Saints owner Tom Benson, his family and the Saintsations rode into the stadium on a parade float bearing a giant replica of the Lombardi trophy. Tom Benson held the real Lombardi trophy in his hand.

Figure 3: Inside the Superdome on game day



The scene inside the Superdome during a Saints game.

Prior to kickoff, the Saints team captain raised a fist in the air as a signal for all 73,000 fans in the Superdome to simultaneously engage in three rounds of chanting, *Who Dat? Who Dat? Who Dat Say De Gonna Beat Dem Saints?* One visitor to New Orleans heard all the fans chanting *Who Dat* at the same time after the coin toss. When she asked what it was I explained that it was a new tradition Drew Brees had started by calling for a press conference and asking Saints fans to chant *Who Dat* three times when he raised and lowered his arm as a cue before opening kickoff. She thought that was pretty cool and wished her home basketball

team had something like that to unify and excite fans. As the Saints rivaled their opponent, fans cringed in unison when a player received a particularly rough hit. They high-fived, screamed and jubilantly yelled when the Saints scored a touchdown.

A certain amount of cooperation was necessary among those sitting together in the Superdome. Anytime someone needed to exit their stadium seat to use the restroom or get snacks, it required the entire row of people to stand while the passing person shimmied across the slender aisle. Every time my seat flopped down it grazed the leg of the person seated next to me. People returned to their seats mostly carrying newly purchased beers or nachos at the cost of \$8.50 each. One man mentioned to me at a game that he does not think anyone can go to a game without spending about \$100 on food, drink or souvenirs. This conveyed the idea that even if you have already paid for the game ticket, the act of going to the game itself can still be expensive. Some people admittedly snuck flasks of alcohol into the Superdome to try and get a buzz while avoiding the high cost of stadium fare. Two women showed me how they tucked makeshift flasks into their bras, nestled into areas of the body where the security guards will not touch them during a search conducted before entering the game.

A snapshot of section 630 in the Superdome showed a cross section of Saints fans. As I sat in my stadium seat, to my right sat a large, African-American man who appeared to be in his forties. Next to him sat a trio of white, gay men in their late fifties to early sixties. To my left, a young, white couple in their late twenties occupied two seats. In the row behind me, a group of eight to ten Puerto Ricans of various ages often spoke in Spanish during the game. Three middle-aged white men sat in front of me, one always wore the same camouflage-colored LSU cap with a fishing hook speared into it. One man that sat off to the left often brought his tiny son to the game and allowed this blond, blue-haired cutie to perch on his lap. The other men who sat around him smiled, waved and made googly faces at the child. One tiny frail woman with puffy white hair sat next to a wheelchair bound woman in the front row of section 630, some of the few ADA compliant seats in the Superdome. Sprinkled around these regulars in section 630,

some seats contained new people each game. For example, during one game a whole row of African-American Atlanta fans sat in front of me. Seven out of this group of nine were women.

As all these fans navigated the halls of the Superdome, walking through the crowds of people reminded me of a documentary of penguins huddled together for warmth against the icy environment. People packed shoulder to shoulder, butt to belly, waddling weight from one foot to another, trying to move forward without being stepped on. I was impressed with the way one elderly woman navigated the crowd. With her wrinkled face, grey hair, and bright yellow football T-shirt that said something about ROAD KILL, she didn't appear to have any problems being in the overcrowded concourse. These throngs of people, all in the same formation, motioned out of the Superdome together when the game ended.

Beyond game day: collective identity and everyday practice

These observations could be applied to any game that the Saints played where fans gathered together inside the Superdome or at local bars. The descriptions of fan behavior revealed several indicators of collective action. People reacting simultaneously to game plays, high-fiving, chanting 'Who Dat?,' dancing to the *Get Crunk* song, wearing black and gold Saints outfits were all indicators of football fans acting as a collective. Despite where people watch games and who they watch with, the celebrations all displayed similar characteristics. The football crowd seemed to accept certain tacit rules of behavior, especially inside the Superdome where people were required to be so physically close to one another – waddling through the concourse and squeezing cooperatively into seats together. Wearing black and gold and sharing a *Stand Up and Get Crunk* dance showcased similarities among members of a diverse football crowd.

These indicators of collective action displayed cohesiveness in an otherwise diverse crowd. These physical displays of similarity – team colors, songs, fan behaviors – were all carried out by diverse people. The Saints fans I observed include men, women, African-

Americans, Latinos, children, elderly, gay, straight, or disabled. These different types of people were united under the common interest of rooting for the Saints. These findings were consistent with collective identity literature that portrayed sports as having the power to unite people across social barriers and build place-related identity such as those conducted by Kraszewski (2008), Clark (2006), Rader (1977), and Waitt (2001). Clark (2006) used ethnographic data collected at Scunthorpe United Football matches to demonstrate that chants and songs have become an integral part of constructing place-related collective identities. He found that although what it means to be 'Scunthorpe 'til I die' will vary from person to person, "the symbolic act of singing this chant transforms the potentiality of difference into the appearance of similarity" (Clark 2006: 500).

The concept of the Who Dat Nation did more for the New Orleans community than simply creating the appearance of similarity during Saints games. The collective acts contributed to the creation of a Who Dat identity that transcended football games and was on display throughout New Orleans daily life. Anderson (1983) conceptualized nations as imagined communities. "It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (Anderson 1983: 6). The imagined community of the Who Dat Nation was both an idea and practice where the concepts of a collective and the opportunity for interaction strengthened one another. Collective identity and imagined community are powerful as concepts but this is enhanced by looking at everyday practices and social interactions. The Who Dat Nation developed as an imagined community where New Orleanians fostered person-to-person and person-to-place connections. Behaviors – such as shouting Who Dat – that were fostered through game day rituals became woven into everyday practices. They became influenced by and reflective of a broader New Orleans culture.

Interviewees attributed the emergence of a Who Dat language as concrete evidence of a grassroots phenomenon that proves the Saints provided diverse urban residents with a common

point of understanding and communication. The words “Who Dat” infiltrated city culture, rather than just Saints culture, and became part of the local lexicon. One interviewee said it’s like a secret language and talked about how you can walk down the street and shout out ‘Who Dat’ and someone (a stranger) will answer back. According to one interviewee, “Who Dat” replaced “hello” and even replaced “throw me something mister” during Mardi Gras parades. In October 2010, the *Times-Picayune* published a Who Dat Dictionary to offer a humorous guide to the new language which both poked fun at the proliferation of the Who Dat phrase and spoke to the significance within which this phrase had risen in local culture. “Rare, universal joy over the Saints newfound success has created a new common language and solidified a shared identity” (*Times-Picayune* February 2, 2010).

The powerful circumstances surrounding the Saints first Super Bowl spread this Who Dat language onto a city-wide level and developed it as a lingering part of local culture. It was a language born as a football chant but reflective of New Orleans cultural traits, emphasizing that New Orleanians have a certain way of speaking or certain local phrases that would not be found in other communities. In proper English, the chant “Who Dat Say De Gonna Beat Dem Saints” could be read as, “Who are they who believe that they might beat those Saints.” The very language of the Who Dat chant was reflective of New Orleans culture.

Although the Saints are an NFL team, a product with a national identity, the Who Dat Nation represented a football phenomenon that valued local culture and local forms of expression. One woman told me about a Saints ritual that she participated in that showed how local peculiarities mix with regular football:

Let me go back to the Florida game when we played Miami. When we were down so low and Ricky Williams was coming back to haunt us in a very big, bad, nasty way, I decided that we needed a little voodoo ritual and that we needed sage to get the bad out, purify, get the Saints strong again. So we went through the spice and herb rack and didn’t find any. We actually went next door. Luckily the neighbor that was home did have some sage in her cupboard and we literally went in the backyard and poured this herb on a brick and we lit it and we danced around the smoldering brick saying Ricky Williams do be gone, Ricky Williams do be gone, Ricky Williams do be gone. We didn’t want him to

get hurt or anything but we just gave him the gris-gris to go away and it worked. We came back and won.

Her story represented a distinct way that Saints rituals intermingled with local cultural practices.

This same woman told another story about how she was able to use her love of the Saints to create a social experience in the city:

Now one of the peculiar features of Chef Who Dat's costume is he wears a big, glued on moustache and the bigger, the swirlier, the better and he thinks that his moustache has secret powers. So we decided to do a blessing of the season for 2007 with a bicycle pub crawl and a blessing of the moustaches and we named our pub crawl The Dash for the Stache, as in moustache. What we do is we start at The Bulldog on Canal Boulevard. We gather there. They open early for us so that we can get lunch and be ready for our drinking. We write prayers. We have some amazing prayers. They're all Catholic prayers that we've changed and altered to read for the Saints like Hail Rita instead of Hail Mary and Our Coach instead of Our Father and it's evolved in that since Buddy D passed, some people go visit the grave of Buddy D before going to the Bulldog. Once the founder or the builder of the Dome, Dave Dixon passed, he's buried in the same cemetery so some of us visit Dave Dixon and Buddy D's grave before going to the Bulldog. I am the route coordinator. I speak to all of the bar owners and let them know what time we'll be passing through. Most of them put extra staff on for us. Some of them even provide a specialty drink for us. Some of them, Finn McCool's, gives us a microphone to let us amp our prayers. Since we now have books written by the coach and the quarterback, we now, before prayers, have a reading from the Book of Brees. So we decorate our bikes and we dress very fancifully and ride through the streets clanging our bells. And we make our way through the Mid City area bar to bar all the way to the Superdome where we race up the front ramp, Ramp A, and say our final prayers and don our moustaches, boys and girls alike, moustaches on and if you notice, the fleur-de-lis is right there for the main entrance Gate A. It always wears a moustache. Because we jump up there at the very end and put a moustache on that fleur-de-lis.

These stories demonstrated personalized ways of creating a social environment around the idea of Saints football. This story exemplified how the Who Dat Nation operated when there was not a Saints football game going on. Beyond game day, in different areas of town, in spaces that were not meant for football, evidence of the Who Dat Nation emerged.

The more mundane ways that Saints symbols were woven into daily life reinforced the idea of the Who Dat Nation as a collective identity rooted in symbolism and practice. New Orleanians reaffirmed collective action through the everydayness of seeing Saints stuff around town or hearing the Who Dat chant. The song associated with Saints wins, *Stand Up and Get Crunk* could be heard all over town, from dance clubs to popular radio stations. Instead of listing

drink specials, the white writing on chalk boards outside of bars said Saints themed phrases such as, Who Dat, Repeat Dat. Driving by a local daiquiri shop, I saw their marquee advertising a Sunday Who Dat special. A few weeks later their marquee read 'Now hiring Who Dats.' As I sat in the waiting room of the dentist office, a father and son pair walked past both wearing Saints T-shirts and caps. As I walked my dogs around the neighborhood, we crossed paths with a man walking a large pit bull. The pit bull was wearing a gold Saints jersey. Colorfully painted murals covered dingy concrete walls in various city locations. A mural on Orleans Avenue bore a black and gold fleur-de-lis, the words 'Home of the N.O. Saints', and was still streaked with Katrina's dingy water line.

During a New Orleans neighborhood festival called Gentilly Fest, an entire family encircled an elongated banquet table that was set up on the grassy field near a music stage. This family listened to the festival music rather than huddling around a TV to watch the Saints football game that was playing that day. However, they all wore white Saints jerseys. They looked unified in their jerseys like Saints football was something the family celebrated communally- even though watching the actual game was not their priority that day.

Figure 4: Grocery store sign



This banner greeted customers entering a neighborhood grocery store. Saints themed messages appeared in various New Orleans locations that residents encountered throughout their daily routines.

Building relationships

The social interactions that occurred through the rituals of watching football built relationships that transcended the game. Shouting 'Who Dat', wearing black and gold and dancing to *Stand Up and Get Crunk*, were not only indicators of collective action but also became tools that people used to interact with others. Football watchers built different types of relationships through the game day experience. Three different types of relationships found within the football crowd included family, friend groups, and strangers. Movement between the three relationship levels was fluid. People could move between these levels throughout the course of a game or season. Strangers could be welcomed into the semi-private tailgate areas. Strangers that sat near each other in the Superdome or frequented a neighborhood bar could become friends. Groups of friends formed symbolic families or communities.

Although having Saints football in New Orleans provided a way for urban residents to share a brief moment of “Who Dat” happiness with complete strangers, many people placed importance on the less fleeting relationships they built with the people they watched games with. For some this meant the family you were born into and for others this meant a ‘family’ that you built with other Saints fans who happened to sit around you during a game.

Fans emphasized the importance of using football to enhance family ties. Saints games were family events. One could easily find small children perched on their mom or dad's lap in the Superdome. One Saints fan discussed his determination to continue the family tradition of sharing his season tickets with his own children because he knew how special the memories can be. Another person quoted in a news article talked about how growing up, Saints games meant four or five hours out of every week that he knew he would be with his dad (*Times-Picayune* November, 21 2010). In November 2010, the *Times-Picayune* featured an article on kid Saints fans and described the Saints experience as being a family event “where football is one of the few things that pulls us together each week” as a family (*Times-Picayune* November 12, 2010). One fan's answer to the question what are some things you enjoy most about watching football simply stated, “it brings family together.” A person quoted in the local paper talked about the importance of sharing Saints games with his children saying “our fans love seeing their section ‘neighbors’ in the Superdome” and felt his kids should be a part of that (*Times-Picayune* November 21, 2010). One fan stated that the thing she enjoys most about watching professional football is “the three to four hour family I acquire during that afternoon.” In various ways, urban residents were forming collective bonds through Saints football events.

Saints games became a time to build friendships. One woman who I talked to had season tickets with her very best friends and – as a matter of ritual – she must sit in between them. It was easy to spot friend groups at neighborhood bars when people gathered to watch Saints games. They sat in close proximity to each other and mostly socialized with the friends seated at their table or in a cluster of barstools. Tailgate parties around the Superdome felt like

semi-private events taking place in public spaces. However, as people shared football spaces the opportunity arose to foster friendships. One Saints fan said during an interview, “I bought my tickets in 2006 for the reopening of the Dome; I just picked two random seats together in the very upper terrace. I was sitting next to a very charming, young couple and we quickly became friends and our whole section had such a dynamic that we all became very close friends and started gathering together in bars and at people’s home for the away games.”

Socializing with other people who like the same team was an important reason why fans enjoyed watching football. A news article published in January 2011 highlighted the numerous celebrations that took place in neighborhood bars during Saints games and said “Saints fans form football families when they watch big games at their neighborhood bars” and said that “Who Dats are looking for gathering places outside their homes to share in the black and gold bonding and communal hell raising that are standard at every Saints watch party” (*Times-Picayune* January 8, 2011).

One interviewee shared a story that highlighted the importance that people placed on the relationships that they built through Saints football. She was part of a group that named themselves The Missing 1200. This name referred to 1200 Saints season ticket holders whose seats were removed to make room for Superdome renovations. When they eliminated her seating section, she compared it to the demolition of a neighborhood:

A lot of us were new ticketholders starting in 2006 for the rebirth of the Saints, the rebirth of the city, all of that and we came together and we became our own little community within the community so that’s one of the things you have in the Dome. You have neighborhoods up in the Dome. You have groups of people who may just sit there with whoever they came to the game with and then you have lifelong friendships that are forged and yeah I mean you basically demolished our neighborhood. I mean really you just said if we can, we’ll put you here but if we can’t then you just can move to another city and never come back to this city. You know? It was pretty harsh. We were all pretty upset about it.

These personal relationships that people built through Saints football were one part of the connectedness that they valued.

In addition to the family and friend group relationships that people built, the Who Dat Nation generated sociability among strangers. Lofland (2007) talked about the idea of 'open persons' who because of certain characteristics are seen as more available for an encounter than others. Wearing a Saints jersey made someone an open person. Someone who recently moved to New Orleans told me that he just got 'Who Dat-ed' for the first time. Someone had given him a Saints jersey as a gift and he wore it to the grocery store. He said a man in the parking lot said 'Who Dat' to him and offered up a fist bump. The man then proceeded to talk about details of the Saints game that had been played earlier that day. My friend confessed to me that he was relieved he had watched the Saints game that day otherwise he would not have had a clue what the man in the parking lot was talking about.

Whyte (1980) used a term called triangulation, defined as a process by which some external stimulus provides a linkage between people and prompts strangers to talk to each other as though they were not strangers (94). Displaying Saints related symbols served as a stimulus that created linkages between people. This prompted strangers to talk to each other. The simple act of wearing a Saints jersey to complete mundane daily chores like going to the grocery store opened strangers up to talking to each other. People could identify with strangers outside of the cosmopolitan canopies formed on game day.

Lofland's (2007) work on the public realm offered insight into understanding how strangers interact. She said, "a crucial dynamic of the public realm emerges from the fact that not only do many of its inhabitants not 'know' one another in the biographical sense, they often do not 'know' one another in the cultural sense. The public realm is populated not only by persons who have not met but often, as well, by persons who do not share 'symbolic worlds' (Lofland 2007: 8). The imagined community of the Who Dat Nation created a 'symbolic world' for people in New Orleans that allowed strangers to interact and begin to know one another. The act of wearing a Saints jersey, for example, gave two otherwise strangers a sense of knowing. A sports jersey delivered information about the person wearing it. Two strangers

wearing sports jerseys that met on a city sidewalk could assume information about each other. They could make conclusions about what geographical location a person is tied to, that the person shares a common interest in the sport, and that the person shares a fan culture or shares similar narratives.

In different ways, Saints fans built relationships throughout the duration of a football game and during interactions that took place throughout more mundane routines of daily life. In addition to placing value on Saints football as a way build different types of relationships, New Orleanians talked about the value of building community cohesion.

Community cohesion and racial barriers

Saints fans articulated the need for community cohesion. When interviewees and survey takers were asked to talk about the ways in which they thought the Saints are important for New Orleans, many of the answers involved the concept of uniting people. This indicated a recognition that barriers existed among the diverse urban population that comprises the New Orleans collective. The formation of the Who Dat Nation was important for the New Orleans community because it built community cohesion across historically segregated social patterning. For example, the Super Saints parade was assembled by borrowing single floats from various Mardi Gras parade krewes. This was the first and only time that such a mixture of floats appeared in one parade. A Zulu parade float rolled in the same line as a Rex parade float and Muses parade float. This was a profound co-mingling of local tradition in the sense that membership in Mardi Gras krewes remains deeply segregated by race, class, and gender based on historical segregation patterns in New Orleans. New Orleans historical residential development resembled a checkerboard pattern where slave and servant quarters rested very close to the homes of the city elite. Whites and blacks lived very close to each other and with the absence of a physical separation by race or class, prominent New Orleanians carved out a realm of privilege which involved membership in Carnival organizations. Memberships in

Carnival krewes continue to represent race, class, and gender segregation. For example, Rex is mostly reserved for white, wealthy New Orleanians. Leaders in the African-American community march in the Zulu parade. Muses, established in 2000, is one of the only all female krewes. Therefore, seeing these symbolically segregated signature floats together in a singular parade provided a visual indication that the Saints football team allowed the city to break through traditional race, class, and gender barriers.

Saints fans saw value in using football to bring the community together in a positive way. Talking about Saints football encouraged fans to express their desire to forge a spirit of community cohesion. Their words conveyed this message. For example, when asked in what ways the Saints are important for New Orleans, one fan responded, "it brings the community together and bonds us." Another used the words "motivation, inspiration, and community involvement" to describe why she thinks the Saints are important. To further reinforce the idea that people felt the Saints promoted positive feelings for New Orleans collectivity one fan simply stated "just bringing everyone together" was important and that "it helps the people to feel good about something New Orleans." Another fan said, the Saints were "a common theme that everyone from the city can rally around regardless of background." The Saints "bring everyone together" and were "a common rallying point for the city."

The celebrations taking place after the Saints won the Super Bowl highlighted a particularly dramatic example of New Orleanians feeling community cohesion in connection with their football team. One fan described this feeling:

I think it's something that was a true victory for the City of New Orleans. We've been waiting so long for it and we weren't the last NFL team to ever win a Super Bowl. There are still some out there that never have but it's the one thing that no matter what your race, creed, or color, it's what we all in this city wanted more than anything else to pull together for was a Super Bowl win and so you couldn't have anybody that could say anything negative. It was a purely positive thing for every member of society in the City of New Orleans.

As another enthusiastic Saints fan explained, “the Saints are what ties every New Orleanian together – near or far. People can have different favorite local restaurants or bands or places to watch parades, but *everybody* loves the Saints. It gives us something to collectively root for, celebrate, and commiserate about.” This fan suggested that having the Saints in New Orleans united people in a way that is unique to sports teams, rather than other celebratory or social events such as parades or dining out at restaurants. One fan said the Saints were important for New Orleans because “civic and cultural pride is most easily manifested in a sports team to root for.” This participant talked about sports as a cultural phenomenon that had mass appeal regardless of different individual tastes.

Even people who were not life-long or die-hard fans insisted that the Saints were important in bringing the New Orleans community together. One fan admitted, “I am new to New Orleans but I think that the team really brings the city together. It provides the community with a team to cheer for and helps them be closer.” Another explained, “I wasn’t really a sports fan before I fell for the Saints. But that team has been a sort of great equalizer for New Orleans – the one thing that everybody can love.” Another person said, “it’s a way to connect that seems to be a little more universal than a lot of other things. Take any kind of weirdo freak nerd who’s not even into sports, never played in their life and boom, all of a sudden you start talking about the Saints and they’re into it. It’s crazy that way. Sense of pride I guess, sense of belonging. It’s because people need something to hold onto that brings people together.”

While these fans focused on the mass appeal of a sports team, others addressed the ability to unite a community across social divides based on socio-economic status. The participants in this study made it clear that they believed the Saints bring people together regardless of social divides. One participant said, “the Saints provide a central point on which just about everyone in the city can get behind regardless of ethnicity, social background, income levels or anything else. They also provide a sense of continuity in a constantly changing world because the Saints have been around my whole life.”

Participants in this study often identified race as the particular social divide that the Saints could help unite people across. For example, “they help hold people together; race isn’t an issue between fans” and the Saints “bring us together as a city regardless of race.” The local paper picked up on the concept of the possibility that the Saints could bridge some kind of gap in city race relations and said, “a new dialogue has emerged in New Orleans race relations. The Saints first Super Bowl berth could prove to be emblematic of a turning point in the infinitely more tortured story of race in the Crescent City” (*Times-Picayune* February 2, 2010). “The concept of the Who Dat Nation, a post-Katrina phenomenon that has tied together Orleanians, suburbanites and displaced former residents of all ethnicities, ages and socioeconomic classes based on their love of the Saints” (*Times-Picayune* February 2, 2010). In this case not only were people demonstrating a collective identity, they also believed that this collective engagement could make a difference.

One person explained the phenomenon and said, “I feel like anything that is going to bring people together and transcends any kind of lines is a good thing. And for some reason sports, and specifically Saints football is like that here. It doesn’t matter; people are fanatical about that thing. And they will see past *anything* if you are a Saints fan and they are a Saints fan.” The local paper echoed similar sentiments saying, “the Saints are good for everybody. This blurs all the lines – racial, income, social status, everything” (*Times-Picayune* February 9, 2010).

Sociological research and mass media narratives commonly use sports as a microcosm of society to better understand or even influence race relations. Influential football player and coach, Bill Curry, talked about a phenomenon that occurs between members of a football team who are working towards common goals that he calls “The Miracle of the Huddle.” The miracle of the huddle occurred when players of all races, nationalities, religions, and backgrounds transcended their differences and came together as one to accomplish a goal as a team. The way that Saints fans talked about football, especially in referencing the Super Bowl winning

year, sounded like the miracle of the huddle was experienced by the New Orleans community. Rather than being reserved as a phenomenon for athletes, Saints fans talked about these powerful unifying forces as being possible between fans of an NFL team in a contemporary American city. One man who experienced the Aints funeral described the event by saying, "It done a whole lot for the city because it made the city fall in love. It doesn't matter what color you is. Everybody is embracing each other, hugging each other, saying, 'Who Dat, we 'dat, and all 'dat. You understand?" (houmatoday.com, *In New Orleans, Saints fans stage funeral for the Aints*, 2/22/11).

New Orleans residents believed that the Saints offered a way for them to interact with other urban residents regardless of color, age, or social status. Ordinary fans talked about sports having the power to unite people across racial and other social barriers, believed in the concept, and believed it was important for their city. People responded to open ended questions with answers about the Saints being a rallying point to bring the city together regardless of race without specifically being asked about race.

Observing Saints fans provided evidence that different races of people do gather together to engage in Saints game watching. The snapshot of fans in section 630 of the Superdome revealed a mix of demographics. The crowd of people in the streets for the Buddy D dress run contained a mix of people based on age, race, gender, disability all co-mingling for the purpose of celebrating the Saints. The skinny man in the bar with a Mohawk and tribal piercings wore the exact same Saints T-shirt as the Tulane student- it would be difficult to imagine that any other items in their personal wardrobe closets would be anything alike. These stories and observations provided clues for how people were interacting and how people of diverse backgrounds were co-mingling using Saints football as a catalyst.

Contradictions exist within the narrative of sports as a racial unifier. Saints fans were quick to point out that they believed in sports to unite people across differences, particularly race, but there remained some question about whether or not something as seemingly frivolous

as sports can make a real difference in something as complex as racism. When the race narrative emerged in 2010, the *Times-Picayune* article published about this topic quoted social scientists who explained the significance of the Saints success as a racial unifier should not be overstated. Lance Hill, executive director of the Southern Institute of Education, a program focused on race relations, said, "I'd like to think anything that makes people trust each other and have more confidence in their ability to succeed as a city is a good thing, but we shouldn't fool ourselves into thinking that winning football games solves fundamental structural problems, or that a racial group will relinquish long-held grievances because of it" (*Times-Picayune* February 2, 2010). Tulane University geographer Richard Campanella agreed and said, "Is it an illusion? Of course it is; it's a sporting event. But if this sense of optimism and unity is this universally shared, it's a powerful illusion and maybe it's not entirely illusory" (*Times-Picayune* February 2, 2010). The camaraderie associated with Saints football can be both illusory and not, reinforcing the complexity of negotiating meaning through sport spaces and highlighting the contradictions within the narrative of sports as a racial unifier.

One resident quoted in the news article, a black Vietnam veteran living in the Gentilly neighborhood said, "I have never seen black and white people talk like this. I saw Bourbon Street after the game and it was like seeing salt and pepper put together. It's not the end-all-be-all, but it's a good start" (*Times-Picayune* February 2, 2010). This man's comment offered a poignant summary of the extent to which the collective identity of the Who Dat Nation can influence city race relations. He recognized that the Saints success and shared sense of euphoria sparked positive social interactions between different races and that this was a good start towards envisioning a more collective commitment to bridge gaps between deeply divided social circles.

New Orleans Saints fans marked Saints football as a realm that allowed them to interact with other New Orleanians regardless of race and indicated that this opportunity for community cohesion through racial unity was a valuable part of having sports in New Orleans. In addition,

Saints fan talked about using Saints game watching experiences to build friendships with groups of people where strangers became friends and friends became like family. The Who Dat Nation was both a symbol of community cohesion and offered a means of interaction. Whether or not people can use that symbolism, the fan interaction, and the newly formed relationships to take conversations about race to the next level and address racial problems presents a greater challenge. However, sporting moments that achieve wide-spread attention such as the case with the Saints, could offer opportunities for social scientists, activists and citizens to raise these more substantial questions regarding disparate racial outcomes based on structural social inequalities to an attentive audience. Sport spaces offer a place to challenge and renegotiate bigger questions of social justice. The contradictions, questions about whether sport unites or divides, do not undermine the power of narratives about race and community cohesion or the opportunity to negotiate popular opinion about social issues through sport spaces in a way that can begin to promote social justice. The popular and powerful narrative showed that people believed community cohesion was possible where diverse urban residents could unite under the collective identity of the Who Dat Nation.

In addition to the idea of the Who Dat Nation, Saints fandom also offered places to experience face-to-face interactions among diverse people. Places where Saints fans gathered were examples of Anderson's (2011) cosmopolitan canopies. These cosmopolitan canopies "do all provide an opportunity for diverse strangers to become better acquainted with people they otherwise seldom observe up close. The existence of the canopy allows such people, whose stronger reference point often remains their own social class or ethnic group, a chance to encounter others and so work toward a more cosmopolitan appreciation of difference" (Anderson 2011: 276). Anderson (2011) suggested that chances to encounter strangers with different social classes or ethnic groups help work towards appreciating these differences. When talking about how he thinks the Saints contribute to improving city race relations, one Saints fan offered his thoughts in a way that shows how contradictions co-existed:

How the Saints are connected to stuff and people get into it. It's good. It really is a good way to calm people down. Calm them down. Make them stop hating each other. It's a good way. It's not very substantive at the end of the day but it's still good for the soul. That's because we're all feeling the same way at the exact same time and it's being caused by something that's not a conflict. It was something positive and it helped that black people could go to the stadium and buy a ticket wherever they wanted to from the beginning.

When this man talked about black people being able to buy a ticket since the beginning, he was referencing the first exhibition game that New Orleans staged in 1963 to lure the NFL. Tickets to that game were sold on a first come, first served basis regardless of race (Dixon 2007). During the interview this man also talked about how the Saints were able to integrate people where other institutions failed. He talked about the how the current school system was supposed to be an integrated institution but in many ways was still segregated. He said "it's like the other institutions that you could integrate here didn't but with football, many people have to be together." This man recognized the contradictions but still saw how narratives and interactions within the realm of sport could be helpful. He saw Saints football as the institution where people of different races could interact.

This fan's ideas coincided with how Anderson (2011) described the function of cosmopolitan canopies. Anderson (2011) explained, "as urbanites, they discover people who are strangers to them, not just as individuals but also as representatives of groups they "know" only in the abstract. The canopy can thus be a profoundly humanizing experience. And when people exposed to all this return to their neighborhoods, they may do so with a more grounded knowledge of the other than was possible without such an experience. In this way the generations may establish new social patterns" (Anderson 2001: 276). The repetitive civility experienced under the canopy creates expectations of continued civil engagement. This analysis suggested that the presence of cosmopolitan canopies, such as those formed during Saints game day, can have a lasting and positive influence on city social patterns.

People saw community cohesion when they saw the Who Dat Nation and wanted to use that cohesion to transcend the Who Dat Nation and impact other dimensions of urban life. Using

the collectivity to create a narrative of renewal for the city served as an extremely powerful example of how a collective identity could serve a greater purpose. The moment in 2006 when the Saints returned to the Superdome after Katrina solidified the symbolism surrounding the Saints and showed they could help New Orleans people feel connected to the city of New Orleans. The Who Dat Nation emerged as a city-wide phenomenon in 2009 to connect New Orleans people to each other. The Super Bowl celebrations brought this idea to the forefront as people had ample opportunities to interact with others. New Orleans residents continued to interact with each other using Saints football as a medium for generating sociability.

Within discourses of collective identity, people latch onto the elimination of racial tensions through sport spaces as a positive narrative connected with reproducing collective identities. People tend to seek out instances of unity and cohesion among different races within the sports crowd. To a certain extent, Saints fans embraced this message. As Saints fans gathered in public spaces during football games they created pockets of sociability throughout urban public spaces where people interacted in a positive way despite their social differences. Fan practices created a 'cosmopolitan canopy' to which everyone had access through fandom. The cosmopolitan canopy was a diverse, civil space that could be inclusive. A deeper sense of collective identity emerges grounded in knowledge of the other based on face to face interaction. The idea of the cosmopolitan canopy is deeper than game day civility and can leave lasting impressions beyond the fleeting interactions experienced within the canopy. Members of the Who Dat Nation both wanted to see a sense of racial cohesion and recognized that they experienced interactions with strangers that were different than themselves in positive ways. It is possible that this could have a lasting effect where the symbolism and interactions present in the cosmopolitan canopy can create a pattern of repetitive civil interactions.

However, the contradiction remains that viewing the collective of Saints fans as a homogenous group despite racial differences ignores structural racial outcomes. A true commitment to address structural inequality based on race and class that Hurricane Katrina

exposed quickly faded. The rebuilding of New Orleans was marked with more incidents of racial disparity than equality. Although sport fan spaces allow people a space to envision greater community cohesion and the ability to transcend what appeared to be deep racial divides in the city they live in, this did not necessarily lead to different racial outcomes. When the narratives of race and community cohesion emerge in sport spaces, the question remains unanswered about the extent these spaces can really do to facilitate changes in city race relations. Sport spaces continue to offer a platform, both symbolic and in practice, to further negotiate and challenge ideas about social differences. The connections between fans, their city, and their home team offer an intersection for continuing discussions about the extent to which imagined community and a sense of community identity foster repetitive civil interactions. This provokes discussion on the extent to which sport fan activities influence changes in social interaction across racial differences.

The proliferation of Saints messages in New Orleans threw a blanket over the city that seemed to wrap up New Orleanians in a unified Who Dat package, especially during the Super Bowl winning season. But, underneath the covers lies a multiplicity of voices that experience the city in different ways. People have multiple, often contradictory alliances, networks and identities that are not erased through affiliation with the Who Dat Nation. A look at how city residents created their own fan environments throughout urban public spaces, leads to a better understanding of the social patterning that exists within the larger realm of Saints fandom.

Figure 5: Cosmopolitan canopy



Saints events create cosmopolitan canopies where people of different races and genders can come together and interact in a positive and civil manner. This picture was taken at the Buddy D Dress run in 2010.

CHAPTER 7: FROM HOME TO DOME: Fandom, Gender and Public Space

Telling team history in terms of great catches, big wins, and coaching changes gives fans a chain of events upon which to build a common story about football and fandom. However, the drama that takes place throughout city spaces in connection with football builds fandom in a different way. Fan practices extend throughout city spaces where fandom becomes the compilation of diverse activities that reflect attachment to the team and attachment to other people through social interactions and the shared experience of rooting for the home team. Fandom is not limited to those cheering in the stadium or limited to knowledge of the game, such as quoting game statistics or player achievements. All activities that people engage in that make them feel connected to the team or connected to other people in a communal spirit of rooting for the home team count as fan activities.

Looking at the ways in which city residents created their own fan environments throughout urban public spaces showed nuances in how people experience fandom because they have different social identifiers or different ways of experiencing city life. At a tailgate party, one person may talk about the best plays in Saints history while another fan is happiest to socialize and drink beer. Whether someone talks about football, eats cheese fries in a sports bar during a game, watches the game on television, cheers loudly, or silently wears a Saints tie with their business suit, all of these practices are fan activities. These indicators of fandom can take place in diverse spaces and at any time such as on game day, during routines of daily life, at the stadium, or in a neighborhood bar.

City residents created their own fan experiences throughout urban public spaces. There were multiple ways to engage in fan practices. The social activities taking place throughout the city showed that the value of professional football to a city extended beyond the confines of the publicly funded stadium. This created a new concept of fandom that incorporated many diverse

people in diverse spaces. People interacted with football in a way that was compatible with their identities and daily lifestyles. City residents displayed Saints emblems even when there was not a football game going on to further solidify a fan identity. Saints fans socialized in preferred neighborhood bars that complemented their everyday lived experiences rather than conforming to some ideal of 'traditional' fandom.

Much fandom literature defines 'traditional' fandom through masculinity, where stadiums are perceived as masculine spaces and fan activities function to reinforce male cultural. However, when I looked at spaces across the city, they were populated with both men and women. Rigid divisions between masculinity and femininity were not always apparent when looking at the practices of Saints fans. Both genders appeared to engage in fan activities and talked of their attachment to the team similarly and in equal numbers. Women fully participated in creating fan spaces and meaningful experiences around football. Given the proliferation of women engaging in fan activities throughout the Who Dat Nation, fandom can no longer be taken for granted as a masculine space. Contradictions existed between what I saw in different city spaces and defining fandom through masculinity. Shifting the discussion of fandom from team attachment to fan practices helps resolve this contradiction by allowing us to gain a more robust understanding of how diverse people create meaningful attachments to professional sports throughout city spaces.

Even though spaces of Saints fandom were populated by women, assumptions remained about gender and sports fandom. Throughout my participant observation at Saints games, moments occurred where I was reminded that, as a woman, people make assumptions about me as a fan. Despite the growing confidence in being able to assert that sports can make a difference in uniting across social barriers, gender conspicuously sticks out as a social divide where exclusionary, rather than inclusionary practices plague women participating in sport. Gender remains as a less visible and often misunderstood social divide within sport spaces, particularly when questioning the role of sport in constructing masculine and feminine social

spaces. The stadium stands as a space that reminds us sport spaces are gendered, for example, through regulations such as gender specific security lines. Expanding spaces of fandom to include places such as a grocery store, a home porch stoop, or an intimate tailgate party begins to reveal different kinds of team attachment and an understanding of diverse fan behaviors that may or may not reinforce assumptions about gendered sport spaces.

Looking at fan practices that took place throughout New Orleans city spaces lead to a broader conceptualization of sport fandom where all have access to the Who Dat Nation, can experience fandom in multi-faceted ways and each way is a valid form of fandom. Sport spaces have a history of being characterized by hegemonic struggles over whose activities count more than others, situated within a wider social and historical context of structured inequality. Fandom can be multi-faceted where one version does not have to be a lesser version than another based on traditional measures of fan authenticity. I target gendered fan practices as a way to bring forward the discussion of the extent to which spaces of sport fandom can be used to negotiate meaningful collective identities through social interactions and lived experiences. The analysis leads to a more robust understanding of gender and fandom, as well as spaces of fandom that help us illuminate the gendered nature of sport fan activities and the ways in which sport fan identities are more deeply embedded within city spaces.

Gendered spaces in sports fandom

Throughout western civilization, sport has been an almost exclusively male domain. A textbook published in the 1970s about the sociology of sport, pointed out that “sport is perhaps the most sexually segregated of America’s civilian social institutions” (Edwards 1973). The extent to which this has changed since that sentence was written is subject to debate. Sport served as a sign of masculinity and arena spaces were a major site for the cultural reproduction of masculinity. Consumption of sport had to do with defining what is masculine and what is not feminine. Sport as a cultural institution served as a training ground where boys learned what it

means to be men where masculinity was something that had to be taught. Boys learned at an early age that participating in athletics was an important part of developing a masculine identity. The insult, 'you throw like a girl,' demonstrated the way in which femininity was seen as degrading and incompatible with sports participation and masculine ideals. Young (2005) demonstrated the strength of this stereotype when she borrowed the phrase 'throwing like a girl' as the title to her essays on the socially constructed behavior of female bodies in a male-dominated society.

Early approaches to sport sociology which served as a foundation for the field presented theses that sport served as a masculine realm and a site for the production and reproduction of gendered power relations. This perspective continued to influence conceptual approaches to analyzing gender in sport. Feminist approaches to sport analysis explored female athletes to show ways in which women were marginalized and excluded in sport participation (Birrell and Cole 1994). Most analysis of women in sport centered around the female athlete where research focused on the under-representation of women in sport or the uneven availability of resources for women to participate in sports. Examining women's participation in sport as athletes provided analysis of the ways in which resources for men's and women's athletics were not equitable. Women's sports performances were often marginalized and trivialized as inferior versions of "the real thing." Common arguments involved framing sports and the sports stadium as a domain for expressing masculinity while demonizing women, all while reinforcing hegemonic gender norms (Griffin 1998).

Since most research focused on the female athlete, even less was understood about women in terms of sports fandom. Although, mainstream stereotypes assumed and academic fandom studies reported that sports fans were disproportionately likely to be male (Wann et al 2001). The traditional constructions of fandom, such as those defined by Armstrong (1998) or Giulianotti (2002), included *male* culture as a core definition. The white, working class male was seen as the default fan, and therefore his behaviors were still regarded as the most authentic

fan practices (Jones 2008). Although there existed more ambiguity in studying fans than in studying athletes, the practice of trivializing women seeped into the realm of sports fandom as well, where women were portrayed as inferior versions of the real fans. Because sport was defined with men and masculinity, women in sports became trespassers on male territory (Griffin 1998).

This trespasser construct was difficult to avoid with the case of women as fans of NFL football. Cities spent millions of dollars to attract men's sports, not women's sports teams. American football was held up as the epitome of a masculine realm in which women cannot cross. Nelson (1994) explained that many men need to establish the 'fact' that no matter what gains women make in sports they could never play football. Therefore using the case of the Saints in New Orleans, a men's professional football team seemed an unlikely place to agree that all fans 'Who Dat the same.' However, fan spaces in the Who Dat Nation incorporated all the actions of fan activity and men and women appeared to engage in fan activity and speak of their attachment to the Saints similarly and in equal numbers.

One woman in Finn McCool's bar during a Saints game with puffy, almost afro-like hair talked to me about how she is the biggest Saints fan. Her enthusiasm for Saints football was obvious when she jumped up on her barstool in cheerful jubilation at the end of the game when the Saints won on a field goal in the last seconds of play. She wore an oversized white Saints jersey, which looked tent-like on her round frame and draped past her shorts. She showed me pictures of when she went to look at the Lombardi trophy and got a personal glimpse at the Saints Super Bowl ring. After the Saints won the Super Bowl, they took their Super Bowl trophy and a Super Bowl ring on tour to different locations throughout the greater New Orleans area so that fans could see these artifacts up close for themselves. This woman described her excitement as she waited in line for her personal moments with the ring and the trophy. She asked me if I knew that the Saints had a high number of female fans, saying she had heard some report that 50% of Saints fans were women. "That's crazy" she said, either in pride or in

disbelief that football had so many women fans. She was only one of several people who quoted that ambiguous statistic to me throughout the Saints football season. The fact the people state this statistic revealed that assumptions remain about the role of gender in constructing fan identities. According to the NFL, about 375,000 women attended NFL games each week and 45 million watched the games on TV, accounting for almost 50% of the NFL audience (Yost 2006). How can sports be a reflection of male culture when so much of the fan activities and opinions of the Who Dat Nation were created by women?

Women fully participated in Saints events and Saints fan activities but, assumptions remained about the gendered nature of sports fandom. One of the city-wide celebrations surrounding the Saints Super Bowl win, the Buddy D Dress run, showed the complexity of negotiating gender identities in sport fan spaces. The men flipped gender norms on their head while sporting dresses – an act that seemed as absurd as the Saints going to the Super Bowl. During the parade, I saw one woman dressed in black pants with a black jacket and tie. She painted a mustache across her lip in opposing satire to the men in dresses surrounding her. I told a friend the next day about the Buddy D Dress run. She quizzically asked me why I walked in the parade. I said because it was for Saints fans. She corrected me saying that it was supposed to be only for men. I was confused faced with the idea that something for Saints fans, something to celebrate the Saints was not meant for all fans. In practice, the Buddy D dress run was a celebration with diverse participants, including women. But the perceptions remained, as evidenced by my friend's comments, that this sport celebration was something for men where women played the role of intruders. Saints games offered a particular time and space to transcend differences in gender, race, class and sexuality. Despite this, there were still incidents of gender marginalization within Saints fandom. Many scholars argued that women will experience feelings of marginalization and denigration in their consumption of organized sport (Griffin 1998; Birrell and Cole 1994).

Fandom literature did not offer a convincing framework for conceptualizing the Who Dat Nation. A concern with violence in football (soccer) culture sparked ethnographic studies on the male subculture of football hooliganism that formed a foundation for fandom studies. The construction of 'traditional' and 'authentic' forms of fandom were built upon the idea of masculine culture as a core definition. Studies that give voice to women fans are extremely limited and have done little to challenge the masculine foundation upon which fandom literature was constructed. For example, Jones (2008) focused her research on female fans at male sporting events (soccer in England) to illustrate that women experienced a tension between fan identities and gender. She focused on how women reacted to abusive male behavior and found that women asserted their fan identities over their gender identities. Although Jones (2008) focused her research on female fans, her interpretations reinforced the idea that men are traditional fans.

With the case of Saints fans, women did not talk about a need to overcome being a woman in order to be a Saints fan. Saints fans who are women did not perceive themselves as counterparts to a male fan standard. They were fans. They were the Who Dat Nation. The ways that they engaged with sports was fandom, not an inferior version of fandom. Within the collective identity of the Who Dat Nation, having a female gender identity was not incompatible with being a sports fan even though the sports industry and sport scholars remained sluggish in realizing or acknowledging this. The introduction of pink jerseys as the first official fan apparel choice for women served as a loud indicator that society lacked clear understanding of women sports fans. Many women sports fans wanted to wear apparel that displayed their team colors, not stereotypical, gendered pink. Reproducing sports spaces as something homogenous, in this case using an assumption that all women like pink, does not seek to appreciate differences and account for a multiplicity of voices that comprise the collective of sports fans.

Rather than asking women to readjust their identity to fit into definitions of fandom, it is necessary to shift how we conceptualize fandom. We need to adjust our understanding of

fandom as the practices of those who experience sporting events. Fandom literature does not address women sports fans in a way that seeks to appreciate difference and assess the extent to which women can influence sport fan spaces to construct and maintain alternatives to the dominant perspective of sports as a masculine realm. Looking at spaces of sport fandom throughout city public spaces shows how fans create and inhabit social worlds that fit their needs. The public spaces within which fan activities occurred, gave opportunities to examine both restrictions and opportunities for fans to assert meaningful interactions and social experiences.

Public social spaces

Public spaces offered a place where an individual fan's relationship to the team transformed into relationships among other fans. Lofland (2007) outlined three realms of city life: private, public, and parochial. The parochial realm could be defined as "characterized by a sense of commonality among acquaintances and neighbors who are involved in interpersonal networks that are located within communities" (Lofland 2007: 10). Lofland (2007) simplified the definitions of these three realms by explaining the private realm is the world of the household and friend and kin networks; the parochial realm is the world of the neighborhood, workplace, or acquaintance networks; and the public realm is the world of strangers and the street.

Another way that Lofland (2007) defined the three realms of city life is: a private realm exists when the dominating relational form found in some physical space is intimate; a parochial realm exists when the dominating relational form found in some physical spaces is communal; a public realm exists when the dominating relational form found in some physical space is stranger or categorical. The realm of Saints fans included all of these different types of relationships. The relationship forms among Saints fans changed as people watched games together. Strangers became friends and friends became like family during the duration of a football game. Fan activities toyed with the rules of public life. The relationship building that occurred between those cheering for the same team turned public space into something

parochial. As Saints fans gathered in public places during football games, they created pockets of sociability throughout urban public spaces where people interacted in a positive way despite their social differences.

Focusing on sports fans as a research subject provided an opportunity to study human interaction that was fluid across private, parochial, and public realms. Among football spectators, these three social realms of city life played out in public spaces. The link between fans and public spaces provided an important connection. The activities of athletes, especially professional athletes, were carried out in private spaces. Athletes were sequestered in their own private spaces such as locker rooms, the playing field, closed team practices or secluded team transportation. In contrast, the activities of sports fans were largely carried out in public spaces such as neighborhood bars, city streets, or stadiums. This link between fans and public spaces made fandom studies a unique way to study the public realm. Collective identities develop through engagement with others. To develop collective identities across differences that are reflected in our daily life patterns and routines we need public spaces that transcend those differences. Fandom offers a way to both conceptualize the idea of a collective identity and a mechanism for interaction throughout the public realm.

In a basic sense, the public realm means urban public space with an important characteristic being that it is inhabited by strangers. The public realm has a geography, a history, a culture, and a complex web of internal relationships (Lofland 2007). This dissertation described the geography, history, culture, and web of relationships of the public realm known as the Who Dat Nation. Lofland's (2007) definition of the public realm was "in short, the public realm is a form of social space distinct from the private realm and its full-blown existence is what makes the city different from other settlement types. The public realm is the city's quintessential social territory" (Lofland 2007:9). Almost every activity that Saints fans engaged in generated sociability. Even people who watched games alone at home may talk about game plays before

or after with neighbors or co-workers. People left their homes wearing Saints gear, decorated their porches with Saints flags, or bought a Saints decorated cupcake from the local bakery.

Having a home team transformed public spaces outside the confines of the publicly funded stadium. City residents created their own fan environments throughout urban public spaces. Saints fans that could not or chose not to watch Saints games in the Superdome carved out their own spaces to experience the community cohesiveness of watching football with other urban residents. Participant observation took place throughout New Orleans spaces including in the Superdome during Saints home games and at various bars and other locations in New Orleans during away games. Walking the streets on game days, driving through neighborhoods, and even stopping by the grocery store provided places to observe ways in which people experience the Saints throughout New Orleans. This approach leads to a richer understanding of the multi-faceted ways in which people experience fandom.

Looking at the ways the Who Dat Nation operates throughout different city spaces approaches an understanding of how sport is experienced in everyday life and social interactions where sporting and urban affiliations are intertwined. Navigating through public spaces on Saints game day revealed the nuanced social patterning that existed among Saints fans throughout the city. Public spaces changed on game day, rearranged both formally and informally to accommodate people who wanted to share in the communal revelry associated with football.

The rules of public social structuring during Saints games are like a map of concentric circles laid over top of New Orleans with the Superdome positioned in the center as the tightest controlled space. The control and physical social segmentation loosened up as you moved away from the stadium, into the closest surrounding streets and sidewalks and further out into the city. Once fans moved out of the public sidewalks, open parking lots, and public transportation modes and into neighborhood bars, more parochial spaces emerged. Each neighborhood bar became its own center of sociability where the control and social

segmentation was influenced by those who spent time there. The following descriptions show what game day looked like across the city for people who were engaging in their chosen game day routines.

Navigating public space on game day

When I stepped on my front porch that morning to retrieve the Sunday paper, the neighbor a couple of houses down was outside attaching two Saints flags to his car windows. On this particular Saints game day, as the bus rolled up to the stop where I regularly catch a ride downtown, the words GO SAINTS scrolled across the lighted marquee on the front of the bus rather than the words ELYSIAN FIELDS and the number 55 that normally flash in lights to indicate the route for this bus. As the doors opened I noticed the bus driver wore a Saints jersey over his transportation uniform.

Walking from the bus stop or a parking spot towards the Superdome on game day, one encountered bars, tailgate parties, busy sidewalks and other spaces of sociability throughout New Orleans. Tailgating spaces tended to be centralized within a handful of city blocks near the Superdome. Parking lots often provided the settings for tailgate parties. Parking in the Superdome garages was reserved, purchased like a season ticket, for \$20 per spot per game. The parking lots closest to the Superdome filled up early with cars or were kept clear of all cars to accommodate private parties. This scarcity of space to actually park a car meant that people did a lot of walking on game day from further out in the city to get near the Superdome. People left from their houses, from a far out parking spot, from a bus or streetcar stop, from a hotel, from a bar and all walked in droves towards the Superdome.

Walking through the French Quarter, a site of activities for tourists and service industry workers, showed a mix of locals and tourists. During one Saints game, I entertained three out of town visitors to New Orleans who had tickets to the Saints game. On the morning of the game, they wanted to shop in the French Quarter, walk around, check out the tailgating and still get to

the Dome in time to see pre-game. We went to the French Market to get souvenirs. Each of my guests wore a Saints shirt they bought the night before in the French Quarter. One of them wanted to get a hand grenade drink from the Tropical Isle bar on Bourbon Street. The bartender said lots of Saints fans come through there on game day to get hand grenades and pre-party in the French Quarter. Fans from the opposing football teams descended on the French Quarter as a hospitable spot for tourists. The French Quarter, as an established entertainment venue, was an obvious choice as a place to gather to experience a party atmosphere. Saints fans instinctively flocked to the French Quarter after the Super Bowl win in 2010 to share in revelry and communal joy.

Other city spaces that seemed like less obvious choices for communal celebration attracted Saints fans anyway. For example, Saints fans flocked to Handsome Willy's bar prior to Saints home games. It was the kind of bar where people stopped by on their way to the Superdome to have a drink, get a burger, and do some pre-game celebrating. Handsome Willy's bar was nestled into the 7th Ward, downtown near the Superdome and medical district. Rather than a row of entertainment venues, this tiny, red brick building stood almost isolated amid the industrialism of grayish white medical buildings. Its close neighbors included a cemetery and the remnants of a public housing project. A small pizza place next door gave Handsome Willy's the only company on an otherwise uninviting street. In contrast to the vacant buildings and barren streets shadowed by Interstate 10, Handsome Willy's was alive with people, colors, and a general fun atmosphere. Secured behind a wooden fence, an open air patio hides from the vast blacktop parking lot surrounding it. Picnic tables, shade umbrellas, an outdoor bar and grill station all welcomed Saints fans. The sizzling burgers and smoke from the grill wafted into the air, filling the lungs of patrons with a deliciously tempting smell. A paper sign advertised breakfast burritos for \$3. Bartenders served up beer and a specialty drink called Handsome Juice.

Figure 6: Bourbon Street



People walk along Bourbon Street in New Orleans French Quarter prior to a Saints home game.

The interior of the bar had a big screen for game watching and a DJ station for playing music. People spilled out of the front entrance to the bar into the streets creating a block party type atmosphere. A temporary bar poised along the sidewalk accommodated the crowd that was far larger than the modest indoor bar could handle. While the indoor bar was small and dark, outside was sunny and lively with young Saints fans.

About one-half block down the street, three men sat in folding chairs propped up against a building wall, chattering and having drinks. It resembled tailgating except no one else was around them. Their location was several blocks from the Superdome and there was not much to look at on the street they were on. I saw a similar scene in an almost empty parking lot nearby – three men sitting at a folding table outside their truck. It looked like a pre-game party without the pre-game crowd, an isolated site for tailgating. This informal tailgate setting was removed from the more regulated tailgating hub outside the Superdome.

In contrast to these smaller, intimate gatherings, the city blocks surrounding the Superdome transformed on game day into a large block party. Police officers were posted at each intersection, waving batons to coordinate the flow of cars with the waves of pedestrians walking across the city sidewalks. Stretching out from the Superdome for several blocks the city felt like an outdoor party. Music from large, personal speaker systems covered every area. The soundscape created from outdoor speakers along with smells emanating from barbeque cookers seemed to unify an outdoor space that spanned several city blocks. It looked like a series of private parties taking place in a public space. Some of these spaces were tightly secured and regulated while many resembled more informal gatherings of friends in parking lots and sidewalks.

Lofland (2007) pointed out that small pieces of the private realm – ‘bubbles’ – may intrude into public or parochial space. “Just as they do when they reserve portions of public parks for weddings or family reunions, persons who are linked by ties of family and/or friendship may, if they are sufficient in number, create little bubbles of private space in a sea of public or parochial territory” (Lofland 2007: 12). Tailgate parties surrounding the Superdome looked like these little bubbles of private spaces. Hovered under tents, around cars or near personal RVs, some of these parties looked like the living room had been transported to a public space. However, these spaces were unified in purpose. They all celebrated the Saints game. They were unified under a canopy of noise, smells, and the sight of black and gold jerseys and costumes.

Groups of people gathered around their parked cars in lots that provide just enough room to carve out spaces to set up tents, grills, chairs, and drink coolers. Tents and in one case even a thick chain demarcated the party spaces. Along one strip some sort of bean bag toss game entertained members of that party. Mostly, the scene involved people standing around with their friends. People mingled for hours, listening to music, drinking and eating, dancing, or chatting with friends. Talk of football, Saints trivia, reflecting on past games, or discussing how

much each player is liked or hated gave people who don't know each other something to talk about. At one of these parties a man confided in me that talking about football gave him something to say to the "high powered lawyers" around him – a group of people whose incomes and political influence were so far removed from his own that he couldn't imagine what else they would have in common.

Amongst these stationary parties, people walked in constant streams along the sidewalk and streets for hours leading up to kickoff. Two women weaved in and out of the groups of people offering pralines for sale. Two men walked up and down the streets, through parking lot areas selling black and gold T-shirts. A few open air buses circled the city blocks, blaring music and providing the passengers a mobile party experience. Heads turned as loud music blared from these mobile parties. People clad in Saints jerseys danced and dangled out of the moving bus. The walk to the Superdome surrounded me with hoards of people all moving in the direction of the Superdome. I glanced in the windows of a Subway sandwich shop in a building across the street from the Superdome. Almost everyone in there was wearing a Saints jersey, except for one man asleep at a table. He was homeless and found an opportune time to take a quick nap indoors as the streams of Saints fans rendered him mostly invisible.

A row of RVs, positioned for pre-game festivities near the Dome, lined an entire edge of parking lot along Loyola Street. One group looked like they were going to camp out in that parking lot through the entire game. An elaborate set up with a tent, grill, tables, and chairs all provided enough entertainment to sustain the group throughout the duration of the game. The words *Happy Birthday Kaylee* decorated a paper sign stuck onto the side of the RV. Several people sat in a circle of chairs under a pop up tent as if re-creating their living room on the searing asphalt.

The next RV looked expensive. A sleek black and red exterior, built in canopies, and a retractable drawer extended out from the RV to hold a flat screen TV. Built in speakers projected music across the parking lot. Another RV housed a smoker grill big enough to serve a

modest sized restaurant. Several tents and tables set up to serve food. Although the city layout of New Orleans did not provide the same expanses of grassy fields that other stadiums boast for tailgating festivities, people found these small niches to conduct traditional tailgate parties.

The tailgating spaces closest to the Superdome were more regulated than their outlying counterparts. Entire parking lots were fenced off, some protected with barricades. Instead of housing cars these parking lots held private parties, where only people with a wristband could enter the temporary party space. Some of these parties required wristbands that had to be obtained ahead of time by private invitation only. I passed by one cordoned off tailgate party space sponsored by Coors Light beer. Metal barricades outlined a queue line, where dozens of people lined up single file to get in.

Champions Square served as the official, controlled and commercialized pre-game party space. Champions Square, the newly developed party area outside of the Superdome, was set up to entertain fans on their way into the game. This space also attracted Saints fans who wanted to join festivities near the Superdome but did not have a ticket to the game. A one block stretch of LaSalle Street had been permanently closed to vehicle traffic to accommodate Champions Square. 30-foot photos of sports heroes were on display including Drew Brees, Michael Jordan, and Muhammad Ali. Hoisted high in the air above the music stage, the Saintsations cheerleaders danced in scaffolding boxes surrounding the several story high projector screens. They resembled cage dancers in an exotic night show. A grand staircase led up to the gate C Superdome entrance. People without tickets were welcome to sit on the steps and watch the game that was projected on a large viewing screen.

During the pre-game festivities local musicians like Rockin Doopsie performed on stage. Saintsations cheerleaders walked around selling their calendars. Saints fans posed for pictures with other Saints fans who wore elaborate costumes. There was a large crowd at Champions Square but you could move through it freely. One Seahawks fan at Champions Square caused a little bit of a crowd to gather around him as he performed crazy dance moves that were

acrobatic in nature. Sponsored by Verizon, the space contained food vendor booths, carnival-like cotton candy stands, drink stands, and NFL apparel sales. Portable potties lined the sidewalk and the entire area was monitored by Superdome security.

The outside concourse around the Superdome featured entertainment elements set up by the Saints organization. One strip held promotional tents for sponsors. A Saints Kids Club sign-up area had large inflatables for children to play on. The Lottery, as a Saints sponsor, had a big cart set up to buy Powerball tickets and scratch off tickets. For \$10 you could get a T-shirt and be entered for a chance to win field passes for a Saints game. Verizon had a large tent set up. Even within this commercialized and regulated tailgate spot an unsanctioned, entrepreneurial spirit emerged. For example, a woman offered face paintings and used a garbage bin to lay out her small basket of supplies. These sponsored spaces along with Champions Square were all directly outside of the Superdome and controlled by the Saints and SMG, the Superdome Management Group.

The journey through city streets towards the Superdome before Saints games provided a setting that was alive with sights, sounds and smells all brewing in anticipation for the football game. The ride back home after the game provided a time to reflect on the less frenzied aspects of city life on Saints game day. In contrast to the complete Saintsmania that existed in and around the Superdome during pre-game festivities, there was something so ordinary about riding the bus home from the game. At the bus stop, my husband and I stuck out as anomalies in our Saints jerseys. A tourist from Europe stopped and asked which bus would take her to the French Quarter. As we waited for the bus, a local woman on the phone loudly cussed at the man on the other end of the call, saying she wanted her stuff back. People clamored on and off the bus in work uniforms – a grocery store polo shirt, a white cook's uniform. The fact that it was Saints game day did not take everyone away from their daily routine of taking the bus to and from work. The loudness of the streets around the Superdome was absent in the quietness blanketing the passengers on the city bus. Within the confines of the bus, it almost seemed like

any other day in the city. Although, as I looked out the bus window, I saw a sprinkling of stores throughout the French Quarter displaying black and gold apparel on the sidewalks and in their store entrances. As I arrived home and took a few minutes to sit on my front porch, I could hear the neighbors across the street talking about Saints football.

Many people do not leave their homes to experience a Saints game. Instead of trekking near the Superdome, some experienced public spaces of sociability near their homes. For example, a couple of people on Franklin Avenue were setting up a tent and TV outside of their house to watch the game. A truck parked in the neutral ground as a way of delineating an otherwise empty plot as a party space. An abandoned school loomed across the street. The marquee on the decrepit pink building with boarded up windows read 'AUG 2005 ENROLLMENT' as an eerie reminder that no children have been able to return to that school since Katrina. This was a poorer, slower to recover strip of town. Their tent was set up on the sidewalk, like a community or block party type of atmosphere. These more intimate block party type spaces occurred in different pockets of town on game day. It was not unusual to see small scale social activities taking place on the neutral grounds of this neighborhood on a daily basis when it is not Saints game day. Sometimes, a handful of men played horse shoes. Other times a group sat outside in metal folding chairs, just visiting with each other. Setting up a tent and TV in this same neighborhood space for Saints game watching served as an extension of an urban lifestyle that made sense for this group of Saints fans. They were enjoying Saints games together in a way that fits their urban lifestyle and identity. Far removed from the Superdome and the lifestyle of those experiencing the game from the luxury suite boxes or elite club seats in the Superdome, ordinary residents created Saints fandom and found value in the Saints in terms of enjoyment and sociability.

Like the men on the mostly empty sidewalk near Handsome Willy's bar in the 7th ward or the birthday party taking place in an RV outside the Superdome, these people were enjoying a more parochial space on game day. These bubbles of sociability taking place in different parts

of town contributed to a city-wide sense of unity on football game day. Far from the actual football playing field, the reach of Saints fandom extended into outlying sidewalks and seeped into conversations between neighbors that take place far from the Superdome.

The Superdome

On Saints game day, the Superdome became like a city within the city of New Orleans. With over 70,000 people inside, its population outranked all but five Louisiana cities. In addition to 185 Superdome staff members, SMG brought in 2,500 part time workers to operate Saints games. The Superdome was the most tightly regulated Saints game day space. Each person who entered the building received assigned spaces where they were and were not allowed to occupy. The Superdome was separated into two broad spaces, those for workers and those for fans attending the game. In the early morning hours on game day, only employees with a job function were allowed to enter the Dome. The stadium gates did not open to ticket-holding spectators until two hours before kick-off. A game ticket, a work uniform or a credential were all coded to signify where each person who entered the Superdome was supposed to be. The printed ticket that told which seat a spectator could occupy was as much about regulating where they cannot go as it was about reserving a spot to watch the game.

Both spaces for workers and spaces for spectators were further segmented into spaces of inclusion and exclusion based on race, class, and gender. Superdome entrances, concourses, elevators, and seating sections as well as the locker room, press box, suite area and playing field were all areas that physically designated who ideologically belonged in each stadium space.

The most exclusive areas were those for the football players and coaching staff – team buses, private stadium entrances and hallways, the team locker room, and the green turf of the playing field. The football players and coaches were kept separated from the fans attending the game. Women were shut out from these team only spaces in men's professional sports.

Income separated those who were in the building to work as the Dome housed both multi-millionaire athletes and part-time janitorial workers. Workers who were employed by the stadium management group included security personnel, janitorial staff, food servers and vendors, ushers and ticket takers. These workers were designated with a uniform that signified their respective job function. Another class of workers included Saints staff members, entertainment staff, and members of the media including TV crews and NFL films. Each of the workers who entered the building wore a credential issued by the Saints or NFL. The Superdome was sectioned off into several zones with each credential specifying which zones each credential wearer was allowed to access. Credentials were not all-access passes to the Superdome but rather served to designate where in the Superdome each person without a seat ticket was allowed to be to perform their specific game day function.

Every non-working person who entered the Superdome on game day had a seat ticket. Pricing and scarcity of tickets automatically shut a majority of people out of the Superdome. Ticket prices ranged from \$25 per seat for the upper level section to thousands of dollars for luxury suites. The dome seating sections were segregated by class levels: Luxury Suites, Club Level Seats, Plaza Level Seats, and Terrace Level Seats. I ran into an acquaintance on my way into the Dome one game. She asked where we were sitting and reacted almost as if she was embarrassed or felt sorry for me when I said I had season tickets in the 'cheap seats' in the 600 level rather than the higher priced premium seats that she enjoys.

As I stood just outside the entrance gate to the Superdome, I reached into my purse, pulled out my two season tickets and handed one to my husband. He does not know where I keep them in the house and I only hand him a game ticket right before we go into the Dome. All people with tickets were temporarily separated by gender as they approached the Superdome gates. The entrances to get into the Superdome on game day were segregated into separate lines for men and women, so that the same gendered security person could perform the mandated pat down that inspects each person entering the game. During preseason, the

women's line stretched significantly longer than the men's line. This line length was reversed from regular season games where the men's lines typically stretched longer than the women's. I sometimes had to skip over four men only lines before finding one designated for women.

When I reached my seats in the 600 level, most of the men seated near me only talked to my husband, not to me. During one game a couple wanted to switch seats with us to be closer to their friends. They asked my husband permission and bought him a beer when we complied. Even though they were my season tickets, the neighboring seat holders made assumptions about fandom based on gender. During touchdowns, I watched the men around me high five each other. They did not offer high fives to me or the woman who sat in front of me. When these moments occurred, I missed the days when I could watch college football surrounded by my female roommates.

Once inside the Dome I made my way up every escalator heading toward the highest level of the Dome, the 600 Terrace seats. I could walk around the Plaza level concourse to go to the Saints merchandise store or buy from food vendors, but was not allowed to access other seating sections without the proper ticket. Ushers stationed throughout each seating section checked tickets to make sure fans did not occupy seats that did not belong to them. I continued up the escalator and passed over the Club Level, where ropes and ushers protected the concourse entrance, only allowing in those with Club seating tickets. Club tickets provided access to better quality food and beverages than the traditional hot dog stand lining the concourses. Club areas offered more amenities than regular stadium seating such as cup holders for each seat and lounge areas that were more comfortable than crowded concourse areas.

I passed over the 300 Level Suites and then the 400 Level Suites, each with extensive security. One needed a suite ticket, received a hand stamp, and received a hole punched into their ticket to enter the suite level. Suite holders had their own separate entrance to the Superdome at Gate A on the ground level. Some people in the 300 level suites wore Saints

jerseys but most dressed in business casual attire. Suites were mostly owned by companies rather than individuals. They were occupied by those who shared business relationships and therefore displayed different decorum than fans in the upper levels of the Dome. High fives and Who Dat chants were rare among those watching the game from the suites. The environment was much calmer and quieter than the regular stadium seating and concourses. People chatted, watched the game, and helped themselves to the spread of catering and beverages custom ordered by each suite holder. The 400 level suites were larger than the 300 level suites holding 40 people instead of 20 in each room. One woman admitted to me that she was a little embarrassed her company had a 300 level suite. She viewed it as a downgrade to the 400 level suite her father used to own. The 400 level suites were even more stiff and formal than their lower level counterparts. It was not uncommon for these suite holders to impose a dress code on those they invited to the game and to create an assigned seating chart for the seats in their suite.

I often received invitations to watch Saints games from the suites. If I decided to accept a suite invitation, I had to worry about what to wear because jeans, tennis shoes and a Saints T-shirt were not formal enough. Even though they were the most expensive and exclusive spaces to watch the games, it did not mean they were necessarily 'the best' atmosphere for football watching as people had other preferences about how they wanted to experience Saints games. A couple of people told me that they did not want to watch Saints games in the suite among their business partners. They wanted to sit elsewhere in the stadium where they could yell loudly, and cheer intensely for their team instead of having to submit to the subdued behavior expected in a business environment. They would rather watch the game and clap and yell and cheer and feel the energy of being surrounded by thousands of other fans, than mingle politely in a room where they may not be able to see much of the actual game play on the field.

Fans perceived differences between themselves and those who sat in other levels of the Superdome. Fans in the 600 level tried to buck a myth that the biggest fans are those that sit

the closest to the action. Fans that sat in the cheapest seats had a need to prove they are worthy fans even though they didn't spend the most money on a ticket. These perceived differences between fan types were not only imposed as top down structure (where you sat where you could afford to buy a ticket) but, they were also desired by fans in some ways. For example, suite holders paid for the exclusivity and eliteness associated with having a private box for the game. In contrast, I talked to a 600 level fan who said she would not give up her seat for anything, even if offered a seat much closer to the field. She said they are the real fans even though the television cameras will not go up there. The woman in the hand crafted black and gold tutu sitting in the highest level of the stadium can have the same amount of football knowledge and team loyalty as the man wearing licensed NFL apparel sitting on the 50 yard line. Socioeconomic differences between those in different sections of the Superdome seemed vast but, they all still had rooting for the Saints in common.

Whether a person had access to the Superdome or not, a fan may prefer to watch games elsewhere where they could express their personal urban lifestyles and identities. While the Superdome was tightly controlled and structured by the power of NFL rules and regulations, the social structuring in neighborhood bars were influenced by those who spent time there. Rather than being ushered into a gender specific Superdome security line or holding a ticket that delineated where one belongs, people found different levels of belonging and fan expression in bars throughout the city during Saints games.

Neighborhood bars

During away games, rather than being drawn towards the Superdome as the center of the Who Dat Nation, people gathered to watch Saints games in places that meshed better with their everyday routines and lifestyles. The neighborhood bar served as a center of social public space that easily accommodated sports fans. The power of neighborhood institutions cannot be ignored in examining the culture of New Orleans. Bars have always been a primary location for

information sharing and coalition forming. The bar setting provided a type of parochial space. During games where the Saints were not playing in New Orleans, certain public spaces seemed to transform to accommodate throngs of people eager to huddle around television sets in a public setting to share the experience of watching the Saints play. This phenomenon also occurred among those who were not allowed access into the Superdome on game day.

Observing fans in the stadium during a live event is a common research approach to understanding fan culture and fan behavior. Mega-events are often selected as the unit of analysis for evaluating the social impacts of sports teams on host cities. However, observing Saints fans at different bars and other event spaces throughout New Orleans provided insight into how people created game day experiences in places outside of the Superdome. Seeing how people interacted at regular football games, rather than Super Bowl sized events, and how they gathered in spaces that were not the designated stadium for an event allowed for a look at how fans experienced Saints games in different ways because they had different preferences for enjoying urban life. Bars where people gathered to watch football games in New Orleans took on different characteristics: spaces for socializing; spaces that recreated the living room in public; spaces that were an extension of the neighborhood; spaces of sports fandom rather than Saints-only fandom; and spaces that were not for sports but where fandom occurred anyway.

Finn McCool's Irish pub, located in New Orleans Mid-City neighborhood, became a space for entertaining and socializing. This establishment completely rearranged their indoor bar area to better serve Saints game watchers. Rather than a comfortable scattering of pub tables, extra banquet style tables took up every available foot of space in the bar with excess folding chairs all arranged to point at a large temporary movie screen. Right before kickoff, additional folding chairs were positioned in front of the large white screens which projected the Saints game broadcast. An overflow of patrons who spilled out of the dark, smoky bar could find additional spaces to watch the game on the sidewalk outside, where another temporary movie screen broadcasted the game. Some people brought their own collapsible chairs from home

and found their own patch of sidewalk near the action, balancing baskets of french fries and burgers on their knees while chatting with friends and watching the Saints play. When all the seats filled, people found spots to stand or lean. One group of four guys spent the game coolly hovering around their bucket of beer. For \$8 the bar served up a plastic bucket filled with ice and five bottles of beer. These prices were much lower than anything in or near the Superdome.

Beyond the cigarette machine, in a dark corner of the bar stood banquet tables, pressed up against the wall. Trays and trays of food lined these tables with catchy names poking fun of the Saints opponents. Regular bar patrons brought in each tray of food and offered them up as a pot luck contribution to anyone watching football at Finn's. About halfway through the game, the bar owner strolled the room, polling each person to choose a favorite dish among the evenings offerings. The person who provided the voted best dish would receive a complimentary \$20 bar tab.

Although the groups of people wearing black and gold were drawn to Finn McCool's at that particular time to watch the Saints game, more than just a football game added to the festive atmosphere in the bar that night. Two pretty girls who looked like they fell out of the pages of a calendar photo shoot mingled with the people standing in line to grab a plate piled high with food. The words Miller Light were emblazoned across their tight fitting T-shirts. These Miller Light promotional girls mingled with the crowd, offering free Miller Light beers. A group called Dear New Orleans had set up a photo shoot in an area of the bar normally reserved for the game of darts. Instead of dodging the gauntlet of dart throwers to gain access to the restrooms in the back corner, bar patrons were greeted with photo flash bulbs, a donation bucket and black sharpie markers. After depositing a \$5 donation, the black markers were used to write messages on hands, arms, bellies or any number of body parts that would then be photographed and posted to a Dear New Orleans website. The photos and messages generated served as a sort of love letter to the city of New Orleans. Almost everyone in the bar took a few minutes away from game watching to participate and decorate themselves with some

sort of Saints themed message. People chose whatever messages they wanted to convey although almost all of them were Saints themed such as *Who Dat, Two Dat, or Saints go all the way*.

The Saints game drew people to Finn McCool's bar on a Monday night where people watched the game and cheered for their team but, mostly the evening looked like a time to socialize. Most people in the bar that night wore black and gold Saints gear. Only one girl in the bar wore a red San Francisco shirt in support of the opposing team. In comical fun the bar owner spanked her with a wooden spoon in mocking punishment for supporting the wrong team. An overall communal atmosphere existed in the bar that night although the crowd looked like a gathering of pre-determined social friend groups – an off duty bartender and her boyfriend, members of a kickball league, participants in the local dance troupe called the Pussyfooters, athletes from the Big Easy roller derby league. Co-mingling among the various groups was commonplace as many people seemed familiar or even comfortable in this Mid-City neighborhood bar. People were pretty mobile instead of staying in one spot with their eyes glued to the televisions. People got up, moved around the bar room, went outside to chat, went back inside to chat. One man described Finn McCool's as more of a community center that happened to serve drinks. The Saints game created an excuse to socialize in Finn's that night.

Entering a new bar called Bayou Beer Garden, I felt like I had walked off the street and into someone's living room. The bar was housed within a converted shotgun double – an architectural style of home unique to New Orleans. I was told it used to be a café but never did well and was recently converted to a bar. With an expansive outdoor patio, it offered a reprieve from the loud, dark, smoky interior characteristic of so many sports bars. The indoor bar was sparsely populated even though it was equipped with televisions and a temporary big screen set up for Saints game watching. On this sunny afternoon, people flocked to the outdoor patio and gathered around tables with sun-blocking umbrellas sprouting from their centers. People huddled around TVs under shaded awnings. Dogs lounged near their owners feet on the deck

floor of the bar patio. One young woman sat at a table with her dad, as their dog lay under the table. People smuggled in po-boy sandwiches, dripping with fried shrimp since Bayou Beer Garden did not serve food.

A large group of women congregated around an outdoor TV. One woman invited me to sit with them and offered an empty chair. The woman who sat next to me wore a Touchdown Jesus necklace and a Holy Grail fleur-de-lis charm around her neck. I chuckled at the touchdown Jesus charm when I saw it at a festival art booth the day before. The art vendor had different necklaces portraying patron Saints of almost anything from touchdowns to the patron saint of pets. After the Saints won their game that day against the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, this woman vowed to wear those same charms at every Saints game. This woman told me when she is not in the Dome she usually watches games with her friend Kat. All the women at the table wore Krewe Du Drew shirts except for one wearing a classy black dress adorned with white and gold fleur-de-lis.

One man buried in a large text book had a yellow highlighter marker poised in his hand. I mockingly asked if he was getting much studying done. He said he was in law school and needed to study but that his friends begged him to come to the bar with them for the Saints game. They promised he could bring his books and get some work done while still spending the day in a social atmosphere with them.

The relaxed atmosphere at Bayou Beer Garden felt opposite of the highly regulated spaces in the Superdome on game day. People eating sandwiches and sitting with friends looked as comfortable and laid back as if they were watching the game in their own living rooms. Even the dogs hovering around their owners gave the bar more of a family room feeling even though it was a public space. People were able to take what made them feel comfortable and expressed their personal habits and rituals while still sharing in a public atmosphere and being around other people.

Rather than a place for social friend groups, Markey's bar was a dark place with people sitting in isolation, concentrating on the Saints game. Located in the Bywater neighborhood, Markey's bar felt like a social lodge for nearby residents. I heard cheers coming from inside the little building when I was about a half block away. I parked by Markey park, which hosted the local Mirliton festival the day before. It was such a beautiful, cool, sunny day, stepping into the darkness of Markey's bar was a shock. A stifling blanket of smoke filled the bar. All the blinds were closed so the darkness could allow people to see the televisions better. Many patrons sat along the bar smoking cigarette after cigarette. Three large screens were set up to show the Saints game – two on either side of the bar and one in the back room. Four regular televisions behind the bar each tuned in to different NFL games. It was a great location if you just wanted to sit, have some drinks, smoke some cigarettes, and actually focus on watching the Saints play. Not the social event that Finn McCool's bar provided. People did not really move around throughout the bar but rather sat still in their dedicated bar chairs. This was a different crowd of fans – older, more men – in an environment where it was easy to see the game plays on TV.

Markey's bar was a long, narrow room with only enough space for three rows of people. One row of people leaned against the bar, perched on barstools. Behind them was a pathway wide enough for a single line of people to walk through. Up against the outer wall of the bar was a row of people sitting on stools pushed tight up against the wall, sprinkled with occasional pub tables. The bartenders each had their hair fashioned into curly pigtails. I watched one of them make an elaborate bloody mary, with Worcestershire sauce, spicy green beans, and something from a spice jar. At least five people around me ordered that drink, which seemed appropriate for an early Sunday game in New Orleans. The bar didn't serve food but a couple of people ordered off of a bartender supplied menu from the place next door.

Markey's was a neighborhood bar, rather than one that attracted people from all over the city. At first, I thought the men (as there were only two women in the bar) were mostly there by themselves or with one friend. But, the longer I sat and observed, I realized these were people

who all kind of knew each other already. A guy walked in, shook hands with a man sitting against the wall, and then shook hands with a man sitting at the bar before going to sit on a stool in the back room. Another man with a long, silver ponytail poking out from underneath his hat came in looking like a local politician working his way through the bar saying hello to people he knew, shaking hands, never sitting to watch the game. It made the bar feel like an extension of the Bywater neighborhood surrounding it.

Some people wore Saints jerseys and T-shirts but there were many people wearing every day, grungy looking clothes. A couple of people wore “Defend New Orleans” shirts, a popular local design. One person wore a Bywater neighborhood shirt. Two men wore sunglasses the entire time, which seemed strange to me in such a dark place. They gave the place a kind of poker table feel. Some people wore sports apparel that was not Saints apparel – a Yankee’s jacket, or a Giant’s shirt.

The man whose pub table I shared sipped slowly on a constant stream of Miller High Life, an in demand cheap beer in New Orleans bars. He and my husband talked a little about college sports. My husband established that neither he nor the other man were originally from New Orleans but had each lived here over 10 years. My husband mentioned that being from Pittsburgh was a tough situation for his team allegiances when the Saints played the Steelers. The man in the bar said he had the same problem when Alabama, his home town, played Louisiana State University. LSU has a rabid fan base in New Orleans.

At any given time, there were never more than ten women in the bar and all of them were with a man. Except for one couple of older women who came in during the second quarter to sit at the edge of the bar near the front door. Their position in the room made it look like they were poised to escape at any time. This was the first bar where I would have felt a little out of place being there by myself, without my husband. There were no groups of women at Markey’s which is different than the other Saints spaces I had observed. At Bayou Beer Garden, for example, a group of women invited me to sit at their table with them to watch the game to

increase the communal spirit. Markey's bar was calmer and quieter than any of the others I had been to for Saints games. Everyone in the bar clapped for good Saints plays and touchdowns, as was characteristic of Saints watching groups regardless of venue. But Markey's didn't have the same loud, social buzz as Finn McCool's. It was easy to imagine Markey's would not be too much different if there wasn't a Saints game on.

New Orleans is characterized by neighborhood bars rather than themed bars. Nationally popular chain restaurants and bars are not common in New Orleans, whose landscape is dotted with mom-and-pop locales. It was not easy to pinpoint what would be considered a 'sports bar' in New Orleans. However, local publications advertised Cooter Browns bar as a popular sports bar boasting several televisions and located in Uptown New Orleans. Televisions were set up everywhere playing every NFL game, not just Saints football. That was one aspect that separated Cooter Browns from other places I have gone to watch Saints games. Cooter Browns attracted NFL fans from other teams, not just Saints fans or fans of the team playing against the Saints. In addition to all the WHO DAT T-shirts, several people entered the bar wearing jerseys for other teams. A group of Cardinals fans came in, whose apparel filled the bar with much more red coloring than I am used to seeing in New Orleans. One section of people sounded like a group of fantasy football players. They followed games on different TVs, watching players from all around the league and cheering for whoever would bring their fantasy team the most points.

The place was dark on the inside with several large, banquet style tables lining the room. Big wooden chairs with heavy armrests suggested that once seated, you would not move around much during the game. Except you did have to get up to go to the bar to get drinks, or oysters, or go to a separate bar to order, pay for, and pick up food when your number was called. The place was crowded despite the spacious interior with two bars and two large rooms.

At one end of my table a group of Latino Saints fans sat together, speaking Spanish with each other throughout the game. A young woman sat at my table with some family and friends from out of town. She put them all in Saints shirts before leaving the house to come to Cooter

Browns. She talked about the Saints Super Bowl the year before, describing how her grandmother had cheered, screamed and worked herself up into a frenzy to the point where the family was concerned about her health because she was shaking and hyperventilating from excitement. In the moments after the Saints won the Super Bowl, the grandmother wanted to go downtown with everyone else. Her grandkids refused to let her go with them and put her in a car that would take her home. The argument concluded with the grandmother pointing a finger at each of her kids and letting out a string of expletives aimed at each one before giving in to their protests and going home. The woman who told me the story was shocked to hear her nana using such harsh language.

While Cooter Browns attracted sports fans from different teams and fans of the league, Lost Love Lounge was not in any way a sports bar but attracted Saints fandom anyway. Lost Love Lounge in the Bywater neighborhood had an eclectic crowd. The houses surrounding the bar showcased intricate gingerbread type architecture common to some New Orleans neighborhoods. The front half of Lost Love contained a bar with some televisions, some bookshelves, and a small lounge area. The back of the bar room housed a restaurant serving Vietnamese food. It looked more like a small kitchen serving food in the back of a bar than an actual restaurant. There was a big screen set up especially for watching the Saints game. Some die-hard fans sat at the front bar. One of the women had a VooDoo doll she made resembling a player from the opposing team. One table full of people watched the game while they waited for their food order. When their food was ready they moved their Saints watching party back to their nearby house. One man in the bar screamed, got up and walked away, acting really upset every time the Saints had a bad play – which was often in this particular game. Sitting at a picnic table, eating Vietnamese soup in a neighborhood bar while watching the Saints play felt like a completely different experience from the regulated Superdome spaces. Lost Love was not a sports bar kind of place but everyone there was focused on the Saints that day. Similar to other bars, the scene mostly looked like groups of friends sitting together. But people were generally

friendly and open to talking to strangers – making room at their tables, rather than guarding seats. People were free to come and go throughout the duration of the Saints game.

Figure 7: Gender and Fandom



These young women demonstrate sociability in public space as they tailgate on a city street prior to a Saints game. They are strengthening a female friendship group relationship through football related activities. How can sports be a reflection of male culture when so much of the fan activities and opinions of the Who Dat Nation were created by women?

Challenging gendered spaces for a new definition of fandom

Fan practices and activities extended beyond game day, beyond sports stadiums, and beyond team attachment where fandom encompasses the practices of those who engage with sport spaces. Observing what people did gives a more accurate picture of fan activities and more robust understanding of the practices that lead to team attachment and how the team is integrated into the city. When looking at different city spaces, such as neighborhood bars, it became clear that fandom as a practice was an extension of other social connections. Fans who

wanted to socialize and be entertained beyond the Saints game plays chose a bar like Finn McCool's. Someone living in New Orleans who was a fan of football or sports other than the Saints chose a sports bar like Cooter Browns. An example of how sports fandom can be compatible with other social identifiers came from a woman who talked about her experiences of wanting to watch the Super Bowl somewhere among other people. She is a diehard Saints fan and wanted to share in the communal aspect of watching the game surrounded by fellow New Orleanians. She said that she went to the Ruby Fruit Jungle, a bar that she frequents, to watch the game because she didn't know where else to go. The Ruby Fruit Jungle is primarily a lesbian nightclub and bar in New Orleans French Quarter. Saints fans did not have to reject other identity factors, such as being a woman, being gay, being elderly, or being disabled in order to conform to a fan identity.

In the Superdome, it may be easier to see how incidents of gender marginalization, such as gender specific security lines or men failing to high-five the women seated around them, contributed to the social construction of sport stadiums as masculine spaces. This also helps explain why previous scholars defined fandom in terms of male culture. Looking at places where Saints fandom manifested outside the stadium, such as grocery stores, neighborhood bars, or city streets, begins to give voice to those who do not conform to the 'traditional' roles of male, working class fans upon which fandom literature was built.

Although future studies could benefit from applying this perspective to the ways in which men and women diverge in their fan activities, this study found more ways in which men and women demonstrated similarities in their perceptions of fandom. This dissertation found local narratives where people pointed to ways in which the powerful meanings associated with sports transcend the game itself. The narrative of renewal, the idea of community cohesion, interacting and building relationships – these are not inconsequential aspects of football fandom. These narratives offer an inclusive vision of Saints fandom that is shared by both men and women. The Who Dat Nation was comprised of both men and women. My notion of fan practices

incorporates all the actions of fan activity and men and women appeared to engage in fan activity and speak of their attachments to Saints football in similar ways and in equal numbers.

Rigid divisions between masculinity and femininity were not always apparent when looking at the practices of Saints fans. Who Dat chants were often led by women. Women yelled, screamed and cheered for good plays. Women covered their bodies in black and gold Saints gear. They did not cover up their bodies by erasing feminine traits but rather found ways to accentuate being a woman in Saints apparel. Two female Saints fans wearing black corsets and tutus looked very different than two women dressed in black and gold nun habits. But each of them displayed Saints themed costumes as a barometer to indicate their team affinity.

Looking at how people experience game day in different locations showed that people created fan experiences in ways that were compatible with their identities and lifestyles. Collective experiences involved more than simply covering everyone in the same team logo. Although the collective actions of wearing team logos and colors or simultaneously cheering for the Saints created a sense of cohesiveness across an otherwise diverse crowd, Saints fandom did not wash away other identity factors. Rather, this showed us that underrepresented groups – those other than the stereotypical male sports fanatic – created fandom in multiple ways that can all be valued expressions of fandom. I was able to look at different spaces where people created and participated in fan activities outside the confines of the publicly funded stadium and at times that were not football game day. In these spaces, we are able to rethink ideas of diversity among the football crowd that both expands our conceptualization of fandom and reinforces sport spaces as a place to renegotiate and challenge notions of diversity in sport spaces.

All have access to the Who Dat Nation and can experience it in multi-faceted ways. Each way is a valid form of Saints fandom. This perspective allows us to challenge concepts of gendered sports spaces that seek to reinforce dominant power structures. When all have access to the Who Dat Nation – people who are not really sports fans, people who are

newcomers to the city, people who do not live in New Orleans, anyone who is not the stereotypical male sports fanatic – all can use expressions of fandom to feel connected to something larger than themselves. It is not difficult to gain acceptance through spaces of fandom – wearing team colors, chanting, cheering, engaging with other people through football related activities are all easy ways to enter the Who Dat Nation. I targeted gendered fandom as a way to bring the discussion forward about the power of sport spaces to challenge dominant power structures and to challenge how we conceptualize fandom.

Fandom literature often perpetuates assumptions about masculinity and femininity that correlate with assumptions about the authenticity of fan loyalty and devotion. Fandom studies tend to reinforce an assumption where men have more knowledge of the sport itself and that is valued as the most authentic indicator of fan identity. On the other hand, women are assumed to be more interested in 'inconsequential' aspects of sports such as sociability. The social aspects of game watching that are correlated with women's fan experiences are valued lower than the men's fan experiences that focus on reinforcing knowledge of the game. The women in this study see themselves as fans, not an inauthentic or lesser version of a fan. While traditional fandom studies continue to marginalize women and conclude that their fandom is a lesser version of fandom, this study shows how sport fan spaces can be sites to renegotiate and challenge discourses of power. While the stadium is framed as a site that reproduces gendered power relations, looking beyond the stadium allows us to see nuanced fan practices that can empower and give voice to those marginalized in traditional definitions of sport fandom.

The relationship between space and gender has been examined by sociologists and urban planners such as Hayden (1981) and Spain (1992) to the extent that spaces within the built environment are accepted as being gendered. Places are characterized as being masculine spaces or feminine spaces dependent upon dominating power relations. While activities within the home and family life are presented as feminine spaces, the activities of work and public life are often described as the male domain. Sports stadiums and bars are taken for

granted as being masculine spaces. Urban studies texts use bars and sports stadiums as 'excellent examples' to illustrate masculine spaces (Gottdiener and Budd 2005: 81). This demonstrates the extent to which ideas of masculinity are intertwined with sport spaces.

However, looking at the practices and discourses of Saints fans offers a way to begin peeling back the stereotype that seeks to reinforce uneven gendered power relations. Rather than relying on the assumption that sports reproduce 'natural' differences between what is masculine and what is feminine, the spaces of sports fandom offers a platform for challenging these ideas. Given the proliferation of women in the Who Dat Nation, the spaces of sports fandom can no longer be taken for granted as masculine spaces. The crowds of people gathered to watch Saints games were not a sprinkling of women among a sea of men. Women fully participated in creating public social spaces and meaningful experiences around football. Accepting masculinity or conforming to masculine ideals was not a prerequisite for entering the Who Dat Nation.

The civility between strangers that took place underneath the cosmopolitan canopy of the Who Dat Nation was not completely free from incidents of gender marginalization. Despite the freedom women have gained in expressing both a fan identity and a gender identity while participating in Saints activities, interactions between fans continue to be influenced by gender stereotypes. However, the findings show that people are consuming sports in ways that accentuate urban identities and lifestyles that make sense for them.

Figure 8: Sister Mary Who and Sister Mary Dat



'Sister Mary Who' and 'Sister Mary Dat' stood out from the crowd in their home-made Saints costumes. Women attend Saints games in mass numbers, displaying characteristics of die-hard fans.

Figure 9: Challenging 'traditional' fandom



These two Saints fans do not illustrate masculinity in their fan activities and dress. The proliferation of women at Saints games challenges the assumption of sports spaces as masculine gendered spaces.

CHAPTER 8: SPORT CULTURE AS COMMODITY: adaptations of commercialism in fan culture

The previous chapters focused on the non-economic values that residents placed on having a professional sports team in their home city. However, the role of Saints football as a commodified cultural form cannot be ignored when evaluating the relationship between sports and the city. New Orleans is a city bound by the reality of its place within American capitalism where both the team and the fans are located within the larger framework of the city as a place of cultural consumption. Scholars highlight the growth of cultural consumption as a defining factor in understanding the condition of cities in a shifting economy where manufacturing and production have been replaced by the consumption of experiences and pleasure.

Public investments in sports teams and facilities are symptomatic of post-industrial cities looking to gain a competitive edge in a changing world economy. Sports teams are viewed as commodities that are supposed to: stimulate tourist-oriented development and growth; revitalize downtown areas; promote enhanced city images; create urban spectacles and a celebratory atmosphere. The case of the Saints in New Orleans displayed all of these characteristics of sport as a cultural commodity. This chapter continues to highlight the perspective of sports fans and the value they place on professional sports by looking at how Saints fans interpreted the role of Saints football as a cultural commodity that is highly commercialized. The ways that locals embraced NFL hype and the commodification of professional football while also engineering local cultural adaptations to the economic dimensions of sport reveals the complexity of values assigned to Saints football.

New Orleans residents recognized the economic connections between Saints football and tourism-oriented economic development. The framework of looking at everyday practices and interactions revealed that fans found their own ways to capitalize on the NFL brand and emphasized that economics matters to them on a scale much smaller than macro-economic analysis. Fans were both aware of the need to market city images to visitors and had a need to

claim a collective identity for themselves. The Saints organization is a privately owned, wealth generating business under the umbrella of the NFL - a national brand devoid of locally contrived flavor. Yet Saints fans demonstrated ways in which local culture could emerge through a national product. National and local forms of consumption coexisted side-by-side both harmoniously and in conflicting ways.

This case study of the Saints football team in New Orleans offers insight into understanding the culture of cities within the framework of commodified cultural forms. American sports and particularly the NFL are highly commercialized institutions. Engaging in professional sports as a fan or a spectator is often framed as a consumer activity. A persons consumption of professional sports teams involves buying tickets to watch the live games, buying and wearing team logo apparel, or purchasing food, beverage, or other consumer goods in connection with the game watching experience. In exploring fan culture, Crawford (2004) argued that although not all fan activities directly involve consumption, that fans are first and foremost consumers especially if we are subscribing to the belief that consumption is of central importance to capitalist societies.

Saints fans engaged with the reality of consumerism and adapted to this reality in a meaningful way. Fans did not resist commercialism as an inauthentic form of culture. They showed adaptations of commercialism in order to garner benefits on a level that was meaningful to them both economically and culturally. Saints fans did not passively accept any pre-packaged marketing product the NFL passed down. They embraced aspects of sports commercialism that meshed with their own ideas of local culture and adapted elements to suit them. They rejected those that did not seem to quite fit with local ideals. As we will see in this chapter, sports fans traveled along a continuum from embracing highly commercialized forms of sport consumption, to creating more local forms of consumer culture, to outright expressing that not everything of value is for sale.

City image and investment in sports commodities

Giulianotti (2002) used the term 'hypercommodification' to describe the current state of professional sports emphasizing his critique of the commodification of sport. The NFL represents an extreme example of the commodification of sport. The 32 NFL teams ranked among the top 50 most valuable sports teams in the world with the average team worth \$1.04 billion (*Forbes* September 7, 2011). The National Football League, the Saints football team and the Superdome combined serve as cultural institutions for the city of New Orleans that are highly commercialized. The Saints team owner, the city of New Orleans, and the State of Louisiana all are stakeholders invested in developing football as a cultural form of economic development. These stakeholders have invested in revitalizing downtown properties surrounding the Superdome.

In October 2011, the Saints organization signed a naming rights deal to rename the Superdome the Mercedes-Benz Superdome. A newly installed LED light system around the exterior of the Dome projected the Mercedes-Benz logo large enough to see from blocks away, with the interstate traffic receiving a particularly good view. Enormous lighted Mercedes-Benz signs rested atop the giant scoreboards on each end of the Saints playing field. Interior walls of the Superdome that were previously blank displayed ceiling to floor photo advertisements of different cars and vehicles that showcased the Mercedes-Benz product. Corporate logos of all types splashed across sports fields and stadium infrastructure as teams activated sponsorship agreements. The timing of an NFL game is as much strung together by a series of advertising promotions as much as it is strung together by first downs in each quarter of play. The National Football League's revenue sharing business model assures that a portion of tickets sold to New Orleans Saints games enters a revenue stream that is shared with the league. Revenue from the sale of sponsorships and luxury suites however, remains with each individual team.

The state of Louisiana and the Saints partnered to build a sports and entertainment area outside of the Superdome that served as a tailgating area featuring food and retail. Named 'Champions Square' and presented by the sponsor Verizon, the project sits on 60,000 square feet of land adjacent to the Superdome. The \$13.5 million construction project began in January 2010 with the demolition of a patch of the dormant New Orleans Centre mall, which had been closed since Hurricane Katrina. Officials supporting the project hope this space will become a year round entertainment district. Superdome Commission Chairman, Ron Forman said, "our hopes and dreams is that this [opening for the 2010 season] is just the first phase. But as we lead up to the 2013 Super Bowl, we'll have a major sports district that will be open 365 days a year, 24 hours a day that will be another major attraction for economic development" (*Times-Picayune* August 15, 2010). The construction project was financed by \$10.5 million in inducement payments the Saints were scheduled to receive under their lease agreement with the state. LSED was responsible for paying the balance, which is expected to be recovered through revenue generated by the square. The creation of Champion Square transformed a Katrina-derelict space into a space for sports entertainment.

Although Creole cuisine, jazz music, conventions, Mardi Gras and the iconic French Quarter are arguably the symbols of New Orleans marketed to tourists, sports deserve a place within this mix. The Louisiana tourism and marketing officials charged with using the national marketing power of the NFL emphasized Saints football as a tourism attracting cultural commodity. A Louisiana tourism press release distributed at Super Bowl XLIV said the number of visitors was expected to recover to pre-Katrina levels by 2012, with 24.8 million people expected to visit the state of Louisiana. According to this press release, tourism generated \$9.4 billion annual spending in Louisiana business and directly employed over 140,000 while creating an additional 60,000 jobs in secondary employment throughout the Louisiana economy. The press release read, "New Orleans tourism recovery is critical to the Louisiana tourism recovery. Because New Orleans visitors stay longer and spend substantially more per person than the

average visitor to the rest of the state, they are especially critical to spending figures and economic impact” (LA Tourism press release, Super Bowl XLIV media center).

New Orleans residents recognized that the Saints played a part in marketing New Orleans to potential tourists. This in turn helped fuel the idea that New Orleans is a vibrant community. The way New Orleanians felt in 2006 when the Saints returned to the Superdome lies at the heart of a narrative of renewal about a real sense of spiritual recovery for the people of New Orleans. But, these ties between the NFL and Louisiana tourism were not lost in the recovery narrative as nationally televised Saints games provided a platform for delivering promotional messages meant to stimulate a tourist economy. NFL games are national events staged for TV audiences, local residents, and visiting fans. The NFL kickoff weekend held in New Orleans in 2010 demonstrated how this commercialized product was perceived and experienced by local fans.

NFL Kickoff Weekend: local celebration or commercial product?

As the previous seasons Super Bowl winners, New Orleans was selected by the NFL as the site for the opening kickoff game for the 2010 NFL season. In recent years, the first game of the season grew into a spectacle celebration unlike other games that occur throughout the season. Driven by national network television broadcasts and celebratory events staged throughout downtown New Orleans, the NFL was eager to create hype for a new football season while Saints fans were eager to celebrate their championship team. As the NFL infused New Orleans with their version of a celebratory event, city residents found their commercialized version lacking in flavor and ignoring what New Orleanians value.

The day before the 2010 NFL kickoff game, I went to the NFL Fan Fest being held in the Jackson Brewery parking lot in the French Quarter. New Orleans has festivals throughout the year to celebrate all manner of things. Some festivals, like Jazz Fest, are mainstream,

celebrating the cultural heritage of music in New Orleans. Others celebrated more obscure things, like wrinkly green vegetables at the annual Mirliton festival. This NFL fan fest staged in the French Quarter did not resemble other festivals that I have attended in this same French Quarter location in the sense that this fest was highly commercialized and littered with national sponsors. Every booth or attraction was sponsored and existed for the sole purpose of advertising a product – Pepsi, General Motors, Verizon, Febreze. This contrasted sharply with local names that decorated regular New Orleans festivals – Oschner, Crystal, Rouse’s, Entergy. While walking past the booths someone handed me a free Pepsi. I was invited to step into the Coors tent and throw a football to win a prize – Coors koozies and tattoos, which are really more advertising pieces than prizes. At another booth I spun a prize wheel only to win a coupon for 50 cents off of a Febreze product. The only element that felt local at all in the Fan Fest was radio announcer Bobby Hebert broadcasting a live radio show from a tent on the small festival site. Bobby Hebert’s tent was also the only thing at the event attracting any crowd of people.

Figure 10: Hypercommodification



This booth at NFL Fan Fest in New Orleans prior to the 2010 season NFL Kickoff game demonstrates the highly commercialized nature of this NFL event.

A few blocks down from this Fan Fest, crews were busy setting up for the concert to take place the next day in Jackson Square. Decatur Street, a main thoroughfare through the French Quarter was blocked off, even to pedestrian traffic. To call this blockage highly inconvenient to local traffic movement would be an understatement. Jackson Square, which would normally be strewn with wandering tourists and local vendors eager to accommodate them with original artwork or buggy ride tours of the Quarter, was closed – barricaded by fancy banners and security guards. Saint Louis Cathedral, whose doors would normally be open for anyone to take a peek, was closed. Paper signs taped to posts on the corners of Jackson Square read in plain black and white letters ST. ANN BUSINESSES OPEN. Store owners posted these signs fearing that the barricades would deter people from coming into the stores that rested so close to

Jackson Square. The *Times-Picayune* had reported that French Quarter businesses and artists were upset about the NFL taking over their space without any communication or even a courtesy notice. Observing the scene at Jackson Square that day, I understood their complaints as the normal tourist heart of the French Quarter had been shut down and barricaded to prepare for the NFL spectacle.

Some business owners lost business while others struggled to manage parking problems and crowds. The main complaint was that they were not notified of what would be taking place and therefore could not properly plan to manage the event in a way that did not adversely affect their normal daily operations. Jackson Square is a public space where local culture clashes with tourism on a daily basis. Although the NFL activities were not the only incident of contested space in Jackson Square, the local paper reported that “complaints reached a fever pitch after the NFL threw their kickoff concert without serving notice to the neighborhood” (*Times-Picayune* October 11, 2010). After the concert in Jackson Square, local business owners organized a task force to draft recommendations on how to best maintain Jackson Square and inform local residents and businesses about events taking place there. One task force organizer said, “we are trying to make sure the city’s most iconic site is protected and respected for the future” (*Times-Picayune* October 11, 2010).

Figure 11: Barricades



Barricades, emblazoned with NFL sponsor logos, block access to Jackson Square in preparation for NFL Kickoff activities. This area surrounding Jackson Square would normally be vibrant with tourists, artists, palm readers, brass bands and other pedestrian traffic.

The NFL barricade around Jackson Square was erected in preparation for events that would take place throughout the day prior to the Saints facing the Vikings in the Superdome on Thursday, September 9, 2010. The NFL teamed up with local Mardi Gras connoisseur Blaine Kern studios to produce a Mardi Gras style parade to roll through the French Quarter two and a half hours before kickoff. Activity organizers reported that, “given New Orleans tradition of parades and music and food and football, we decided to combine all those things into a single celebration” (*Times-Picayune* August 15, 2010). However, this production of a celebration lacked some local nuances that characterize true local celebrations. For example, New Orleanians objected to the lack of local musical talent scheduled for the game night concerts

since NBC chose to schedule artists that had a broad appeal nationally. One editorial writer compared the musical lineup to 'bland alphabet soup' rather than a 'flavorful gumbo' (*Times-Picayune* August 15, 2010). Despite the highly commercialized and NFL directed production of events, the days worth of celebrations offered several different opportunities for Saints fans to express themselves and engage in Saints football.

The newspaper warned there was no way that ticket holders to the Superdome could watch the parade, see the concert, and get to the Dome in time to see the banner-drop honoring the Saints Super Bowl win the season prior. I woke up feeling anxious stress, trying to decide where to be and what to try and do to observe as much as I could about how Saints fans were experiencing this out of the ordinary day. At 11am, I went to the NFL Shop for Women on Magazine Street. This was a temporary boutique, the first of its kind, erected as an experiment by the NFL to market and sell products to women. Two rocking chairs adorned the porch leading to the front door of the tiny store, carved out of a shotgun house in one of New Orleans more posh shopping districts. The small boutique was full of shoppers. I asked the store clerk if it was busy for game day. She replied, "it's busy every day." She said every morning when she comes to open the shop, there are people waiting at the door. Each store worker wore a matching Saints shirt. Shoppers were calm – a mix of black and white women – all already wearing some sort of Saints or black and gold attire. The only two men in the store followed their women around and seemed out of place in the small, crowded boutique. The merchandise offerings were adequate but, not as enticing as the offerings at local shops that feature Saints shirts with a more New Orleans flair. One could buy all sorts of items emblazoned with the official NFL Saints logo – shirts, cocktail dresses, a bikini, nail polish, necklaces, shorts, jeans, or sunglasses. I spent \$20 for the least expensive item – a T-shirt with the word Saints sprawled across the front – and went home to paint my toe nails black and gold before heading out for the festivities.

On my way home I drove through downtown, past the Superdome. So many people on the downtown streets wore black and gold. If not as blatant as a jersey, less subtle outfits paid tribute to the Saints that day – businessmen wearing a black suit with a gold tie, or a yellow shirt with a black belt. Tailgate parties, tents, and even a black and gold party bus were set up in the parking lots surrounding the Superdome. The football game would not start for at least seven more hours.

I caught the 4:00pm bus from my house to the French Quarter. Most other people on the bus were not wearing Saints gear or black and gold clothes. It was a reminder that despite the hoopla, some city residents were simply performing their daily routines – going to and from work – not possessed by the Saintsmania that seemed ubiquitous in the local news. The number 55 bus stopped several blocks shy of its normal route down Elysian Fields, as those streets were blocked by the staged parade and by the temporary concert stage on Decatur street. I exited the bus while the other passengers stayed as the bus driver tried to get them closer to the normal end of the route on Canal Boulevard.

Although the parade was not yet in motion, I walked past all the stationary parade floats. Former Saints stars Michael Lewis and Deuce McAllister posed for pictures with the few fans lucky enough to be walking by as the players were mounting their parade floats. The local paper later reported, “the sponsor branded pre-game floats no doubt caused locals to moan” (*Times-Picayune* September 11, 2010). A float emblazoned with the Snickers logo did not arouse as much interest as a typical Mardi Gras float throwing satirical punches at New Orleans elected officials. I walked down the sidewalk, on a slow, two hour stroll through the French Quarter to the Superdome to see all the people and the spectacle. Spectators lined up along the street, waiting for the parade to roll. The sidewalk contained several kids with their families eager to see the Saints parade. Black and gold, fleur-de-lis, Saints gear and costumes splattered across members of the crowd.

After the parade and concerts were over, people arranged themselves into their more normal Saints game watching routines – meeting with friends at bars, squeezing into Superdome seats, or returning home to watch the game in the family living room.

Fan interpretations of economic impact

Spectacle literature evaluates events such as these in terms of the positive or negative impacts they provide a city. I observed NFL Kickoff weekend in New Orleans in 2010 as an example of both a highly commercialized NFL event and an event experienced by local Saints fans. This Saints game was a positive experience laced with the same collective engagement present at any other Saints game. But the commercialism of the national product did not mesh perfectly with local culture. The example of conflicts between the businesses in Jackson Square and the production of the event illustrated this. One manager of a shop along Jackson Square said, "We're all about this city and supporting the success of the Saints, but when we are neglected and cast aside, it's demoralizing. Nobody came to us with any information whatsoever. We weren't consulted in any way. Basically, the NFL was given free rein and had no restrictions whatsoever. This is disconcerting for the business owners and residents" (*Times-Picayune* September 5, 2010). A local gallery owner said about the event, "I'm all in favor of promoting the city, but when you come into our front yard, we want you to invite us to the party" (*Times-Picayune* September 5, 2010). These quotes demonstrated that New Orleanians were not completely opposed to the commercialization aspects of the NFL but rather wanted to adapt it to make sense for their daily way of living in New Orleans.

Saints fans were aware of the economic narrative built around having a professional football team in New Orleans. One reason why Saints fans did not entirely oppose the heightened commercialism was because they believed in the role of the NFL to market messages necessary to stimulate New Orleans tourism industry and believed that it held some value. For example one Saints fan said, "it brings legitimacy to the city (without a team, New

Orleans is more of a small market). There is a quality of life issue regarding professional sports teams. Some businesses factor that into the decision to relocate to the area. I also think it aids in tourism, the most dominant industry in the city right now.” As I surveyed, interviewed and interacted with Saints fans, the word ‘economics’ kept emerging as a reason why they thought the Saints were important for New Orleans.

People living in New Orleans recognized that the Saints are part of a tourist economy and believed that fans from visiting teams made a positive contribution to the local economy. As fans of the opposing team trudged down the steps of the Superdome seating section past rows and rows of Saints fans, it was common to hear some light heckling that frequently included statements like “go spend money,” encouraging the out of town guests to go to the French Quarter and pump more of their tourist dollars into local attractions.

After the Saints played Atlanta in 2010, a large group of Atlanta fans congregated in one parking lot on Poydras street near the Superdome. They posted a banner designating their claimed parking lot spaces as a Falcons party, making it clear they weren’t finished celebrating even though the football game had ended. On this game day Atlanta fans happily spread themselves throughout the French Quarter excited their team had won the game. As I walked to the spot where I could catch a bus ride home, several Atlanta fans cat-called *Who Dat* and *We Dat* in my direction, mocking my position as a losing Saints fan. I was an easy target as one of only a few people wearing a Saints jersey on Canal Boulevard, a busy street for tourists in the French Quarter. When I reached the bus stop on the corner of Canal and Tchoupitoulas, one woman yelled back to the people wearing Atlanta Falcons jerseys, saying “thank you; go spend money” indicating a local appreciation for any tourist dollars that come into the city. There was a certain irony involved in that exchange where even though the Atlanta football team won the game that day, ultimately New Orleans won in terms of economic benefit.

One Saints fan talked about how he thought money was a key reason why it was important for New Orleans to have an NFL team:

Especially as major corporations leave and the oil industry leaves you have to have something and people are kind of like well it's frivolous and sports aren't important. Well how do you feel about tourism because that's kind of important and Saints football is part of it. You can commercialize it more if you wanted to. I don't care. It could be the Home Depot Superdome for all I care. It's still going to be my team. It's still going to be the Superdome as I've seen it at political conventions, high school games. I've seen college games there. I've seen the Super Fair there. I mean it's still going to be our Superdome. You can call it whatever you want. It's still going to be the New Orleans Saints. You can call them the Gulf Coast Saints and it will still be my team.

This fan recognized that some commercialism was involved with the NFL and believed that it held value for the city as a contributor to New Orleans tourism economy. He also emphasized that the commercialism did not dampen the way that he felt about the team.

The ways in which Saints fans talked about economics revealed that they thought economic impacts were present and important. But, they were present and important on a scale much smaller than the way academic scholars talk about city-wide economic impact. Multiple people offered their 'expertise' on whether or not a Saints win or loss affects the local economy. If the Saints win, then the French Quarter bartender could expect to make more money or take home more tips because the fans of the opposing team would be out on the town after the game celebrating because their team won. If the Saints lose, that same bartender would make less money because the fans of the losing opposing team would not feel as elated and ready to continue the celebration. Whether or not this win-loss informal economic theory is true, several different fans repeated it. This further reinforced that New Orleans residents believed there was some connection between the Saints and city economics. This example also showed that a unit of economic measurement as small as one bartender's evening tips is the level of pecuniary measurement that matters to urban residents. One fan explained his views on the economics involved with Saints football:

I always look at everything through a New Orleans lens so true, if it had nothing to do with money, I would still follow the Saints and want them to be here. But it [money] is part of it. I've seen it. I've spent personal money on stuff that I would not have bought had it not been for the franchise. Now where is my money going? I don't know. Maybe it's going to Taiwan for the iron on patch I'm buying. I don't know but my question is why not? Well, you say my tax dollars are going towards it and I'm not a football fan. Guess

what? Your tax dollars are going towards a lot of stuff you don't believe in. Of all the crap we do spend money on, I'm more than happy for a sliver of it to go towards subsidizing a team. What's it going to kill you to support a team that is going to do so much good?

The ways in which local people bought and sold Saints products illustrated different ways that New Orleanians adapted to the commodification of sport and found economic value on a smaller scale. New Orleanians found several ways to capitalize on the widespread demand for all types of Saints themed goods. On game day, the city sidewalks leading up to the Superdome were scattered with informal street vendors. Crafters offered bracelets, beads, buttons, top hats, elaborate parasols – all decorated in Saints black and gold. During the Saints verses Atlanta Falcons game, several of the parasols for sale were decked out in red and black feathers and sparkles to entice buyers from the opposing team. One group sold decorated paper grocery bags for fans to wear over their heads. Instead of the brown paper bags that hid Saints fans in shame in the 1980s, these bags were yellow, allowed a cut-out to show the wearers face, and boasted the words *WE DAT*.

Creeping closer towards the Superdome, many people set up coolers on the sidewalks to sell beer and water. One guy sold beers out of his cooler, two for \$5. Two blocks closer to the Dome, a woman sold beers for \$4 each. Although I heard one man talk her price down to a \$3 beer. I asked if she was always on this corner selling beers for Saints games. She said yes and explained that she had to get a \$1500 annual permit from the city to be able to sell beers out of her cooler near the Superdome. Before she was able to get this permit, she had to establish herself as a company with a liquor license to vend outside the Superdome. The process she explained sounded so formal for what, on the surface, looked like a very informal way for a low-income, African-American resident to make a few extra dollars.

Figure 12: Selling parasols



New Orleans residents offer homemade parasols for sale to fans walking along Poydras Street leading up to the Superdome. New Orleanians find economic value and participate in commodifying sports in ways that matter to them.

A handful of other groups trying to make a few dollars greeted Saints fans on the sidewalks leading up to the Superdome. I stopped and donated \$1 to one of these groups, a boys' sports team raising money for uniforms. Face painters roamed the areas where tailgaters mingled, offering an artistic design in exchange for tips. Two women wove in and out of the parties of tailgating fans, carrying a wicker basket full of praline candy, selling them for \$2 each. In Finn McCool's bar during a Saints game a woman walked around to the bar patrons selling hand decorated black and gold pillar candles for \$15 each. The man who I saw hoisting a toy touchdown baby doll into the air at the Rendezvous bar transformed this quirky ritual into a way to make money. A year after I saw this fan at the Rendezvous bar during a Saints game, I ran

into him at a local art market. He sold tiny gold, brass, silver and pewter touchdown baby jewelry for \$40 to \$150 and up. He said his touchdown baby business was doing really well.

Throughout art markets in the city, several different vendors offered the Who Dat version of their regular art products. One of the jewelry vendors had a Saints themed line of jewelry she created including a replica Lombardi trophy. One of the T-shirt vendors admitted she was tired of everything being black and gold as she smiled at her new purple NOLAgirl shirts. Another vendor sold 'scrappy dolls,' a hand-sewn rectangular shaped cloth doll with dangling scraps of fabric depicting the dolls arms and legs. I inquired about the dolls and she explained that her mother had nine kids and had made scrappy dolls to be toys for her infant children. The daughter made her own scrappy dolls for sale at craft markets. She pointed out that she made black and gold scrappy dolls with fleur-de-lis for eyes, instead of button eyes. She retold stories of how some people held their scrappy dolls in their laps throughout entire Saints games for good luck. In these instances the commodification of a cultural form, turning the Saints into product and profit, was still an expression of Saints fandom that reflected local cultural particularities.

Local fandom within a national product

The Saints position as an NFL brand and a cultural commodity shapes fan culture. The Saints are one of 32 teams that comprise and are overseen by the National Football League. The NFL operates as a savvy marketing corporation more so than a sporting organization. Yost (2006) said, "the NFL has become the most financially sophisticated and market-savvy league on the planet" (122).

Merchandising became a highly visible sign of the extent to which sports entities have been commodified. Americans spent roughly \$29 billion annually on sports apparel (*Sports Business Daily* May 17, 2010). The NFL sold \$3.5 billion annually in team products (Yost 2006). One of the most obvious expressions of fandom was dressing up in team colors and team

apparel to mark affiliation and show loyalty to the home team. The New Orleans Saints sold the most licensed products of any NFL team on NFLshop.com in 2010, the year the Saints won the Super Bowl (*CNBC.com* April 14, 2010). When the NFL formed into its modern day form in the 1960s, the term 'team apparel' applied only to players uniforms. The NFL tightened control over its brand and licensing agreements to solidify NFL merchandise as a specialty item.

Despite the popularity of officially licensed gear, people wearing some sort of black and gold costume, rather than a traditional Saints jersey was a common sight for Saints games. Two fans gladly posed for a picture as I snapped a shot of their floor length nun habits displaying the names Sister Mary Who and Sister Mary Dat. At one Saints game, a woman had her silver hair tucked under a hat that boasted Saints logos on one side and Cleveland Brown logos on the other side. Her pink football jersey had also been refashioned with one half Saints jersey sewn together with one half Cleveland Browns jersey. During another game, two young women in black and gold tutus occupied the seats next to me. Women in black and gold colored tutus were a common site in the Superdome on game day. One lady wearing a black and gold tutu had her baby strapped around her front belly with a sort of safety harness. The baby also wore a black and gold tutu. Together they looked like a big cloud of festive tulle. Creative costuming was an expression of fandom that defied commercialism as fans found ways to express their fandom without the use of corporately controlled logos.

One factor steering Saints fans towards locally produced products or choosing handmade Saints themed costumes was price. Branded as a specialty item, officially licensed NFL gear is expensive. An 'authentic Reebok New Orleans Saints team jersey' retailed for \$239. One could pick up a 'replica New Orleans Saints team jersey' for \$109. In contrast to these high priced items, small New Orleans shops offered Saints themed T-shirts that are not officially licensed NFL products for around \$25.

One woman who described her Saints game day outfits said, "Sunday mornings I tend to get up particularly excited and figure out which Saints outfit I'm going to put together. Whether

it's going to be a jersey – and I do have a Marques Colston and Drew Brees jersey – so I decide if I'm going to wear a jersey or if I'm going to do some festive black and gold party clothes with a little sparkle and a little fringe and that sort of thing. There's always an element of fancifulness to it. It's not just jeans and a black shirt.”

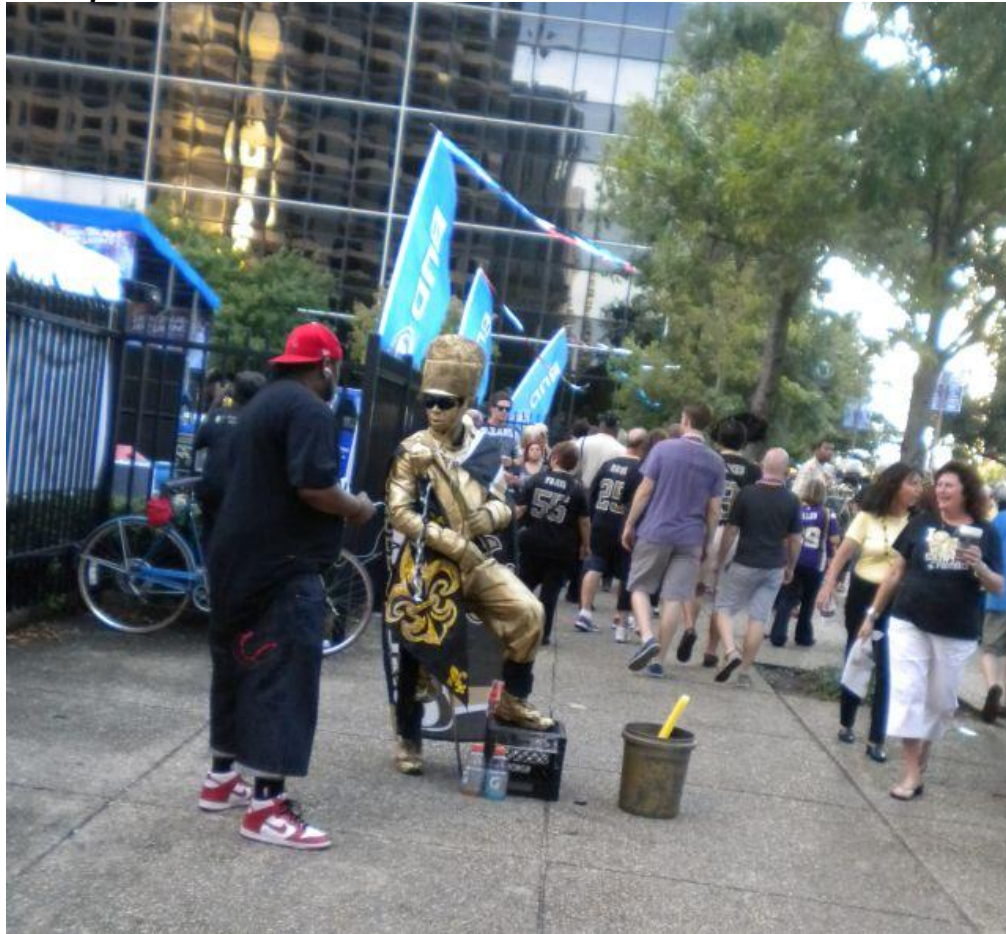
The commercialized brand did not control fan identity. Fans wanted something compatible with their personal identity as well as their fan identity. I saw Saints outfits worn by women that included corsets, tutus, go-go boots, gold lame tights, and black and gold fleur-de-lis hair clips. These types of costuming represented personal forms of public self expression. In the case of women fans, the fact remained that the NFL had only barely begun to offer merchandise designed for women. The idea behind officially licensed NFL team apparel was that fans could buy and wear the same stuff that the players and coaches wore. Since NFL players and coaches are exclusively men, women sports fans only had the option of buying a mens or child's size shirts and trying to make it work. A small sized men's polo did not fit the curves of a woman's body. The NFL Shop for Women that operated as a pop up boutique in New Orleans for a few months in 2010 was an experiment in marketing products to a new consumer segment. Although women have been Saints fans since the team's inception in 1967, creating official products for women was a relatively new concept.

In addition to fans wanting to wear team apparel that was compatible with their personal identity, Saints fans also wanted something that was an expression of New Orleans culture. Buying Saints themed products at a local art market or from a small T-shirt shop was an expression of fandom that supported local New Orleans artists and small businesses. This was something that the official NFL brand could not provide. For example, parasols are a part of New Orleans culture. Flashy decorated umbrellas are fundamental in second-line celebrations. Hoisting a black and gold parasol in the air, dancing around after Saints touchdowns was what Saints fans did because it was part of local ritual. In the late 1980s, Saints team owner Tom Benson influenced fans with his 'Benson Boogie,' a celebratory shuffle performed while twirling

a black and gold parasol in the air. Twirling parasols in the air was a part of New Orleans culture that had also become enmeshed within Saints fan culture. Finding a street vendor selling black and gold parasols on sidewalks outside the Superdome was an extension of this local cultural form that was present alongside what looked like an endless row of informal product vending.

Saints fans embraced some aspects of commercial culture and rejected others. One story that illustrates this complexity of fan engagement in commercial aspects of football involved a dog called fetch monster. In the Saints Hall of Fame Museum inside the Superdome, one magazine cover displayed a picture of fetch monster – a live dog mascot that used to run onto the field and retrieve the tee after kickoffs. I was told by a former Saints executive that Saints coaches were never too fond of a dog interfering with football game play, sometimes becoming a distraction by pooping on the field. When Saints officials naively obeyed a coaches request to get rid of the fetch monster in 2000, this Saints official said it was the worst marketing mistake he had ever made. He said the way fans reacted to the removal of this beloved dog, you would have thought it was the worst mistake in the history of the team. Inventing the Jr. Tee Retriever promotion and allowing two contest-winning kids per game to run onto the field to retrieve the tee put a tiny band-aid over fans wounds but did not quite relieve the pain of losing fetch monster. What used to be an entertainment element for Saints fans was now an entertainment element that had a clear sponsorship promotional element. People allow commercialism to shape their fan practices but they have agency in interpreting these commercialized forms and negotiating concepts of what they value.

Figure 13: Adaptation of commercialism



This sidewalk scene near the Superdome on Saints game day displays both elements of corporate commercialism and creative adaptation to commercialism that coexisted in public space on game day. The living mannequin street performer covered himself in Saints symbols to take advantage of game day crowds. Corporate banners advertising Bud Light loomed in the background. An iron fence separated a semi-private tailgate space from the open sidewalk.

I Own Who Dat

Although fandom adapts creatively to consumerist structures, conflicts arose in 2009 between the NFL and the people of New Orleans that illustrated Saints fans felt that not everything they value was for sale. With the success of the Saints 2009 season leading up to the teams first Super Bowl win, the phrase 'Who Dat' journeyed out of the living rooms of hard core Saints fans, spread across New Orleans and Louisiana and found its way to a national audience of people watching the television broadcasts of NFL games. Saints fans craved anything that said Who Dat – from the words simply printed on a T-shirt, to a more clever shirt

design saying 'Horton Hears a Who Dat' paying homage to the Saints and childrens' book writer Dr. Seuss. The words WHO DAT blanketed the city of New Orleans, appearing on bus stop benches, artwork, daiquiri shop signs, necklaces, posters, T-shirts – the phrase was everywhere.

The NFL issued cease and desist letters to small New Orleans businesses featuring these consumer goods, claiming that WHO DAT was an NFL owned trademark and ordering them to stop selling unlicensed Saints merchandise. The NFL cited a 1988 trademark the Saints organization filed with the State of Louisiana and said they had exclusive rights to the phrase Who Dat. It was a common practice for NFL teams to legally protect their trademarked and copyrighted marks and logos. The Saints organization regularly sent cease and desist letters to companies that were using the Saints name and logos in their advertising or merchandising plans without first obtaining permission to do so through paying hefty licensing or sponsorship fees. According to NFL spokesman Dan Masonson, "Any unauthorized use of the Saints colors and other marks designed to create the illusion of an affiliation with the Saints is equally a violation of the Saints trademark rights because it allows a third party to 'free ride' by profiting from confusion of the team's fans, who want to show support for the Saints" (wwltv.com, *NFL orders shops to stop selling Who Dat gear 1/27/10*). Saints fans were not confused, as the league spokesperson suggests, by the market being flooded with Who Dat merchandise. Fans as consumers were keenly aware of the difference between officially licensed NFL gear and something black and gold with a fleur-de-lis on it.

Although the NFL protecting its marks and logos was common practice, attempting to claim the rights over the phrase Who Dat shocked and offended New Orleanians. The people of New Orleans, the members of the Who Dat Nation viewed the actions of the NFL trying to assert claim over the phrase "Who Dat" as an attack, as an attempt to steal something that belonged to them.

The words 'Defend Who Dat' quickly appeared on chalk board advertising signs outside of local businesses. A vendor sold hand towels stitched with the words "I own Who Dat" for sale at an annual neighborhood festival. Saints fans balked at the NFL's perceived arrogance and bristled at an entity with superior legal and monetary resources. They jokingly questioned whether they should be asked to stop using the fleur-de-lis symbol or the colors black and gold altogether in order to point out the absurdity of being asked not to use a symbol that was so ubiquitous and laced with intangible meaning. The general feeling among New Orleanians was that no one should own WHO DAT because it was something that belonged to the people of New Orleans. According to a man quoted in the local media, "In my opinion, I don't see how you can take something that is New Orleans, that has been around as long as I can remember and call it your own. They don't own dat phrase, or dat language, or dat nation. It's not a phrase. It's a people. It's a community. It's the way we talk. For someone to say dat language belongs to them, that's out of the box" (*Times-Picayune* January 29, 2010).

The technicality of pinpointing the origins and ownership of Who Dat was not clear. Some sources connected the phrase Who Dat to minstrel shows from the late 1800s. Before the phrase Who Dat became a rally chant for Saints fans, its contemporary origins have been traced back to a New Orleans high school, St. Augustine, who used the chant at their football games. The New Orleans Louisiana Saints Limited Partnership registered the mark 'Who Dat' with the State of Louisiana in 1988. However, Steve Monistaire registered a business Who Dat, Inc. in 1983 in connection with an audio recording that placed *Who Dat* within the song *When the Saints Go Marching In*. Although trademarks rights generally go to the entity that registered them first, determining the exact legal boundaries of 'Who Dat' remained unclear. Several months after sending the initial cease and desist letters, the NFL backed off of its legal claim over the Who Dat phrase.

Control and complete commodification of 'Who Dat' would not be possible for two main reasons. First, the phrase started with the fans and was first adopted and used by fans. It was

not created by a corporation manufacturing a new marketing slogan to sell merchandise. Second, Saints fans have demonstrated extreme creativity in displaying Who Dat messages throughout New Orleans on a daily basis. Crafting outfits to wear to Saints games, offering original Who Dat creations at local art markets, and even spray painted murals gracing the sides of otherwise uninviting urban structures all showcased the phrase Who Dat. The Who Dat phrase was laced with the cultural power to symbolize New Orleans people. Like one Saints fan said, "It's not a phrase. It's a people. It's a community." His thoughts reflected the belief that the NFL could not possibly take something or claim to own something that New Orleanians felt belonged to them. The Who Dat Nation and being a Who Dat was more of a feeling for New Orleanians than a commodity. Chanting the phrase and wearing Who Dat T-shirts was something that New Orleanians did to create a sense of collective belonging with fellow residents. Following this line of thought, it appeared impossible or absurd for an outside entity to try to assert ownership over something that was so freely used and intangibly interpreted. Another reaction to the Who Dat controversy was perceiving the NFL actions as a large, national corporation trying to assert dominance over small, local businesses. Fans critiqued the NFL for waiting until they saw an opportunity to profit off of Who Dat before trying to assert ownership of it.

Turning Who Dat into a commodity was not the issue for Saints fans. Saints fans and New Orleanians have carved out numerous ways of turning Who Dat into a commodity. For example, vendors at local art markets started slapping the phrase Who Dat onto any number of creative items for sale from paintings to light switch covers to jewelry. Saints fans craved these items. Purchasing an item from an art market or local boutique represented another extension of New Orleans culture. Buying and wearing a Who Dat themed T-shirt from Fleurty Girl, Dirty Coast, or Storyville - local shops whose T-shirt phrases play on local customs - represented embracing something that was New Orleans. In contrast, NFL ownership over Who Dat

undermined what Saints fans considered not only a New Orleans cultural expression but also a New Orleans right.

The NFL's action represented a fundamental conflict between a national entity's branding and profit-seeking strategies and the traits, characteristics and nuances of a local market. The NFL demonstrated a complete misunderstanding of local culture. Although the Saints organization was an NFL team and NFL product, the NFL was oblivious to the ways in which local Saints fans engaged with their home team. This disconnect between the national organization and the local environment provided evidence that sports fans had agency in creating local cultural practices around a national product. The Who Dat example showed that the corporate drive for commodification was not all consuming and there existed the possibility for local resistance and meaningful, grassroots expressions of fandom.

The analysis presented in this chapter resulted from trying to make sense of the fact that so many interviewees and survey takers listed economics as a reason why people thought the Saints are important for New Orleans. Exploring how fans recognized and adapted to the commercialization of their sports team showed how fans created value for themselves. I have never been convinced that fans were duped into thinking a team has economic value where there was none and blindly following a pro-growth mentality. Rather, looking at how Saints fans actually engaged with their home team showed that they engaged in ways that were meaningful to them.

CHAPTER 9: Concluding Remarks and Research Implications

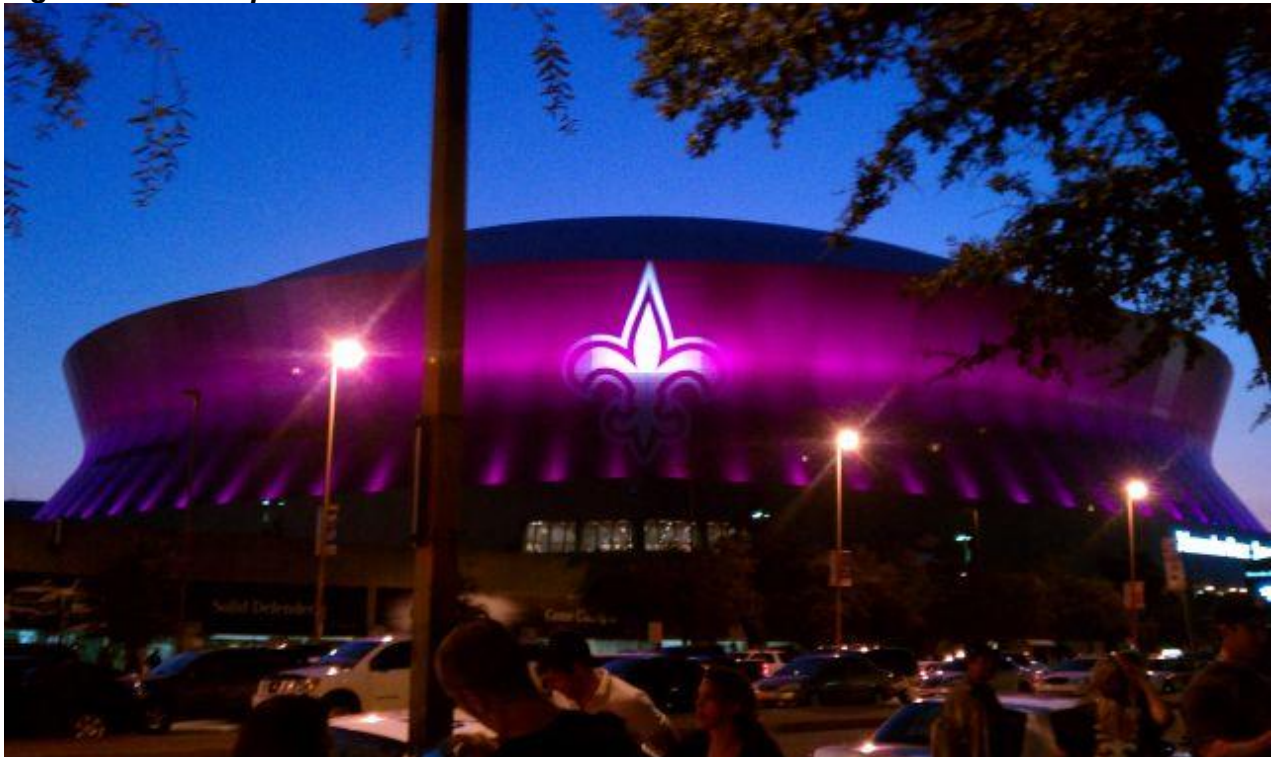
The Saints Hall of Fame museum located in the Superdome opened to fans on game day. Fans wandered through a collection of memorabilia erected as a tribute to the team's history. The exhibit started with a news clip from November 1, 1966 talking about the Saints coming to New Orleans, trumpeting it as a good thing for the economy and mentioning women football fans. Below this article sat a framed copy of a letter from the NFL officially awarding a franchise to New Orleans in exchange for a \$50,000 fee. One man meandering through the exhibit commented on this \$50,000 amount, bewildered at its tiny size in comparison to the multi-millions cities now spend to attract and maintain professional sports teams. Behind glass cases one could find newspaper clippings, old uniforms, Saintsations cheerleader costumes, pictures, bumper stickers, and all kinds of artifacts arranged in a timeline through the decades. A couple snickered at the old cheerleader costume for being out-of-date with current fashions. The displays guided you through different eras of star players, coaches, and owners.

In addition to these small tidbits saluting Saints history, a hallway, almost equal in size to the first hallway cataloguing decades of Saints history, stood a tribute to Hurricane Katrina. A white Saints T-shirt hung with a brownish line separating the top, white portion of the shirt from a muddied looking bottom half of the shirt. In magic marker, the shirts owner wrote, *this is where the water line was in my closet. When the levee failures flooded eighty percent of New Orleans, the point at which the water settled and festered for days left a waterline across everything it touched. In October 2005, when taking a journey down a long stretch of Canal Boulevard one could see this water line across everything – houses, cars, trees, sign posts – a continuous, horizontal line stretched across all elements. As the T-shirt in the Saints museum pointed out, this waterline infested homes and was found on cherished objects. These museum displays paid tribute to a disaster but more so seemed to signify that Hurricane Katrina was a significant*

point of history for the Saints organization – just as it was in differing ways for everyone in New Orleans.

Rounding another corner in the museum, the story told by the display of artifacts became one about the Saints role in rebuilding New Orleans. Pictures of flooded homes stood next to photos of newly restored homes. A brightly colored safety jacket displayed a message scribbled in black marker that said, ‘if last year was hell, this is heaven,’ referencing the Saints first game back in the Superdome on September 6, 2006. On the opposite facing wall, began documentation that the Saints did indeed win the Super Bowl in 2010. The artifacts on display in the Superdome paid tribute to Saints history but also projected a narrative arc that reflected a forty year cultural relationship with the city of New Orleans.

Figure 14: The Superdome



The refurbished Superdome illuminates the city skyline. It stands as an icon of New Orleans recovery.

The aim of this dissertation was to gain a deeper understanding of the relationship between sports and the city by exploring how local culture is expressed through professional sports and in what ways professional sports matter to urban residents. The ethnographic, case study research approach allowed me to gather in-depth descriptions about why professional sports are important to urban residents and in what ways the home team matters to urban residents. This key piece about what people value was missing from discussions that lie at the intersection of sports studies and urban studies. Through the story of the Saints in New Orleans, we show sport spaces as a combination of symbolism and practice where sporting and urban affiliations interrelate. Sport spaces embody constructions of race, urban place, gender and identity where sport spaces can be places of empowerment to challenge, renegotiate and rethink differences.

The narrative of renewal that Saints fans created within the extraordinary situation of coping with Hurricane Katrina and the subsequent recovery provided an extreme case study for highlighting the intensity and complexity of the values constructed through relationships between a professional sports team, a city and the fans. While I anticipated the ability of this case study to demonstrate the use value of sports through narratives about the symbolic and emotional meanings people attached to Saints football, I was slightly surprised to hear so many Saints fans referencing economics while talking about the importance of football in New Orleans. Giving attention to economic importance combined with the strategy of observing how people experience Saints games led to the chapter that described adaptations of commercialism in fan culture. Economic values and cultural values cannot be easily separated when looking at the practices of sports fans in urban settings. Positioning this discussion in a framework of commodified cultural forms provided a different way of conceptualizing how local culture is expressed through the home team.

I initially thought the ways in which New Orleanians intertwined Saints football and Katrina in narratives about fandom would satisfy the research question that asked how local

culture is expressed through a professional sport home team. However, the juxtaposition between the NFL as a national commercial brand and interpretations of the Saints as a local commodity highlighted ways in which local culture can emerge through something that is a national product. The conflicts that occurred during the NFL kickoff weekend in New Orleans and struggles over ownership of the Who Dat phrase underscored the tension between national and local identities. This provided a different way of answering my research question about local culture. This analysis also offers a starting point for future discussions on the role of American football in a growing body of academic literature concerned with globalization, identity, and sports. For example, there is some discussion in the literature of needing to protect what is local against global commercial forces. Some, like Harvey and Houle (1994), view major sporting events as contributors to the commodification and homogenization of cultures. The Saints case study shows that commodification does not lead to cultural homogenization. Saints fans demonstrate that the national brand does not erase or even overshadow local flavor, customs, and preferences.

The research question concerned with the collective identities that occur between football spectators illuminate our understanding of how collective identities manifest in a way where sporting and urban identities are interrelated. Identifying with the home team was an extension of identifying with and feeling connected to the city. In addition, fandom was shaped and influenced by everyday lived experiences within the urban environment. The descriptions included in this dissertation of how people experience football games, who people watch with, and where people watch games served to explain *how* people create collective identities and *why* they are important across urban spaces rather than being satisfied simply by recognizing that collective identities exist. Applying a framework that looks at social interactions and everyday practice leads to a richer understanding of how sport spaces can be used to negotiate constructions of gender, fandom, race, and urban place.

I incorporated the connections between Saints football and New Orleans race relations throughout the narrative arc presented in this dissertation. The efforts to attract NFL football to the city in the 1960s involved contesting racial segregation in New Orleans entertainment spaces. In this case, negotiating racial change through sport spaces lead to changes in legislature surrounding segregated entertainment spaces indicating that sport spaces can be used as a platform for substantial progress in influencing racial patterns. Ideas of race resurfaced through sporting spaces in the time period between Hurricane Katrina and the subsequent recovery efforts in New Orleans as residents used Saints football to construct narratives about race and community cohesion. I let the words and actions of Saints fans guide the direction of this dissertation and what Saints fans recognized was how their experiences brought people together regardless of race. Questions remain about how substantial this narrative can be in influencing city racial and social patterns.

Processes of social transformation are difficult and cannot occur overnight. It is too early to tell if the catalyst started with a 2010 Super Bowl winning season will have lasting effects or if history in memory will point to the Who Dat Nation as a facilitator in changing social patterns. More research and perhaps time will be necessary to see if changes in social patterns occur in a meaningful way. We do know that the cosmopolitan canopy is present beyond the extreme situation that occurred in 2005 and 2010 in New Orleans and have the potential to offer more than just fleeting social benefits. Beyond the confines of the disaster recovery framework, the ongoing, repetitive social relationships fostered through association with Saints football could provide lasting community benefits. People believed the collective act of rooting for the Saints offered them a way to interact with people of different races. While New Orleans has institutions that still segregate, the Saints are viewed as a cultural institution that is open to everybody. My research can advance the discussion of race and sport in cities by recognizing the potential for sport spaces to become cosmopolitan canopies. It is possible that people can come to expect a greater level of civility and repetitive occasions for inclusive social interactions. Sport spaces

can be used to continue to raise consciousness about relevant issues because sports provide a sort of universal language that people pay attention to and understand.

Future academic studies could benefit from looking at whether perceptions about using sports to construct narratives about race and community cohesion differ across race and ethnic groups, something this dissertation was not designed to do. Giving voice to minority and ethnic groups, and seeking out alternatives to the dominant narrative could inform the debate about the ways in which sport spaces embody constructions of race. In addition, activist scholars should look to spaces of sports fandom and the everyday lived experiences of urban residents to find rich data that can inform questions and discussions centered around sport, race and society.

Conducting participant observation at various locations throughout the city provided greater insight into how sports are connected to city culture by allowing me to see the link between sports fandom and public spaces. Combining sport space with city space offers a platform for challenging notions of fandom. Using reflexivity in my role as researcher led to an exploration into issues regarding gender and fandom. In a project that set out to capture the experiences of Saints fans, many of these fans were women. Their voice is the voice of the Who Dat Nation not an inauthentic version of the Who Dat Nation. Fan identity can be inclusive of gender identity factors without oppressing one or the other. Even though assumptions about gender plague sport spaces and can reinforce uneven power structures, these socially constructed ideas about gender that marginalize women in sports are permeable. There exists the possibility for sports fandom to offer spaces of empowerment to challenge social barriers rather than reinforce them. While this dissertation was able to question gendered fandom as an accidental benefit of reflexivity, future research needs to confront women as sports fans and their perspectives.

The findings in this study offer a first step in making women more visible in sports fandom in ways that do not further marginalize them as inferior versions of real sports fans.

Fandom as a practice is about people interacting in public spaces and creating sociability in ways that make sense for them. Future studies should use this framework to guide analysis in order to move towards an understanding of sports fan spaces as places of empowerment to challenge, renegotiate, and rethink difference. Future studies could confront fandom within the framework of looking at everyday lived experiences and social interactions as a way of giving voice and developing rich descriptions of the complexities of how people value sports.

Although violence was not directly addressed in my dissertation, studies of sports fandom often address violent behavior. The euphoria surrounding the Saints Super Bowl win, the narrative of renewal, and the creation of the Who Dat Nation serve as examples of fandom that was not concomitant with violence. Nothing violent happened on Bourbon street the night the Saints won the Super Bowl and people take pride in telling me that. The local paper described this non-violent scene by saying that as New Orleanians and football fans, “We dance on cars, we don’t burn cars” (*Times-Picayune* February 9, 2010). With all the news and studies on violence associated with sports fans, the Saints case study serves as an example of how sports fandom manifests in peaceful ways. Saints fandom is not inherently violent or masculine. Future studies on sports fandom could benefit from this new perspective where looking at fan practices and different interpretations of fandom allows space to rethink and challenge dominant discourse of power. Challenging the idea of spaces of violence could also inform new perspectives on gendered fandom especially when paired with literature on the construction of gender, bodies, and space. The lack of research on women as sports fans presents a great opportunity for further studies.

Focusing my research on the ways in which fans experience Saints games in public spaces also provides useful analysis for those engaged in debates over public investments in professional sports teams. The politics surrounding spending public dollars to support professional sports teams and facilities remains a topic of concern for scholars and city leaders. Uneven power relations exist between the NFL and cities who want to host teams or large

events like the Super Bowl. The scarcity and monopoly status of the league gives team owners the upper hand in negotiations where local governments and local fans are left facing a lingering threat that their home team could be relocated to another city. A cautionary tale exists in the literature surrounding economic development and professional sports teams where any 'symbolic' value could be seen as a tool used by the economically and politically powerful to blackmail cities into investing in problematic sports developments. Skepticism remains about the social benefits to a city of having a professional sports team when the financial stakes to keep them are so high. However, my research reminds us that fans have agency and create and interpret values in different ways. The central emotional connections that binds people to a sports franchise involves a connection that transcends traditional measures of economics and goes beyond growth machine theory to explain the willingness of urban residents to subsidize professional teams.

Part of the cautionary tale surrounding sports and economic development has to do with questions of social justice where viewing sports as providing a public good for the city as a whole ignores the idea that different people are affected differently by investment decisions. Speaking for the community as a whole presents the danger of repressing those of lower socioeconomic status or exploiting local communities in the interest of dominant corporate groups. Assumptions remain throughout sports economic literature that the benefits involved in sport investment projects are reserved for the corporate elite or higher income residents of a region. We cannot fully understand the possibility of social benefits and threats if we don't know how low income groups experience and perceive their home teams. More work is needed to flesh out their opinions and experiences. The findings in this study suggest that there is room for residents to capitalize on a local professional sports franchise by creating small-scale economic exchanges. Several examples emerged where residents piggybacked on the presence of Saints football to create small-scale economic value that mattered to them. In addition, focusing my research on the ways in which different city residents experienced Saints games revealed that

New Orleans residents, regardless of socioeconomic differences, had access to the imagined community of the Who Dat Nation. More than just the economic and political elite found value in having the Saints in New Orleans in terms of enjoyment and sociability.

Even though this dissertation highlighted the social benefits or non-economic values that local residents assign to their home team, the findings are not meant to serve as fodder for supporting problematic investments in sports development projects. Public subsidies, urban development projects and the contracts negotiated between sports teams and city officials should continue to receive scrutiny. I encourage policy makers and those wielding negotiations between sports leagues and their host cities to seek out solutions that protect what urban residents value in their home teams. For example, challenge legal structures that keep cities and fans vulnerable to the threat of team relocation and explore contract clauses that keep local identifiers, such as team name, with the city in the event that a team does dissolve or relocate.

While the limited economic gains produced by sports facilities have been documented, the conversation about how cities could benefit from sports teams is changing. Rosentraub's (1997) book *Major League Losers* was influential in framing the economic relationship between sports and cities. More than a decade after this initial publication, he published a book titled *Major League Winners* (Rosentraub 2010). Even the shift in title suggests that scholars are interesting in examining how cities can possibly use sports and cultural entertainment developments as strategic investment tools to create vibrant cities. Fostering social capital is of central importance to this new perspective and is linked to the idea of making cities a vibrant place to, among other goals, attract Richard Florida's (2003) 'creative class.' How can we keep discussing ways in which to leverage sports developments to attract newcomers without an understanding of how people who are already present in the city use and interpret sport spaces? I remain hopeful that my perspective of looking at the everyday lived experiences and social interactions in public places would be helpful in evaluating how to use sport developments to shape urban space.

Whether approaching the analysis of sports teams from an urban development strand of literature or from the strand of literature that questions the economic and social benefits of sports, all point to the idea that sports developments in cities are often motivated by a desire to forge a new city image. My work delves deeper into this discussion of city image enhancement by describing what kind of images the sports team projects for the city and how locals engaged with those messages. The narratives surrounding Saints football and the Superdome revealed more complex messages about city image and identity than simply portraying an enhanced city image. My approach of looking deeper into city images and city identity could foster discussions in academic literature that suggests city image and place competition are important factors in urban development for places grappling with post-industrial forms of consumption. Making a connection between Zukin's (1995) 'symbolic economy,' sport spaces and consumption in post-industrial cities could move an evaluation of the role of professional sports in urban areas forward in more interesting ways than being stuck in growth machine debates over the economic pitfalls of publicly funded stadiums.

My research moves sports and urban development discussions forward by filling in the missing piece of how city people interpret and create value around their home professional sports team. It was important to look at how people are actually experiencing the professional sports teams in their home cities because this piece is missing from many evaluations on the impact of professional sports on urban areas. The case study of the Saints in New Orleans offers a detailed description of the relationship between the city, professional sports, and the people who call that city home. The resulting narratives surrounding Saints football provided insights that can contribute to future interdisciplinary research and more in depth discussions about the nature of the sport-city relationship by moving the literature towards an understanding of how sport spaces influence everyday lived experiences and social interactions.

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Appendix

University Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research

University of New Orleans

Campus Correspondence

Principal Investigator: Renia Ehrenfeucht
Co-Investigator: Casey Knoettgen
Date: December 10, 2010
Protocol Title: "Football and 'Who Dat?' Calls: Resituating Sports into Urban Society"
IRB#: 04Dec10

The IRB has deemed that the research and procedures described in this protocol application are exempt from federal regulations under 45 CFR 46.101 category 2, due to the fact that any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research would not reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

Exempt protocols do not have an expiration date; however, if there are any changes made to this protocol that may cause it to be no longer exempt from CFR 46, the IRB requires another standard application from the investigator(s) which should provide the same information that is in this application with changes that may have changed the exempt status.

If an adverse, unforeseen event occurs (e.g., physical, social, or emotional harm), you are required to inform the IRB as soon as possible after the event.

Best wishes on your project.
Sincerely,

Robert D. Laird, Ph.D., Chair
UNO Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research

Vita

Casey Knoettgen was born in Wichita, Kansas. After earning Masters Degrees in Business and Sports Management from the DeVos Sport Business Management program at the University of Central Florida, she found herself in New Orleans pursuing a career in the professional sports industry. Casey has professional experience working for the New Orleans Saints football team, the Tampa Bay Devil Rays baseball team, and numerous sporting events including six Super Bowls. Her love for New Orleans transformed into a passion for studying cities and investigating creative solutions for urban problems. Her time spent completing a Ph.D. in Urban Studies from the University of New Orleans allowed her to combine her passion for academics, social issues, and sports in a constructive, research environment. She remains fascinated with the culture and quirky nuances of New Orleans, where she currently lives with her husband and two rescue dogs.