

The Influence of the Super Bowl on the American Culture

Kuserbanj, Leon

Undergraduate thesis / Završni rad

2020

Degree Grantor / Ustanova koja je dodijelila akademski / stručni stupanj: **Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences / Sveučilište Josipa Jurja Strossmayera u Osijeku, Filozofski fakultet**

Permanent link / Trajna poveznica: <https://urn.nsk.hr/urn:nbn:hr:142:228736>

Rights / Prava: [In copyright](#)/[Zaštićeno autorskim pravom.](#)

Download date / Datum preuzimanja: **2024-07-17**



Repository / Repozitorij:

[FFOS-repository - Repository of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences Osijek](#)



Sveučilište J.J. Strossmayera u Osijeku
Filozofski fakultet Osijek
Dvopredmetni sveučilišni preddiplomski studij engleskog jezika i
književnosti i hrvatskog jezika i književnosti

Leon Kuserbanj

Utjecaj Super Bowla na Američku kulturu

Završni rad

Mentor: doc. dr. sc. Jadranka Zlomislić

Osijek, 2020.

Sveučilište J.J. Strossmayera u Osijeku
Filozofski fakultet Osijek
Odsjek za engleski jezik i književnost
Dvopredmetni sveučilišni preddiplomski studij engleskog jezika i književnosti i
hrvatskog jezika

Leon Kuserbanj

Utjecaj Super Bowla na američku kulturu

Završni rad

Znanstveno područje: humanističke znanosti

Znanstveno polje: filologija

Znanstvena grana: anglistika

Mentor: doc. dr. sc. Jadranka Zlomislić

Osijek, 2020.

J.J. Strossmayer University of Osijek
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
Double Major BA Study Programme in English Language and Literature
and Croatian Language and Literature

Leon Kuserbanj

The Influence of the Super Bowl on the American Culture

Bachelor's Thesis

Supervisor: Dr. Jadranka Zlomislić, Assistant Professor

Osijek, 2020

J.J. Strossmayer University of Osijek
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
Department of English
Double Major BA Study Programme in English Language and Literature
and Croatian Language and Literature

Leon Kuserbanj

The Influence of the Super Bowl on the American Culture

Bachelor's Thesis

Scientific area: humanities
Scientific field: philology
Scientific branch: English studies

Supervisor: Dr. Jadranka Zlomislić, Assistant Professor

Osijek, 2020

IZJAVA

Izjavljujem s punom materijalnom i moralnom odgovornošću da sam ovaj rad samostalno napravio te da u njemu nema kopiranih ili prepisanih dijelova teksta tuđih radova, a da nisu označeni kao citati s napisanim izvorom odakle su preneseni. Svojim vlastoručnim potpisom potvrđujem da sam suglasan da Filozofski fakultet Osijek trajno pohrani i javno objavi ovaj moj rad u internetskoj bazi završnih i diplomskih radova knjižnice Filozofskog fakulteta Osijek, knjižnice Sveučilišta Josipa Jurja Strossmayera u Osijeku i Nacionalne i sveučilišne knjižnice u Zagrebu.

U Osijeku, 30. rujna 2020.

Lea Vukobratović, O/22276543

ime i prezime studenta, JMBAG

Abstract

The Super Bowl is much more than just a regular game of American football. It is a window into American society and culture through sports, patriotism, entertainment and advertising. The paper takes a close look at the Super Bowl from its beginnings to today through different perspectives to determine its significance in American culture. The Super Bowl is seen through the perspectives of commercialism and consumerism, patriotism, the military and culture. It is explained how and why the Super Bowl became a staple of the American identity over the years. The study explores how the Super Bowl began, how it has changed over the years from a football championship to a sports and entertainment extravaganza. The paper explains how and why the Super Bowl attracts so many viewers and sports fans in America, and how it reached its status of a national holiday. A particular emphasis is placed on the political voices heard by millions of people during the Super Bowl as players use the opportunity to tackle racial injustice and inequality through their powerful platforms. By examining the television coverage over the years of this largest sporting event in the United States and the participants on and off the field, the paper highlights the Super Bowl as an American symbol of patriotism and national identity which showcases the six core American values, which are individual freedom, self-reliance, equality of opportunity, competition, hard work and material wealth.

Keywords: The Super Bowl, football, American culture, values, entertainment, patriotism

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
1. The History of the Super Bowl.....	2
1.1. The Inception of the Super Bowl.....	2
1.2. The Growth of the Super Bowl.....	3
2. The Super Bowl Today	5
2.1. The Super Bowl Televised	5
2.2. Commercials During the Super Bowl.....	6
2.3. The Sporting Side of Affairs	8
2.4. The Political Side of Affairs	9
3. America and the Super Bowl.....	11
3.1. The NFL: America’s Civil Religion.....	11
3.2. The Super Bowl and American Values	12
3.3. The Super Bowl and the War Discourse	13
Conclusion.....	15
Works Cited.....	16

Introduction

The Super Bowl is the final game of the NFL championship held on the first Sunday in February every year. The aim of this paper is to establish why the Super Bowl is such a big part of the American culture and society by taking a closer look at this significant sporting event through the perspectives of commercialism and consumerism, patriotism, the military and culture. The Superbowl is much more than just a regular game of American football and its roots are deeply connected to the American society and culture, its beliefs, and values. The study explores the development of the Super Bowl from its beginnings and its transformation from a football game to a sports extravaganza. The paper focuses on how it has changed over the years and the significance of the changes.

The first chapter of this paper looks at the history of the Super Bowl, its inception and how it has grown to become the cultural phenomena as we know it today. It explains the merger between two leagues from which the Super Bowl began and its development leading up to the last Super Bowl held in 2020.

The second chapter focuses on the Super Bowl today, with a particular emphasis on the significance of the sporting event for the American people and the impact of the television broadcasts, especially the commercials. In addition, it is highlighted that the Super Bowl is not only a major football championship but also an event that has become politicized as players use their powerful platforms to voice opinions over racial injustice and discrimination in American society.

The final third chapter examines the link between the Superbowl and the American identity with its core values. Also, it looks at the NFL as America's Civil Religion and the ties of the Super Bowl with the US military. Furthermore, it is pointed out how the American traditional values go hand in hand with football, especially the emphasis on patriotism highlighted by the involvement of the military during the celebrations, be it by parades, plane flyovers or by inviting military personnel to the game.

1. The History of the Super Bowl

The Super Bowl football tradition has been going strong for over five decades, transforming from a championship football game to the biggest sports entertainment event in the United States and a cultural phenomenon. Year after year it has been attracting a wide diverse audience of millions of viewers not only nationally but globally as well.

1.1. The Inception of the Super Bowl

The beginnings of the Super Bowl can be traced to a rivalry between the NFL (National Football League) and the AFL (American Football League) for players, support, and fans. “In the 1960s the challenge presented to the National Football League from the newly formed American Football League led to a costly war between the two organizations” (Crepeau 7). The rivalry led to a merger of the two leagues (History.com Editors). As of 1966, the Super Bowl, known initially as the AFL-NFL World Championship Game, was played between the champions of two rival leagues, the NFL, and the AFL (History.com Editors). The first AFL-NFL World Championship Game took place on January 15, 1967 in Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum with the NFL’s *Green Bay Packers* defeating the AFL’s *Kansas City Chiefs* by 35-10 (Frommer). That game did not see great interest as only two television networks (CBA and NBC) broadcast the game with the modest viewership of 60 million people, compared to today’s standards, and the stadium did not sell out in its entirety, around 35,000 seats were left vacant despite low ticket cost, while the stadium can take up to 90,000 people. (Hopsicker and Dyreson). Since the rebranding of the AFL-NFL World Championship Game to the Super Bowl, the use of Roman numerals have been used to indicate what annual Super Bowl was being played. According to Crepeau,

that practice too had a chequered beginning. Roman Numerals first appeared on the Game Logo at Super Bowl II, appeared on the game programme for Super Bowl III, was used in the press for Super Bowl IV, but did not appear on the tickets until Super Bowl V. The term ‘World Championship Game’ remained on the tickets though Super Bowl IV.” (8)

Furthermore, halftime shows held during the Super Bowl nowadays get a lot of attention, but during the first championship finals although they existed, they did not garner as much attention as today. Hopsicker and Dyreson depict the Super Bowl half-time show as follows:

The half-time show featured standard football fare, performances by Grambling College, the University of Michigan, and the University of Arizona marching bands.

Those same musicians rather than a world-famous pop star performed the ‘Star Spangled Banner’ before the game commenced. From many perspectives, the inaugural Super Bowl fell short of achieving its ‘super’ superlative. The game was hardly the cultural touchstone it would later become in American society. Indeed, it was just another game. (1)

Initially the Super Bowl remained relatively unimportant for Americans for years. However, as time passed, the Super Bowl transcended sport, and is now widely regarded as an unofficial American holiday. Super Bowl Sunday, the day on which the Super Bowl is held, usually on the first Sunday in February, is a day reserved for viewer get-togethers either at home or bars and restaurants.

1.2. The Growth of the Super Bowl

As the game has had the reputation of being boring because of its lack of competitiveness and usually ended in a hands-down victory, there had to be a way to raise its popularity and viewership, to make it more than just a football game. Hopsicker comments that:

The Super Bowl is generally super boring – at least, in terms of the typically lopsided score. The game is so boring that a rehash of all 50 of the past Super Bowls finds that the average margin of victory is more than 14 points. Only 18 of the games have been decided by seven points or fewer, while only seven have been settled by a field goal or less.

Americans love competitiveness, and if there is a lack of it, they would not care for the Super Bowl. Because of that, the NFL started implementing shows before and during the half time of the game, to draw away attention from the uninteresting game and onto the additional entertainment. The Super Bowl halftime shows began as relatively small performances “featuring university marching bands and faded pop stars. But as early as Super Bowl XI in 1977 – when the league contracted with the Walt Disney Company to produce a halftime show titled “It’s a Small World” – the NFL began to craft a new production template” (Hopsicker).

Later, the halftime shows got bigger and bigger. For example, Super Bowl XXVII featured Michael Jackson, Super Bowl XXXVIII featured Beyonce, XXV featured Whitney Houston, and the list goes on. With that said, the sporting event itself has been pushed back and overshadowed by shows, commercials and concerts that have taken over the limelight. This shows American reliance on entertainment. It can be said that the Super Bowl is the biggest event in the US, both as a sporting and as an entertaining event. It may be as popular as soccer or basketball, but the focus in those two sports is almost purely on the game. There are no

shows, and the only thing of importance is the game itself. The importance of the Super Bowl game is not as great as in, e.g. the Champions League Final.

2. The Super Bowl Today

The Super Bowl today is a completely different thing compared to what it was at its inception. It has evolved from a football game to an event similar to a national holiday.

Like other holidays, the Super Bowl leads Americans to alter their daily routines. Businesses close while celebrants meticulously plan profligate parties. People gather for a common purpose – to participate in the shared rituals that have developed to celebrate the spectacle. Similar in many ways to Thanksgiving, Super Bowl Sunday gatherings include feasts of specific food and drink – chicken wings and crudités, chips and guacamole, fried finger foods and pizza, soda and beer, Bloody Marys and other football-themed cocktails. Super Bowl Sunday also evokes overt displays of nationalism that rival the Fourth of July, Veterans Day, and other patriotic holidays. (Hopsicker and Dyreson 2)

It is obvious that the Super Bowl is much more than just a sporting event to Americans; it is a day they plan for and that they look forward to as a special time to spend with their friends and family.

Two entire weeks full of commotion and buzz about the Super Bowl turn the event into a spectacle as anticipated as the Olympics, a royal wedding, or the Grammys. The super Bowl is bigger than just a game of winner takes all. Whether one supports the Eagles or Patriots isn't the big picture; it is but only a backdrop for such an event dear to many Americans hearts and generations of families. (Alverio)

In other words, the Super Bowl has evolved into a spectacle, a truly patriotic event that evokes happiness and pride in almost every American. Considering the fact that football is the most popular sport in the United States, and at its core, “the most American” sport there is, it should not come as a surprise that the Super Bowl is the most viewed event on television each year.

2.1. The Super Bowl Televised

The Super Bowl between the Kansas City Chiefs and the San Francisco 49ers in 2020 reached a peak viewership of 102.1 million (Breech). A true spectacle broadcast on television. The viewership gained an admirable number quickly in the seventies due to the limited number of seats to attend the game. The interest was high and the only way for the vast audience to see the game was on television. Also, the Super Bowl gained a lot of its popularity because it is an American tradition to watch television on Sunday afternoon, when the game is played. That meant there would be an inevitable growth in the Super Bowl viewership and ratings. Even the

now distant Super Bowl III and IV are well-known for having attracted the largest audience for a single TV event up to date. The numbers were good from the beginning, but today's numbers are astronomical and almost seem unreal.

The 'golden anniversary' game finished with a 'mere' 111.9 million viewers to earn a third-place ranking behind Super Bowl XLIX and Super Bowl XLVIII, which garnered 114.4 million and 112.2 million, respectively. Super Bowl 50's television broadcasting, joining a score of other Super Bowls that rule American airwaves as the dominant programming in the history of that medium. (Dyreson, 139)

It is worth noting that these numbers are for the US only. The NFL wants the Super Bowl to be among the global events, such as the World Cup and the Olympic games. That is hard, if not impossible to accomplish because the rest of the world does not see football as their own sport, but distinctly American. There are football fans worldwide, but the excitement and euphoria that the US goes through prior to the Super Bowl are not replicable anywhere else. "A 2016 Huffington Post poll found that millennials were less likely to be interested in "the game itself" than in the commercials and the halftime show. The same poll showed that the older you are, the more important football is in your Super Bowl celebration" (Hopsicker). This goes to show just how much the entertainment aspect is important to Americans and many prefer the commercials and concerts over the actual game. The Super Bowl would not have evolved into the Super Bowl if it had not been for the commercials and concerts. It would have been just another football game for the average viewer.

2.2. Commercials During the Super Bowl

Material wealth and the heritage of abundance are deeply carved into the American identity, so they rather enjoy seeing a number of brands and products in the commercials during the halftime of the Super Bowl. As the viewership of the Super Bowl goes through the roof, it attracts more and more corporations and businesses to get a commercial during the halftime. The pricy commercials are usually witty and short, targeting a broad audience. Involvement of the media in the Super Bowl is huge, but the Americans seem to love it, as they want to experience this bombardment of the media. The Super Bowl is an "Ad Bowl" to Hopsicker and Dyreson. The competition to get an ad in the Super Bowl is huge, as corporations expect vast audiences to see them. The advertisers are aware that there is no better opportunity than the Super Bowl viewership and they are willing to pay a hefty price.

"Of course, with such high value comes an equally high cost. Super Bowl prices have risen to \$4 million for a 30-second spot (Horovitz, 2013). And they are going to keep

rising. The spots still sell out more than two months in advance (Siltanen, 2014). Gary Carr, senior Vice President and executive director for TargetCast calls Super Bowl spending supply and demand. Because the spots always sell out before the big game, prices will continue to rise. While a tipping point is inevitable, we may not see it for a long time to come (Krashinsky, 2013).” (qtd. in Steinbach 11)

The Super Bowl is of the utmost importance to the advertising industry, as it is a huge promotion for the product, regardless of the price for a 30-second ad.

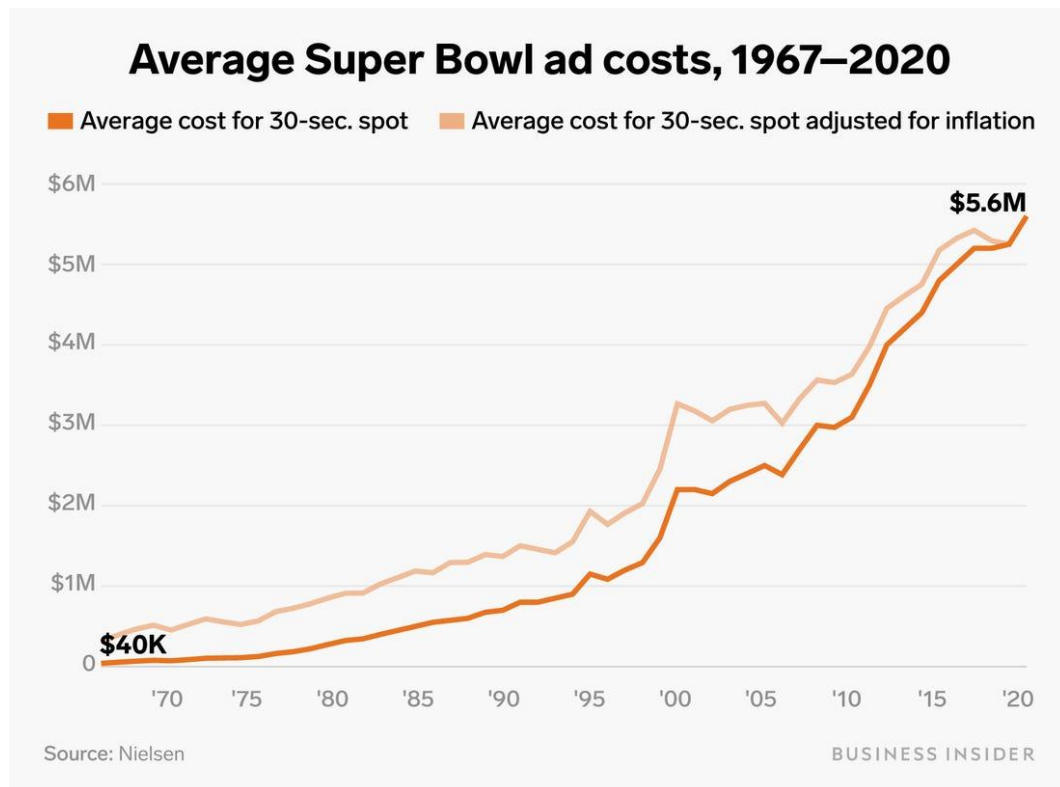


Fig. 1. Ruobing Su and Erin McDowell. “How Super Bowl ad costs have skyrocketed over the years.” *Business Insider*, Business Insider, 2 Feb. 2020, www.businessinsider.com/super-bowl-ad-price-cost-2017-2. Accessed 24 September 2020

As seen on the graph, the price has skyrocketed over the years, from between \$37,500 and \$42,500 in 1967 to a whopping \$5.25 million in 2019 (Ruobing Su and Erin McDowell).

In the years since, they’ve escalated to become the most expensive advertising time in the history of television. After 1985, in response to the huge impact of Apple’s legendary “1984” commercial, advertising rates soared to over \$500,000 for a 30-second spot. This trend sparked the emergence of the “Ad Bowl,” an unofficial but hyper-intense marketing competition to produce the most creative and memorable television commercial targeting the Super Bowl’s enormous captive audience, which

hit 111.9 million viewers last year. Within a decade of the debut of “1984,” advertising rates doubled to \$1 million for a 30-second spot. For Super Bowl 50 in 2016, the price reached \$5 million. The Ad Bowl has further eroded the focus on football, drawing in viewers who claim that they watch the game more for the commercials.” (Hopsicker)

The numbers quoted above show how much influence these commercials have. Thus, many companies choose the Super Bowl to help with the promotion of their product or the service. The largest advertisers are *Hyundai* (\$38.8 million in spending), *Time Warner* (\$39.8 million in spending), *Comcast* (\$40,3 million in spending), *Viacom* (\$45,9 million in spending), *Coca Cola* (\$66.8 million in spending), *Walt Disney* (\$73.9 million in spending), *General Motors* (\$82,8 million in spending), *PepsiCo* (\$174 million in spending), and *Anheuser-Busch InBev*, the brewery behind Budweiser and Bud Light, \$239.1 million dollars spent on ads during the Super Bowl (Steinbach 16).

2.3. The Sporting Side of Affairs

Despite the large sum of money invested in commercials and consumerism, the Super Bowl is not just a television “Apocalypse.” The Super Bowl is the final, deciding-of-the-champion game of the NFL season. It is played between the champions of two conferences, the American (AFC) and the National (NFC). It differs greatly from other traditional American sports as conferences in other sports are usually geographically divided into the East conference and the West conference. Held only once a season, football fans wait for this specific game for a long time. As mentioned before, the games held in the past were not nail biters, but one sided, hands-down victories as one team is usually the most dominant for the season. That does not change the fact that the football players in the Super Bowl are role models.

The league is beginning to dominate cultural currency in America. The NFL produces national heroes in the form of talented male athletes. The NFL is a stage that presidents try to appear on to reach the public. The NFL establishes the notions of merit and masculinity, as well as femininity. Players and even sports broadcasters are held at such high regards equivalent to role models for citizens. The NFL is conceived as, and purports itself to be, a model for America. (Cordova, 2)

For Americans, football is special. It is so special that the sport is known outside the US as American football. The reason behind its popularity might be that the season in the NFL is the shortest, compared to the NBA, the MLB and the NHL leagues of other major American sports, so the growing anticipation is greater in comparison. Also, the Super Bowl is the only one of those four major American leagues that decide its winner based on the winner of one

game only. But, unfortunately, even with that, the game is not the most important thing about the finals, as Hopsicker says:

Even with the recent spate of close contests, it's unlikely we'll see a major revamping of Super Bowl productions to focus more explicitly on football. To those, however, who hunger for the halcyon days of old when Super Bowl Sunday was about the contest on the gridiron – and not the hoopla at halftime or the barrage of ads – we'd point out that a quality football game has almost never been the core component of this distinctly American holiday.

2.4. The Political Side of Affairs

Sports, in the past, have been a safe haven from politics and everyday struggle for the average American Joe. Recently, things have been starting to change and gradually more and more politics is being introduced into sports. For example, movements like Black Lives Matter have induced athletes into becoming more vocal about political issues and have been impacting people in their safe haven. Politics has become a part of every aspect of life and sport is no exception. However, those involved in sports have at times fallen short. Cordova mentions that “in 2014 the NFL faltered in dealing with two large social issues in America. The first is Michael Sam—the first openly gay football player entering the draft—and the second, in which the league made a severe mistake—its understanding of the social importance of domestic violence—and that almost cost the league everything” (2). Thus, the league has got to adapt to new standards and beliefs. In the NFL, the biggest scandal has been caused by the player Colin Kaepernick, who refused to stand for the national anthem because of his belief that the USA is still oppressive towards people of color.

His latest refusal to stand for the anthem -- he has done this in at least one other preseason game -- came before the 49ers' preseason loss to Green Bay at Levi's Stadium on Friday night.

"I am not going to stand up to show pride in a flag for a country that oppresses black people and people of color," Kaepernick told NFL Media in an exclusive interview after the game. "To me, this is bigger than football and it would be selfish on my part to look the other way. There are bodies in the street and people getting paid leave and getting away with murder." (Wyche).

Of course, he was supported by celebrities for his bravery and activism, but his actions did not sit too well with the average American, which resulted in the burning of sportswear clothing and footwear made by the *Nike* corporation that is Kaepernick's sponsor. His first

protest happened in 2016, and his continued protests have even led to some artists refusing to participate in the half-time shows, which would bring them a lot of money. In an article for *The Guardian*, basketball legend Kareem Abdul-Jabar said that

This clash of conscience is one of the reasons why the NFL struggled to find performers for its halftime show, even though an appearance would mean being exposed to over a hundred million viewers in the United States alone. That can translate into a lot of money. Yet famous singers such as Cardi B, Jay Z, and Rihanna refused to perform out of solidarity with Colin Kaepernick, who has been blackballed for his non-violent, non-verbal message that there is racial inequality and injustice in America. Instead, they have Maroon 5, Big Boi, Travis Scott, and Gladys Knight to sing the national anthem. The backlash against the NFL and these performers resulted in the league cancelling the traditional pre-game news conference for the half-time show performers, with the excuse, “As it is about music, the artists will let their show do the talking as they prepare to take the stage this Sunday.”

That could leave the NFL in a conundrum as the half-time shows bring them a lot in revenue. It seems that the true American spirit is slowly edging away from the NFL, but the American identity will always remain hand in hand with football, even with the ongoing almost boiling political and racial situation.

3. America and the Super Bowl

American identity, patriotism and beliefs have played a big role in the popularization of the Super Bowl. As Cordova points out, “Football viewers consume the American identity when watching NFL games. Their active participation in celebrations like the Super Bowl helps fashion their external identity into a more notable American one” (93). That identity can be seen through football, as one must be tough, strong, individualistic, and self-reliant to be successful in life, as well as in football. The Super Bowl is their civil religion. As it seems, watching the Super Bowl in the comfort of your home and with your family is being an American. Alverio says, “For most Americans, every football game is special. Football connects us under our shared longing of seeing our teams win. We celebrate with blown out parties surrounded by family, friend, or foe. We support our teams with all our might, buy jerseys, merchandise, and slather their team colors on us in fervent support.”

3.1. The NFL: America’s Civil Religion

As the United States has no official religion, the melting pot can be seen in the Super Bowl as diverse cultures unite through a national religion. Religion is seen through the national identity as the Super Bowl celebrates America and its core values, its society, and its people. Price explains that:

Professional football games are not quite so obviously religious in character. Yet there is a remarkable sense in which the Super Bowl functions as a major religious festival for American culture, for the event signals a convergence of sports, politics and myth. Like festivals in ancient societies, which made no distinctions regarding the religious, political and sporting character of certain events, the Super Bowl succeeds in reuniting these now disparate dimensions of social life. (qtd. in Cordova 41)

The Super Bowl is a great example of how Americans see America and what they believe America stands for. Patriotism and the Super Bowl are heavily linked together, as Americans believe watching the Super Bowl is something that makes you an American, which is exactly what civil religion is. “Specifically, Chidester finds that Ronald Reagan established an American sacrificial religion, and that religion helped him justify and operate within his particular profree-market worldview with large public support” (qtd. in Cordova 10). Thus, the Super Bowl is a great part of American culture. It brings people together through the celebration of American society and the notion of America being the best country in the world.

The very notion of American civil religion aims to satisfy the desire Americans have to be considered – what the dominant American culture would define as – ‘good.’ In

instances of rituals like the Super Bowl, the show is produced in a way to celebrate the “distorted” or “exaggerated” concept of America to gain favor among their audience. (Cordova 56)

Americans perceive the Super Bowl as something good, as something that will show that they love their country and that they will, naturally, go out and celebrate both the Super Bowl and America with the ones who they hold dear, which perfectly fits into the definition of the civil religion.

3.2. The Super Bowl and American Values

Individual freedom, self-reliance, equality of opportunity, competition, hard work, and material wealth are the six core American values and all six can be seen in the Super Bowl. The competition in the NFL is devastating, contracts are in millions of dollars, and the training regime is ruthless.

To be a successful player in the NFL, a player needs to train well and eat well, which is a good way to get children into healthy nutrition and a daily workout. A player has to be stronger than the players on the opposite team, and that is achieved through self-reliance and hard work. With hard work and self-discipline, you can reach the finals and have your shot at the Super Bowl. It is important to work hard since during the game, players exert themselves to their utmost and they must run for several miles during just one game. According to the official NFL website, players train up to 6 hours a day during preseason.

The NFL is the wealthiest sports league in the world. It grosses billions of dollars every year through sponsors, commercials, and donations. The median salary of a player is \$3 million a year, but some individual players signed 5-year contracts for \$140 million, thus earning more than \$25 million per year (Renzulli and Connley). According to Handley, each player of a Super Bowl winning team gets \$110,000 and each player of the losing team gets roughly half of that. It is fair to say that the players who get a chance to be in the Super Bowl are well rewarded.

Equality of opportunity is also present in the Super Bowl as every team from the league has a chance of reaching the Super Bowl and, ultimately, winning it. It is also equal because the Super Bowl is not played at home, so neither team has an advantage, as it is played on a neutral pitch.

To win, you must be competitive and have a thirst for winning. To win the Super Bowl, you must be the best of the best and have the hunger to win more than the other team. Even reaching the Super Bowl means you are among the best, so why not step it up a notch. Competitiveness is especially present in American football, as it is a physical and frequently

even violent sport, which Americans find appealing. The American values are the glue that binds Americans together and since these values are ingrained in the Super Bowl culture they make this major sports event a part of their identity as Americans.

3.3. The Super Bowl and the War Discourse

“The National Football League is more than just the most popular sports league in America. Dominant American discourses that surround American patriotism and popular culture have a parallel in the NFL. This parallel is due to the fact that football is a game uniquely rooted and structured like war” (Cordova). A lifetime of Americans being involved in a war of some kind is present in the culture of the Super Bowl. It is not rare that during the Super Bowl the military is involved during the celebration, be it by parades, plane flyovers or by inviting military personnel to the game.

NFL players are often compared to soldiers, as Gems describes:

At the 2004 NFL draft, a public ceremony in which the professional teams select the best players from the college ranks as potential warriors, the commissioner of the league stated that “Pat Tillman personified the best values of America and of the National Football League . . . Like other men and women protecting our freedom around the globe, he made the ultimate sacrifice and gave his life for his country.” After a moment of silence the assembled crowd of fans erupted in the “USA, USA” chant, continuing to link nationalism, patriotism, and football with the perception of heroic martyrdom. (9)

Not only are the players compared to soldiers, but there is also proof that the core values of the American national identity include military, football, and patriotism.



Fig. 2. Bertrand, Natasha. “The Pentagon Paid 14 NFL Teams \$5.4 Million to 'Salute Troops'.” *Business Insider*, Business Insider, 12 May 2015, www.businessinsider.com/the-pentagon-pays-the-nfl-millions-to-honor-veterans-at-games-2015-5. Accessed 30 September 2020)

The Super Bowl has a function, and its function is to get the public familiar with the missions and to minimize the public knowledge of the realities of the war. It is an easy way to get approval of the public as Super Bowl Sunday is one of the most patriotic days in the year. There are games known as Salute the Service game which promote the military and they are hosted by every team once a year. The NFL and the Super Bowl have always been tied with the military, but after 9/11, the ties got even deeper.

The joint venture honored the military, offered support for the so-called “war on terrorism,” and linked the effort to the NFL, which culminated the event with the inaugural game beamed to American military bases around the world. The production provided a justification for American retaliation and equated the military warriors with the warrior ethic that had been trained on the football fields for more than a century. (Gems, 8)

Also, there was a program known as Operation Tribute to Freedom which was a tool by the army to help generate support for the ongoing war in the Middle East. Elaine Scarry compares war and games and explains that “[T]he conflation may occur as a flat assertion of equality—war is a game, games are war—or, more often as the importing of the attribute of one into the other’s sphere” (qtd. in Cordova 13).

David Swanson discusses the connection between the Super bowl and the military as follows:

The NFL website explains: “For decades the NFL and the military have had a close relationship at the Super Bowl, the most watched program year-to-year throughout the United States. In front of more than 160 million viewers, the NFL salutes the military with a unique array of in-game celebrations including the presentation of colors, on-field guests, pre-game ceremonies and stadium flyovers. During Super Bowl XLIX week [last year], the Pat Tillman Foundation and the Wounded Warriors Project invited veterans to attend the Salute to Service.

It is very clear that the NFL and the military are tied together, but as long as people are supporting the military, there is no evidence that the popularity of the Super Bowl will decrease. The game of football itself could be seen as war, as two teams fight over domination on the field by gaining yards in order to score a touchdown, “where physical domination and territorial invasion are the winning strategies” (Cordova 1). This is a clear comparison between sports and war, so it was easy to repurpose the Super Bowl as a propaganda tool, from commercial propaganda to war propaganda.

Conclusion

The Super Bowl provides a great insight into the American society and its culture. It is a true national holiday which brings people together through the representation of American values, lifestyle, national identity, and patriotism. The exploration of this significant sporting event through the perspectives of commercialism and consumerism, patriotism, the military and culture has revealed that the Super Bowl embodies much more than just two teams competing against each other. The championship football game has evolved into a sports and entertainment extravaganza that is deeply rooted in the American society, its culture, and its core beliefs and values. It attracts an audience of millions nationally and internationally. Some viewers tune in for the action on the field while others are attracted to the commercials and shows before the game and at half-time. The televised broadcast of the Super Bowl attracts top corporations that pay hefty sums to reach the vast Super Bowl audience. This consumerization of the game reflects the American valorization of material wealth and the hunger to consume. With the consumerism rooted deeply into the American society, it comes as no surprise that the game itself sometimes falls out of the limelight as it is overshadowed by the commercials and the celebrity performances.

In addition to its commercialization, the Super Bowl has also become politicized as players use their powerful platforms to voice opinions over racial injustice and discrimination in American society. The NFL has become America's Civil Religion and the ties of the Super Bowl with the US military are also significant. The American traditional values go hand in hand with football, especially the emphasis on patriotism highlighted by the involvement of the military in parades, plane flyovers or by inviting military personnel to the game.

It can be concluded that American values are well represented in the Super Bowl, and that watching the Super Bowl brings Americans together. The Super Bowl is the epitome of American culture and society and it summarizes the American identity into one Sunday afternoon.

Works Cited

- Abdul-Jabar, Kareem. "The Super Bowl Is a Showdown of America's Dueling Values: Commerce and Conscience." *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 2 Feb. 2019, www.theguardian.com/sport/2019/feb/02/super-bowl-patriots-rams-commerce-conscience-social-justice. Accessed 1 Oct. 2020.
- Alverio, Krystal. "Why Football and the Super Bowl are Staples in American culture." *The Harbinger*, 4 Feb. 2018, <https://mlecharbinger.wordpress.com/2018/02/04/why-football-and-the-super-bowl-are-staples-in-american-culture/>. Accessed 21 Sept. 2020.
- Bertrand, Natasha. "The Pentagon Paid 14 NFL Teams \$5.4 Million to 'Salute Troops.'" *Business Insider*, Business Insider, 12 May 2015, www.businessinsider.com/the-pentagon-pays-the-nfl-millions-to-honor-veterans-at-games-2015-5. Accessed 30 Sept. 2020.
- Breech, John. "2020 Super Bowl rating revealed: Chief-49ers ranks as the 11th most-watched show in TV history" *CBS Sports*, 5 Feb. 2020, <https://www.cbssports.com/nfl/news/2020-super-bowl-ratings-revealed-chiefs-49ers-ranks-as-the-11th-most-watched-show-in-tv-history/>. Accessed 30 Sept. 2020.
- Carroll, Bob, "Super Bowl," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 21 Sept. 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/sports/Super-Bowl>. Accessed 5 Sept. 2020.
- Crepeau, Richard. "The Super Bowl at 50 or L, The International Journal of the History of Sport," 2017, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09523367.2017.1349114>. Accessed 5 Sept. 2020.
- Cordova, Hugo. *The NFL: The Cultural Stage for a Shifting American Landscape*. 2015. University of Colorado at Boulder, Journalism & Mass Communication Graduate Theses & Dissertations. www.mobt3ath.com/uplode/book/book-38489.pdf. Accessed 6 Sept. 2020.
- Dyreson, Mark. "The Super Bowl as a Television Spectacle: Global Designs, Glocal Niches, and Parochial Patterns." *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, vol. 34, no. 1-2, 2017, pp. 139-156. *Taylor & Francis Online*, doi.org/10.1080/09523367.2017.1349115. Accessed 22 Sept. 2020.
- Frommer, Harvey. "How the Super Bowl Got Its Name." *TIME USA, LLC.*, 15 Jan. 2016, <https://time.com/4181367/the-first-super-bowl/>. Accessed 2 Sept. 2020.
- Gems, Gerald. "American Football and National Identity." 8th world Congress on Science and Football 20-23 May 2015, Copenhagen, Denmark. Conference paper. www.researchgate.net/publication/277569582_American_Football_and_National_Identity. Accessed 2 Sept. 2020.

- Handley, Lucy. "The Super Bowl is worth billions each year — Here's who makes what." *CNBC*, 1 Feb. 2019, www.cnbc.com/2019/02/01/the-super-bowl-is-worth-billions-each-year--heres-who-makes-what.html. Accessed 20 Sept. 2020.
- History.com Editors. "Super Bowl History." *History*, A&E Television Networks, 11 May 2018, <https://www.history.com/topics/sports/super-bowl-history>. Accessed 6 Sept. 2020.
- Hopsicker, Peter and Dyreson, Mark. "Super Bowl Sunday: A National Holiday and a Global Curiosity." *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, vol. 34, no. 1-2, 2017, pp. 1- 6. *Taylor & Francis Online*, doi.org/10.1080/09523367.2017.1348756. Accessed 7 Sept. 2020.
- Hopsicker, Peter. "The Super Bowl's evolution from football game to entertainment extravaganza." *The Conversation*, 3 Feb. 2017, <https://theconversation.com/the-super-bowls-evolution-from-football-game-to-entertainment-extravaganza-72046>. Accessed 20 Sept. 2020.
- Renzulli, Kerri Anne and Connley, Courtney. "Here's what the average NFL player makes in a season." *CNBC*, 1 Feb. 2019. <https://www.cnbc.com/2019/02/01/heres-what-the-average-nfl-players-makes-in-a-season.html>, Accessed 31 Sept. 2020.
- Steinbach, Avi. "Advertising in the Super Bowl: Worth the Cost?" 2014. Syracuse University Honors Program Capstone Projects, 789, Spring 5 Jan. 2014, https://surface.syr.edu/honors_capstone/789/. Accessed 23 Sept. 2020.
- Su, Ruobing and McDowell, Erin. "How Super Bowl Ad Costs Have Skyrocketed over the Years." *Business Insider*, Business Insider, 2 Feb. 2020, www.businessinsider.com/super-bowl-ad-price-cost-2017-2. Accessed 30 Sept. 2020.
- Swanson, David. "Sorry, but the Super Bowl Promotes War - FPIF." *Foreign Policy In Focus*, 9 Feb. 2016, <https://fpif.org/sorry-super-bowl-promotes-war/>. Accessed 1 October 2020.
- Wyche, Steve. "Colin Kaepernick Explains Why He Sat during National Anthem," *NFL*, 26 Aug. 2020, www.nfl.com/news/colin-kaepernick-explains-why-he-sat-during-national-anthem-0ap3000000691077. Accessed 30 Sept. 2020.