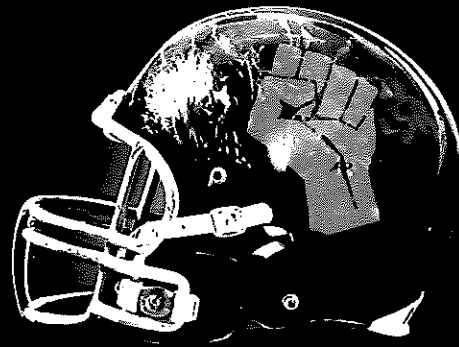

THE HERITAGE



**BLACK ATHLETES,
A DIVIDED AMERICA,
AND THE POLITICS
OF PATRIOTISM**

HOWARD BRYANT

"It may make people uncomfortable, but I'm pleased that Howard Bryant has chosen to tell the story of our heritage, and even more pleased that there are still ballplayers today who are willing to stand up for what they think is right." —HENRY AARON, Major League Baseball Hall of Famer

"OUR WAY OF LIFE"

Eventually, in *Life on Earth*, people will try to tell you that sports is the toy shop, a mindless entertainment that exists basically to hold down or delude or opiate people, an inferior concept to business, because business is pure. And you might buy into all that for a while—up until some hurt or pain you know you aren't strong enough to handle alone comes down on you. Then you put in that emergency call. And it ain't to no bond trader. To the Home Team. "*What's the score? C'mon, guys . . .*"

—RALPH WILEY, September 11, 2001

THE WRITER AND HISTORIAN David Halberstam conceptualized book projects by identifying what he called *intersections*, those crucial pivots where decisions or indecisions made by a handful of key people at key times altered the arc of history. Halberstam reasoned that history could not be understood without deep examination of those intersections. As sports fractured along the lines of the protest and politics, race and patriotism, 9/11 was that intersection. Referring to it as such even felt like an understatement, for nothing about the current state of the sports world can be explained *without* the context of September 11, 2001. It wasn't an intersection of American life. It was a full freeway interchange.

The death toll was just under 3,000. Of the first responders, 343 firefighters were killed, as were 60 combined officers from the New York and New Jersey Police Departments and the Port Authority. The media showed chilling, heartbreaking images of the doomed inhabitants of the World Trade Center towers, holding hands and leaping into the air to their deaths before the skyscrapers imploded.

The trading firm Cantor Fitzgerald lost nearly two-thirds of its workforce, as 658 of 960 employees were killed. Howard Lutnick, the Cantor CEO, only survived because that morning he had taken his son to his first day of kindergarten. According to the Centers for Disease Control, 1,361 bodies, or nearly half of the total death toll, were never recovered. For months following the attacks, when the Manhattan winds would shift north, they carried a daily reminder of death: visible flakes of debris from what was once the World Trade Center flew biliously into the air.

America had fought many a foreign war, but it had little experience with fighting on its soil, trying to enjoy life while its streets, subways, buildings, and civilians were under threat. September 11 forced a certain, though by no means complete, reattachment to the world. "I went back to thinking about watching war movies, as all kids did, and realizing that all of those things happened in someone else's country," recalled the baseball Hall of Famer Joe Torre, who was the manager of the New York Yankees at the time of 9/11. "And now you're attacked in downtown Manhattan, in my hometown."

What would America do as it reattached to a dangerous world? Would it rethink its enormous role and influence and image in the world, understanding that its power was also responsible for conflict and might one day invite deadly challenge? Would it seek blind revenge? Would it descend into religious war? Would it turn inward?

The attacks changed who could speak and who could not, and on what issues. Out of respect for the victims, the men and women killed in the line of duty, and in the interest of unifying of the country, the attacks tempered much criticism. Police and military were elevated for their sacrifice and bravery and the coming two-front war.

Of all American social institutions, 9/11 most radically altered sports, from the place where fans escaped the world and its problems to the definitive staging ground for the nation's war effort, the restoration of its wounded spirit, of taking back everything Osama bin Laden took from it. Sports would embody the way the United States would view itself and its institutions. If the opportunity for the riches of the good life destroyed the political foundations of the Heritage, September 11 both killed *stick to sports* and became a patriotic war cry, even if the people who most used that term didn't know it at the time. What was thought to be a period of

grieving and a temporary display of militarism became a permanent, cultural transformation, now going on nearly twenty years.

America had been there before, when the 1991 Super Bowl between the New York Giants and Buffalo Bills was played during Operation Desert Storm. The touches would soon become familiar: yellow ribbons signifying support for the Gulf War soldiers were affixed to flagpoles, ribbon magnets attached to cars. On game day, a giant American flag covered much of the field, and F-16 fighter jets roared over the stadium.

The national anthem that year was performed famously by the pop star Whitney Houston. Sports had recognized wartime in the past but never with such fervor, with seventy thousand fans waving tiny American flags. Houston's performance was so iconic that two weeks after her performance, Arista Records released it as a single. But once the war ended, a month after the Super Bowl, virtually all daily traces of patriotism on the field, on the court, or at the ballpark disappeared. Neither the subsequent 1993 World Trade Center bombing nor the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing elicited the same cultural response. The Whitney Houston moment was over.

September 11 was different. The 1991 Super Bowl was a pep rally. The resumption of sports following the attacks were a combination of wake, defiance, hero worship, and a deeply rooted, dormant nationalism as a response to having home soil attacked. Between September 11 and 14, Walmart sold more than five hundred thousand American flags, and Samy Yousef, a forty-five-year-old immigrant from Egypt who worked for the nation's oldest American flag manufacturer, assembled 200 flags per hour and received seventy orders per hour. "Some 2.3 million American flags were imported last year, almost all of them from China and Taiwan," the *Times* reported. "But many retailers will sell only flags made in America, and many Americans will pay more for a flag with a 'Made in the U.S.A.' label." National Public Radio reported that 98 percent of all American flags, however, were made in China.

By the first week of October 2001, the United States began its bombing campaign of Afghanistan. Everyone had a job to do. President George W. Bush urged the public not toward introspection or service but to spend money, to shop and to travel. Sports had a role, too, and a new word was added to our vocabulary right alongside *winning* and *losing*; the new word to describe sports' mission was *healing*. Teams and their leagues felt an

obligation to be involved in the patriotic rush. They had to show their colors and show their faces. At first, Joe Torre was unconvinced. He was not sure that sports had any business being thrust into the center of America's geopolitics. "Baseball was the last thing any of us were thinking about at that moment," he recalled. On the morning of the attacks, Torre was at home with his five-year-old daughter, trying to shield her from the horrific television images of the Towers burning before their collapse. "I was trying to get her to look at something else while I was paying attention to what was going on," he said. "When we got back on the field and they'd play 'God Bless America,' and the camera would pan to little kids in the crowd, I just started crying. You couldn't help it."

Part of the healing was rebuilding confidence in American resolve. Jerry Laveroni, head of security for the New York Yankees, handed out tiny American flag lapel pins to everyone in the Yankee clubhouse, a little item that would soon become a mandatory accessory for politicians. Wearing the pin may have seemed optional to staff, coaches, players, and the writers as a show of respect for, solidarity with, and loyalty to America, but it angered Laveroni tremendously whenever he noticed anyone connected with the Yankees without one.

In Queens, the city had used Shea Stadium as a relief center for victims. New York Mets manager Bobby Valentine and pitcher John Franco, a Brooklyn native, joined volunteers in the parking lot, handing out food and clothing to people, packing supplies, serving coffee to weary first responders, connecting eye to eye with New Yorkers. Privately, George Steinbrenner simmered that the Mets were being perceived as more patriotic than the Yankees. However anecdotally, the Mets were being identified as the city's most visible sports face of the recovery. (That some of the star Yankees weren't even in New York on 9/11 didn't help. Within hours of the disaster, Andy Pettite and Roger Clemens got in a car and drove to Texas.)

The weekend following the attacks, Yankees manager Torre, his coaches, and players made a goodwill mission to visit with victims, and his belief that their presence was inappropriate in the aftermath of the disaster began to change. "We had a workout on Saturday for whoever who was in town: Bernie Williams, Derek Jeter, [Don] Zimmer, Willie [Kandolph]. Just going down to the staging area at the Javits Center and seeing all those sleeping bags on the floor, people appreciative that we

were there. . . . Meanwhile, at the same time, I'm thinking, "These people have work to do. Why are we down here getting in the way?" That was exactly how I felt: what right do we have to be here when people are dealing with all this tragedy in their lives? We play a game."

Then, the Yankees went to the Armory, on Lexington Avenue and Twenty-Fifth Street, where the city had set up DNA staging areas to identify the missing.

"Clergy members, councilors were there, and we just walked around the outside," recalled Torre. "One family recognized us. Bernie Williams walked up to this woman and said, 'I don't know what to say, but you look like you need a hug.' So, he hugged her, and with that, we were like magnets. . . . People were sort of looking to us, showing us pictures of family members in their Yankee jackets and jerseys. And it struck me that day [that I needed] to go back to work. It felt like we had a job to do."

On September 21, the first sporting event was played in New York after the attacks: the Mets against the Atlanta Braves. The Mets handed out miniature American flags to the sellout crowd. The Mets (and football's New York Giants, whose season was also under way in the aftermath of 9/11) wore New York Police Department and Fire Department of New York caps to honor the survivors and those killed in the line of duty.

At Major League Baseball headquarters in midtown Manhattan, a minor eruption occurred when some league officials considered fining the Mets for a violation of the team uniform code by wearing FDNY hats in-game instead of the team's official cap. Patrick Courtney, then the number-two communications man at MLB, sensed disaster. He recalled his boss, Rich Levin, lambasting the decision. "Are you fucking kidding me?" Levin said. "After everything that city has been through you're going to threaten them with fines for supporting organizations that risked their lives?" Baseball wisely backed off.

Police officers at Yankee or Shea Stadium would then be honored on a nightly basis, to throw out the first pitch or sing the national anthem. American flags were stitched to the back of every major-league jersey, just below the collar, and on the side of every major-league hat. Daniel Rodriguez, a member of the NYPD, became such a fixture performing the anthem at sporting events that he became known as "the singing cop."

The Mets played at home first. Eighth inning, one on, one out, Braves up 2-1, Mike Piazza, New York star faced Steve Karsay, Queens

kid, born and raised in Flushing, attended Christ the King High. Karsay delivered. Piazza swung. A mammoth two-run homer to center, and a week's worth of contained emotion erupted. "I remember that being the moment where you were allowed to cheer again," recalled Sweeny Murti, who covered the Yankees for the all-sports radio station WFAN. "People treated it like it was an escape, but was it really when everyone is wearing the flag and people are bringing their own flags during the seventh-inning stretch and they're holding up signs? Was it really an escape? Because it sure didn't feel like one, but Piazza's home run made sports feel normal again. It was an outburst. Before that, you weren't sure. That moment sort of told everyone it was okay to let it out, that we could start going forward."

In Chicago, where the Yankees resumed play after 9/11, old animosities were tabled. "We Love You, New York" signs were prominent throughout US Cellular Field, the corporate takeover of New Comiskey Park. Once a sworn enemy of all things Yankee, the White Sox held a moment of silence for victims and, as in New York, Chicago police and fire officers were on the field during the pregame ceremonies. The Yankees then traveled to Baltimore, where the two teams just five years earlier had been involved in a bitter pennant race and at least one brawl. This time, the Yankees were received not as the hated overlords of baseball but as the sentimental representatives of a wounded city and country.

When the Yankees returned home, George Steinbrenner made certain there was no ambiguity about the team's commitment to the city's healing and its defiance. The Yankees took batting practice wearing NYPD, FDNY, and Port Authority caps, and added the great Irish tenor Ronan Tynan to the payroll to sing at home games. During the seventh-inning stretch, Tynan, with his beautiful voice, full of pride and pain, the old country weeping in solidarity with the new, would not just sing "God Bless America" but the *long version*, Irving Berlin's 1938 full-length original, the one with the "solemn prayer" preamble. Bob Sheppard, the legendary and eloquent voice of the Yankees over the public-address system began every home game with a reminder of a city's pain—and an unobtrusive message to the world showing just who was boss.

"Ladies and gentlemen . . . would you please rise," Sheppard would begin. "And now, please offer a moment of silent prayer for the servicemen and -women who are stationed around the globe. And especially

remember those who have lost their lives defending our freedom—and *our* way of life.”

But it was the 2001 World Series between the Yankees and the Arizona Diamondbacks that encapsulated what post-9/11 sports would become. In many ways, the Yankees served as a larger metaphor for America at the moment: the superpower as sentimental favorite. The game did not provide any escape from wartime signifiers: from the police, fire, military, and first responders honored at Game 1 at Bank One Ballpark in Phoenix to the Game 7 appearance of the military’s futuristic new weapon, the Northrop B-2 Spirit, better known as the Stealth Bomber.

When the series shifted back to New York, cleanup crews from Ground Zero were invited to Yankee Stadium, as were some families who had lost loved ones in the Towers. A tattered American flag recovered from the rubble stood above the scoreboard at the stadium. Word buzzed through the clubhouses and stands that President Bush might be on hand to throw out the first pitch. As game time neared, the umpires gathered for their pregame meeting. One of the umpires, Jim Joyce, recognized each member of the crew except one, who turned out to be a member of the Secret Service. The president would be on hand.

The legendary baseball played in the middle games in New York was unforgettable not so much for the Yankees’ championship fight, with comebacks in Games 3, 4, and 5, as it was for President Bush, fitted with a bulletproof vest while snipers manned the Yankee Stadium roof, throwing out the first pitch of Game 3 at Yankee Stadium. Right before the game started, the president walked up to Yankees manager Joe Torre and said, “Kick their asses.” This time, New York, the team that had won the last three World Series, four of the last five, and twenty-six overall, was in the minds of many, the underdog. The moments were memorable, the graying Yankee dynasty fighting to win one more championship, this one maybe the most important. Though the Yankees didn’t win that year, the series was a catharsis, and they stood as the symbol of a rebuilding of spirit. Figure that: the New York Yankees, America’s Team.

During the postseason, the Yankees’ pre-game ceremony included Challenger, an American bald eagle, flying to the pitcher’s mound while the stadium was awash in American flags, pictures of the Twin Towers, and fans wearing NYPD baseball caps. “We were really representing, for that brief moment, America,” Torre recalled. “And it was a rare thing for

the Yankees to walk into a visiting ballpark and receive anything but boos, but I think that was indicative of how much people were hurting for what happened to the country and to the people of New York. I told my players they were representing everything that New York was all about."

FROM THE MOMENT THE GAMES resumed across all sports after the attacks, sports sold the idea of healing, of everyone coming together at the ballpark in a combined show of force. It also sold another product: conformity and obedience cloaked in an ostensibly benign patriotism. It was an easy sell because who *wasn't* against terrorism? The fervor was too seductive to challenge.

The post-9/11 template carried into the following years. Following the Yankees' lead, the rest of baseball added the playing of "God Bless America" to the seventh-inning stretch. The Montreal Expos and Toronto Blue Jays, of course, were exempt. (So were the Cubs, incidentally, because of their long-standing tradition of singing "Take Me Out to the Ball Game.") Then, caught in the wave, the Commissioner's Office got into the act, and commissioner Bud Selig made the playing of "God Bless America" *mandatory* at every ballpark in the country, with all uniformed personnel required to be on the field or top step of the dugout, or face discipline.

Meanwhile, the NFL stitched American flags onto the black-and-white-striped referee uniforms. And the American flag decal from the 1991 Super Bowl returned to the back of players' helmets.

The San Diego Padres wore camouflage uniforms for every Sunday home game, but this was the nation's preeminent US Navy town, so the mood, the touches, had to be perfect. The Padres' television broadcaster, former ballplayer Jerry Coleman, had left the Yankees in 1943 to serve in World War II, flying fifty-seven missions in the Philippines and Solomon Islands. The city's greatest baseball player, Red Sox star Ted Williams, had been a war hero not once but twice, having served in the navy during World War II and the marines during the Korean War. In the weeks following 9/11, the Padres organized a day to honor the soldiers. Coleman, of course, was there. He worked for the team. The Padres, however, were having difficulty securing Ted Williams. Williams was in ill health and, though no one knew it at the time, had less than a year to live. The Padres

begged, to no avail. MLB got involved, offering to send a private plane for Williams with full accommodations, but Ted's son John Henry refused to commit the Splendid Splinter to the event. Ultimately, the son turned down the request, and the ceremony commenced without the Greatest Hitter Who Ever Lived. Days later, baseball public relations man Patrick Courtney was sitting at his desk in New York when his phone rang. Before he could speak, the voice on the other end did all the talking, at top decibel: "HELLO? THIS IS TED WILLIAMS. WHY THE FUCK WASN'T I IN SAN DIEGO LAST WEEK?!"

ON THE ORDER OF THE NFL, teams handed out American flags and "United We Stand" placards to every fan entering the stadium. "It was to show that as a nation we were unified and resilient and determined and not cowed," NFL commissioner Paul Tagliabue told NFL Films. After beating the Kansas City Chiefs in their first game back in New York, the Giants took a team photo with every player wearing an NYPD cap.

Over in the NBA, for the Washington Wizards' home opener, commissioner David Stern took the microphone to applause at half-court at the MCI Center in DC. "Tonight, as we have done at every opening night, and as we will do all season long, we honor our heroes: the armed services, our fire departments, our police departments, our emergency services, our relief services," he told the crowd. Stern was followed by Washington mayor Anthony Williams, who also honored the heroes by alluding to the NBA return of a legend, Michael Jordan, who had joined the Wizards after a two-year retirement.

Months later, in February 2002, the underdog New England Patriots met the heavily favored St. Louis Rams in the New Orleans Superdome in Super Bowl XXXVI. The TV production of the game was virtually themed after the military and in honor of the war effort, down to the Fox broadcast creating a video graphic with a marine or navy member introducing the starters once the game began. The background behind each graphic was an American flag. When the game began, the broadcast frequently cut away to video feeds of American troops in Kandahar, Afghanistan, watching the game. The Super Bowl XXXVI logo was the shape of the United States covered by an American flag. When the

Patriots completed the 20-17 upset win, team owner Robert Kraft took the microphone amid the confetti cannons and told the crowd, "Today, we are all Patriots."

Army Lieutenant Colonel Mark Zinno saw the tragedy of 9/11 and the subsequent eruption of patriotism at ballparks and in New York as exactly the reminder he needed to rededicate himself to the purpose of serving his country. "Ever since 9/11, everything in my military career has had impact," he said. "And maybe that held true beforehand, but I just couldn't see it. Most people enlisted because they were bad kids. They were trying to stay out of trouble. You used to hear it all the time, 'Why don't you get a real job?' Well, my job got real, *real* quick. And it gave me an anchor for my life."

In many ways, Zinno reflected the attitude that made sports celebrating the military so powerful. Not a fervent flag-waver in spirit or ideology, he had entered the army not with patriotism in mind but pragmatism: serving was the best way to pay for college. While energized by its potential in theory, he had not found the daily experience of military life particularly rewarding in practice. "I was a cocky son of a bitch who thought he knew better than the military what it would provide me. In the pre-9/11 world, I wanted to do something impactful, but I didn't feel that I was. I was living in places I didn't want to live, [like] Fort Hood, Texas, doing a job I didn't want to do," Zinno recalled. "I was a maintenance officer. It was very *Groundhog Day*: Get up, fix vehicles, wash, rinse, repeat. I wasn't even turning wrenches. I was handing out orders for other people to do the work. Couldn't see what my role was and why it was important. With a couple of exceptions, in the military, you are literally as far away from any place you'd want to be. The thought of being stationed at Fort Riley, Kansas, was like taking a baseball bat to my own skull."

Zinno grew up in the Roman Catholic hamlet of Franklin Square, a part of Hempstead on Long Island, New York. His stepfather, Joseph, was a police officer, a sergeant with the county police department. His sports teams were all New York-based: the Yankees, Giants, Knicks, and Islanders. He received early release from active duty in June 2001 and joined the Maryland National Guard. Searching for purpose, he had also requested a deployment to Honduras on an overseas mission that contained some familiarity, as part of his unit would be there. Around the same time, through an army recruiter, Zinno found a job in sales with the uniform

company Cintas. He was twenty-three, living in Baltimore as a part-time civilian, part-time soldier.

"I remember we were at a hotel in a training conference. People from all over the company had come in. We were on a break, and a guy from Boston, in his Boston accent, said, 'A plane just hit the World Trade Center.' I said, 'Get the fuck outta here.' We all found a TV and gathered around it.

"Me, being a native New Yorker, once the second plane hit, I picked up the phone. I had a half-dozen friends working on Wall Street. I remember somehow getting hold of my mother. I remember asking about my brother. He worked in the city, but I wasn't sure where. My good family friend, her brother was in the [one of the] Towers. Another friend worked on the 104th floor for Cantor Fitzgerald, and we all know what happened there. Right after it happened, I remember going to the [Baltimore] armory and asking what I could do. To me, it was personal. That was my city. I grew up in the shadows of the Towers. It was my America, and I was going to do my part."

"OUR WAY OF LIFE"

There was something in the way Bob Sheppard, whose first day on the job was April 17, 1951—Mickey Mantle's debut—emphasized, with his trademark dramatic pauses and intonation, the word *our* that telegraphed the emerging American attitude—and it wasn't exactly a compliment to everyone. The country's view would not be complicated: America was attacked without reason. Innocents were killed. America was not part of a global community collectively wounded by terrorism, nor did its foreign policy invite conflict. America didn't start the fight, but be damned sure she planned on finishing it. And too bad for the peaceniks who felt uncomfortable with the new reality.

"Well, the reason we don't have peace is because we got a bunch people that are trying to fucking kill us," Lieutenant General Russel Honoré said. "We didn't start 9/11. They came over here and bombed our shit, and after that we had to go over there and open up a big old can of whup ass. . . . So, if people didn't bomb our people and kill them, we wouldn't be doing this. Come over here, wreck three airplanes, and attack our citizens around the world?"

The ballpark was the place of defiance and the introduction of a new, post-9/11 character: *heroes*. On the field, the players had always been the ones celebrated as heroes. Now sports would recognize the off-field citizen in uniform as heroes too: police, fire, military, sometimes emergency services. The ballpark atmosphere made sports the perfect venue for that form of tribute, but it was also the perfect place to bring out the worst elements of our cultural instincts. Political confrontation was never supposed to be the plan. For years, sports was the country's province of political neutrality, of fun and games, of root, root, rooting for the home team.

And when the Heritage got involved, when a player wanted to make a political statement, the business of sports backed away, assuaging the public by clarifying that a player's act of political protest was an *individual* one, not endorsed by the team. Teams knew politics were polarizing, and no way were teams going to risk alienating half the people who bought tickets.

September 11 posed no such risk. Not only did America seem to be in lockstep in honoring the military, but the cultural pressure against dissent was so strong, opponents didn't dare speak out against fifty thousand flag-wavers, still waiting to get its collective mitts on Osama bin Laden—and that was the danger. After the initial pain, when fans needed to look fellow Americans in the eye and feel safe, the ballpark brought out the dangerous side. Sports was rooted in conflict, confrontation already in place. Two sides wore different colors, *Us* against *Them*, home versus road, good guy versus bad, winners and losers and no backing down. It was the province of machismo and competition, of imposing will, and every other sports cliché the broadcasters had ginned up over the past fifty years. The line was delicate, but in the moment, the country felt itself in the fight of its life and those not on board, even if they were Americans, were not particularly welcome. Fans expected every other fan in the ballpark to go along with the spectacle, to *act right*. Hand on heart. Sing along, or *you* were the problem.

"I remember everybody showing up [at games] with an American flag. And they supported the NYPD. They were at the game, but they were still thinking about everything that's important. I loved seeing that," Mark Zinno recalled of those first months and years after the attacks. "Nothing was better than watching people celebrate the anthem for the first time in my life. It wasn't a matter of routine. It mattered for

the first time. I remember the anthem giving me chills, actually striking a chord in my heart. The minute it stops giving me chills, it's time to hang up the uniform."

To anyone at the ballpark not joining in, there seemed a collective, tacit threat to the flag-waving. *Defiance* and *healing* were not competing emotions but complementary to a people who were emotionally wounded by the attacks—yet hungry to kick some ass. "I admit it," Zinno said. "I wanted to do my part, but I was angry. I wanted to get back at them for what they did. I couldn't wait for the chance to hit back."

There would be no dissent or neutrality at the ballpark. Underneath the inspiring sentiments of *resilience* and *unity*, however, was fear. And anger. "The United States is really good at investing in violence. We're interested in solutions that come through violence," said Toni Smith-Thompson, a former Division III basketball player for Manhattanville College in Purchase, New York, who would go on to work in education policy at the New York Civil Liberties Union.

"The way we feel we best solve problems is through vengeance, revenge, or punishment. It's power. It's dominance. Even these displays of unity were not unity. It was a temporary rallying of people to take up arms to kill other people. That's not unity. That's nationalism and, in essence, white nationalism. This country has never reckoned with that."

During the 2001 American League Championship Series between the Yankees and the Seattle Mariners, hell rained on two Seattle sportswriters, John Hickey and Larry LaRue, for not standing during the singing of "God Bless America" during the seventh inning. Yankee writers, many lifelong New Yorkers still processing 9/11, seethed at the perceived disrespect. One New York writer looked at Hickey sitting while Tynan's voice broke hearts across the stadium and muttered under his breath, "Look at that fat fuck."

"I remember it," Hickey recalled of his decision not to stand. "Maybe it was a statement, I don't know. I remember all of it just being over the top. Sometimes I got up. Sometimes I didn't, and at that moment, I really didn't feel like standing up."

The hero narrative rose, as did identifying the bad guy. This was channeled through sports and the popular culture, where Muslims would become the new screen villains du jour, like the Nazis, the blacks and hippies, the Soviets, and the South Africans before them.

"I'm living proof. You don't need to wear a turban to have people looking at you cross-eyed," said Sweeny Murti, a sports journalist who grew up in central Pennsylvania. He isn't Muslim, but his Indian descent made him a target for post-9/11 racism. "The end of the [baseball] regular season, we were in Tampa. I had to piss like crazy, but security being what it was, you couldn't get out of line; you had to wait to get on the plane. First thing I do, I get on the plane, I put my bag down on my seat, and I go straight to the back of the plane. I'm not even thinking about what it looked like. I've got to pee. The bag goes down. I go to the back of the plane. [then *New York Times* Yankees writer] Buster Olney was seated a few rows by me and told me later he saw people's heads turn, and they were all thinking, 'Where's that guy going? What's he doing?' He kind of laughed to himself, and I'm thinking, 'Yeah, whatever.' But as the next month continued and we were on one cross-country flight after another, I was getting agitated having to go through all those layers. And I understand people wanted to be safe, but a lot of it was for show. The most popular place in line was right in front of me or right after me, because they weren't taking two people in a row for the 'random' security check."

During his time as a Yankee, David Justice was a favorite with many of the Yankee beat writers. A perennial all-star, he'd appeared in the World Series with two teams before joining the Yankees in 2000 and was one of many accomplished great players on a great team. His home run in the clinching Game 6 of the 1995 World Series won the Braves their only title since moving to Atlanta in 1966. He had been married to the actress Halle Berry, and unlike many players who could never get comfortable with the crush of people and expectations to win, he was generally unfazed by the aura of New York City. Justice and Sweeny Murti had forged a good relationship, and a key to success as a reporter in a major-league clubhouse is the ability to talk with players about anything other than the game. Players quickly ostracized media members who only talked to players when they messed up a ballgame.

"Go back a few months. Locker-room humor is what it is. David Justice and I got to be pretty tight. One day we were talking about world politics, and a couple of reporters came over," Murti recalled. "Justice put his arm around me and said, 'You know who this is? This is Bin *lay*-den. That's who that is.' Everyone laughed. You didn't know who he was. You

could tell by the way Justice pronounced the name. Bin *lay*-den. He wasn't a household name. It was before the attacks.

"So that first night in Chicago, the locker room is quiet. Justice's locker is the first one in. I walk up to him and say, 'Hey, you've been throwing around that Bin Laden stuff. Might want to cool it.' And he looks at me and says, 'Look, the day you wanna bring your bomb to the ballpark, tell your boy, and I won't show up to work that day.'

"I can't say I was offended then or now, really," Murti recalled. "I laughed and repeated the joke many times. It was between friends."

It went unarticulated at the time, for there was no historical precedent for its scope, but 9/11 was the ultimate of one of David Halberstam's intersections. The games would never again be neutral. The people who thought they were experiencing a temporary condition to get America back on her feet found post-9/11 sports to be nothing like how it was at the 1991 Super Bowl, when everyone carried tiny American flags but the ceremony ended when the war did. *Stick to sports* was dead. More importantly, sporting events were now *political*, selling touchdowns and beer, three-pointers and home runs, but also fidelity to police and military and to a point of view that accepted the American government's war on terror.

You didn't have to be a genius to guess that the encroaching jingoism would crush the broader critiques of the wars in Afghanistan and, later, Iraq or to raise an eyebrow at the agents of authority with sometimes infamous histories, now being universally beloved. Nor did you have to be particularly astute to recognize that a big part of the ceremony was designed for that very purpose: to make anyone who was considering getting too loud about opposing it to think again.

Toni Smith-Thompson was offended by the loudening scene around her. She did not approve of the violence of war, the ease in which it was waged, and America's inability to consider the effects of its policies in real time on the people—not the governments—of other countries. As a biracial black woman whose eyes were opening about the realities and hypocrisies of the world, as happens to many during college, learning the history did not square with the myth that America was always the good guy, especially with so much evidence to the contrary. The response to the attacks did not help. In many ways, they provided a dual effect: the drum-beat of 9/11 emboldened her fellow citizens to increase the *us against them*

mentality, which intensified the aggressive instincts of American culture that made her the most uncomfortable.

It was during a basketball game in December, at New York University—December 7, 2002, the sixty-first anniversary of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, coincidentally—when Smith-Thompson joined the Heritage. She was twenty-one-year-old Toni Smith back then and had talked with her boyfriend at the time about doing something to challenge the climate. When the national anthem played, Smith turned her back to the court. No one noticed.

She never told anyone, not friends, not teammates, what she planned to do. She didn't even tell her parents because they always arrived late when the anthem had already played. After the game, her teammates did not say anything. The next game, Smith turned her back again, but fans didn't notice for the rest of the month or in January or most of February as the Valiants compiled their third-best record in school history. After a few games, the school president, Richard Berman, gave her words of support. "If anyone gives you a problem," he said, "come to me." No one gave her problems—until they did.

On February 25, 2003, at home against Merchant Marine, Smith became a national story—a black woman protesting her country not living up to its flag's ideals. The *New York Times* and all the cameras and the television shows descended. The school received demands to have her removed, but Berman supported her right of expression. The hate rained down in letters and boos—as did heartwarming support. A St. Joseph's player yelled at her at the end of one game. There were the teammates who held her hands during the anthem and the home game when a random fan charged the court to berate her while another player was shooting free throws. He tried to hand her an American flag.

Today, working on education policy at the New York Civil Liberties Union, Smith-Thompson recalls the parallels between her action and what Colin Kaepernick faced nearly fourteen years later. She did not do interviews out of the conviction that the media filter would distort her protest into an attack on soldiers. She said nothing, and the media distorted anyway.

"People remember it as an antiwar protest, but it really wasn't. It was a statement about the way people of color have been treated over the history of this country, and we've perpetuated it around the world," she

said. "You're sitting here with a broken people and a broken country. And racism breaks white people the way it breaks black people. And you have to sit with that. One of the things I wanted to say during my protest was, 'I don't want to play this game anymore.' We haven't handled any of this, we haven't handled slavery. We haven't handled the Constitution never being an equal document. We've never handled that it was all a lie. Maybe it would do a whole lot of good for us to be able to say it out loud."

Around the same time, just as the ground war in Iraq began, MSNBC (a joint venture between the NBC parent company General Electric and the tech giant Microsoft) fired the legendary talk-show host Phil Donahue from his primetime show for criticizing the decision to invade Iraq. "They were terrified of the antiwar voice," Donahue said. In an internal memo, MSNBC—the supposedly "liberal" voice of cable television—said that Donahue was a "difficult public face for NBC in a time of war" and that MSNBC becoming "a home for the liberal antiwar agenda at the same time that our competitors are waving the flag at every opportunity" would be nothing less than a disaster.

September 11 defined the career of Ashleigh Banfield. It was Banfield, also from MSNBC, who stood in front of the North Tower as it collapsed behind her, live on the air. It was a star-making moment. At a 2003 talk at Kansas State University, Banfield offered her thoughts of what she saw as scrubbed, dubious coverage of the Iraq war. "What didn't you see?" she said. "You didn't see where those bullets landed. You didn't see what happened when the mortar landed. A puff of smoke is not what a mortar looks like when it explodes, believe me. There are horrors that were completely left out of this war. So was this journalism or was this coverage?" For that mild critique, Banfield was banned from any significant role at MSNBC.

Most famously during that period of smothering opposing views in the mid-2000s was the public and corporate silencing of the country music group the Dixie Chicks. During a March 2003 concert in England, the trio told the crowd they were against the coming war in Iraq and ashamed that the president, George W. Bush, was from Texas.

The criticism of an initially very popular war destroyed them. No one wanted to hear a word of dissent, not from a Texas country band or from Phil Donahue or Ashleigh Banfield. And no one, not liberal MSNBC or media mega-giant Cumulus Radio, which owned hundreds of radio

stations, had the courage to go against the tide by defending the musicians' right to protest. The Dixie Chicks were now considered un-American, unpatriotic. Radio stations dropped the band within days of the remarks. They were now toxic. Their single "Landslide" fell from number ten in the Billboard chart to forty-fourth in one week. Their sponsor, Lipton, dumped them. Death threats to the band followed. The Cumulus-owned radio station KRMD ("All American Listening Family"), in Bossier City, Louisiana, fielded calls from angry listeners and presented a stunt protest: if the Dixie Chicks were metaphorically being run into the ground, KRMD decided to physically do the same and crush the group's CDs. "I said, 'Yeah, I'll jump on that in a heartbeat,'" recalled Darrell Robertson, the general manager of Goldman Lawn and Tractor, which provided the 33,000-pound tractor to run over a pile of discs.

Even money couldn't save the Dixie Chicks. The band attempted to make a million-dollar donation to the American Red Cross, which, too scared to challenge the perceived public sentiment or find itself at the center of a possible boycott, rejected the money. One sentence about a war that would soon be historically discredited ruined the Dixie Chicks' careers.

The old guard of the Heritage, the ones such as Muhammad Ali and Jackie Robinson, who would one day end up on a stamp or light the Olympic torch to weepy, national admiration—but who in their time were the subjects of widespread hatred—knew this response well. There was always going to be a price to pay, and in post-9/11 America, everybody—pop stars, reporters, *everybody*—was expected to stay in line. This was the real reason for the ballpark ceremony night after night. It was to ingrain a mind-set. "These people may think they are patriotic, but I think they are irresponsible," Natalie Maines of the Dixie Chicks said in a 2006 interview. "And this whole episode has fundamentally changed my definition of patriotism. Do I have a flag on my car? No. Do I stand up for my rights as an American? Yes."

There was a name for what was happening: nationalism. But Americans were too cool, too comfortable to believe not only that it was happening to them, but they were willful participants in it. Nationalism was for the Nazis or the fascists in Italy—the World War II stuff. Couldn't happen here. It was much easier to laugh off anyone who took the signs seriously as paranoid—or to produce enough pressure to shut them up.

Two weeks after the Towers fell, Arista re-released Whitney Houston's rendition of "The Star-Spangled Banner" from the 1991 Super Bowl. A month later, the same week the Stealth Bomber flew over Bank One Ballpark in Phoenix before Game 1 of the 2001 World Series, the single peaked at number six on the Billboard Hot 100, sandwiched between Jagged Edge and Nelly's "Where the Party At" and "It's Been Awhile" by Staind. It went on to sell one million copies. Nothing better illustrated the new mood of patriotism that swept the country than this: for the first time in history, *the national anthem went platinum.*