

Highlighting the Pollution in Sports Marketing:

Michael Jordan and his Global Capitalism



Figure 1: It is more than just a basketball shoe, it is the embodiment of a cultural icon

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Cross-Cultural Rhetoric

Research-Based Argument

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Carlos Arellano is a graduate of Magnolia High School in Anaheim, California, and now is a first year, prospective Economics major at Stanford University. Businessman and entrepreneur at heart, he hopes this department of study will promote opportunity for financial prosperity in the near future. Considering that Carlos has



two significant passions in his life, basketball and money, he is fascinated by the empire Michael Jordan assembled and continues to develop. He acknowledges that prominent corporations—such as Jordan’s “Jumpan23”—rely on a heavy use of superstar-centered advertisements to promote revenue, and this established the foundation for his research.

This paper will highlight the use of Michael Jordan’s superstardom as a mechanism to promote sales for “Jumpman23” industries. It will illuminate how Jordan has acclaimed worldwide fame, and it will challenge the utilization of his elevated position in marketing. Furthermore, this paper will delve into how our contemporary society is easily captivated by corporations such as Jordan’s, and how as a result, this selling of celebrity status ultimately pollutes the genuine passions found in athletics.

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Figure 2: The Michael Jordan logo is a symbol that is a direct representation of the game of basketball

In a man who revolutionized the game, a basketball shoe bares his name. In an era that revolves around a consumer society, his figure is seen virtually everywhere: arm outstretched, ball in hand, and legs spread widely (Figure 2). The figure is the logo of a cultural icon, it is the logo for Michael Jordan's "Jumpman23" product line. As this symbol is an evident representation of Jordan's greatness and vast popularity, it highlights the central issue with modern sports—the glorification of superstardom and celebrity status quo by contemporary media to globally promote products pollutes the genuine adoration for a game, which ultimately overshadows the authentic self-

expression in athletics. Thus, we ask what Bill Friday, former president of the University of North Carolina (Michael Jordan's alma mater), asked in a recent article from *Newsweek*, "have Nike and Michael Jordan gone too far?" Has Jordan surpassed the point of simple marketing and evolved into a capitalist figure?

To answer this question, it takes a capitalist to know a capitalist, and this is why global capitalist and multibillionaire, George Soros, presents an insightful argument in his article "Toward a Global Open Society." In this article he warns, "we can have a market economy, but we cannot have a market society. Americans hardly think through that distinction, even though it was the problem posed by Nike." Although the separation between the market economy and market society may not be readily noticeable, there is a difference in an economy that, on the one hand, operates through a free market, in comparison to a society that is the market. Nike sells its products, it is a simple matter of economic producer and consumer relations, but when its label and its component "Jumpman23" dominate an entire market the result is the formation of what is seemingly a monopoly. Society is mesmerized by the materialistic values in a brand that we no longer have a market that revolves around an economy; we have a society that revolves around a market. In regards to the sports marketplace, society seems to literally be a branch off of Jordan industries.

Hence, the Michael Jordan/Nike connection calls attention to the extent to which media is transforming sports into a forum that sells the values, products, celebrities, and institutions that are then adopted by a consumer society. It is what Walter LaFeber argues in his book study *Michael Jordan and the New Global Capitalism*, "The new corporations thus not only change buying habits in a society, but modify the composition of the society

itself. For the society that receives it, soft power can have hard effects” (LaFeber 157). This phenomenon allows companies to manipulate a system, knowing that their consumers are attracted and dependant on popular brand names such as Jordan. By appealing to the values of a consumer society—and relying on ethos through advertising their premier athletes—top corporations can then dictate and mold society through the progression of time, subtle changes in the societies spending behavior ultimately will alter the structure of the society itself. These are the fundamental ideals of the “hard effect;” small contributions produce drastic results. Specifically, Michael Jordan’s product line “Jumpan23” exemplifies how an astounding athlete can captivate a society through this “hard effect,” as Jordan pandemonium is conquering the nations of the world, one mind—one pair of feet—at a time.

Jordan’s “hard effect” unquestionably comes in part to his superior athletic accomplishments, but does all the heavy saturation of his name in the media elevate his acclaimed worldwide fame? An article from the *Washington Post* during his early



Figure 3: Michael Jordan co-stared with Bugs Bunny in *Space Jam* to target younger audiences

booming years demonstrates his presence in the media, and it converts the superfluous promotion of Jordan’s “Jumpman23” company into numerical figures—“In 1997 Jordan’s earnings shot up to \$100 million.” Simultaneously he had endorsements besides Nike, such as “McDonald’s, Oakley Sunglasses, Gatorade, Wilson Sporting Goods, Wheaties, Rayovac Batteries, and a half-dozen other companies.” Jordan appealed to all audiences on the spectrum, including kids when he filmed *Space Jam* and “starred with popular cartoon figure to

win a climatic basketball game (Figure 3). This highly successful film scored \$230 million at the box office and over \$200 million more in video sales” (LaFeber 131). Moreover, the adoration of his fans was reflected in television ratings for Ted Turner’s (TNT) cable network when he returned from his brief retirement in 1996—“Ratings shot up 21 percent over those for the year before” (LaFeber 142). It became evident that Jordan was becoming an admirable icon, and with his development in prominence, so too, unfortunately, was he establishing the “market society” in America.

What, however, proclaims launching the market society in America as undesirable? What is the major issue in placing the future of basketball in the hands of materialistic principles via a Michael Jordan logo? The answer: the high paying endorsement contracts, the high volume of celebrity-associated sports advertisements, and the envy for name brands all devalue what can be considered a pleasurable and self-expressing pastime. Basketball should serve as a mechanism of exploration, creativity and imagination for kids, teens, and adults worldwide. The game should minimize the glorification of professional levels by limiting its association with money and this should regulate the economy from its correlations to the “market society.” We like to believe we live in an age where salaries and wages are traditionally based on the values of a person’s work, but professional athletes are only modeling that realistically, society pays for jobs that are more economically significant. In an article for the *San Francisco Chronicle*, for example, Glenn Dickey comments that “In the 1996 season, playing 3,106 minutes Michael Jordan made 170,000 dollars a day, equaling out to be 160.97 dollars a second” (Dickey 3). These numbers suggest that over the span of Jordan’s first five years in the NBA he could have donated enough money to considerably aid the nation in one of its

most severe issues: poverty. Not to mention, the money generated through endorsements supplements this income. The message that is portrayed through sports today is thus one that deems a dark depiction of athletics and thus reflects pollution in our contemporary sports system. Shouldn't our youth focus on education and aspire to facilitate knowledge for the better development of our nation, but more importantly the world—leaving basketball and other sports as an activity for merely personal satisfaction and pleasure? This would be favorable yet there is no incentive to pursue teaching when educators do not make in a year what a superstar athlete makes in a game. Better yet, the President of the United States of America, the man who makes critical decisions affecting the stability and prosperity of our nation only makes, according to the free online encyclopedia, Wikipedia, “a salary of \$400,000 paid annually.” In comparison, Forbes.com, an Internet site that yearly ranks the wealthiest individuals wrote the previous about Michael Jordan.

“The bulk of his income, though, still comes from the Swoosh. Nike's Jordan brand is a \$500 million business and finished the year with record profits and sales. In addition to the legendary basketball star, Nike employs an elite list of athletes to market the Jordan brand, including Ray Allen, Carmelo Anthony and Derek Jeter.”

It is apparent that professional athletes play a limited role in regards to the position of the president; however, the salaries reflect otherwise—advertising and entertainment has steered society in this direction. Games are supposed to be played for fun, not for millions of dollars. The campaign of “Jumpman23” strategically pushes the superstardom of Michael Jordan to ensure that this perspective is not commonly adopted.

Jordan Beyond America

Not only was Jordan's elevated status quo revolutionizing sports marketing and consumer proliferation in America, he was also an eminent athlete and icon in China. In 1998 the *New York Times* wrote an article covering the bulls win over Utah in the championship series, "the cry of Qiao Dan, Qiao Dan or Jordan, Jordan, was heard in the dormitories of Beijing University." At the university, a management major by the name of Min Yuan commented in the same *New York Times* article that, "when a Chinese firm asked a thousand people to name the best known Americans, Jordan finished second, just behind Thomas Edison, and ahead of Albert Einstein, Mark Twain, and Bill Gates." This evidence is an indication that Jordan's deft basketball skills have earned him a spot next to the most renowned individuals in the world, illuminating his overarching role as a cultural icon. Likewise, LaFeber highlights in his book that "in certain avenues of China, vendors sold Michael Jordan posters and calendars alongside those of the late Chairman Mao, father of the Chinese Revolution" (LaFeber 135). Remarkably, the general public in China considers a man who led the revolution of their nation at the same level of a man who dribbles and shoots a basketball.

Moreover, his aura continued to extended worldwide, often to countries where basketball had been only a minor diversion. Upon the Bulls' arrival in Paris for the McDonald's Championship in October of 1999, for example, his presence spawned immediate havoc. National Basketball Association writer and analyst, Art Thiel, quoted

the front-page story in the France-Soir national newspaper in his article, “Michael Jordan: Modern-Day Icon.” It read, “Michael Jordan is in Paris. That's better than the Pope. It's God in person” (Thiel 2). It is seemingly apparent that the media and its publicizing of athletes has created a day where citizens of America, China, France, and the world, perceive sports to be a representation of certain superstars rather than the actual, pleasurable, activities themselves.

The Selling Of A Superstar Reputation

Appealing to celebrity status to advance sales of merchandise logically seems reasonable, but is this tactic acceptable to the consumer society, is it suitable for the development of sports in general? If a kid sees his favorite athlete wearing a particular

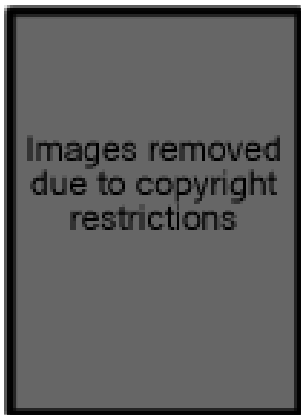


Figure 4: This Jordan ad underscores Kang's claim that "Jumpman23" emphasizes a big superstar

brand, he will beg his parents for that same article of apparel, and this would spark the proliferation of sales; thus it is logical. Stephanie Kang, writer for the *Wall Street Journal*, delves into the issue of celebrity superstardom as a strategy to advance a sport—and product—in one of her recent articles. Instead of advocating teamwork, she argues that Nike “emphasizes a big superstar who performs spectacular feats and sometimes overwhelms” (Figure 4). This is obviously the case in “Jumpman23” advertisements where Michael Jordan is the ultimate spectacular athlete

that almost seductively captures audiences through his recognition as a cultural icon.

Kang continues by saying that “for decades, Nike has used its mix of star athletes and savvy marketing to dominate the basketball-shoe market, which is why it, and its subsidiary brands, commanded 83% of the U.S.'s \$3 billion basketball-shoe market.” As the numbers suggest success, it is not a mystery to why top brand names, such as Jordan’s “Jumpman23” continue this phenomenon to propel their sales. It is as if consumer society epitomizes what is introduced in the theory of scholar and author of *Sports Marketing: It’s Not Just a Game Anymore*, Phil Schaaf. He summarizes his perception of a consumer society in a simple statement: “like trained seals, fans are persuaded by the advertising mechanisms that accompany the stars and events” (Schaaf 327). The seal is a very intelligent mammal, and when a single one reacts or is occupied by any given factor, the rest follow. Similarly, Schaaf implies the same idea for civilization in regards to the manipulative process of sports marketing through this analogy—Society witnesses the big star wear, buy, or perform something and seemingly the public as a whole must do the same. Moreover, he states, “The future of endorsements will always be bright—they will never go entirely out of fashion. As long as there are gifted athletes who capture the public’s attention, companies will line up to contract their promotional services, and in the process, continue the evolution of celebrity endorsements” (Schaaf 296). This is definitely a truth witnessed by the campaign of Jordan industries; he is a gifted athlete, and as a result he captivates the public’s attention.

What lies ahead for the future of sports if influences such as celebrity status continue to shed this negative light on athletics? Significant consideration regarding this matter must be projected towards the fans—as it is this audience that keeps the sports industry booming through revenue from ticket sales, merchandise, and memorabilia. But

do fans know that they are directly being lured into these sales, or do they just see themselves associating with a pastime they enjoy and love? Theorist, Chair of Comparative Education at UCLA, and a P.H.D. professor at Columbia university, Douglas Kellner provides insightful commentary in his argumentative essay, “The Sports Spectacle, Michael Jordan, and Nike: Unholy Alliance,” that “it appears professional sports can no longer be played without the accompaniment of cheerleaders, giant mascots who clown with players and spectators, and raffles, promotions, and contests that hawk the products of various sponsors.” It is this maelstrom of activity that unquestionably is appealing to a vulnerable audience, but it is also the activity that sways the adoration and authentic value of a game to a money-oriented revenue generator. The flashing lights, uproar of the crowd, money circulating through the vendors—all this creates the façade that allures and leaves the public visibly hapless. Moreover, Kellner underscores that “sports writers too participate in the canonization of athletes like Michael Jordan, regularly describing him as “the greatest basketball player who has ever lived,” and even the “greatest athlete of all time.” Jordan’s popularity is literally launched over the reputations of other athletes as a direct relationship with this support by the media. Nike readily absorbs this greatness, and they effectively integrate it into their ads. For example, Jordan’s first corporate logo “just do it,” signifies that you too can be like Mike and this highlights Jordan's status as a role model” (Figure 5). Is, however, this “role model” status positive?

There are various perceptions of what a “role model” convincingly can be. There is no question that



Figure 5: The Nike ad emphasizes that anyone can be like Mike

Michael Jordan's name would complement these perceptions. However, it is the corporate aspect of his late career and his alliance with Nike that challenges his overall credibility. His superstardom is one that has been manipulated from the dedicated and hard working athlete to the prestigious and prominent logo found on clothing, television, sporting events, and most notably on the feet of practically the vast majority of our civilization. Jordan declared in a recent publication in *Newsweek*, "I wanted to invest in something that will keep me in touch with the game and the fans whenever I leave, but I didn't want to do the ordinary, like coach or report from the sidelines" (LaFeber 163). It is apparent that he has openly accepted the role of businessman and entrepreneur, but in doing so he slowly sacrifices losing his recognition as a star athlete, as the public now acknowledges him for his more recent success in the marketing industry. Although he is highly respected and glorified, sports are intended to promote self-expression and individualism, and this is why his established global capitalism is bombarded with controversy: it entices the general public to "wanna be like Mike" and it disallows for own personal and individualistic growth in athletics. Simply, Michael Jordan is one of the leading sources of modern day sports pollution.

The Manipulative Marketing System

With Jordan's increasing popularity across the world, he justifies his reasoning behind his developing global capitalism in an interview published in *Newsweek*. At this time, The Jordan line was projected to take in "\$250 million in gross revenues during its first year—a figure that immediately made it one of the nations largest clothing

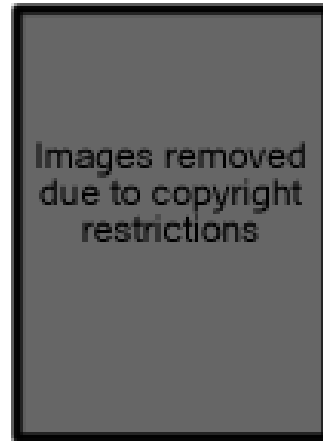
businesses” (LaFeber 163). Jordan claimed in the article, “I want to leave my mark without actually having to be anywhere near the court.” This is a statement that carries substance, and just as Jordan claims he doesn’t want to be “ anywhere near the court,” we see that the genuine athlete and advocate of the statement “for the love of the game” is losing sight of his initial motivations that brought him to this position. Once an ambitious participant, now an avaricious spectator, Michael Jordan exemplifies the materialistic reality overshadowing basketball and for the most part all sports. This is what Michael Wilbon notes in his article “Now, Jordan Really Means Business,” “the materialistic demand for Jordan sneakers has been realized in an America full of television advertising, and the combined efforts of cultural icons like Michael Jordan and overpowering technology to convince viewers to buy more and ever more.” Has Jordan, then, gone too far? Can Michael Jordan specifically be targeted for the fault of sport’s manipulative marketing system? Colombia Professor Kellner answers this best. He examines that

“The media figure of Michael Jordan thus has contradictory effects. While he is a symbol of making it in corporate America, he also is tarnished by the scandals and negative qualities with which the corporations to whom he sells himself are tainted, as well as embodying negative aspects of excessive greed, competitiveness, and other capitalist values.”

Michael Jordan has earned legendary fame, and it is a shame that his name is associated with negative implications of his actions. Although this spectacle in sports is occurring with other athletes besides Michael Jordan, his eminence is what attracts recognition and it also is what casts this negative shadow amidst his greatness. In Michael Jordan we see the component of

greed and capitalist values that promotes the “market society,” and this is a large contributor in polluting the genuine love for recreational activity.

In an era where Michael Jordan can represent the American flag at the Olympics award ceremony, “Reebok is the endorser and sponsor of the gold medals” (Figure 6) team U.S.A. dangles from their very necks (Schaaf 108). In an era where children wish to innocently participate in enjoyable pastimes, advertisements and television commercials lure them into purchasing specific products. In an era where sports are so widely accepted across the world, celebrity superstardom taints and overshadows teamwork and fundamental values to develop a pristine adoration for a game. In an era where sport can be accepted as the culture of America, will soon become an era where sport can be defined as the culture of the world. This era, unfortunately, will entail a frightening scene, as sports will continue to degrade as it has miserably been witnessed in this one.



Figure

6: Team U.S.A. celebrates wining the gold medal: however, Reebok is the sponsor of these medals

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Start your review of Michael Jordan and the New Global Capitalism. Write a review. Mar 21, 2019 Joseph Stieb rated it really liked it. The reader would be far better served to read separate accounts of these phenomenon, Michael Jordan and Global Capitalism, rather than the disjointed effort presented here. On the other hand it may be true that many students of globalisation would prefer to read a book like this where the name Jordan and the Bulls occasionally pops up rather than a straight treatise on global capitalism. ...more. flag Like · see review. Jan 25, 2018 Thomas rated it did not like it. Nike revolutionized sports marketing with Michael Jordan as the brand's muse. WireImage. The Last Dance, ESPN's documentary tracking Michael Jordan's final season with the Chicago Bulls, has captivated the American viewing public at a time when sports are on lockdown. Nike NKE has always been Jordan's biggest backer, both financially and marketing-wise. The sportswear giant has paid him an estimated \$1.3 billion by Forbes' count since it signed its first deal with Jordan in 1984, and it has helped make him a cultural icon. It is the richest athlete endorsement deal ever but also arguably the biggest bargain given that Jordan helped transform Nike from a scrappy underdog into one of the largest, most valuable consumer brands in the world. Jordan made less than \$100 million as NBA's greatest player, but his estimated net worth is \$1.65 billion. Here's how he built his successful career. DraftKings announced last September that Jordan took an equity stake in the sports betting company, along with a special adviser role. The company's shares surged 12% immediately following the announcement. AP Photo/Thibault Camus. Bubba Wallace will make his debut on Michael Jordan's NASCAR team at the Daytona 500. Chris Graythen/Getty Images. Source: Insider, ESPN.