

Contests of Masculinity

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This dissertation examines the relationship between and the leadership of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), the National Football Foundation (NFF), and Notre Dame and how each framed particular conceptualizations of collegiate football, masculinity, and identity, and their place within the larger American cultural landscape between 1945-1972. Chapter 1 discusses the NCAA, NFF, and Notre Dame's commitment to a model of masculinity that led to the projection of multiple narratives that operated on a number of levels which could change, shift, and overlap across time and cultural space. This chapter examines the components that combined to form a masculine ideal of football, promoted most strongly by Chester LaRoche at the NFF, and how large structural and institutional changes intertwined with the expansion of collegiate game during the leadership of Walter Byers at the NCAA. This growth led to tensions between "winning-the-right-way," exemplified by Notre Dame, and "winning-at-all-costs" mentalities that would prove difficult to restrain. Chapter 2 focuses on Notre Dame between 1954-1963, discussing university growth, the changing landscape of college football (including the development of competing models), and a period of mediocrity for the Fighting Irish football team, leading to the formation of different conceptualizations of Notre Dame, particularly in its relationship to masculine ideals. Despite these shifts, some groups continued to express an older understanding that reflected a more masculine-centric Notre Dame which would, at times, stand in opposition to the developing "new Notre Dame." This chapter also discusses the early presidency of Father Theodore Hesburgh who strongly framed the values of the university amidst an ambitious expansion of facilities and academics. The third chapter uses the 1966 "Game of the Century" against Michigan State to focus on how Notre Dame confronted and dealt with these issues between 1964-1974, as the football program once again positioned itself as both a perennial contender and a durable model of masculinity. This period also saw Notre Dame respond to shifting social relations, and the sometimes difficult process of expanding its model of masculinity to encompass the Civil Rights Movement, Title IX, and the beginning of coeducation at the university in 1972.