

The Fort Bragg baseball game, American militarism and the Fourth of July

Niles Niemuth—SEP candidate for vice president
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The Fort Bragg Army Base in North Carolina was host to a Major League Baseball (MLB) game between the Atlanta Braves and Miami Marlins Sunday night, the first professional sporting event to be held on a US military base.

Sunday's baseball game marks a further development of the noxious integration of American sports with nationalism and pro-imperialist propaganda. The regular season game was scheduled to coincide with the Fourth of July holiday weekend, with the intention of manipulating the celebration of the American Revolution to promote militarism and war.

A day marking the anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence and the revolutionary struggle against the British aristocracy has been twisted into a celebration of militarism and the new aristocracy that benefits from imperialist operations across the globe.

The game was carefully coordinated between MLB officials and the Pentagon, which has pumped millions of dollars over the years into the professional sports leagues in order to inundate millions of fans and spectators with pro-war propaganda.

The chief of the recreation division of Fort Bragg's Directorate of Family and Morale, Welfare and Recreation, Eric Hill, told local media last month that MLB officials organized the event because they "wanted to do something to give back to the military." The game, which was only open to members of the military and their families, was held on a field donated by MLB specifically for the event at an estimated cost of \$5 million.

The Fort Bragg game opened with a singing of "The Star-Spangled Banner" accompanied by the unfurling of a giant American flag that covered the entire outfield, while three attack helicopters flew low over

the stadium.

Particularly since the beginning of the "war on terror" fifteen years ago, popular sporting events have become one of the preferred conduits for spewing militarist and nationalist filth in an effort to bully the population into supporting unpopular military operations in Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, Syria and elsewhere throughout the world.

These grotesque exhibitions of jingoism are neither spontaneous nor are they the reflection of the demands of sports fans, but are rather carefully scripted and staged spectacles. A report published last year by Republican Senators John McCain and Jeff Flake that criticized "paid patriotism" found that the Department of Defense spent more than \$53 million on marketing and advertising contracts with sports teams across the US between 2012 and 2015.

The Pentagon has spent tens of millions of dollars to inundate sports fans with an endless stream of jetfighter, bomber and helicopter flybys; salutes to active duty troops and wounded veterans; the unfurling of oversized American flags; military camouflage paraphernalia; advertisements and recruiters enticing often economically desperate young people to enlist in the military; and on field swearing-in ceremonies.

However, as James P. Cannon, the early leader of the Trotskyist movement in the US, noted 65 years ago, the ruling class' cynical efforts to manipulate America's revolutionary heritage into support for their current machinations should not lead socialists and revolutionaries to conclude that they should reject that history.

"I recognized the standard Fourth of July orators as phonies, as desecrators of a noble dream," Cannon wrote. "They didnt look like the Liberty Boys of 76." He added, however, that it is wrong to confuse

internationalism with anti-Americanism, to relinquish the revolutionary traditions of our country to the reactionaries.

Today, every official institution, from the government and the two big business parties, to the media and popular sports, has been mobilized in the effort to cajole and intimidate the population into supporting the military in anticipation of the next big conflict. In the upcoming elections, voters are told they must pick between two right-wing militarists: Republican Donald Trump, a fascistic billionaire huckster, and Democrat Hillary Clinton, the preferred candidate of Wall Street and the military/intelligence apparatus.

Despite this unremitting and desperate attempt to indoctrinate the population, war remains deeply unpopular. The last quarter century of war has had a devastating impact not only the millions in those countries subject to the predations of American imperialism, but to millions in the United States as well.

From Valdosta, Georgia to Corvallis, Oregon, the American working class is still coming to grips with the fallout of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, while the ruling class pushes forward with its plans for the next, even more catastrophic, war with nuclear-armed Russia or China.

Some 6,900 US soldiers have been killed in the wars in the Middle East and Central Asia since 1990, while there are 7 million veterans of those conflicts. Counting spouses and other family members, approximately 30 million Americans have been impacted in some way by the wars.

The deployment of pro-military propaganda at every turn and the manipulation of the revolutionary legacy of the Fourth of July is not sign of strength but of weakness. The ruling elite knows that popular sentiment is turning against it.



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