

Outside The Cage: The Political Campaign To Destroy Mixed Martial Arts

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OUTSIDE THE CAGE: THE CAMPAIGN TO DESTROY MIXED MARTIAL
ARTS

By

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ABSTRACT

This is an early history of Mixed Martial Arts in America. It focuses primarily on the political campaign to ban the sport in the 1990s and the repercussions that campaign had on MMA itself. Furthermore, it examines the censorship of music and video games in the 1990s. The central argument of this work is that the political campaign to ban Mixed Martial Arts was part of a larger political movement to censor violent entertainment. Connections are shown in the actions and rhetoric of politicians who attacked music, video games and the Ultimate Fighting Championship on the grounds that it glorified violence. The political pressure exerted on the sport is largely responsible for the eventual success and widespread acceptance of MMA. The pressure forced the sport to regulate itself and transformed it into something more acceptable to mainstream America.

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INTRODUCTION

For over a century, combat sports have held the attention of many Americans, yet at the same time, drawn revulsion from others. The unique blend of brutality and sportsmanship seems to have made this dichotomy almost inevitable, as society hungers for entertaining spectacles and a reaffirmation of masculinity, while at the same time it desires rationality, moderation and safety. Thus combat sports seem destined to be controversial. In 19th century America Bare-knuckle Boxing was viewed this way and in the late 20th century these same perceptions were directed towards Mixed Martial Arts (MMA).¹

Mixed Martial Arts is a combat sport which combines various forms of grappling and striking, essentially combining kickboxing with submission grappling. This separates it from all other combat sports which limit the style to one or the other, such as Boxing and Tae Kwon Do with striking, or Wrestling and Judo with grappling. To many spectators this makes MMA look like a “real” fight. The wide variety of techniques allowed in MMA (takedowns, submissions, punches, elbows, kicks, and knees) makes some believe that the sport is too brutal to be legal. As Mixed Martial Arts gained popularity in America through the first and most well-known MMA organization, *The Ultimate Fighting Championship* (The UFC), these issues of violence drew the attention of the American media as well as politicians. Although the UFC initially fostered this controversially violent image, it almost destroyed the sport as politicians attempted in direct and indirect ways to ban MMA. Luckily for Mixed Martial Artists and its fans, the sport had a

¹ Elliott J. Gorn, *The Manly Art: Bare-Knuckle Prize Fighting in America*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), 14.

massive resurgence in the 2000's and has now become the most popular combat sport in America, driven by pay-per-view sales.²

The controversy surrounding Mixed Martial Arts was spearheaded by Arizona Senator John McCain. With his leadership, many other politicians throughout America rallied around the call to ban Mixed Martial Arts. Politicians worked to push MMA events out of their states. Local and national media outlets wrote editorials attacking MMA as unsafe, and too violent for Americans to watch. Notable journalists such as George Will wrote multiple articles attacking the sport.³

Mixed Martial Arts was not the only entertainment under media and political attack in the 1990's. At the same time MMA was being attacked, so too were video games, television, and music. The controversy surrounding MMA in America, and corresponding arguments directed at other forms of emerging entertainment, revealed a sort of moral panic directed at violent entertainment. The attacks on MMA were indicative of a larger political current within the United States at the time, one in which many people sought to blame violent entertainment for violence in society.

In the 1990's America was still engaged in the "Culture Wars" between conservatives and liberals. Conservatives contended that America was corrupted and in decline, for various reasons, including the popularization of violent entertainment.⁴ The fight against MMA was an excellent example of the "Culture Wars" of the 1990s. It showed the power of conservative

² Goldman, Adam. "Extreme Fight for Pay Per View Crown," *Boston*, February 28th, 2007, http://www.boston.com/business/articles/2007/02/28/extreme_fight_on_for_pay_per_view_crown/

³ George Will, "Cruelty For Sale." *Washington Post*, November 26th, 1995.

⁴ Robert Bork, *Slouching Toward Gomorrah: Modern Liberalism and American Decline*, (New York, 1996).

action against violent entertainment. It also showed how the creation and the success of the Ultimate Fighting Championship demonstrated that there was a very real demand for violent entertainment.

As the athletes in Mixed Martial Arts evolved from single discipline martial artists into advanced hybrid fighters, so too did the sport itself evolve. The Mixed Martial Arts performed in the UFC in 1993 was almost unrecognizable to the MMA performed in the UFC a decade later. Pressure from outside and within forced major changes that altered many of the rules and regulations of the sport, allowing it to survive the political campaign to destroy it. Ironically, the actions to destroy the sport ultimately changed the sport into what it is today and increased its popularity.

This study will focus from 1993 to 2002, as these were significant points in history for the Ultimate Fighting Championship, the first and most important American MMA organization. The first UFC event was held in 1993 and in 2002 the UFC held UFC 40 which was a massive success and gained mainstream media exposure. At that point the future of MMA in America was secure. Attention will be given to some events prior to 1993, but only to better contextualize the events which are within the scope of this study. This is a study of MMA specifically within the United States, and not worldwide. Mixed Martial Arts in Japan began at a similar time but the origins of the sport in that country were vastly different and the issues that arose within the sport in Japan are not comparable to American MMA.

Historiography

Mixed Martial Arts as a sport in the United States has only existed for two decades and has yet to become a major focus in academic circles. Thus, a formal historiography specific to MMA does not exist. With that said, there is an excellent historiography on professional boxing in the United States and the similarity of these combat sports makes the use of this historiography helpful in putting MMA into a historic context. Boxing historiography began in the 1980's, primarily with Elliott Gorn's *The Manly Art: Bare-Knuckle Prize Fighting in America* in 1986. This groundbreaking work on the origins of boxing in America expanded the boundaries of what historians could extrapolate from sports history, examining subjects such as masculinity, class and ethnicity all within the context of fighting. Gorn illustrated how bare-knuckle boxing showcased a certain type of masculinity which was embraced by the lower classes in the Victorian era. It was decidedly different from the stable and mild-mannered masculinity of the bourgeoisie.⁵ The bourgeoisie favored self-control and sobriety and the lower classes preferred strength and independence. In reference to the study of Mixed Martial Arts, Gorn's work is noteworthy for two reasons. The first is his analysis of the transition from underground bare-knuckle boxing to sanctioned boxing utilizing the Queensbury rules. This example laid out a framework of analysis which helps contextualize the evolution of MMA. Second, Gorn relied heavily upon newspapers of the time period as his primary documents of research. Newspapers provide an in depth look into the campaign against Mixed Martial Arts as

⁵ Gorn, *The Manly Art*, 31.

well. This study utilizes the similarities between the attacks on bare-knuckle boxing and Mixed Martial Arts.

The next major history of boxing was *Beyond the Ring: the Role of Boxing in American Society* by Jeffrey Sammons who focused on 20th century boxing. He argued that boxing was a reflection of social trends within the United States with an emphasis on race. The focal point of the book is on the careers of such famous African American heavyweight boxers as Joe Louis and Muhammad Ali. Sammons was able to use their careers to illustrate the racial tension within the United States.⁶ His work is an excellent example of how a history of boxing need not be confined to the ring, but can illuminate important social issues.

The majority of the other well known histories of boxing are biographical works, such as Randy Roberts' biographies of Jack Dempsey and Jack Johnson.⁷ Perhaps the best example of this type is Michael T Isenberg's 1988 work *John Sullivan and his America*. Isenberg was able to focus on the entire life of one individual as opposed to moving from fighter to fighter giving the reader a clearer picture of the fighter and his world. Like Gorn, Isenberg heavily utilized periodicals. Isenberg was able to represent ethnic identity issues through Sullivan's Irish-American fan base as well as social mobility through Sullivan's rise to prominence through boxing.⁸

The major theme in the historiography of boxing is that the sport can highlight greater social issues of the time, such as class conflict or racism. It is not only the boxer, but also what

⁶ Jeffrey T. Sammons, *Beyond the Ring: The Role of Boxing in American Society*. (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 31.

⁷ Randy Roberts, *Jack Dempsey: The Manassa Mauler*. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press), 1979.

⁸ Michael T. Isenberg, *John L. Sullivan and His America*, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 14.

the boxer represents to the audience. It is in that same vein that Mixed Martial Arts will reveal some of the important issues for Americans during the sport's infancy.

Sources

As previously noted, there is no historiographical body of work that specifically deals with Mixed Martial Arts but there are some excellent amateur works of history that chronicle the early years of the sport. They have been very helpful for understanding the back stories of the Ultimate Fighting Championship and the general chronology of the significant events. The most complete and informative accounts are *Brawl: A Behind-the-Scenes Look at Mixed Martial Arts Competition* by Erich Krauss and *No Holds Barred: The Complete History of Mixed Martial Arts in America* by Clyde Gentry. These works contain interviews with important individuals within the sport; excerpts from many MMA related documents and extensive chronologies of events taking place from the very early origins of MMA to the modern period of the sport. *Let's Get it On! The Making of MMA and its Ultimate Referee* by John McCarthy is an autobiography which offers into the political pressure placed on the UFC and the controversy surrounding the sport.⁹

James T. Patterson's *Restless Giant: the United States from Watergate to Bush v. Gore* has been of particular help. Patterson details the rise of the political right and the culture wars that continued into the 1990s.¹⁰ It is this latter focus which has been useful in contextualizing many of the controversies surrounding MMA.

⁹ John McCarthy, *Let's Get It On! The Making of MMA and its Ultimate Referee*, (Medallion Press, 2011).

¹⁰James T Patterson, *Restless Giant: The United States from Watergate to Bush V. Gore*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

Interviews have been conducted with mixed martial artists, sports journalists, and MMA fans. UFC 5 tournament winner and former UFC Superfight champion Dan Severn, was interviewed for this project. Also, former UFC fighters Din Thomas and Joe Doerksen provided interviews about their MMA careers which started in 1998 and 1999 respectively. Veteran MMA journalist and writer of the 2011 book *Raw Combat: The Underground World Of Mixed Martial Arts* was interviewed as well as Eugene Robinson, weekly contributor to the MMA website Bloodyelbow and author of *Fight: Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About Ass-Kicking but Were Afraid You'd Get Your Ass Kicked for Asking*. The MMA website Sherdog, home of the largest MMA forum on the internet provided a large number of interviews detailing fan perceptions of events regarding MMA in the 1990's. Many Sherdog users were fans of the sport from its early years and were eager to provide their own personal experiences of watching the sport. These interviews of various individuals who were connected to MMA in various ways offer insight into the sport from various angles and better illustrate its place within America at the time.

Many newspapers such as *The Orlando Sentinel*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *The New York Times*, and *The Washington Post* provided details of state efforts to push MMA out. Most useful were Dan Barry's articles in the *New York Times* about New York's multiple efforts to stop MMA events in the State. George Will, a journalist and cultural critique, provided an illuminating example of the right's intellectual attack on the sport highlighting issues of social degradation and the decline of western civilization.

CHAPTER 1: ORIGINS OF MIXED MARTIAL ARTS IN AMERICA

The Ultimate Fighting Championship prior to UFC 1 in 1993 must be addressed to fully explain how the UFC was created and why the marketing focused heavily on violence. The Ultimate Fighting Championship broke new ground in combat sports. People were not quite sure what to make of it, and that included the people who created and marketed the event as they had no real precedents to follow. The marketing of the first UFC events featured the extreme violence of the sport. While this method produced short term success, it created a tone for the sport which made it an easy target for those opposed to violent entertainment. This chapter will explain the origins of the UFC, address various controversies associated with the sport and highlight the reasons that media and political figures denounced it.

The Gracies

The origins Mixed Martial Arts in the United States go back to Brazil in the early 20th century and the Gracie family, the most influential family in the history of MMA. It is not likely that Mixed Martial Arts in America would have developed without them.

The Gracie family became involved in martial arts when they were introduced to Judo by the famous Judoka Mitsuyo Maeda. Jigoro Kano, the founder of Judo, taught Maeda and made him an ambassador of the sport encouraging him to travel the world to promote Judo.¹¹ Maeda travelled to different countries and challenged different wrestlers and boxers in no-holds-barred competitions. His travels brought him to Brazil in 1914, where he so impressed the wealthy

¹¹ Erich Krauss, Brawl: A Behind the Scenes Look at Mixed Martial Arts Competition, (Toronto: ECW Press, 2002), 24.

Brazilian landowners that they rewarded him with property, which led Maeda to make his home in Brazil.¹² Here Maeda met Gasteo Gracie, a wealthy scholar. Maeda became interested in establishing a colony in Brazil for Japanese immigrants, and Gasteo was able to use his political connections to help him. In return Maeda taught Gasteo's son Carlos his eastern fighting style.¹³

Maeda's teaching of jiu-jitsu and judo to the Gracie's revolutionized martial arts as it led to the development of a new style of martial arts called Brazilian jiu-jitsu and Gracie jiu-jitsu. Another one of Gasteo's sons, Helio Gracie was considered too weak to train with Maeda. For years Helio watched as his brother Carlos learned how to fight and he slowly learned by observing. Eventually when the two brothers were older, they relocated to Rio de Janeiro and opened the Gracie Jiu-Jitsu Academy. The story goes that Carlos was unable to teach his class on one occasion, and Helio taught it in his place. The students were so impressed with Helio that they wanted him to become their permanent teacher.¹⁴ Since Helio was weak and unhealthy, he developed a version of jiu-jitsu that focused heavily on leverage and technique, rather than brute strength. Thus, Brazilian jiu-jitsu was born.

In order to prove the effectiveness of Gracie jiu-jitsu, Helio entered no-holds-barred matches against fighters of other martial art styles. In 1932, Helio defeated renowned Brazilian boxer Antonio Portugal in only 30 seconds.¹⁵ These no-holds-barred fights gained popularity in Brazil and even *O Globo*, Brazil's largest newspaper, wrote about them. An *O Globo* reporter

¹² Clyde Gentry, *No holds Barred: The Complete History Of Mixed Martial Arts In America*, (Chicago: Triumph Books, 2011), 16.

¹³ Krauss, 24.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 25.

¹⁵ Gentry, 18.

gave them the name *Vale Tudo* (Portuguese for *anything goes*).¹⁶ On October 23rd 1951, the most famous of these *Vale Tudo* matches took place in Marcana Stadium as Helio Gracie fought Masahiko Kimura, a famous Judoka, in front of 20,000 spectators.¹⁷ Although Helio lost this fight to Kimura who was much younger and larger, the effectiveness of Helio's fighting system was firmly established in Brazil.

In 1969 Rorion Gracie, Helio's oldest son, took a trip to the United States, during which his return flight ticket was stolen. He took to panhandling and it took him a year to raise enough money to return to Brazil.¹⁸ Despite this, America made an impression on him and he tried to export Gracie jiu-jitsu to the United States. In 1978, after receiving his law degree in Brazil, he moved to California to teach his martial art, where success came slowly.¹⁹

Rorion taught out of his garage in Hermosa Beach, California, where there were two important developments. First, a small but loyal group of students helped him popularize his fighting system. Second, it was here that Rorion made fifteen tapes of various Gracies fighting in Brazil which he showed to potential students so they could see his fighting system in action. Eventually he put the fights together on one tape and advertised it in martial arts magazines as *Gracies in Action*. In many ways, the Ultimate Fighting Championship was originally designed as a live *Gracies in Action* product, since it was meant to demonstrate the effectiveness of Gracie jiu-jitsu.

¹⁶ Gentry, 18.

¹⁷ Ibid., 20.

¹⁸ Krauss, 26.

¹⁹ Ibid., 27.

Many of Rorion's students went into local martial art dojos and challenged instructors to fight Rorion. Eventually this evolved into the *Gracie Challenge*, where Rorion offered 100,000 dollars to any martial artist that could beat him. This helped establish Gracie jiu-jitsu in America. Word of mouth spread about the effectiveness of Rorion's fighting style as he time and time again defeated different martial artists. This attention eventually caught the eye of journalist Pat Jordan. Jordan published an article about Rorion entitled "BAD" in a 1989 issue of *Playboy*.²⁰ The article details the unique fighting style of Gracie jiu-jitsu and the reputation the family established in Brazil.

The Origins of the Ultimate Fighting Championship

The UFC initiated as a joint business venture between Rorion Gracie and a marketing businessman named Art Davie. Art Davie came to the Gracie Academy in 1992. As a student of Rorion, Davie learned firsthand the effectiveness of Brazilian Jiu Jitsu. As a result Davie agreed to help market the *Gracies in Action* tapes as well as other instructional videos by direct mail.²¹ These tapes were a great success and led Davie and Gracie to create a reality based show that captured the essence of the *Gracie Challenge*.

Another one of the Gracie's students, John Milius, was a Hollywood director known for the Arnold Schwarzenegger action film, *Conan the Barbarian*.²² Davie, Gracie and Milius decided to name their reality show *War of the Worlds* and Art and Rorion formed a promotion company of the same name. They began pitching the idea of a no-holds-barred elimination

²⁰ Pat Jordan, "BAD," *Playboy*, September, 1989.

²¹ Krauss, 30.

²² *Ibid.*.

tournament featuring fighters of various martial arts disciplines to pay-per-view companies. None of the companies seemed interested in the product except for Semaphore Entertainment Group (SEG) which was owned by Bob Meyrowitz, creator of the radio program *King Biscuit Flower Hour*. The name of the event was changed to *The Ultimate Fighting Championship* as that tested well with sample groups.²³ Milius decided to hold the event within a thirty foot diameter, five inch six foot tall chain link fence. Initially, Milius proposed electrifying the fence and surrounding the cage with a moat full of alligators although these ideas were rejected.²⁴ Those rejected concepts demonstrate that Milius saw the Ultimate Fighting Championship as a spectacle and not as a sport. The promoters decided to hold the event in Brazil to minimize legal issues. However when Davie discovered that in 1977 Colorado had repealed all statutes governing boxing and wrestling except for an age requirement the event was moved to Colorado.

It was clear to Rorion that in addition to martial artists he needed to acquire a professional boxer of some renown for the event as Americans viewed boxers at the “baddest fighters on the planet.”²⁵ Well known fighters such as Leon Spinks and James “Bonecrusher” Smith were approached but they turned down the offer.²⁶ Eventually Arthur Jimmerson agreed to compete in the event. Jimmerson was featured in *Ring* magazine’s “Fights of the Year” edition for knocking out Lenny Lapaglia in 1988 and was ranked 10th by the World Boxing Council at cruiserweight. He was guaranteed 18,000 dollars just to show up, win or lose. After agreeing to compete, Jimmerson attempted to drop out after he realized the tournament had no rules. The other contestants were offered 1,000 dollars to compete, with the grand prize being 50,000

²³ Gentry, 38.

²⁴ John McCarthy, Let’s Get It On! The Making of MMA and its Ultimate Referee, (Medallion Press, 2011), 123.

²⁵ McCarthy, 124.

²⁶ Ibid.

dollars.²⁷ Gerard Gordeau, a Kyokushin Karate and Savate kickboxing champion who was nearing the end of his career also agreed to compete. Kevin Rosier, a retired kickboxer who had won several championships, also joined in the competition. Art Davie and Rorion Gracie allowed Rosier to enter the competition even though he was grossly overweight at 345 pounds.²⁸ A Sumo wrestler was acquired for the event to highlight the wide variety of styles within martial arts. Teila Tula, the first non-Japanese man to win the all-Japan collegiate sumo championships, was selected.²⁹ Patrick Smith was an easy addition to the tournament since he was a native of Denver and held a black belt in various karate styles as well as Taekwondo and was highly ranked in professional kickboxing. Zane Frazier, a 4th degree black belt in Kenpo Karate, was selected by Rorion because of the notoriety Frazier gained from assaulting Frank Dux, the man who inspired the film *Bloodsport*. The final two participants in the tournament were the most important, Ken Shamrock and Royce Gracie. Rorion selected Royce to represent Gracie Jiu-Jitsu in the tournament. Royce was a slender man, standing 6'1 but only 176 pounds and looked nonthreatening although he had a black belt in the family's art. Ken Shamrock was enlisted by Art Davie because he had a chiseled "hero" physique that Art believed he could promote. Shamrock was a professional wrestler who worked in America and Japan. While in Japan he had taken part in some of the earliest Japanese forms of Mixed Martial Arts.³⁰ None of these fighters other than Ken Shamrock ever had a chance of actually defeating Royce Gracie in the tournament, and this was by design. None of the fighters were aware of Gracie Jiu Jitsu's heavy

²⁷ Gentry, 52.

²⁸ Ibid, 49.

²⁹ Ibid., 46.

³⁰ Ibid., 48.

emphasis on ground fighting and aside from Shamrock, all of the other competitors were only trained in striking.

The way in which the UFC marketed their event led to many unintended consequences. Art Davie decided that it was in their best interest to emphasize the violence of the event, so it was marketed as a blood sport. Art Davie, Rorion Gracie, Bob Meyrowitz and executive producer, Campbell McLaren discussed whether the show would be marketed as a sport or a spectacle. Art Davie said, “I reminded everybody that I had sold it to Bob on the basis that it was a spectacle. It was designed very much as a spectacle. We did not feel it as a sport. Everyone felt that it had a lifespan of maybe about two years.”³¹ McLaren likened the event to a pseudo gladiatorial circus placed on top of the Gracie Challenge.³² Jim Genia, an MMA sports journalist, recalled being a fan of the sport during its inception and elaborated on how the first events were marketed: “Well when the UFC first came out it marketed itself as a two men enter, one man leaves, almost like they were marketing it as a fight to the death, that it was a blood sport, which was great for the first few PPVs, people watched for that reason. But that strategy would bite them in the ass.”³³

The UFC’s decision to not require the use of gloves during competition caused heavy criticism. Although bare-knuckle striking appeared to be more dangerous, it is actually less so, and gloved combat sports such as boxing use gloves to protect the striker’s hand, not the

³¹ Gentry, 40.

³² Ibid.

³³ Jim Genia, Interview by Andrew Doeg. Phone. November 5th 2012.

opponent's head. The bare-knuckle aspect was used by opposition to the UFC and the UFC originally emphasized the danger of not using gloves.³⁴

UFC 1 was marketed as having absolutely no rules. Despite this claim, there actually were rules in place such as, a fight would be stopped in the event of a knockout, a submission, or if a corner threw in the towel. Also, eye gouging, biting and groin striking were not allowed. If they happened in competition, the fight continued, but the offender would be fined a thousand dollars.³⁵ Despite this, UFC 1 was heavily advertised as having no rules. Below is an example of an advertisement for the event in *Black Belt Magazine* in which "There are no Rules!" is featured twice.

³⁴ Krauss, 32.

³⁵ Ibid.

THE FIGHTNERD.COM

THE ULTIMATE!

SUMO vs KICKBOXING vs KARATE vs JIU-JITSU
vs TAE KWON DO vs SAVATE vs DRAKA.

Who will be the ULTIMATE FIGHTER?

Never in the history of combat have all of these fighting styles
come together in a ring designed for no escape.
Match by match, these true champions
will challenge each other until only
the ULTIMATE FIGHTER is left standing.
There are no rules!

LIVE!
NOVEMBER 12TH
EXCLUSIVELY ON
PAY-PER-VIEW!
CALL YOUR CABLE COMPANY FOR DETAILS

THE ULTIMATE FIGHTING CHAMPIONSHIP

THERE ARE NO RULES!

SEG
WOW PROMOTIONS

Figure 1: UFC 1 ad from 1993.³⁶

³⁶ "Check out this original UFC 1 ad from 1993!," last modified December 6, 2011, <http://www.thefightnerd.com/check-out-this-original-ufc-1-ad-from-1993/>.

UFC 1

The sport of Mixed Martial Arts officially began in America on November 12th 1993 in Denver Colorado with *The Ultimate Fighting Championship*, which later became the premier MMA organization in the world. Considering the way the UFC was marketed, it could not have debuted at a worse time. A month prior to the event, Senate Commerce Committee hearings were held to address three bills regulating violence on television. At those hearings Attorney General Janet Reno threatened the television industry to significantly reduce violence on television or the government would force them to.³⁷

The event started clumsily, as the announcer Bill Wallace incorrectly identified the event as the “Ultimate Fight Challenge.”³⁸ The first bout of the night was chaotic. The two participants involved, a Savate kick boxer and a Sumo wrestler, were not trained in styles which prepared them for a no holds barred competition. The fight was short and shocking for nearly everyone involved. The Sumo wrestler ran in looking to clinch and proceeded to trip over himself into the cage. At that time his opponent, the kick boxer, kicked him in the mouth knocking out some teeth. The referee immediately stopped the fight and came between the men, something he technically had no authority to do so under the stipulated rules. The fight was ended with the kickboxer being declared the winner, despite the protests of the sumo wrestler who wanted to continue, and the boos of the crowd who were not quite sure what had happened. John McCarthy, future referee of the UFC and a student of Rorion Gracie, and his wife’s reactions to

³⁷ “Reno threatens to use government restrictions to control violence on television”, Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press, November 2nd 1993. <http://www.rcfp.org/browse-media-law-resources/news/reno-threatens-use-government-restrictions-control-violence-televi>

³⁸ UFC 1: The Beginning, 90 min., Prod. Semaphore Entertainment Group, 1993, DVD.

this first fight serve as an excellent example of two differing views to what had just transpired. While McCarthy's wife decided she had seen enough and immediately left the arena, McCarthy felt otherwise, "Me? I thought it was awesome. Everyone had thought Tuli would win, but I'd known the heavy guy wouldn't be able to take this thing. I was enthralled by what I'd just witnessed, and I sure as hell wasn't going anywhere."³⁹

The second bout was the most violent of the night and highlighted virtually all of the unsavory aspects of early MMA. Kevin Rosier and Zane Frazier fought an ugly bout which included both men totally exhausting themselves within the first minute of the fight. There was hair pulling, punches to the back of the head, and a knee to the groin. The fight ended when Rosier stomped on the head of Frazier.⁴⁰ In modern MMA rules, most of the action in this bout would have been illegal. The third bout featured Royce Gracie taking on the boxer Art Jimmerson. Jimmerson bizarrely wore one boxing glove in the fight, claiming he wore the single glove because he was afraid he would break his hand and that would jeopardize his upcoming boxing match.⁴¹ Royce took Jimmerson down and Jimmerson almost immediately tapped out.⁴² The boxer did not wish to put up a fight since his paycheck was guaranteed no matter the outcome. The tournament ended with the Royce Gracie victorious having subdued all of his opponents.

The Ultimate Fighting Championship's first event was a surprising success. At a pay-per-view price of 14.95 the event earned a buy rate of over 86,592, grossing over a million dollars,

³⁹ McCarthy, 133.

⁴⁰ UFC 1.

⁴¹ Gentry, 61.

⁴² UFC 1.

which was very impressive considering there was no cross-coverage promotion on television.⁴³ There was no great uproar of anger from the media or the public to the event, perhaps due to the limited nature of the events exposure. One of the few major media outlets to write about the first event, *The Los Angeles Times*, did not harshly criticize of the show, and instead poked fun at the absurdity of it. The Times reporter seemed fascinated by the smallest weakest looking man winning the tournament.⁴⁴ The viewers were treated to something they had never seen before. Fans at Sherdog.com recalled their UFC 1 experiences with one individual stating, “At the time I thought NHB and the UFC was amazing. It finally gave an arena to test all the martial arts styles against one another to see which style was truly the best.”⁴⁵ Other fans enjoyed the “real” aspect of what they were watching.⁴⁶

1994 and the Roots of Political Pressure

Due to the astonishing success of the first event, plans were almost immediately set to produce another for Denver, Colorado, on March 11th, 1994. The event was expanded from an eight man to a sixteen man tournament. The size of the tournament would not be the only change, as UFC 2 allowed groin striking. There were two reasons for this seemingly heinous rule change. First, many of the applicants requested that groin strikes be made legal because their martial art style utilized groin striking as a vital part of their strategy.⁴⁷ Second, executive producer Campbell McLaren loved the no rules aspect of the show and thought this would add to

⁴³ Gentry, 67.

⁴⁴ Howard Rosenberg. "Ultimate' Fight Lives Up to Name Television: Pay-Per-View Battle, Instead of Being Merely Gory and Funny. Gets Interesting After the First Two Bouts." LA Times, November 15, 1993.

⁴⁵ Marcus Madera, Interview by Andrew Doeg. Email. November 5th 2012.

⁴⁶ Gabe Kessler, Interview by Andrew Doeg. Email. November 5th 2012.

⁴⁷ McCarthy, 149.

the drama.⁴⁸ This move did not go unnoticed by the media as even before the event took place, articles were written about UFC 2 which made mention of groin striking. An article in the St. Louis Post on March 11th 1994 remarked that, “The site of the matches is Denver, where there is no state athletic commission and no rules. And, unlike the first Ultimate Fighting Championship, fighters will be allowed to kick and punch each other in the groin. We are not making this up.”⁴⁹

To add fuel to the show’s controversy, McLaren put out a press release for UFC 2 containing many false statements purposely trying to make the sport seem more shocking and violent. McLaren stated that the no eye gouging and biting rules were actually only “suggestions,” even though these actions were forbidden in the official rules. He also said that the UFC was banned in forty-nine states, although at the time the UFC had only attempted to put on events in Colorado and would later hold events in other states. The most sensational statement that he made was in regards to how fights could end. He stated “Each match will run until there is a designated winner—by means of knock-out, surrender, doctor’s intervention or *death*.”⁵⁰ In that lone sentence the UFC gave any would be critic an easy point of reference to the danger involved in the sport. This death statement was pointed to by critics time and time again for years to come.⁵¹

Though the event was originally set to take place once again in the city-owned McNichols Sports Arena, Denver Mayor Wellington Webb used a clause in the deed to prevent

⁴⁸ Gentry, 69.

⁴⁹ Dan O’neil, “Morning Briefing; Eye Openers.” St. Louis Post, March 11th 1994.

⁵⁰ Gentry, 72.

⁵¹ Ibid.

the event from taking place.⁵² The UFC simply moved the event down the street to the smaller privately owned Mammoth Gardens Arena. This was the first political interference to a Mixed Martial Arts event in America, and was a sign of things to come. Despite, or perhaps because of, the increase in negative media attention to the blood sport aspect, UFC 2 was even more successful than UFC 1 attracting 125,732 pay-per-view buys.⁵³

It was at this time that John McCain entered the political discussion on Mixed Martial Arts. Although McCain himself was an avid boxing fan and had an amateur boxing career in his youth in the Navy, he appeared to have some serious objections to the Ultimate Fighting Championship.⁵⁴ At a congressional hearing on health and safety in professional boxing in September of 1994 McCain steered the conversation away from boxing for a moment to address Mixed Martial Arts when he said: “recently there has been a phenomenon which has arisen in America, and I do not call it a sport, this tough man-style, no-holds barred boxing.”⁵⁵ At this point Senator McCain presented a 60 second clip of UFC 1 to the hearing and urged the committee to take action against the UFC. After playing the clip, McCain said: “That is what is being done in America today. Maybe there are comments that can be made about the degeneracy of our society, but the fact is that this kind of thing, I think, continues to occur. The only way it can be stopped is through regulation.”⁵⁶ It is here that McCain established the connection between Mixed Martial Arts and the degeneration of society, a concept frequently invoked by conservatives in the culture wars. In addition Senator McCain went on a letter writing campaign

⁵² Ibid, 73.

⁵³ Ibid., 73.

⁵⁴ Holly Bailey, “John McCain: ‘I Learned How to Take Hard Blows.’” Newsweek, May 13th 2007.

⁵⁵ US Congress. Health and Safety of Professional Boxing: Hearings Before the Comm. on Commerce, Science, and Transp., 103d Cong. 2, 1994.

⁵⁶ Ibid..

to all fifty governors urging them to prevent this type of event from taking place in their respective states.

Senator McCain's spearheading of the campaign to ban Mixed Martial Arts has been subject to some discussion amongst fans of the sport. Many find it odd that a man who was involved in combat sports himself, and even saw a man beaten to death in a boxing match, found this new sport so abhorrent. Many were quick to suspect there was an underlying financial motive to his decision.⁵⁷ Some UFC fans believed that since John McCain's wife was the heiress to the Budweiser distribution fortune, and that since Budweiser was the main sponsor of professional boxing at the time, that in essence meant, what was good for boxing was good for the McCains. The McCain's public financial statements confirmed that they had large financial sums invested in Anheuser-Busch and Hensley & Co. (Anheuser-Busch's distribution company).⁵⁸ Regardless of his motives, his rhetoric was supported by many of his colleagues and set the tone for the way in which politicians engaged Mixed Martial Arts competition.

1995 and the First Battle in New York

New York proved to be a pivotal state for Mixed Martial Arts. There were multiple legal battles in the mid nineties ending with the sport being banned in the state. New York is one of the few states in which MMA has remained banned. The first controversial moment in New York was not caused by the Ultimate Fighting Championship, but instead by Battlecade, a production company started by film producer Donald Zuckerman, and *Penthouse* mogul Bob Guccione.⁵⁹ They decided to hold an event called Extreme Fighting in Brooklyn's Park Slope Armory on

⁵⁷ McCarthy, 202.

⁵⁸ John McCain, Financial statement 1995 & 1996, <http://www.opensecrets.org/pfds/candlook.php?CID=N00006424>.

⁵⁹ Krauss, 104.

November 18th, 1995. Zuckerman contacted *New York Times* reporter Dan Barry in order to create publicity for the event. The amount of controversy started by Dan Barry hurt Extreme Fighting far more than it helped.

Dan Barry alerted Senator Roy Goodman, who supported John McCain's push against the sport, and of the event to be held in New York City. A week before the event Senator Goodman held a press conference alongside New York Governor George Pataki and New York City Mayor Rudolph Giuliani. Goodman attacked the barbarism of the sport but Zuckerman was at the press conference and defended his event. When asked about the rules, Zuckerman said "We have three rules, no biting, no eye gouging, and no mercy."⁶⁰ This press conference began a large amount media attention around the event. Dan Barry and other journalists covered the drama extensively in *The New York Times*. From the period of November 14th to the 18th four separate articles appeared in *The New York Times* giving a day by day account of the events leading up to Extreme Fighting. The first of these articles, written by Ira Berkow, was titled "Sports of the Times; Better Than a Stick in the Eye," and explained State Senator Roy Goodman's objective to ban what he called a "organized street brawl in New York State."⁶¹ Berkow mocked the banning of biting when so much else is allowed, although in the end Berkow suggested that politicians should make better use of their time.

The authorities at the Brooklyn Armory argued that they were unaware of what sort of martial art event Extreme Fighting was when they signed a lease for the event and they attempted

⁶⁰ Ibid., 105.

⁶¹ Ira Berkow, "Sports of The Times; Better Than a Stick In the Eye." *The New York Times*, November 14th, 1995.

to cancel the lease.⁶² As canceling the event on such short notice would cost Battlecade millions of dollars, they took the Armory to the State Supreme Court to seek a temporary restraining order to prevent the cancellation of the lease. The temporary restraining order was granted by the court although the state filed an appeal. That appeal would not be heard until after the scheduled date of the event, which meant the event would have to be postponed as well.⁶³ Instead of postponing the event, Zuckerman decided to move it to North Carolina where he would not encounter trouble.⁶⁴

At the end of 1995 the Ultimate Fighting Championship was having difficulty securing venues. When they went back to Colorado to put on an event named *Ultimate Ultimate 1995* they were denied access to the National Western Events Arena. Mayor Wellington Webb accused the private company that managed the arena of breaching their contract by not informing the city that they were hosting such an event. This forced the UFC to use the Mammoth Gardens Arena once again. As opposed to the previous time the Denver Mayor opposed the UFC in his city, this time the UFC garnered a large amount of media attention. In a press conference, Mayor Webb stated “We want to promote a safe city, not a violent city.”⁶⁵ Furthermore, in an episode of NBC’s *Today Show*, Semaphore Entertainment Group (SEG) president Bob Meyrowitz, now owner of the UFC, discussed the UFC and city policy with Mayor Webb. At one point Meyrowitz asked the mayor if he had ever even seen a match in the UFC to which the mayor had

⁶² Dan Barry, “Brooklyn Armory Officials Want to Bar Extreme Fighting Event.” The New York Times, November 15th, 1995.

⁶³ Dan Barry “State Cancels Lease for Extreme Fighting.” The New York Times, November 16th 1995.

⁶⁴ Ibid..

⁶⁵ Christopher Lopez, “Ultimate Fighting' Gets a Denver Boot.” The Christian Science Monitor, Dec. 12th 1995.

to admit that he had not.⁶⁶ Although the mayor failed to keep the UFC out of Denver, he was publicly praised by Senator McCain and Colorado Senator Ben Campbell for his efforts. Several Colorado politicians pledged to offer legislation to ensure the UFC could not return to the state.⁶⁷

Zenith of Political Pressure

1996 and 1997 saw the most controversy in the media and in the public sphere around Mixed Martial Arts. The pressure put on the sport brought SEG to the brink of bankruptcy and forced them to sell the Ultimate Fighting Championship. Although in the long term, SEG selling the promotion to Zuffa LLC was good for MMA, at the time, the problems the sport faced pushed the UFC down into what fans referred to as the “Dark Ages.” With the UFC no longer available on pay-per-view much of the UFC talent went overseas, and the future of the sport in the United States was uncertain.⁶⁸

UFC 8 was scheduled to take place on February 16th 1996 in the Ruben Rodriguez Coliseum in Puerto Rico. UFC 8 is seen by many as the point at which the political campaign against the sport began to have a serious negative impact.⁶⁹ When the UFC scheduled their event in Puerto Rico, there did not appear to be any problems since the athletic commission of Puerto Rico only regulated boxing and wrestling, and not other forms of martial arts.⁷⁰ The week before the event though the Governor of Puerto Rico, Pedro Rosselló, decided to seek an injunction against the event. SEG had the case moved to federal court and it ruled in favor of SEG. Rosselló told reporters that he concurred with Senator McCain that the UFC had “no place in a civilized

⁶⁶ Lopez, “Ultimate Fighting' Gets a Denver Boot.”

⁶⁷ Ibid..

⁶⁸ Gentry, 257.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 202.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 202.

society.”⁷¹ The court ruled that canceling the event would violate SEG’s contracts since there were no laws which prohibited such an event from taking place, thus the event was allowed to proceed.⁷²

At the same time that SEG was pleading its case in a Puerto Rican court, protests against Mixed Martial Arts stateside began to target the sport’s lifeline, pay-per-view revenue. In Greenwich, a Connecticut minister, Rev. Thomas Stiers, led a campaign against the UFC. Stiers was supported by the regional Council of Churches and Synagogues as well as US Senator Joseph Lieberman and Connecticut Attorney General Richard Blumenthal.⁷³ Blumenthal wrote letters to 40 different cable providers asking them not to televise the Ultimate Fighting Championship. Cablevision dropped it just days prior to the event.⁷⁴ They became the first cable provider to remove the UFC from their pay-per-view selection.

In 1997, a second battle erupted in New York over Mixed Martial Arts, involving many of the same players from 1995. Since the high profile rejection of an Extreme Fighting event in New York in 1995, Bob Meyrowitz had quietly hired an influential New York Lobbyist named James D. Featherstonhaugh to pressure the New York State legislature to sanction Mixed Martial Arts.⁷⁵ Governor Pataki and Senator Goodman attempted to pass legislation that would effectively ban MMA from the state. In a letter to SEG Mr. Featherstonhaugh explained that his

⁷¹ Krauss, 126.

⁷² SEMAPHORE ENTERTAINMENT GROUP SPORTS v. GONZALEZ 919 F.Supp. 543 United States District Court, D. Puerto Rico, Feb. 16th,1996.

⁷³ Bill Keveney, “Attorney General Asks Cable Firms Not To Televise Ultimate Fighting.” Courant, February 16, 1996.

⁷⁴ Krauss, 127.

⁷⁵ Dan Barry, “Seasoned Lobbyist Gave No Quarter In Quest to Legitimize Bloody Sport.” New York Times, Feb. 7th 1997.

strategy was to “derail” those efforts to ban MMA.⁷⁶ Mr. Featherstonhaugh’s lobbying was successful and in October of 1996, New York became the first state to officially sanction MMA. Mr. Pataki signed a bill which legalized and allowed for the regulation of the sport by the state athletic commission.⁷⁷ SEG then booked UFC 12 to take place in the Niagara Falls Civic Center in New York on February 7th 1997. The progress SEG had experienced in New York seemed to be a good indicator of things to come, but another Extreme Fighting event ruined this progress.

Because of the success SEG had in New York, Zuckerman decided to once again plan an event for New York, this time right in Manhattan. Zuckerman contacted *New York Times* journalist Dan Barry to generate some publicity. Zuckerman said that once this was done, “the atmosphere started to change in New York.”⁷⁸ All the politicians who were originally opposed, but had switched to a pro-MMA stance, were now made to look ridiculous, and shifted their position back to opposing MMA.⁷⁹ New York City Mayor Rudolph Giuliani stated in January 1997 that he and several other state officials were exploring ways to block the Extreme Fighting event from taking place inside the city and the mayor publicly reiterated that the sport was “disgusting.”⁸⁰

Political pressure caused the New York Athletic Commission to issue 111 pages of regulations for Mixed Martial Arts which fundamentally altered the nature of the sport to the point where it was no longer viable. Among these changes, contestants could no longer kick above the shoulder or below the knee, the cage had to be enlarged from 32 feet to 40 feet and

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ James Dao, “Senate Chief in Albany, Reversing Himself, Says He Backs a Ban on Ultimate Fighting.” *New York Times*, February 11, 1997.

⁷⁸ Krauss, 108.

⁷⁹ Dao, “Senate Chief in Albany, Reversing Himself, Says He Backs a Ban on Ultimate Fighting.”

⁸⁰ Dan Barry, “Giuliani to Try to Prevent 'Extreme Fighting' Match.” *New York Times*, Jan. 16th 1997.

most notably, contestants would be forced to wear headgear.⁸¹ As Bob Meyrowitz pointed out, headgear could actually make the competition more dangerous, "If you grab somebody by the headgear and fling them, then where the head goes the body must follow... You can break somebody's neck."⁸² The day before UFC 12 was scheduled to take place, the fighters and employees of the UFC packed up and secretly moved UFC 12 to Dothan, Alabama. It would be three more years before the UFC held another event in the Northern part of the United States. UFC events were held primarily in the South and occasionally in Brazil and Japan where they were subject to less regulation and political pressure. Subsequently, New York Governor Pataki signed legislation to officially ban the sport in the state, a ban which is still in effect to this day.⁸³

John McCain was appointed chair of the Commerce Committee in 1997, which signaled even worse fortunes for Mixed Martial Arts, as that committee oversaw the cable television industry. At the end of May, it was announced that all major cable providers would no longer offer Ultimate Fighting Championship events on pay-per-view.⁸⁴ Weeks prior, National Cable Television Association President Decker Anstrom urged the cable companies to drop MMA. Anstrom argued that they were not up to the company's standards, even though the company showed professional boxing events and soft-core pornography.⁸⁵ This made UFC 13 the last UFC event to air on cable networks in the 1990s. The potential buying audience was reduced from thirty million to five million homes.⁸⁶

⁸¹ Dan Barry, "Rules Upheld, So a Bout Leaves New York," The New York Times, February 7th 1997.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ James Dao, "Pataki Signs a Bill Barring Ultimate Fighting," The New York Times, February 26th, 1997.

⁸⁴ Rick Henderson, "Ultimate Wimps," Reason, August/September issue, 1997.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ McCarthy, 224.

Not surprisingly the UFC found it difficult to maintain its popularity in the late 1990s. Many of the UFC's most popular fighters left the promotion and went overseas to Japan to obtain more lucrative fight contracts. Beginning in 1999 the UFC, which was nearing bankruptcy, failed to secure home video releases for UFC 23 through UFC 29 and in January 2001 SEG sold the Ultimate Fighting Championship to Zuffa LLC.

Cultural Criticism of Mixed Martial Arts

Although some critics of the sport were solely concerned with the safety of the competitors, the majority the critics were more concerned with the idea that this type of event was considered entertainment. They were concerned about the implications this had for American society. To many the UFC seemed to embody a perceived downward spiral of American culture in which a once moral people had become corrupted and invited comparisons to Rome and the bloodlust of the gladiatorial games. Others saw the UFC as part of the new generation of Americans obsessed with violence and shock value entertainment.

In an episode of *Larry King Live* in 1995, Bob Meyrowitz and Ken Shamrock were brought on to debate John McCain and Marc Ratner, head of the Nevada Athletic Commission, on the merits of the Ultimate Fighting Championship. Larry King opened the show by calling the UFC a “new pop culture phase” and warned his audience that he would be showing them a “frightening new fad that may be coming to your town.”⁸⁷ Later on the show John McCain said that this sort of entertainment “appeals to the lowest common denominator” in society.⁸⁸ These

⁸⁷ Wade Keller, “FLASHBACK 15 YRS AGO: New Ultimate Fighting sport debated on CNN and other media, should it be banned?,” Pro Wrestling Torch, Dec 9, 2010.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

sentiments were repeated time and time again in various media outlets when writing about the controversy surrounding Mixed Martial Arts.

George Will, a Pulitzer Prize winning journalist and conservative political commentator, who in 1986 was described by the *Wall Street Journal* as “perhaps the most powerful journalist in America” was deeply offended by the Ultimate Fighting Championship. In 1995 he wrote several articles attacking the sport.⁸⁹ In the *Washington Post* on November 26th 1995 under the title “Cruelty For Sale” Will began by writing “Here are some sounds of entertainment in a nation entertaining itself into barbarism.”⁹⁰ Will believed that this form of entertainment was an indicator that the nation was in cultural or moral decline. He warned Americans against mixing consumer sovereignty and the glorification of cruelty, and facetiously argued that the next big thing would be Russian roulette competitions on pay-per-view. Ironically, Elliot Gorn, author of *The Manly Art*, an academic who wrote on the evolution of bare-knuckle boxing and its struggle to find legitimacy, also stated his alarm at the selling of violence displayed by this sport. He was quoted in a 1995 Dan Barry article on the UFC that “It's the whole esthetic of violence that's really disturbing,” and “What's striking to me is the connection between television and pay-per-view and profit. This is mayhem for sale.”⁹¹

In a 1998 article for *The Times* entitled “Mortal Combat” Giles Whittell insinuated that all the violence in television and film led America to hunger for the real violence shown in the Ultimate Fighting Championship. He wrote that since the American public had “become numb to

⁸⁹ Thomas D'Evelyn, "Will's Collection of Columns Chronicles his Conservatism," *The Christian Science Monitor*, October 26, 1986.

⁹⁰ George Will, “Cruelty For Sale,” *Washington Post*, November 26th, 1995.

⁹¹ Dan Barry, “NOT SWEET, AND NOT A SCIENCE,” *New York Times*, Nov. 26th 1995.

Hollywood's designer violence, it seems only the real thing can satisfy their rampant bloodlust.⁹² Giles later went on to write “Welcome back to the dark ages,” clearly drawing a link between Mixed Martial Arts and barbarism.⁹³

The Ultimate Fighting Championship was featured in the television Series *Friends* in 1997, at which time it was the 4th highest rated television series in America.⁹⁴ *Friends* highlighted many of the unseemly aspects of the UFC and serves as an excellent example of public perception of the sport. In the episode, the character Pete fights against real life fighter Tank Abbott. Abbott was a brawler who’s aggressive and unsportsmanlike behavior inside and outside the cage created a negative stereotype around all athletes in MMA. The fictional bout highlighted the fact that Tank Abbot was much heavier than his opponent Pete. After the bout, the purported safety risks of MMA were emphasized as Pete was in a full-body cast because of his savage beating at the hands of Tank. Later in the episode, the cast of *Friends* was shown watching another bout of Pete’s on the television. This time Pete is being repeatedly kicked in the groin, an attack which although unsavory, was legal in UFC bouts until 1997 but was rarely utilized.⁹⁵

This episode of *Friends* was significant for several reasons; first it highlighted the popularity of the UFC within mainstream popular culture. *Friends* would not have been able to lampoon something such as the UFC if it was not something nominally recognizable to the television audience. Second, and most significant, it highlighted the UFC’s brutal reputation. It

⁹² Giles Whittell, “Mortal Combat,” *The Times*, April 4th, 1998.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ “The One With The Ultimate Fighting Champion,” http://friends.wikia.com/wiki/The_One_With_The_Ultimate_Fighting_Champion.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

emphasized the fact that the fighters competed in a cage, and that fighter could be seriously injured, and that fighters of vastly different weight sizes fought each other. In addition there were few limits placed on permissible striking areas.⁹⁶ While many of these rules were fixed within a year of this *Friends* episode, it did little to change the public perception of the sport. It was about to enter a long period of mainstream obscurity.

It is apparent that the negative image originally fostered by Mixed Martial Arts brought on a barrage of negative publicity in the media from 1995 to 1997. In a culture where shock sells, the Ultimate Fighting Championship marketed itself as a bloody, ferocious, no rules battle even though it had rules and was not all that lethal. This marketing bore fruit initially but nearly destroyed it. The UFC unintentionally made itself a target for conservative political forces that saw Mixed Martial Arts as an easy target. Politicians could take a moral stand against something they could portray to the public as a deplorable example of excess and violence in society.

⁹⁶ “[Friends-monikas Pete UFC](#),” YouTube video from a performance televised by NBC on May 8th, 1997, posted by “ugaviiforeverman,” Jun 8, 2007, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NMD-TWtY9IQ>.

CHAPTER 2: MUSIC AND VIDEO GAMES

While the Ultimate Fighting Championship was a product that only received hundreds of thousands of purchases with every release, there were other controversial products that were sold by the millions. Gangster rap music and heavy metal as well as violent video games were extremely popular in the 1990s. They received a large amount of criticism. Much of the language employed by politicians and the media in regards to these violence themed forms of entertainment were the same as those used in regards to Mixed Martial Arts. The ways in which opponents attempted to censor them is similar to the methods used against MMA. They often employed indirect censorship such as having various carriers of these items stop selling them or they attempted to cancel concerts. When all of these various instances were combined, it is apparent that there was a moral panic in the 1990s by social conservatives against entertainment that showcased violence.

Video Games

Mortal Kombat is a fighting game published by Midway Games Inc. that was released at arcades in 1992. What set Mortal Kombat aside from other fighting games of the time was that it utilized digitized versions of actual people, as opposed to cartoon-like images. While this improved the graphics of the game noticeably, it also made the violence appear much more realistic. On top of the realistic looking graphics, the game was incredibly violent and utilized a considerable amount of gore and brutality. Below is an example of a “fatality” which is a special

move to kill an opponent at the end of the fight. These in particular constituted much of the controversial gore within the game.



Figure 2: Screenshot of Mortal Kombat.⁹⁷

Mortal Kombat was incredibly well received by gamers, and quickly became one of the most popular arcade games of 1992. It was not until 1993 when Mortal Kombat was released for home entertainment systems such as the Sega Genesis and the Super Nintendo that there was a public outcry against it. Many parents worried that the realistic violence would impact youth's minds and make them more violent people. Parker V. Page, president of San Francisco's Children's Television Resource and Education Center claimed "The higher the levels of realism,

⁹⁷ "[Proteas finally shake the chokers tag](http://www.thebounce.co.za/2012/10/01/proteas-finally-shake-the-chokers-tag/)," last modified October 1st, 2012, <http://www.thebounce.co.za/2012/10/01/proteas-finally-shake-the-chokers-tag/>.

the more likely children will internalize it and imitate it."⁹⁸ This seems like a silly notion with regards to realistic violence in Mortal Kombat since although the game characters look realistic, the violence is very outlandish. The fighters are able to shoot fire balls and can pull an opponent's spinal cord out of their body. Regardless of whether or not the violence actually had an impact on the people that played the game, many were afraid that it would.

Night Trap was another game which was heavily discussed in the media and subject to scrutiny by politicians. It was released originally in 1992 for Sega and later for various other systems in 1993 and 1994. Night Trap is a survival horror interactive movie video game, which meant the game heavily utilized filmed sequences with real actors. The game was a tongue in cheek spoof on horror films, in which the plot was to save young ladies from vampires. Media and political figures misinterpreted the objective of the game as trying to actually kill the young females although in reality the girls only die if the player makes a mistake in the game.

Powerful politicians such as Senator Joseph Lieberman took strong moral stands against violent video games. Lieberman stated at a press conference in December of 1993 in reference to violence in video games that, "We're talking about video games that glorify violence and teach children to enjoy inflicting the most gruesome forms of cruelty imaginable."⁹⁹ That same month Lieberman headed a Senate committee hearing on censoring violence in video games. At this hearing the Senator showed the committee a video clip of Night Trap and Mortal Kombat in

⁹⁸ Lindsey Gruson, "Video Violence: It's Hot! It's Mortal! It's Kombat!: Teen-Agers Eagerly Await Electronic Carnage While Adults Debate Message Being Sent," New York Times, September 16th 1993.

⁹⁹ Betsy Pisik, "Video-game sex, gore spur senator to seek rating labels," The Washington Times, December 2nd 1993.

order to illustrate the gratuitous violence.¹⁰⁰ While the video game industry countered this argument by stating that they would develop a new rating system that would be imposed on their video games. Senator Lieberman was not satisfied by this and stated, “Creating a rating system is in my opinion the very least that the gaming industry can do. It would be far better if the industry simply kept the worst of violence and sex out of their games.”¹⁰¹ Lieberman further accused the video game industry of nurturing violence in an “already too violent society.”¹⁰²

The strong sales of violent video games, especially *Mortal Kombat* which sold four million units in 1993, sparked a moral outrage from some Americans.¹⁰³ In response to this outrage, these games received much more publicity than they would have otherwise. Journalists wrote condemning articles with provocative titles such as “Violence is Violence, it’s NOT Entertainment.”¹⁰⁴ In response to the negative publicity, many retailers decided to remove these video games from their stores. Kay-Bee and Toys R Us stores chose to remove *Night Trap* from their stores in the middle of December 1993.¹⁰⁵

It was retailer’s decision to pull certain controversial titles and federal government efforts to censor the video game industry that forced the industry to self-regulate. Sega was the first company of many to create a rating system for their games, called the Video Game Rating Council. It was comprised of psychologists, sociologists and educators who applied movie style

¹⁰⁰ Pisik, “Video-game sex, gore spur senator to seek rating labels.”

¹⁰¹ “Video Game Violence.” video clip, accessed February 22nd, 2013, CSPAN, <http://www.c-spanvideo.org/program/52848-1>.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Michael Verespej, “Violence Is Violence, It’s NOT Entertainment.” *Industry Week*, February 7th 1994.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

ratings on games such as G, MA-13, and MA-17.¹⁰⁶ Lieberman and other politicians were not satisfied with the wide range of various rating systems employed by different companies. On February 3rd 1994 Lieberman introduced the Video Game Ratings Act of 1994. It aimed to establish a federal commission to create a standardized game rating system across the board. It was understood that if the game industry could develop a system voluntarily the bill would not be passed.¹⁰⁷ Game industry companies decided to create the Entertainment Software Ratings Board (ESRB), which had a more detailed rating system than previous bodies and was applied to the entire industry. This was proposed to Congress on July 29th of 1994 and was approved on September 1st of the same year, effectively killing the proposed Video Game Rating Act of 1994.¹⁰⁸

Even after the ESRB was established, the debate around violent video games continued and throughout the nineties there were other controversial episodes surrounding games. As video game graphics increased in quality, the violence displayed became more realistic. In 1995, Florida State Sen. John Grant of Tampa proposed a bill which would have prevented individuals under the age of eighteen from playing ultra-violent video games. Grant declared that violence in video games was a serious problem in American society.¹⁰⁹ Grant's attempt was met with opposition from various groups, such as Blockbuster and the ACLU.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁶ Amy Harmon, "Video Game Makers Aim to Regulate Content: Violence: A coalition of companies goes on the offensive to create a rating system before one is imposed on them." La Times, December 8th, 1993.

¹⁰⁷ Chris Kohler, "July 29, 1994: Videogame Makers Propose Ratings Board to Congress." Wired, July 29th, 2009.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Linda Kleindienst, "Legislator Aims to Cap Ultraviolent Video Games." Sun Sentinel, February 23, 1995.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

In December of 1996, Senator Lieberman along with fellow colleagues released a list of video games which they recommended parents keep away from their children. Among the games on the list were Doom and Mortal Kombat.¹¹¹ Lieberman stated that violent games fostered a “culture of disrespect” between parents and children.¹¹² In 1997 Senator Lieberman again attacked violent video games in another congressional hearing. This time he focused on a first person shooter computer game called Postal in which the player could go on a shooting spree.¹¹³ Furthermore Lieberman attacked arcades for supposedly allowing young children to play mature rated games.¹¹⁴ Although Lieberman called games like Postal Service “sick stuff,” the game was one of the bestselling titles of the year, just as Mortal Kombat was one of the bestselling games the year it was released.¹¹⁵

Violent Music

The most well publicized campaign against violent entertainment in the late 20th century was directed at the music industry. Music became a massively popular entertainment product in the second half of the 20th century and the reaction to rock ‘n’ roll and rap music became

¹¹¹ Julia Duin, “2 senators blast video arcades for violent games; Urge parents to screen kids’ choices,” The Washington Times, December 6th 1996.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Julia Duin, “2 senators target video games’ focus on violence, sex; Call arcades lenient on children’s use.” The Washington Times, November 26th 1997.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

symbols of clashing cultures.¹¹⁶ Many conservatives attempted to blame the emerging music of the youth culture for the perceived growth of societal problems.¹¹⁷

With the explosion of heavy metal music in the mid-80's and the emergence of overtly sexually explicit pop music, many politicians and parental groups targeted explicit music in the name of protecting children and the rest of society.¹¹⁸ The most successful group to achieve any censorship of music at this time was the Parents' Music Resource Center (PMRC). It was a coalition of politician's wives, the most notable being Tipper Gore, the wife of Vice-President Al Gore. The PMRC released a list of fifteen popular songs they deemed the "Filthy Fifteen." Each song was accompanied with a reason why the song was so objectionable and two of those songs were found objectionable due to violent lyrical content.¹¹⁹ The PMRC pushed for legislation to warn potential listeners about the obscenities in music. This was brought to fruition in 1985 at a congressional hearing on music. The hearing was subject to heavy media attention due to the celebrity of many of the witnesses brought to oppose the censorship such as Dee Snider and Frank Zappa.¹²⁰ Although eloquent defenses of freedom of speech were presented, ultimately the hearing was able to make the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) agree to put parental advisory labels on releases.¹²¹ Although many bands claimed that the labels on their

¹¹⁶ Betty Winfield, "Because of the Children: Decades of Attempted Controls of Rock 'n' Rap Music," in Bleep! Censoring Rock and Rap Music, ed. Betty Winfield and Sandra Davidson et al. (London: Greenwood Press, 1999), 10.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid, 11.

¹¹⁹ "Revisiting the PMRC and their "Filthy Fifteen" List 25 Years Later," last modified September 20th, 2010, <http://www.bryanreesman.com/2010/09/20/revisiting-the-pmrc-and-their-filthy-fifteen-list-25-years-later/>.

¹²⁰ Record Labeling Hearing Before the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation, United States Senate. 99th Cong. September 19th, 1985.

¹²¹ Ibid.

albums boosted their sales as it made their product more edgy, some retailers such as Wal-Mart refused to sell albums with parental advisory labels.¹²²

The late 1980s saw the introduction of a new genre of music that shocked the sensibilities of many cultural conservatives and created a storm of controversy. This genre was Gangsta Rap, which was a subgenre of Hip Hop music that reflected the violence and crime ridden lifestyle of youth in urban environments. The genre exploded in popularity in the late 1980s with the band N.W.A.'s (Niggaz Wit Attitudes) hit album *Straight Outta Compton* which sold over a million records in 1989 and over two million by 1992.¹²³ N.W.A.'s graphic depiction of violent crime and blatant disrespect for authority created serious opposition to the band. Their summer 1989 tour was heavily affected by this opposition. One such incident occurred in Richmond, Virginia when local police and city manager Robert C. Bobb received warnings from the Philadelphia Spectrum about the N.W.A.'s upcoming concert at the Richmond Coliseum.¹²⁴ The Philadelphia Spectrum ended a N.W.A. show half way through the performance on the grounds that the show was running late.¹²⁵ Coliseum officials were pressured by the local authorities about the consequences of having the band play their incendiary lyrics. The officials forced N.W.A.'s tour promoter to forfeit 25,000 dollars if the band performed any songs which "incite or provoke

¹²² "Music Content Policy," <http://www.walmart.com/cp/Music-Content-Policy/547092>.

¹²³ "RIAA Searchable database – Straight Outta Compton," last modified September 30th, 2002, http://www.riaa.com/goldandplatinumdata.php?resultpage=1&table=SEARCH_RESULTS&action=&title=Straight%20Outta%20Compton&artist=N.W.A&format=&debutLP=&category=&sex=&releaseDate=&requestNo=&type=&level=&label=&company=&certificationDate=&awardDescription=&catalogNo=&aSex=&rec_id=&charField=&gold=&platinum=&multiPlat=&level2=&certDate=&album=&id=&after=&before=&startMonth=1&endMonth=1&startYear=1958&endYear=2007&sort=Artist&perPage=25.

¹²⁴ David Mills, "Guns and Poses; Rap Music Violence: Glorifying Gangsterism or Reflecting Reality?" The Washington Times, August 17th 1989.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

violence by the audience.” The officials specifically made note of the language used in the songs “Fuck Tha Police,” “Straight Outta Compton,” and “Gangsta Gangsta.”¹²⁶

In 1989, the Federal Bureau of Investigation sent a letter to Priority Records (a distributor of N.W.A.) signed by Milt Ahlerich, Assistant Director for the Office of Public Affairs for the FBI. The letter let the record label know that the FBI was offended by N.W.A.’s lyrics. The letter insinuated that there was a connection between N.W.A.’s music and the rise in police killings. Ahlerich wrote, “seventy-eight law enforcement officers were feloniously slain in the line of duty in 1988, four more than in 1987. Law enforcement officers dedicate their lives to the protection of our citizens and recordings such as the one from N.W.A. are both discouraging and degrading to these brave, dedicated officers. ... Music plays a significant role in society and I wanted you to be aware of the FBI’s position relative to this song and its message.”¹²⁷ The letter was immediately attacked by the ACLU which saw this action by the FBI as intimidation and accused them of attempting to limit freedom of speech. The ACLU stated: “It’s designed to get Priority to change its practices, policies and distribution for this record, and that’s the kind of censorship by intimidation that the First Amendment doesn’t permit.”¹²⁸

In 1990, Tipper Gore wrote an editorial in *The Washington Post* entitled “Hate, Rape and Rap,” where she directed her attack on the gangsta rapper Ice-T.¹²⁹ Although she focused her comments primarily on Ice-T’s lyrics that she considered sexist and racist, she was also concerned about violence in his lyrics. She warned parents that this music would influence their

¹²⁶ Mills, “Guns and Poses; Rap Music Violence: Glorifying Gangsterism or Reflecting Reality.”

¹²⁷ Richard Harrington, “The FBI as Music Critic: Letter on Rap Record Seen as Intimidation,” *The Washington Post*, October 4th, 1989.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

¹²⁹ Tipper Gore, “Hate, Rape, and Rap,” *The Washington Post*, January 8th, 1990.

children negatively, “If their reality consists of a street ethic that promotes and glorifies violence against women or discrimination against minorities -- not only in everyday life, but in their entertainment -- then ideas of bigotry and violence will flourish.”¹³⁰ Although five years prior, no rap music had been placed on the PMRC’s “Filthy Fifteen” list, it was clear that a new genre of music now drew the attention of concerned parents and that Ice-T became a major point of focus.

Ice-T was a LA-based gangsta rapper who rose to prominence in the rap music scene in the late 1980’s with the albums *Rhyme Pays*, *Power*, and *The Iceberg/Freedom of Speech... Just Watch What You Say!* In 1990, Ice-T founded a band called Body Count which fused his gangsta rap style with heavy metal. In 1992 the band released a self-titled album which featured a song called “Cop Killer.” The lyrics of the song were about an individual who has had enough of police brutality and decides to kill police officers. The song instantly created a firestorm of controversy and law enforcement groups in New York and Texas urged police from across the nation to boycott Time Warner, the company which released the album.¹³¹ Although the government did not attempt to ban his album, President Bush and Vice President Quayle publicly criticized Time Warner for releasing the content and called the music “sick.”¹³² As the public protests and negative publicity grew, various retail stores, such as Trans World Music and Super Club Music, pulled the album off of their shelves. Combined these two businesses operated approximately 1,000 stores in America.¹³³ Even though some stores pulled this record off their shelves, the massive amount of publicity it received from all the controversy pushed sales to over

¹³⁰ Gore, “Hate, Rape, and Rap.”

¹³¹ Associated Press, “Rapper Ice-T Defends Song Against Spreading Boycott,” New York Times, June 19, 1992.

¹³² Mcquillan, Laurence. “President Bush launches attacks singers who suggest the killing of police,” The Herald, June 30, 1992.

¹³³ Associated Press, “Rapper Ice-T Defends Song Against Spreading Boycott.”

half a million.¹³⁴ In July, Ice-T bowed to public pressure and withdrew the song “Cop Killer” from the album *Body Count*. The new version of the album sold almost as many copies as when it had the controversial song.¹³⁵

Throughout 1992 and 1993 the controversy around violent rap music continued to be featured widely in the media. In December of 1993, a human chain of protestors from a D.C. based group called the National Political Congress of Black Women blocked the entrance of a “Nobody Beats The Wiz” electronic store to protest gangsta rap.¹³⁶ In response to this event and previous demonstrations, Senator Carol Moseley Braun requested congressional hearings to be held on the subject of rap music and its explicit lyrics in early 1994.¹³⁷

On February 11th, 1994 the House Subcommittee on Commerce, Consumer Protection, and Competitiveness held the first of several hearings on rap lyrics. The hearing’s official purpose was to investigate the “production, sale, and distribution in interstate commerce of music that is alleged to contain lyrics that are violent, misogynistic, and homophobic.”¹³⁸ The hearings were headed by Rep. Cardiss Collins. At the hearings Collins stated in reference to rap “I don’t want my grandchild to go out and start singing lyrics of violence. I don’t want that to be accepted.”¹³⁹ On February 23rd, another hearing was held, this time under the Senate Juvenile Justice Subcommittee which featured record executives, performers, and various social science

¹³⁴ Sandra Davidson, “Two Perspectives on Ice-T: “Can’t Touch me”: Musical Messages and Incitement Law,” in *Bleep! Censoring Rock and Rap Music*, ed. Betty Winfield and Sandra Davidson et al. (London: Greenwood Press, 1999).

¹³⁵ Deborah Tannen, “He said, She Said: What You Say, How You Say It: It takes Work to Understand,” *San Diego Union-Tribune*, December 27, 1994.

¹³⁶ Catherine Applefeld, “Group Battles Gangsta Rap; Women Barricade D.C. Wiz Store,” *Billboard*, January 8th 1994.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

¹³⁸ Bill Holland, “House Panel To Examine Rap,” *Billboard*, February 19, 1994.

¹³⁹ Holland, “House Panel To Examine Rap.”

experts.¹⁴⁰ The hearing suggested that the music industry rate music in the way the movie industry rated their movies, but also asked the music industry to be more responsible about the music they produced. Senator Lieberman attended these hearings and along with other politicians who cited their concern for a “moral decline in our society.”¹⁴¹ No new legislation or regulations were passed as a result of these hearings.

Although the congressional hearings on rap music did not produce any direct results against the music industry, record labels and musicians were affected. They began to take note of the financial consequences of not having their explicit material played on the radio or sold at major stores. Many artists began releasing alternative versions of their songs and albums which removed offensive content. The rap group Wu-Tang Clan was one of the first of such groups to release a “clean” version of their album, *Enter the Wu-Tang*.¹⁴² An executive of RCA records explained this decision by stating: “In its original form, there was a chance that a lot of people might not get to hear this record. Our goal was to find a way to satisfy the masses without tampering with the integrity of the music.”¹⁴³

Rap music was not the only type of music to receive harsh criticism and protest in the 1990s. Heavy metal also produced some musicians whose violence ridden lyrics and shocking presentation created a significant amount of controversy. The most notable of these musicians was Marilyn Manson. Whose eponymous band Marilyn Manson combined outrageous costumes and dark lyrical imagery. The band shocked and disturbed many parents but gained the adoration

¹⁴⁰ Paul Basken, “Rock Music Before Congress,” UPI, BC cycle, Feb. 23, 1994.

¹⁴¹ Kevin Merida, “Pop Culture Takes Rap As Congress Battles Violence: Lawmakers Cite Concern for ‘Moral Decline’,” The Washington Post, May 10th, 1994.

¹⁴² “Wu Tang Clan Readies ‘Clean’ Version of Album,” Billboard, March 12th, 1994.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

of many young teenagers. In October of 1996, Manson released his second album, *Antichrist Superstar*. The album became a smash hit and sold 132,000 albums in its first week alone and made Marilyn Manson a household name.¹⁴⁴ Within a month, articles were being written in major press publications about how shocking Manson's live shows were and how explicit his lyrics were. Concerned groups boycotted his music.¹⁴⁵ The American Family Association pressed large retailers such as K-Mart and Wal-Mart to not carry *Antichrist Superstar*.¹⁴⁶

In 1996 Marilyn Manson launched the "Dead to the World" tour which held concerts around the world but primarily in the United States. In America the tour encountered numerous protests and show cancellations. In the beginning of April 1997 a concert in Columbia, South Carolina was cancelled after state legislators introduced a joint resolution banning the band from performing on state property.¹⁴⁷ A concert that was scheduled for Richmond, Virginia on May 10th was cancelled after Richmond City Manager Robert C. Bobb deemed the group "not consistent with our community standards."¹⁴⁸ Even when concerts were not cancelled, there were major protests and complaints. At a concert in Jacksonville, Florida the Mayor's office received over 5,000 calls complaining about the concert and in Oklahoma there were picketers marching outside the concert.¹⁴⁹ The main argument of all these protests was that Marilyn Manson was corrupting society.¹⁵⁰ A notable instance occurred in 1997 when Ozzy Osbourne's music festival Ozzfest was almost cancelled at the Giants Stadium in New Jersey because Marilyn Manson was

¹⁴⁴ Andrew Dansby, "Manson Golden at Number One," RollingStone, May 21st, 2003.

¹⁴⁵ Cheryl Wetzstein, "Shock rock band popularity appalls parents, nets boycott; Live sex shows, satanic themes seen by kids, critics say," The Washington Times, October 30th 1996.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Jacqueline Salmon, "Banned Band; Citing Community Standards, Richmond Cancels Rock Group's Concert," The Washington Post, April 16, 1997.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Salmon, "Banned Band; Citing Community Standards, Richmond Cancels Rock Group's Concert."

¹⁵⁰ Neil Strauss, "A Bogus Band To Scare Parents With," The New York Times, May 17, 1997.

on the lineup. The New Jersey Sports and Exposition Authority had cancelled ticket sales for the event. This forced Ozzy Osbourne to sue the state of New Jersey on the grounds that they were violating the first amendment.¹⁵¹ He won the case and the Ozzfest show proceeded.

In November of 1997, another congressional hearing was held, this time by Kansas Senator Sam Brownback in order to criticize violent lyrics in the music industry.¹⁵² Marilyn Manson was the main focus of attention at the hearings. At one point a father from North Dakota spoke to the hearing and claimed that his fifteen year old son committed suicide because of the music of Marilyn Manson.¹⁵³ Senator Brownback said that this music was causing a decline in the morality of society and stated: “There is a feeling that we as a society have grown coarser, meaner and more alienated.”¹⁵⁴

Columbine

An excellent example of politicians and the media attempting to blame a tragedy on violent music and video games in the 1990s was the Columbine High School massacre. On April 20th, 1999 two students, Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris murdered thirteen people at their school, injured twenty-one and then committed suicide. The tragedy shook the nation and sparked many debates over school security, bullying, and gun control. In addition, it increased the moral panic aimed at the violence in video games and music.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² James Kuhnhen, “CLASH OVER POP MUSIC RENEWED AT A HEARING ON VIOLENT LYRICS / SENATORS SAID THERE WAS A LINK TO YOUTH VIOLENCE. A CRITIC AND C. DELORES TUCKER'S HUSBAND WERE AT ODDS.” The Philadelphia Inquirer, November 7, 1997.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

After the tragedy, information surfaced that the two shooters were avid fans of the computer game Doom, a violent first person shooter game.¹⁵⁵ Stories circulated that the pair created levels on Doom that were made to look like their school so they could practice the shooting. Articles in newspapers stated that the students lived a “fantasy life full of hate, fed by guns, computers and rock groups.”¹⁵⁶ It also was reported that the two students were obsessed with Marilyn Manson, and many jumped to make the connection between his violent lyrics and the student’s violent actions.¹⁵⁷ After further investigation it was revealed that the two students were not in fact fans of Marilyn Manson at all.¹⁵⁸ Nevertheless, after so much concern had been raised in the past over Manson’s influence on children, there was quite a backlash against him as many people built a connection between him and this tragedy. Days after the shooting, Denver Mayor Wellington Webb (the same Mayor who had fought against the Ultimate Fighting Championship) forced the cancellation of a Marilyn Manson concert in Denver citing the band’s influence on the Columbine shooters. The Mayor’s spokesmen stated that “This is a band that epitomizes this whole death-culture movement.....The timing (of the concert) is not appropriate.”¹⁵⁹

The Columbine shooting is of particular relevance to this study. It highlights how violent entertainment was seen as being directly involved in the perpetration of real life violence, as media and politicians were eager to accuse video games and music as being influences in the killing spree. Further, as this event took place in 1999, it highlighted the fact that many of the

¹⁵⁵ David Montgomery, “Fantasy World of Lonely Outcasts Obsessed With Hitler and Occult,” The Scotsman, April 22, 1999.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Dave Cullen, “Inside the Columbine High investigation,” Salon, September 23, 1999.

¹⁵⁹ Mark Harden, “City Wants Manson Concert Canceled,” Denver Post, April 22, 1999.

accusations and concerns that were present at the beginning of the decade, were still very much alive at the end. It was in this environment of moral panic about violent entertainment that the Ultimate Fighting Championship attempted to establish itself. Just as the video game and music industry were targets of boycotts and scrutiny, so too was MMA. In order to survive, just as other forms of entertainment did, they had to change and make themselves more acceptable to America.

CHAPTER 3: SPORT EVOLUTION

Although the Zuffa Era of the Ultimate Fighting Championship is commonly regarded as the time in which the sport changed from a no holds barred event to a more regulated sport, this is more myth than reality. When Zuffa came into control of the UFC in 2001, the majority of rule changes had already taken place under the ownership of SEG. As the political pressure on the UFC grew, so too did the UFC's realization that new rules had to be implemented in order to increase the safety of the sport and make it more palatable to mainstream audiences. Furthermore, many significant changes to the sport were implemented before it was the center of a media storm of controversy. These initial changes were not aimed at increasing the safety of the sport, but rather to make the sport more entertaining and fan friendly. What Zuffa did in the 2000s was not physically change the sport of MMA, but change how that sport was perceived. Zuffa was able to rebrand the UFC and reintroduce it into mainstream America.

This chapter will show the evolution of rules within the UFC that culminated in the creation of the *Unified Rules of Mixed Martial Arts* in 2000. It will also show the emergence of the UFC as a successful mainstream sport. The analysis of the UFC's evolution begins with the initial rule changes of 1994 and 1995 which demonstrate changes specifically focused on improving the sport in terms of entertainment value. Then the rule changes of 1996 to 2000 which focused on adding safety measures to the sport and adding a semblance of legitimacy will be examined. Finally, the sanctioning of UFC events by major athletic commissions and the UFC's subsequent success and rebranding of their image under Zuffa ownership will be

analyzed. The changes were paramount in not only the sport's survival, but in making it the most popular combat sport in America.

Early Rule Changes

The first significant change implemented in the UFC gave the referee authority to stop a fight if he felt a competitor was no longer able to defend himself. This rule was important as some fights had gone well past that point. This rule was created by referee "Big" John McCarthy after his first experience as a referee in 1994 at UFC 2. While refereeing a bout in the opening round of the event between Robert Lucarelli and Orlando Wiet, McCarthy could only look on as Lucarelli took a knee to the face, a kick to the face, and two elbows to the head before his corner finally threw in the towel.¹⁶⁰ McCarthy was upset that Lucarelli's corner had not thrown in the towel sooner. He asked them "How much did you have to see?" to which the corner responded, "He told us if we threw in the towel, he was going to kill us."¹⁶¹ McCarthy never wanted something like this to happen again, but at the time he had no ability to stop a fight unless the fighter submitted or his corner threw in the towel. He addressed this situation after the event, when he told Rorion Gracie that he would never referee another event for the UFC if he was not given the ability to stop a fight. After some negotiations McCarthy was allowed to stop fights once a competitor was no longer able to intelligently defend himself and this new rule was put in place for UFC 3.¹⁶²

¹⁶⁰ UFC 2: No Way Out, 90 min., Prod. Semaphore Entertainment Group, 1994, DVD.

¹⁶¹ McCarthy, 160.

¹⁶² *Ibid*, 172-173.

The next significant rule changes affected time limits and the creation of non-tournament bouts, at the time called “superfights.” Although there was the perception that the first UFC event had no time limits, in fact there were unlimited five minute rounds. This was never made apparent during the event though because every match ended before five minutes. After that, it was decided by the management there would be no time limits at all since it was assumed they were not necessary.¹⁶³ This did not create any significant issues until UFC 4 in December of 1994 when Dan Severn and Royce Gracie fought a fifteen minute and forty-nine second fight in the tournament finals. This caused the event to go past the allotted time slot on television. Twelve minutes into the fight most viewers’ screens went black without ever knowing the winner of the bout. Thousands demanded a refund of the pay-per-view fee.¹⁶⁴ This issue was addressed and the UFC implemented time limits that began at UFC 5 in 1995. Quarterfinals and semifinals were given twenty minute time limits and the final bout and the superfight was given thirty minutes.

The creation of the superfight, the first non-tournament bout in the UFC was prompted by the desire of the promoters to put on a rematch between Ken Shamrock and Royce Gracie (Royce submitted Ken in UFC 1). These were the UFC’s two biggest stars and it was expected they would have a rematch within the tournament of UFC 3. This never materialized as the two individuals both withdrew in the middle of the tournament due to injuries. The UFC made sure at UFC 5 that the two would fight again as they created a non-tournament bout called a superfight championship. This bout became the impetus for many further changes in the UFC. What was

¹⁶³ McCarthy, 150.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid, 185.

the most anticipated fight in the history of MMA at the time also ended up being the dullest MMA bout to date, as within thirty seconds Shamrock took Gracie down and the two stayed there for almost the entire duration of the bout.¹⁶⁵ Despite the thirty minute time limit, the fight went on for about thirty-one minutes and then was given a five minute overtime period. Technically there was no rule providing for overtime. As there were no judges for the event, the bout was declared a draw. This bout brought two issues with UFC rules to the forefront. First, if two competitors became entangled in grappling with neither opponent being able to gain the upper hand or effectively do anything from their position, what was to be done? In this instance at UFC 5, nothing technically could be done so the bout turned into an unbearably dull stalemate. This was corrected at UFC 6 in July of 1995 when the referee was given the ability to stand a fight up (making a fight resume in standing position) if there was a “lack of action.”¹⁶⁶ This rule became a fixture of all future UFC bouts. It helped facilitate fight finishes and made the sport a more entertaining spectacle for audiences. The first event it was introduced actually gave Oleg Taktarov the upper hand on an exhausted Tank Abbott who had been winning the fight up until that point. Once the fight was stood up Taktarov was able to bring the fight back down to the ground in a more advantageous position to submit Abbott and win the UFC 6 tournament.¹⁶⁷ The second issue which the Shamrock-Gracie superfight raised was that of judging. Since fights had always eventually finished, there had never been a need to have judges decide who won a bout, but as the Shamrock-Gracie superfight showed, there would be bouts that took the entire time limit without a finish. It took a second draw in the UFC before this issue was finally addressed.

¹⁶⁵ UFC 5: The Return of the Beast, 90 min., Prod. Semaphore Entertainment Group, 1995, DVD.

¹⁶⁶ UFC 6: Clash of the Titans, 90 min., Prod. Semaphore Entertainment Group, 1995, DVD.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

In September of 1995, UFC 7 featured a superfight between Ken Shamrock and UFC 6 tournament winner Oleg Taktarov. Although the bout was a very lopsided affair, with Shamrock beating Taktarov for the entire bout, it was declared a draw due to lack of any judges to declare a winner. These draws forced the UFC to finally rectify this situation and in December 1995 at *Ultimate Ultimate 1995* judges were finally introduced, which prevented a near disaster as all the bouts in the semifinals and the finals went to judge's decisions.¹⁶⁸

Time limits were occasionally altered in the early UFC events. In UFC 6 they officially adopted the five minute overtime that had been used in UFC 5. At the tournament for *Ultimate Ultimate 1995* the quarter finals were given fifteen minutes, semifinals eighteen minutes and the finals twenty-seven minutes. Finally in UFC 8 the time limit was changed to ten minutes for the quarter finals and semifinals and then fifteen minutes for the finals and any super fights.¹⁶⁹ The time limit changes were occasionally adjusted from event to event until five minute rounds were introduced in 1999 at UFC 21.

The majority of these early rule changes appear to have stemmed from a desire to improve the overall product of the Ultimate Fighting Championship. Issues like judging, time limits, fighter stand ups, all improved the entertainment value for the audience. It was not until serious political pressure was exerted on the UFC that significant changes were made to the sport in regards to how the combat in the cage was conducted.

¹⁶⁸ *Ultimate Ultimate 1995*, 90 min., Prod. Semaphore Entertainment Group, 1995, DVD.

¹⁶⁹ *UFC 8: David vs. Goliath*, 90 min., Prod. Semaphore Entertainment Group, 1996, DVD.

Rule Changes Under Political Pressure

UFC 9, which took place in May of 1996, was the first UFC event to be significantly impacted by events outside of the cage. Following the courtroom struggle to put on UFC 8 in Puerto Rico, the next event also suffered from legal trouble. In Michigan there was a legal battle in local courts which lasted until 4:30 P.M. the day of the show over the legality of the event.¹⁷⁰ The judge decided that if there was no closed fist striking and head butting allowed in the event, he would not categorize it as boxing, therefore the state would have no jurisdiction over the event and it could go on. When John McCarthy asked Bob Meyrowitz how the event was supposed to happen without punching Meyrowitz replied “I didn’t say there wasn’t going to be any punching. . . . I just said I’d make it illegal. When they punch, you’re going to tell them, ‘That’s illegal.’ And you’re going to have to fine them eventually. When they have to pay that fine, only God knows.”¹⁷¹ Thus, UFC 9 became the only event in UFC history in which closed fist striking was made illegal. Head butting was also illegal but soon that would be made illegal for all UFC bouts. The bouts were not heavily impacted by the rule changes except for the main event, as it seemed most fighters and the UFC commentators were not even aware of the rule change or completely disregarded it. The only noticeable difference was that the referee shouted “warning” and “illegal” while head butts and punches were being performed.¹⁷² That all changed during the main event. Dan Severn remembers it this way: “The rules said if you violate the rules you would be warned, which is funny because I said how many warnings do I get before you are penalized? And they just said you would be warned. I was looking for a black and white answer

¹⁷⁰ McCarthy, 211.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 212.

¹⁷² UFC 9: Motor City Madness, 90 min., Prod. Semaphore Entertainment Group, 1996, DVD.

of how many times I could do it so I just went out to see the first couple matches and I think there were four or five head butts in a row and I just kept hearing warning warning warning..... Well it wasn't being enforced in the first match but maybe in my match it would be?"¹⁷³ Ken Shamrock was also apprehensive about breaking the new rules but for a different reason. His father ran a home for orphan boys and he did not want to set a bad example by cheating. He told McCarthy, "John, I can't do that. My father has a boy's home, and I can't set that example for those boys. I'm not going to stand there and knowingly punch illegally just because I know I won't have to pay the fine."¹⁷⁴ Thus what unfolded at the superfight between Dan Severn and Ken Shamrock was a bizarre display in which both fighters circled each other for 30 minutes with almost no contact. The bout is considered by many to be the worst fight in the history of the UFC.¹⁷⁵

Although the changes in UFC 9 were only temporary, the next change appeared at UFC 12. The event was surrounded in controversy. It was moved from New York to Alabama to avoid being cancelled due to heavy political pressure from local politicians. This event split the tournament between heavyweights (those over 200 pounds) and lightweights (those under 200 pounds), creating weight classes for the first time in UFC history.¹⁷⁶ Although the weight division was very simple, it was the start of what eventually became a wide variety of weight classes that allowed smaller competitors to have fair fights against people their own size. This ultimately helped improve the image of the UFC as critics often cited the vast size discrepancies

¹⁷³ Dan Severn, Interview by Andrew Doeg. Phone. October 30th 2012.

¹⁷⁴ McCarthy, 212.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid, 213.

¹⁷⁶ UFC 12: Judgment Day, 90 min., Prod. Semaphore Entertainment Group, 1997, DVD.

between some of the competitors. The superfight championship was renamed the heavyweight championship, which some felt made it more respectable.¹⁷⁷

UFC 14 was the first event in which it was mandatory for all competitors to use gloves during their bouts. Aside from the bizarre instance in the first UFC event where Art Jimmerson wore a single boxing glove, the first instance of an individual wearing MMA style gloves (padded grappling gloves) was Melton Bowen at UFC 4. The man who is credited with popularizing the use of gloves was Tank Abbott, who always wore gloves since his first appearance in UFC 6. Many competitors did not use them until it was mandatory. Gloves offered two advantages. First, it helped improve the image of the sport, as the bare knuckled combat aspect had always left the UFC wide open to criticism from politicians and the media who tried to highlight the barbarity of the sport. Second, gloves protected the competitor's hands while striking. The popular perception is that gloves lessen the blow an individual receives from a strike, but it does little to protect the recipient of a strike. The glove is there to protect the hand which is delivering the strike.

UFC 15 on October 17th 1997 introduced a massive change in the sport, as legal attacks were heavily altered, making head butts, elbow strikes to the back of the head and neck, groin strikes, small joint manipulation, kicks to the head of a downed opponent and hair pulling all illegal. As political pressure was mounting the UFC was being seriously affected by this pressure and these changes were part of SEG's maneuvering to attract sanctioning from major athletic

¹⁷⁷ UFC 12.

commissions.¹⁷⁸ With mandatory glove use and new rules in place, UFC 15 was the first event to be sanctioned and regulated by a recognized governmental body, the Mississippi Athletic Commission.¹⁷⁹

The next change to the UFC took place on July 16th 1999 at UFC 21, in which the UFC altered the number of rounds used and introduced the ten-point must system, making the sport much more closely resemble boxing in many respects. These changes were instituted in large part because of the controversial split decision victory of Bas Rutten over Kevin Randleman for the heavyweight championship at UFC 20. Randleman took Rutten down to the ground and kept him there for the entirety of the fight. Rutten worked hard from the bottom to do damage. In the two overtime rounds of the fight Randleman was noticeably exhausted. Most people felt Randleman dominated the fight and was a clear winner, but two of the three judges gave the decision to Rutten. One of the issues in this judging situation was that the judges gave more weight to the end of the fight. Thus the UFC decided to introduce five minute rounds, two rounds for preliminary bouts, three rounds for regular bouts, and five rounds for title bouts. In conjunction with this, the ten-point must system was adopted, where each round would be judged independent of one another, with the winner of a round being given 10 points, and the loser being given 6 to 9 points. Mike Goldberg, a commentator for the UFC, announced the changes live, “Here at the UFC we try to evolve the sport, we go back into the meetings rooms and we try to be better for you the UFC fans every time, and there will be a change tonight due to the Council of the Mixed Martial Arts Commission [this was an organization run by the UFC to get

¹⁷⁸ David Doyle, “[UFC 15: Change of Plans](http://sports.yahoo.com/mma/news?slug=dd-ufcfifteen041509),” Yahoo Sports, April 16, 2009, accessed February 16th 2012, <http://sports.yahoo.com/mma/news?slug=dd-ufcfifteen041509>.

¹⁷⁹ McCarthy, 244.

de facto approval of rule changes they wanted]. We've been looking at it for a long time and we've decided to take the initiative and do it on our own instead of someone asking us to do it.»¹⁸⁰

Emergence of the Unified Rules of Mixed Martial Arts

The use of gloves, uniformly timed rounds, the ten-point must system, and more strict zones of striking all made the sport appear more legitimate. Even with these changes, the UFC found difficulty receiving sanctioning from major athletic commissions. Bob Meyrowitz spoke with Leo Hindery, Time Warner Cable's CEO, about the progress the sport had made. Hindery told Meyrowitz that if he was able to get MMA sanctioned in Nevada, the most prestigious athletic commission in regards to combat sports, then he would put UFC events back on cable platforms.¹⁸¹ Two Nevada State Athletic Commissioners, Lorenzo Fertitta and Glenn Carano were brought to UFC 21 to showcase the improvements made in the sport. It did not go well, as a middleweight bout between Daiju Takase and Jeremy Horn brutally emphasized the size discrepancies still possible. Horn had cut weight to barely make the 200 pound limit. His opponent Takase only weighed 169 pounds. In the fight Horn used his size advantage to dominate Takase and the bout ended with Takase covered in blood. The two Nevada commissioners could not stop talking about it at dinner after the event with Meyrowitz, referee John McCarthy and other UFC employees. It was clear there was still a long way to go before gaining Nevada approval.¹⁸²

¹⁸⁰ UFC 20: Battle for the Gold, 90 min., Prod. Semaphore Entertainment Group, 1999, DVD.

¹⁸¹ McCarthy, 265.

¹⁸² McCarthy, 267.

Although the UFC was suffering from the pay-per-view ban, there was still hope to gain major athletic body sanctioning. The New Jersey State Athletic Control Board (NJSACB) decided to experiment with sanctioning Mixed Martial Arts. The NJSACB was considered one of the leading regulatory bodies for combat sports. On September 30th, 2000, the NJSACB regulated the first Mixed Martial Arts event under a trial basis. It was an International Fighting Championship (IFC) event with six MMA bouts. The athletic commission used these fights to observe the sport before creating a comprehensive set of rules for regulation. The rules that were established, the Unified Rules of Mixed Martial Arts, became the de facto rules of MMA in America and minimal difference, are still utilized today. On November 17th, 2000, UFC 28 was the first UFC event sanctioned by the NJSACB and it employed the new Unified Rules of Mixed Martial Arts. This was the first Northeastern UFC event in years. The rule changes banned knee strikes to the head of a downed opponent and punches to the back of the head and neck. Ring attire was standardized and strict medical supervision was required. Also, new weight classes were added, further dividing the classes into multiple groups. Despite these changes, UFC 28 did not receive home video release and SEG was still nearing bankruptcy.

Zuffa Era

In January 2001, Frank and Lorenzo Fertitta, billionaire brothers and executives of the Nevada based gambling company Station Casinos Inc., bought the Ultimate Fighting Championship for two million dollars from the near bankrupt Semaphore Entertainment Group.¹⁸³ The Fertittas created Zuffa, LLC as the parent entity to control the UFC and installed Dana White, a businessman and a childhood friend of the Fertittas, as president of the UFC.

¹⁸³ "[Lorenzo Fertitta Talks Buying UFC With Fighter's Only Mag](#)". Fighter's Only. March 3, 2009.

Lorenzo Fertitta was one of the Nevada athletic commissioners that in 1999 opposed the sanctioning of MMA. He had since studied Brazilian jiu-jitsu and became a fan of MMA.¹⁸⁴ At the time, Lorenzo's attorneys advised him not to purchase the near dead sports organization, "...I had my attorneys tell me that I was crazy because I wasn't buying anything. I was paying \$2 million and they were saying 'What are you getting?' And I said 'What you don't understand is I'm getting the most valuable thing that I could possibly have, which is those three letters: UFC. That is what's going to make this thing work. Everybody knows that brand, whether they like it or they don't like it, they react to it.'"¹⁸⁵

Zuffa set out to make the UFC the successful brand that it had previously been. A campaign was initiated to convince athletic commissions and potential fans that the UFC was now a legitimate sport. Advertisements now referred to the UFC as "The All New" Ultimate Fighting Championship. The Ulti-man, the generic looking man standing atop the UFC logo since the beginning of the company, was now removed and the logo became "UFC" in bold golden letters.¹⁸⁶ Zuffa sold merchandise such as posters and t-shirts. Lorenzo was shocked to find that SEG was not already selling these: "When I went to a show in New Orleans, I wanted to buy something; I wanted to buy a T-shirt. I couldn't find anything anywhere. I was blown away that there was this unbelievably strong brand, and they weren't taking advantage of all the items that could generate revenue."¹⁸⁷ Furthermore, Zuffa launched a multimillion dollar campaign advertisement in *Playboy*, *Maxim*, *Stuff* and various magazines specifically focused on male

¹⁸⁴ McCarthy, 224.

¹⁸⁵ "Lorenzo Fertitta Talks Buying UFC With Fighter's Only Mag". *Fighter's Only*.

¹⁸⁶ Gentry, 274.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 274.

demographics. They hired actress Carmen Electra as their spokesperson.¹⁸⁸ According to Dana White, the involvement of celebrities such as Carman Electra added considerably to the publicity surrounding the UFC: “If you went to UFC XXX’s press conference, there was nobody there. Now, fast-forward to the UFC XXXIII press conference at ESPN Zone with Carmen Electra. *Entertainment Tonight, Extra*—all the Hollywood press was there.”¹⁸⁹ Din Thomas, a MMA veteran who made his debut at UFC 32 also felt that Carmen Electra, and other celebrities, made a serious input on the sport: “I remember Carmen Electra being involved, and I remember seeing Dennis Rodman, and that’s when I was like wow this thing is getting pretty big, it’s actually changing.”¹⁹⁰

The new UFC held a very different mindset for the promotion of upcoming events. A more aggressive strategy was employed. Lorenzo himself stated: “Every show either needs to be a step up or a parallel step. It gives us the opportunity to show that this is the new UFC.”¹⁹¹ Although UFC 30 was put on only two weeks after Zuffa bought the UFC, the show was considerably different from its predecessor. A much larger budget was utilized to enhance the live experience that included fireworks and laser lights.¹⁹²

Zuffa’s next task was to open up Nevada for Mixed Martial Arts. This was made much easier due to Fertitta’s connection with the Nevada State Athletic Commission. Zuffa opened an office in Las Vegas and began planning upcoming events from this location. Lorenzo Fertitta had the sanctioning of MMA scheduled to be voted on by the athletic commission. To assist in this

¹⁸⁸ Ibid, 275.

¹⁸⁹ Krauss, 225.

¹⁹⁰ Din Thomas, Interview by Andrew Doeg. Phone. November 4th 2012.

¹⁹¹ McCarthy, 276.

¹⁹² Ibid, 287.

process, he flew referee John McCarthy to the Las Vegas to speak with some of the commissioners. It was here that McCarthy realized how much of a difference was made by having the Fertittas pushing the sport. He spoke with Glenn Carano, a commissioner who had previously opposed the sport. Carano told McCarthy, “John, I’m never going to like this sport, and it’s not what I consider a good athletic event, but I am friends with Lorenzo Fertitta. He believes in it, and I will vote for it.”¹⁹³

On July 23rd, 2001, the NSAC voted unanimously to sanction MMA and adopted the *Unified Rules of Mixed Martial Arts*.¹⁹⁴ UFC 33 was aptly named “UFC 33: Victory in Vegas,” as Zuffa successfully convinced cable companies to lift their ban on the sport. This was the first UFC in Vegas as well as being the first UFC event on cable pay-per-view since UFC 13. Although UFC 33 was charging forward with the momentum from Zuffa’s successes, the actual event was an absolute failure. It included three title fights and every one of them was a dull tedious affair that went all five rounds. As had been the case with UFC 4, the pay-per-view time slot ended in the middle of the main event, depriving viewers of knowing the end result. Many customers asked for a refund and the event was a financial disaster.¹⁹⁵ Luckily, the Fertittas had deep pockets and were willing to lose millions of dollars initially because they were confident they could make the brand successful.

This success finally came on November 22nd 2002 with UFC 40. This event had a level of media exposure never before seen in the UFC. The main event, a bout between Tito Ortiz and Ken Shamrock added to the publicity around the UFC. Ortiz became the light heavyweight

¹⁹³ McCarthy, 299.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ McCarthy, 301.

champion at UFC 25 in 2000, and over the next two years he was one of the main attractions in the UFC. Shamrock, one of the original UFC stars, left MMA in 1996 to pursue a career in professional wrestling in the WWF and returned to the UFC to challenge Ortiz. Ken Shamrock's prior fame in the early UFC and his successful professional wrestling career in the WWF made him a very marketable figure. Furthermore, Ken Shamrock and Tito Ortiz had developed a personal animosity towards each other stemming from an incident after UFC 13. This personal "feud" between the fighters was used extensively to hype the fight and it gained mainstream media exposure unlike any previous MMA event. It was discussed on major outlets such as ESPN and Fox Sports.¹⁹⁶ Shamrock and Ortiz also came on the Fox Sports Net show *The Best Damn Sports Show Period* and engaged in live trash talking days before their bout.¹⁹⁷ UFC 40 exceeded all expectations and earned 150,000 pay-per-view buys, almost four times more than the previous UFC show. In addition, over 13,000 people attended the events live and earned the UFC a record breaking \$1,540,000 gate.¹⁹⁸ The massive success of UFC 40 showed Zuffa that the UFC could be a viable product and showed mainstream America that the UFC was back and bigger than ever.

In less than two years and only ten UFC events, Zuffa completely changed the course of the UFC. They were able to gain access to the lucrative Las Vegas fight market, regain their pay-per-view audience, and give the sport mainstream media exposure. The UFC went from being on the edge of extinction to being poised to take over the combat sport world.

¹⁹⁶ David Doyle, "UFC 40: Signs of Life," Yahoo Sports, May 12, 2009, accessed February 17th 2012, <http://sports.yahoo.com/mma/news?slug=dd-ufcforty051209>.

¹⁹⁷ "Ken Shamrock arguin with Tito Ortiz," YouTube video from a performance televised by Fox Sports Net on November 19th, 2002, posted by "Roniartist," July 6th, 2006, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zf1KeilamU0>.

¹⁹⁸ Doyle, David. "UFC 40: Signs of Life."

CONCLUSION

Mixed Martial Arts highlighted a very real question that was being asked in American society. How violent is entertainment allowed to be? In music, it was only lyrics that were violent, fictionally singing about violence as a form of art. In video games, it was all just a game, with no one really getting hurt. But MMA blurred that distinction between violence and entertainment as it involved real people physically hurting one another. Of course the level of violence was basically the same as the socially acceptable sport of boxing, but this was new, the combat seemed foreign and particularly brutal. The UFC's marketing created a plethora of problems for them in the years after the sport's inception. The UFC emphasized the lack of rules and exaggerated the level of danger involved in MMA. This decision was not necessarily a foolish move. In fact, the concept of exaggerating violence in the entertainment world was common practice at the time as shown by violent video games like Mortal Kombat and gangsta rap groups like N.W.A. They sold millions of games and albums by glorifying violence. The key difference was that the UFC's glorification of violence came directly through actual violence in the cage.

Throughout the 1990s, there were segments of society that were deeply disturbed by the rise in obscene content in American entertainment. Cultural conservatives protested the violent entertainment as part of a decline in morality caused by liberalism. Mixed Martial Arts suffered greatly under this environment. It began with court battles and eventually became a battle of survival as pay-per-view platforms refused to carry MMA broadcasts. The sport was pushed to the very brink of collapse. It was there that it began to reformulate itself, and transform into

something different. In the late nineties MMA implemented a series of rule changes that heavily increased the safety, as well as competitiveness of the sport. In the 2000's Zuffa took this newly modified sport and launched the UFC back into the public eye and was able to not only secure what the UFC had lost, but pushed the sport into the mainstream in a way it had never been before. Even though the UFC has been a mainstream sport for over a decade, remnants of their negative image still haunt MMA. In several states, the sport still struggles for legalization every year, with states such as New York and Connecticut opposing this legalization.

The early history of American MMA has been a silent example of the culture wars in the 1990s. The publicity and condemnations that the sport received were similar to that of other violence themed forms of entertainment of the period. They reflect the conservative fears that the nation was descending into barbarism, and American's morals were in a state of decline.

This moral panic was ultimately an overreaction. If someone did not want to watch MMA, they simply would not attend an event, and would not purchase a pay-per-view. Gangsta rap was not truly advocating violence, but instead it was an artistic expression of the poverty stricken urban environments from which those rappers came. Video games were just that, games. None of these forms of entertainment caused an increase in the violence in society and to the contrary, for the past two decades violent crime has been declining.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁹ “United States Crime Rates 1960 – 2011,” <http://www.disastercenter.com/crime/uscrime.htm>.

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