

# The Illusion of Control: Reinvigorating Colonial Desire Through Fantasy Football's Procedural Rhetoric

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## OVERVIEW

This essay examines the online game of fantasy football as a collection of rhetorical procedures, or programmed processes that present a particular ideology through how the game is played.

## THESIS

I argue that the procedures of fantasy football, from the transformation of human action into numeric representation to trading players with other fantasy owners, are processes that bear the marks of its dominant messages: commodification and ownership. This relationship between subject and object operates as a colonial logic, rearticulating an already troubling relationship that the NFL holds with America's plantation past.

## THEORY

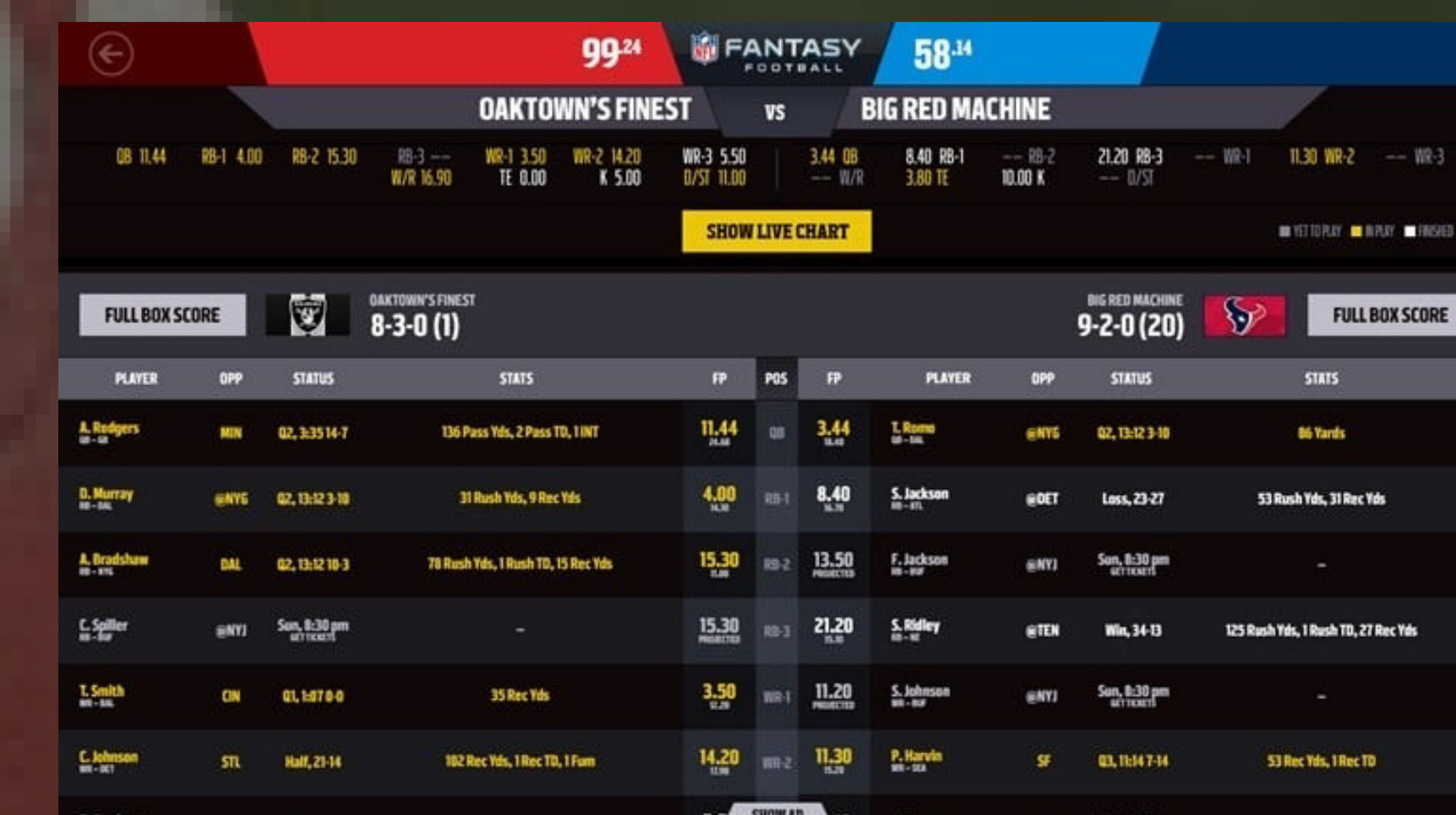
**Neocolonialism:** Legal attempts to outlaw our systematic and violent historic practices have not eradicated our colonial ways of thinking and acting. Instead, this logic has remained masked in our media culture as normalized ways of seeing, speaking, and doing that still other those we aim to empower from the margins (Ono).

**Procedural Rhetoric:** Just as written rhetoric cannot account for the visual, neither can visual rhetorics account for how games uniquely argue through procedures, or the programmed processes of choice (Bogost).

## PROCEDURAL ARGUMENTS

<1> NFL Players are numerical objects through A) the game's process of converting players into statistics and B) the industry's procedure of evaluating and ranking players based on their value as a commodity.

<2> Gamers must think like owners in the marketplace, who are rewarded for rational decisions that value production over character. Likewise, gamers who think like admiring fans are often punished.



The screenshot shows a Fantasy Football game interface. At the top, it displays the score: 99-58. The teams are 'DANKTOWN'S FINEST' and 'BIG RED MACHINE'. Below the score, there are two columns of player statistics, including names, positions, and various performance metrics. The interface is dark-themed with red and blue accents.



## THE ILLUSION OF CONTROL

The reality is that in fantasy football, owners have only a virtual and somewhat passive possession of the production of a given player. Evident in the name "fantasy owner," fantasy football is the mere fantasy of owning a football team. The fantasy owner has no control over what an NFL player will do in any given week. Common logic might suggest that this ontology would mitigate the rhetorical processes of fantasy football. However, it is precisely this procedural illusion that so rigorously remediates and rejuvenates the colonial relationship between subject and object.