

This cap is your cap...

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Introduction

The cap, the illusive everyday 'crown' in America.¹ It hides it plain sight. In this study I will be looking at the 'cap' as a reoccurring phenomenon in American culture. As an object, it moves insidiously through contemporary America- allowing itself to be recycled to serve hosts and their means. For this study I will be examining the red cap in three different spheres that have helped define America in the past century. These spheres are not autonomous and overlap each other.

Sports, politics and television.

The starting point for the evolution of the cap can be traced back to the development of the game of baseball.² The cap began as a badge of identification for your favourite team. A way to belong to something bigger than oneself. The rise of the baseball cap coincided with the rise of America in global prominence after the Second World War³ A country that prided itself for being anti-elitist, democratic and meritocratic. Unlike the 'old world', which for centuries had been constrained with class division and the relationship between an established ruling class and the proletariat.

The cap has no agenda- it is worn by fans of all economic means. The baseball cap forms a part of the uniform worn by the players on the hallowed turf. Through wearing it, the fan gets one step closer to looking like their heroes.

In the game, it serves a practical purpose of shielding a players' eyes from sunlight or used for signals in the game. It was brought into the workplace, the bar, the home by the American people. Through doing so, it secured its position as a part of egalitarian/everyday Americana.

As technology, methods of production and forces of capital have evolved the cap has evolved and redefined itself. Forces from outside the world of

¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/05/magazine/the-common-mans-crown.html?_r=0> [accessed 1 June 2017].

² <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/05/magazine/the-common-mans-crown.html?_r=0> [accessed 1 June 2017].

³ Yanis Varoufakis, *The Global Minotaur*, 2nd edn (England: Zed Books, 2015), p. 56.

team sports have realised and harnessed its potential. The advent of colour television meant that new products being promoted could reach consumers in their own homes. It has progressed from simple team logos to other brands, music, politics, individuals etc

For this study, I will look at how the 'red cap' has straddled our age. How it continues to reinvent itself and what it represents. How it has come to be a manifestation of our TV watching, spectacle gazing, credit chomping, abuse spitting world we live in.



Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4



Figure 5



Figure 6

‘Who is that free-thinking anarchist?’

‘America needs to be lot more like The Waltons and a lot less like The Simpsons’- George Bush Snr ⁴

‘Homer, I don’t use the word ‘hero’ very often...but you, are the greatest hero, in American history’- Lionel Hutz ⁵

The red cap is a recurring motif in The Simpsons universe. Although primarily worn by Bart Simpson it has been worn by Homer Simpson in an episode about him and his friends playing minor-league softball. In the episode ‘Homer at the Bat’, Homer and his friends play for the losing Springfield Nuclear Power Plant Team. At the beginning of the episode, Homer signs up for the power plants softball team. Imploring his friends Lenny and Carl to join. However, they have doubts.⁶ (I’ve included the skepticism expressed by Lenny to Homer- an example of how pessimism at first is rampant and expectations low- setting up the underdog narrative)

Homer remains confident due to his secret weapon. Although not initially revealed to his team mates, he shows Bart his secret- a homemade bat. What follows is an overly romantic retelling by Homer of how he came about the bat. He found the chunk of pine after witnessing it being blown of the tree in his garden when trapped in a storm. Homer takes the wood and carves out of it ‘Wonder-bat’. This sequence is significant in establishing a ‘legend’, a mythic story that supports Homer’s exploits wearing the red cap. **(Fig 1)** The Simpsons’ are commenting on a trend in American sports being imbued with the divine.⁷ Unexplainable miraculous events that lead to a cementing of a legend.

Although not athletic and prior to having Wonder-bat, rubbish at softball- Homer leads the team all the way to the championship game against Shelbyville. In a montage showing Homer hitting home runs against all

⁴ Extract from a speech by President H W Bush in January 1992 to the National Religious Broadcasters- promoting the traditional American family and unfavourably comparing them to The Simpsons.

⁵ Quote by Lionel Hutz speaking to Homer, taken from the episode ‘New Kids on the Block’ The Simpsons 1992

⁶ **“Homer, last season we went 2-28!” “Granted, it wasn’t our greatest season“ “Actually it was!”** *Exchange between Homer and Lenny*

⁷ Robert J.Higgs, *God in the Stadium: Sports and Religion*, 1 st edn (Kentucky: University of Kentucky Press, 1995) p2.

opponents, we witness spectators in awe of their red capped hero. **(Fig 2 and 3)**

Learning of his teams' success and showdown with Shelbyville- Mr. Burns and the unnamed Shelbyville team owner make a million-dollar bet on their respective teams to triumph in the final game. Determined to win, Mr. Burns 'hires' professional baseball players to work 'token jobs' at the plant so they can play for his small-town softball team. Here, Mr. Burns shows to be completely dispassionate to his employees by ignoring their achievements. Illustrating the detachment owners/elites have towards the common man.⁸ (In the footnotes is Mr. Burns' dialogue in the scene he introduces his new employees/professional baseball players to his disgruntled old ones)

Consequently, Homer and his friends lose their places on the team to the professionals. Unfortunately for Homer, new NBA pitcher Roger Clemmons pitches a ball so fast it destroys Homers Wonder-bat. **(Fig 4)**

Homers misery and misfortune is confirmed when most of Mr. Burns' new ringers suffer a series of comically unlikely mishaps. Mr Burns is ultimately forced to play his original team again- apart from Homer who is told to 'hit the pine' as all-star Daryl Strawberry reports in to play.

However, Homer enjoys redemption as Mr. Burns inexplicitly drops Strawberry for the last crucial pitch- much to the incredulity of Strawberry who had 'hit nine home runs today?!' Homer, donning his teams red cap and distracted by Mr. Burns bizarre signal calling, wins the game through getting knocked out through the pitch hitting his head- counting as a hit and therefore winning the game!

The episode examines Americas relationship to sport. But not with the over-exposed professional leagues but with small-town leagues. The episode satirizes the relationship of a few people with access to massive amounts of capital and the many without.⁹ It exposes how vulnerable the

⁸ **“Our new, well err... we'll make up jobs for these fellas later... O by the way fellas there's a sign-up sheet on our bulletin board over there for our plants softball team, just in case you fancy playing...”- Mr Burns**

“But sir! With these guys you won't need us anymore?!”- Lenny

“Well DUH!”- Mr Burns

⁹ Matthew A. Henry, *The Simpsons, Satire And American Culture*, 1st edn (New York: Palsgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 137.

everyday citizen is to the forces of capital, greed and vanity.¹⁰ How even the honest spirit of workplace softball can become overrun/corrupted with money and winning at all costs.¹¹ Homer, the everyday American, lover of beer, doughnuts and TV, overweight and apathetic in his work is a hero. A hero wearing his Power Plant's kit of grey jersey and a red cap. Wielding his 'magic' bat he makes the impossible possible- he becomes exceptional and elevates himself and his team from no-hopers to championship winners. Watched by his fellow Springfield-ians who all don his teams red cap, they witness Homers rise, fall and redemption. The redemption of red cap Homer in this episode reflects a larger part of the American narrative. Comebacks in the field of sport are hailed for the victors display of hard work, perseverance and triumphing over adversity.¹² The theme of the red cap 'comeback' is one I will be revisiting later in this study.

The Simpsons was one of the first and most successful sitcoms to use celebrities in its storylines. The cartoon format allows for a seamless amalgamation between 'real' celebrities and Simpsons original characters.¹³ⁱ The Simpsons integrated these personalities into their episodes through simply portraying them as themselves and having them voiced by the original stars.

In 'Homer at the Bat' we witness a reversal of the relationship between the superstar sportsman and the regular American. Regular fans wear the jerseys and merchandise worn by their sports heroes. Here, the professional sportsmen wear the red caps made famous by Homer. **(Fig 5)**

This can be read of as an inversion of the dynamic between star, product and regular American. The red cap operates as a broker between the two worlds. Usually this relationship is one way- sportsman attains great success and becomes a star while wearing 'red cap', modern capital and mass-production appropriate the 'red cap' and sells them to millions of

¹⁰Matthew A. Henry., *The Simpsons, Satire And American Culture*, 1st edn (New York: Palsgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 22.

¹¹ Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (Ropley, Hampshire: John Hunt Publishing, 2009), p. 25.

¹² <<http://bleacherreport.com/articles/989483-the-10-best-redemption-stories-in-nfl-history>> [accessed 10 June 2017].

¹³ Richard Hamilton, 'For the Finest Art, Try Pop', in *Art in Theory 1900-2000: An anthology of changing ideas*, ed. by Charles Harrison & Paul Wood(Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), p. 742-743

fans. Homer's 'red cap' is different- it's a testament to the under-dog, the comeback, the everyday man. A celebration of the everyday man-snatching victory away from vested interests.¹⁴ **(Fig 6)**

¹⁴ Matthew A. Henry, *The Simpsons, Satire And American Culture*, 1st edn (New York: Palsgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 22.



Figure 7



Figure 8



Figure 9



Figure 10

The devil in blue shorts'

In the opening sequence to the episode 'Barts Friend Falls in Love', Bart (whilst wearing the red cap) steals Homers' change jar. It opens with Bart carefully traversing the perils of his parents bedroom- and through slight dramatic hesitation he takes the jar. **(Fig 7)**

But, he doesn't escape the room without Homer noticing. What follows is Bart hightailing it through the Simpsons household with Homer in hot pursuit. Bart scrambles down the stairs only for Homer to trip over a baseball glove and fall down the stairs behind him- in the process adopting the shape of an Aztec boulder and a half-dressed angry native. **(Fig 8)**

Bart subsequently jumps over his cat, slides between his dogs' legs, avoids a hostile Maggie with a toy gun, jumps onto the kitchen table and catches the spinning ceiling fan for an extreme turn maneuver. Homer presses the button to close the garage door only for Bart to slide under the closing door- momentarily losing his red cap in the process but reaches back and takes back his cap just before the door closes.

The sequence is a parody of the incredulous escape sequences from the Indiana Jones film series, with references to boulder chases, 'poisoned' darts and the losing/regaining of the hat. **(Fig 9)** At the beginning of the scene Bart is seen wearing the cap, an alteration from his usual attire of orange t-shirt and blue shorts. It's only at the end of the sequence when Bart loses the cap and quickly regains it does the cap become activated. The final punch line to an extended comic sequence.

The hat therefore becomes a symbol of Bart defying paternal authority. A symbol of defying the odds with his escape. A symbol of rebellion and breaking from the unparalleled standardization of society.¹⁵ A need for him (and more broadly speaking a child's need) to sporadically break free from established status quo and behave badly.¹⁶ Breaking from an enforced status quo. The reference to the films of Indiana Jones is a key point in raising Bart's character to one of a maverick. **(Fig 10)**

¹⁵ Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (Ropley, Hampshire: John Hunt Publishing, 2009), p. 59.

¹⁶ Steven Keslowitz, *The Simpsons and Society: An Independent Analysis of Our Favourite TV Family and Its Influence on Contemporary Society* (Tucson, Arizona : Hats Off Books, 2005), p. 38.

In the films, Indiana Jones would be pitted in a race with the Nazi's to unearth treasures.

His methods of research and archeology are unorthodox and confrontational. Yet as an audience we enjoy watching him and his acts of transgressions because we have accepted that he is the hero of the story. A rogue that upsets the established order.¹⁷ Indiana Jones' hat has become an icon for the outlier, as had Bart's red cap in this scene.

Neither character is bad, just rebellious. Indiana Jones acts honestly within his given parameters- pushing at what society deems respectable. Bart in this scene, is an example of him experimenting with new ideas and settings new boundaries.¹⁸

¹⁷ Douglas Rushkoff, Bart Simpson: Prince of Irreverence, in *Leaving Springfield: The Simpsons and the Possibility of Oppositional Culture*, ed. by Alberti, John (Detroit, USA: Wayne State University Press, 2004), p. 298

¹⁸ Steven Keslowitz, *The Simpsons and Society: An Independent Analysis of Our Favourite TV Family and Its Influence on Contemporary Society* (Tucson, Arizona : Hats Off Books, 2005), p. 39.



Figure 11

My Lucky Red Cap

In the episode 'Stark Raving Dad', the cap is the trigger that launches a series of events that culminates in Homer being sent to a mental asylum. In a rush to get changed for work Homer discovers Bart had thrown his cap in the white laundry- turning all his white shirts pink. **(Fig 11)**

Upon arrival to the Nuclear Power Plant in a pink shirt, a paranoid Mr Burns speculates that Homer is 'a free-thinking anarchist' because of his pink shirt. He's subsequently questioned and fails a 'test' that checks his mental well-being. Homer is then sent to the 'nut house'. There Homer meets a patient who claims to be Michael Jackson. Upon release from the institution Homers new friend, the 6ft plus, overweight, white, still claiming to be Michael Jackson, comes to live at the Simpsons' household. During this time, Bart has forgotten to celebrate his sister Lisas' birthday after promising he wouldn't. Lisa 'disowns' her brother in response. Seeking redemption, Bart and 'Michael Jackson' write a song together for Lisa. What follows is a tender moment where Bart finally gets in touch with his feelings for his sister. Thereby his and Lisa's relationship is repaired and Bart has redeemed himself. **(Fig 12)**

In the episode, the red cap demarks Bart's personal journey. At first the cap is the cause of his father's shirts turning pink which ultimately leads to Homer being sent to the mental asylum. The red cap represents at first an absence of responsibility or guilt on Bart's side. Bart shows little to no understanding of the effect his actions have had on his family. After Lisa shames her brother for breaking his promise to not forget her birthday. Only then does he start to take responsibility for his actions.

Bart is wearing the red cap during the performance of his song to Lisa. By the end of the episode, the red cap represents Bart's redemption and the reunifying of the Simpsons' family. In the previous example, Bart is celebrated as an Indiana Jones style rogue- the red cap in this example represents a different Bart. He is contrite and affectionate.¹⁹ He has been shunned (therefore punished) by his sister. The red cap, reminds us that he is still the same character (he was wearing it at the beginning of the

¹⁹ Douglas Rushkoff, Bart Simpson: Prince of Irreverence, in *Leaving Springfield: The Simpsons and the Possibility of Oppositional Culture*, ed. by Alberti, John (Detroit, USA: Wayne State University Press, 2004), p. 298

episode) Except now, he has learnt his misbehavior and irresponsibility is not rewarded.²⁰

The red cap operates in two different ways in this episode. When it is found in Homer's white laundry it's an autonomous object. It's not on Bart's head but is instead the trigger point of the overall episode. A seemingly innocuous domestic incident of the dye running from Bart's hat onto Homer's white shirt, escalates into Homer being thrown into the mental asylum. The red cap has caused events without doing its primary function. It is an unspeaking, detached saboteur. It's appearance in this moment is brief and is only quickly acknowledged by Bart- 'Hey! There's my lucky red cap!' Red caps are mass-produced items of clothing that is used in sports and more recently in political campaigning. They are worn by millions of people.

In the Simpsons universe, only one character wears this red cap. Although that would seem to contradict the true nature of a mass-produced object which has no special design or motif- it highlights the lone individualistic position of Bart as a lovable outlier.²¹

²⁰ Steven Keslowitz, *The Simpsons and Society: An Independent Analysis of Our Favourite TV Family and Its Influence on Contemporary Society* (Tucson, Arizona : Hats Off Books, 2005), p. 41.

²¹ Keslowitz, Steven, *The Simpsons and Society: An Independent Analysis of Our Favourite TV Family and Its Influence on Contemporary Society* (Tucson, Arizona : Hats Off Books, 2005), p. 39.



Figure 12



Figure 13

Be Like Mike

The baseball cap is a fashion accessory that has transcended beyond its original usage in the game of baseball. It has overcome divides in gender, class and race and is now worn by anyone in the world. The cap has evolved from being just a functional object. It served a practical purpose in the game of baseball but is now used by everyday Americans in their lives. In the following example, I will look at how the cap has become a symbol for aspiration.

The cap in American sports is usually worn to represent the team you support. As it was worn originally by baseball players during games- fans would wear them to signify their support for a team and to look like their heroes.

For this chapter I will be looking at Michael Jordan. **(Fig 13)** However, not looking at the cap for the team he played for- Chicago Bulls- but his Air Jordan cap. Jordan stands as the ultimate fusion of sporting mastery and commercial maximization.²² The crystallization of the individual sportsman brand.

He is an internationally celebrated figure who has successfully made the transition from a retired sportsman to being the CEO of himself. Jordan's story and success illustrates a new maturation of capital reward.²³ No longer simply 'rags to riches' e.g. born an impoverished Black African-American male to global superstar. His star and his finances rose further after he had retired from the game. He had stopped playing over a decade ago, yet has continued earning more than ever.²⁴

²² S R Johnson, 'The Jordan Effect: The World's Greatest basketball player is also one of its great brands. What is the impact on the economy?', *Fortune*, 22 June 1998, p.124-126, 130-132, 134, 138.

²³ S R Johnson, 'The Jordan Effect: The World's Greatest basketball player is also one of its great brands. What is the impact on the economy?', *Fortune*, 22 June 1998, p.124-126, 130-132, 134, 138.

²⁴ Glenn Stout and Stephanie Peters, *Michael Jordan*, ed. by Christopher, Matt, 2nd edn (New York, USA: Machete Book Group, 2008), p. 143- 150.

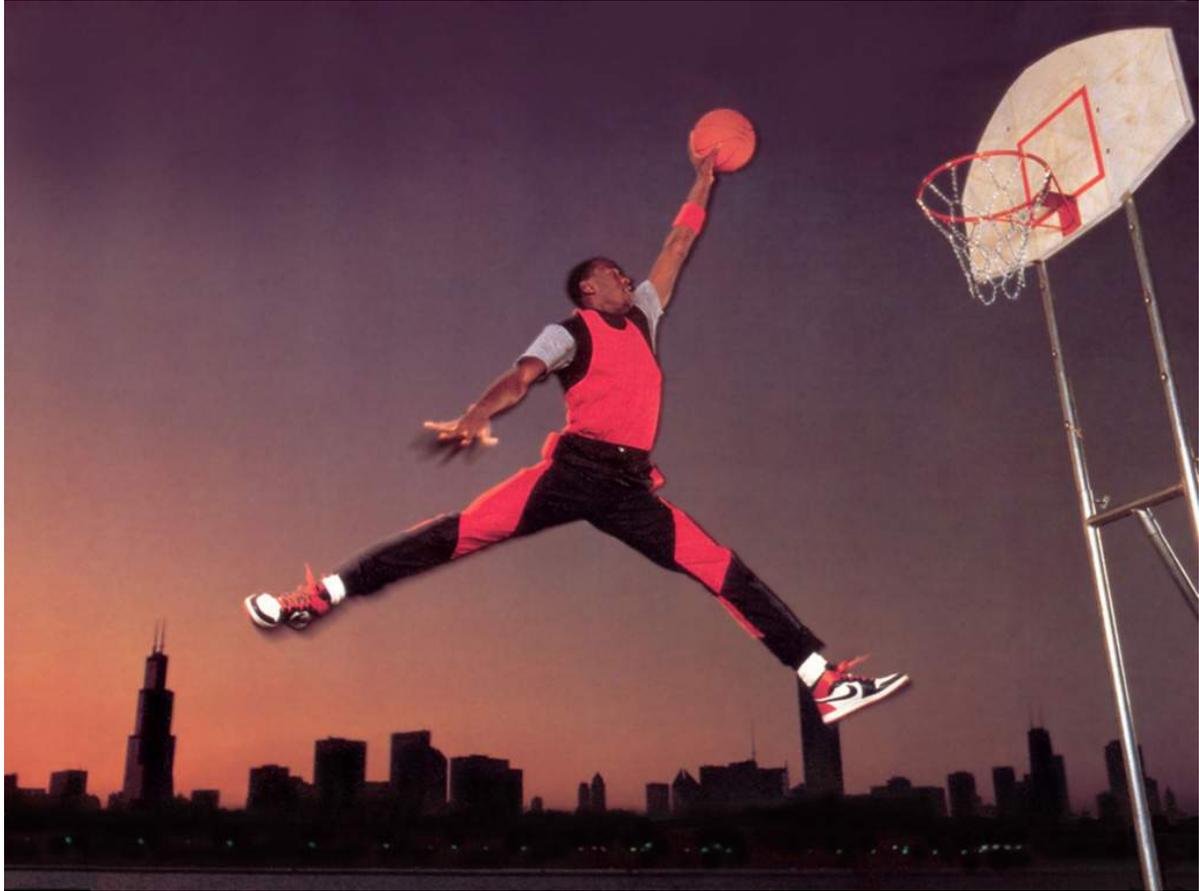


Figure 14



Figure 15

The Jumpman image on the cap came before Jordan had signed for Nike. Instead it came from a photoshoot he did for Life magazine in 1984. A promotional shoot leading up to the 1984 Olympic Games. **(Fig 14)** The photo was staged, with Jordan performing a ballet technique known as a 'grand jeté'. Its aim was to make it appear as if he was leaping for a slam dunk, a movement not actually consistent with Jordan's jumping style. But nonetheless its dynamism led to it being used to promote the brand of Jordan when he signed for Nike. It has become the enduring logo to the most profitable sports star/corporate partnership in the world.²⁵

The Air Jordan red cap **(Fig 15)** with the black figure stands alone as the symbol of the messianic individual sportsman in a team sports game. It forms one part of the wider Jordan brand- one that includes t-shirts, baggy shorts, jackets and shoes.²⁶ The Air Jordan brand successfully brings together this diversity of products. It diffuses a set of meanings and connotations connected to Michael Jordan onto the commodities and into the minds of consumers.²⁷

His celebrity and wealth soared to heights at a time when the internet was expanding and modern forms of promotion had been pioneered²⁸ (cable TV/global coverage etc.) Jordan's brand helped make him the first billionaire in NBA history.²⁹ The Air Jordan merchandise range elevated sports sneakers and caps to new cultural heights and have now become staples of youth fashion all over the world.

The red cap with the Jumpman logo stand as the ultimate fashion representation of sporting achievement and individualism. His "hang-time"

²⁵ Brian Wilson, and Robert Sparks, 'Michael Jordan, Sneaker Commercials and Canadian Youth Cultures', in *Michael Jordan Inc. Corporate Sport, Media Culture and Late Modern America*, ed. by David L. Andrews (New York, USA: State University of New York Press, 2001), p. 217

²⁶ <http://store.nike.com/gb/en_gb/pw/jordan/ofq?ref=https%253A%252F%252Fwww.google.co.uk%252F&ipp=120> [accessed 10 June 2017].

²⁷ Jean Baudrillard, *The System of Objects* (London, UK: Verso, 1996), p. 191.

²⁸ Ben Harrington, David L. Andrews, Steven J. Jackson and Zbigniew Mazur, 'The Global Jordanscape', in *Michael Jordan Inc. Corporate Sport, Media Culture and Late Modern America*, ed. by David L. Andrews (New York, USA: State University of New York Press, 2001), p. 180

²⁹ <<https://www.forbes.com/sites/mikeozanian/2014/06/12/michael-jordan-is-a-billionaire-after-increasing-stake-in-hornets/#302f4efc1443>> [accessed 10 June 2017].

was fabled.³⁰ It renders him extraordinary...and even god-like. The figure on the cap encapsulates a moment that embodies how perfect Jordan is for the era for the consumption of sports entertainment- balletic and explosive. There is only one figure. The body shape however is not reflective or accurate of one in basketball so therefore partially removes itself from the sporting context. The figure leaps out of the game and above everybody else. The cap reflects the 'stylization of the performed self'.³¹ In the game, he had a dazzling array of different shots, fakes, tricks and plays. The figure on the cap is a perfect graphical depiction the performed self.³²

Jordans' career odyssey is one that has a trajectory upwards (his basketball career ended with a storybook finish- winning the championship with his last throw in the last game, with seconds left) Jordan with his exceptional work-ethic and a monomaniacal will to win at all costs.³³ He defied the circumstances he was born into and the people who doubted him along the way.³⁴

'People have no idea with how obsessed Michael Jordan is with winning, not just beating you, but humiliating you'-³⁵

This quote interests me as it could be extrapolated to the realms of Oliver Stones 'Wall Street.' It comments on the virtues of winning at all costs and the glory of hyper-competition which is so celebrated by corporate America.³⁶

³⁰ Douglas Kellner, 'The Sports Spectacle, Michael Jordan, and Nike: Unholy Alliance', in *Michael Jordan Inc. Corporate Sport, Media Culture and Late Modern America*, ed. by David L. Andrews (New York, USA: State University of New York Press, 2001), p. 45

³¹ Michael Eric Dyson, 'Be Like Mike? Michael Jordan and Pedagogy of Desire', in *Michael Jordan Inc. Corporate Sport, Media Culture and Late Modern America*, ed. by David L. Andrews (New York, USA: State University of New York Press, 2001), p. 262

³² Michael Eric Dyson, 'Be Like Mike? Michael Jordan and Pedagogy of Desire', in *Michael Jordan Inc. Corporate Sport, Media Culture and Late Modern America*, ed. by David L. Andrews (New York, USA: State University of New York Press, 2001), p. 262

³³ Glenn Stout and Stephanie Peters, *Michael Jordan*, ed. by Christopher, Matt, 2nd edn (New York, USA: Machete Book Group, 2008), p. 123-142

³⁴ Glenn Stout and Stephanie Peters, *Michael Jordan*, ed. by Christopher, Matt, 2nd edn (New York, USA: Machete Book Group, 2008), p. 5-

³⁵ Michael Wilborn, Washington Post, ESPN. ESPN SportsCentury: Michael Jordan, dir. by Mark Shapiro (ESPN, 2000).

³⁶ Matthew Hancock and Nadhim Zahawi, *Masters of Nothing: Human Nature, Big Finance and the Fight For The Soul of Capitalism* (London, UK: Biteback Publishing, 2013), p. 25.

Jordans' story has been appropriated by corporate America. Jordans' values and beliefs are in line with those of corporate America. They are repackaged and sold to the masses in the forms of advertisements and product lines. The seductive simplicity of this message fitted nicely into the prevailing social/political/economic sentiment of the nineties, one that coincided with an economic boom. This is a crucial facet of the Jordan red cap. It sits happily as a 'spoke on the wheel' of the nineties neo-liberal order. This is in correlation with the rise of 'third-way' politics. There Is No Alternative (TNA) allowed Jordan to position himself as 'apolitical'. Unlike the reputations of Wall Street, economists and politicians- the Jordan red cap survived and continues to thrive. It has successfully navigated the global financial crash 07/08. Why? Because he still presents the fantasy that anyone can make it in the society of competition and status. He embodies values that are held by regular people all around the world- hard work, competitiveness, ambition and success.³⁷

The hat (and the rest of the Air Jordan brand) continued having robust sales globally after the crash because of Jordan's positive global reputation. The absence of text allows the cap to transcend borders, language and culture. As evidenced by its success in Asian markets.³⁸

The commercial success of the product is secure because Jordans' are luxury goods, but ones that aren't exclusive to the wealthiest.³⁹ They operate as a marker for your status in a society and possibly a reflection of your own aspiration to achieve. The brand has successfully transitioned from a sporting brand to a lifestyle one.⁴⁰

A strict sporting brand means the object has a primary functional existence e.g. to assist you in elevating your game to a higher standard. The cap serves no benefit in playing the game of basketball. Baudrillard

³⁷ Kellner, Douglas , 'The Sports Spectacle, Michael Jordan, and Nike: Unholy Alliance', in *Michael Jordan Inc. Corporate Sport, Media Culture and Late Modern America*, ed. by David L. Andrews (New York, USA: State University of New York Press, 2001), p. 48

³⁸ 'In the latest quarter, Nike sales rose 30% in what the company calls "greater China"— including Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macau. The region is quickly becoming a crucial market for the \$100-billion-market-cap company as Western Europe and the U.S. cool off. Jordan Brand sales hit about \$2.2 billion a year worldwide, Nike said recently, and the company expects them to rise to \$4.5 billion by the end of 2020, in big part because Jordans' are becoming a bona fide hit on the other side of the world.'³⁸ <<http://themarketmogul.com/the-economics-of-nikes-air-jordan-brand/>> [accessed 1 June 2017].

³⁹ <<http://themarketmogul.com/the-economics-of-nikes-air-jordan-brand/>> [accessed 1 June 2017].

⁴⁰ <<https://www.forbes.com/sites/kurtbadenhausen/2015/03/11/how-new-billionaire-michael-jordan-earned-100-million-in-2014/#2cf41c20221a>> [accessed 2 June 2017].

describes this relationship between consumer and object as a new freedom of choice.⁴¹

Jordan was the greatest sport spectacle on the planet during the nineties.⁴² In comparison to the previously mentioned example of Bart Simpson and his red cap. Jordan and his red cap is deliberately cast as unthreatening. Debord describes how the spectacle can pacify and depoliticize an electorate.⁴³ Jordan and his cap represent the idea of the physically supreme, but ultimately unthreatening black sports superstar. The cap doesn't offend or scare. In contrast to the then publics' perception of other black sports superstars of the time. Like Mike Tyson or OJ Simpson. Physically supreme but threatening.⁴⁴

Bart Simpson wears his cap when he defies authority and order. Jordans' cap occupies a position that speaks about a different alienated culture.⁴⁵ One, that has lost faith in its political leaders and seeks solace in the spectacle.⁴⁶ One that is apathetic and easily dazzled by the allure of celebrity and commodities. Millions of consumers buy into the prospectus offered by Jordan and his corporate partners. Bart's cap- which has no logo or branding- speaks of a pro-active desire to push and challenge the status-quo.

Compared to other black American sports heroes like Muhammad Ali and Joe Louis- Jordan says nothing and rests solely on his exploits on the court and his clean-cut image off it.

A corporate dream- he is easier to commodify and market than Ali who had a complicated and turbulent relationship to America and its people.

⁴¹ Jean Baudrillard, *The System of Objects* (London, UK: Verso, 1996), p. 141.

⁴² Douglas Kellner, 'The Sports Spectacle, Michael Jordan, and Nike: Unholy Alliance', in *Michael Jordan Inc. Corporate Sport, Media Culture and Late Modern America*, ed. by David L. Andrews (New York, USA: State University of New York Press, 2001), p. 45

⁴³ Guy Debord, 'Writings from the Situationist International', in *Art in Theory 1900-2000: An anthology of changing ideas*, ed. by Charles Harrison & Paul Wood (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), p. 705-707

⁴⁴ Michael Eric Dyson, 'Be Like Mike? Michael Jordan and Pedagogy of Desire', in *Michael Jordan Inc. Corporate Sport, Media Culture and Late Modern America*, ed. by David L. Andrews (New York, USA: State University of New York Press, 2001), p. 261.

⁴⁵ Guy Debord, 'Writings from the Situationist International', in *Art in Theory 1900-2000: An anthology of changing ideas*, ed. by Charles Harrison & Paul Wood (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), p. 705-707

⁴⁶ Guy Debord, 'Writings from the Situationist International', in *Art in Theory 1900-2000: An anthology of changing ideas*, ed. by Charles Harrison & Paul Wood (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), p. 705-707

His product transcends race and class because he transcends race and class.⁴⁷ There's something for everybody.

The role of the cap is to ultimately ensure that Jordan remains 'unthreatening'. However, I would say that it is incorrect given how closely he has been tied up with Nike and big business for most of his career. Also, his known on-court baiting to opponents, petulance to officials and chastising of his team mates.⁴⁸

But, the mass perception has survived and persisted. He is apolitical and a he is a 'role-model.' Jordan offers a product that promises a simple life lesson for the masses- keep your head down (or head up if you're wearing an Air Jordan cap), work hard (to get good at basketball) and you'll succeed...and maybe you'll own your own line of caps.

⁴⁷ Norman K Denizen, 'Representing Michael', in *Michael Jordan Inc. Corporate Sport, Media Culture and Late Modern America*, ed. by David L. Andrews (New York, USA: State University of New York Press, 2001), p. 6

⁴⁸ 'ESPN SportsCentury: Michael Jordan', dir. by Mark Shapiro (ESPN, 2000).



Figure 16

Personal Review of Donald Trump's Red Cap **(Fig 16)**

- Lacking in flair and detail
- Colour is strong and consistent throughout the cap
- Adjustable snapback feature (cheaper models use Velcro)
- Message on the cap is blunt, angry and hopeful
- No direct mention of Donald Trump or the Republican party.
- Recommended to be worn front-facing.
- Recommended to be worn anywhere except- urban centres, university campuses
- Does not provide suitable protection from rain or physical incidents

‘Make America Great Again’

‘A short and striking or memorable phrase used in advertising’⁴⁹
Definition Oxford Dictionary

‘...the slogan is the phrase which comes at the end of the ad and encapsulates the message.’- Nigel Rees.⁵⁰

‘A Scottish Highland War-Cry’.⁵¹

The effectiveness of a slogan lies in its ability at communicating a message which encapsulates a moment. It channels a shared belief/fear/hope like a ‘lightening rod’ and then acts as a transmitter to rest of the populace.

After years of increasing public disenfranchisement and voter apathy⁵², a few slogans have impressed themselves onto contemporary culture and captured the imagination of the electorate.

I will be looking at the effect of the slogan on the red cap. The bringing together of an empty, vacuous piece of political sloganeering onto a physical object that has adorned the heads of millions of Americans.

⁴⁹ *Oxford Dictionaries* <<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/slogan>> [accessed 1 June 2017].

⁵⁰ Nigel Rees, *Slogans* (London, UK: Allen & Unwin, 1982), p. 8.

⁵¹ *Oxford Dictionaries* <<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/slogan>> [accessed 1 June 2017].

⁵² <http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/dan-holliday/public-disenfranchisement_b_4144466.html> [accessed 1 February 2017].

‘But a man at work making something which he feels will exist because he is working at it and wills it, is exercising the energies of his mind and soul as well as his body... Thus worthy work carries with it the hope of pleasure in rest, the hope of pleasure in our using what it makes, and the hope of pleasure in our daily creative skill.’⁵³

‘Make’ as a verb promotes an action, a positive act. It infers labour...hard work. Hard work is associated with honesty.

The subliminal and expanded potential of this word (in hindsight) explains why Trumps message reached beyond the socially and economically displaced. It made its way into the households of Middle America.⁵⁴ ‘Make’ when taken in conjunction with the candidate- a self-proclaimed ‘self-made’ multi-millionaire. He portrays himself as the best example of his own creed.

The slogan challenges the voter to first accept America is not Great now. I will look at this position through the word ‘make’ through the Morris quote made at the beginning of this chapter and to draw comparisons between Morris’ ‘Make’⁵⁵ and my interpretation of the Trump caps’ ‘Make’.

The unifying theme between Morris’ works and Trumps’ cap is an idea of a ‘conservative’ utopia.

Morris believed in a man’s work being integral to his happiness and importance in society.⁵⁶ His work communicates a utopian ideal through a representation of his idealized vision of high craft and beauty. A vision based on Early/Medieval England.

He states that beauty and individual craft shall be principles in a new society.⁵⁷ His prints and other works work as a political ‘visual’ slogan for a new world. But he does this through revisiting and idealizing an old one.

Trumps’ cap is his proposition for a new America. The caps slogan suggests the resurrection of an America from the past. He does this

⁵³ William Morris, 'Useless Work v Useless Toil', *Hammersmith Socialist Society*, 1893, p.3.

⁵⁴ <<https://www.theguardian.com/membership/2016/nov/16/how-trump-took-middletown-muncie-election>> [accessed 1 December 2016].

⁵⁵ William Morris, 'Useless Work v Useless Toil', *Hammersmith Socialist Society*, 1893, p.1.

⁵⁶ William Morris, 'Useless Work v Useless Toil', *Hammersmith Socialist Society*, 1893, p.1.

⁵⁷ William Morris, 'Useless Work v Useless Toil', *Hammersmith Socialist Society*, 1893, p.1.

through a slogan 'Make America Great Again'. It is an explicit statement promoting American exceptionalism. It also teasingly suggests a forgotten 'golden age' of American history. A nostalgic longing for a past, what is unclear though is to whether it even existed. The patriotism of the message gives comfort to a country that has the perception it is failing. Or at least is being told is failing.



Figure 17



TRUMP 2016

MAKE ★ AMERICA ★ GREAT ★ AGAIN

Figure 18

The slogan is a direct lift from Ronald Reagan's 1980 presidential election campaign against Jimmy Carter. **(Fig 17)**

As an object, it seems to straddle spheres of advertising, information and political propaganda. **(Fig 18)** Political propaganda is defined as '...the dissemination of ideas intended to convince people to think and act in a particular way and for a particular persuasive purpose.'⁵⁸

Trump's politics was moulded by two periods in his life which coincided with both Reagan and Clinton in office.

'Product of the optimism of the 80's...'⁵⁹

'It's morning in America, again...'⁶⁰

'...I Believe, that together, we can make America great again...'⁶¹

The first period was the 80's for Trump. It was an era of rapid real estate expansion and growing confidence.

'I'll always remember that day in 1980, standing at the corner of Fifth Avenue and Fifty-seventh Street, watching Trump Tower begin to rise. Even before the construction started, I was selling apartments at a rate that few people had witnessed before. A giddy expectation of the good times to keep rolling was punctuated by the Great 'Real Estate' Depression of 1990.'⁶²

The second period was a series of bankruptcies for his condominiums and casinos in the early nineties. Therefore, in his mind, set the stage for his 'comeback'.

⁵⁸ David, Welch, *Power & Persuasion* (London, UK: British Library, 2013), p. 22

⁵⁹ Nigel Rees, *Slogans* (London, UK: Allen & Unwin, 1982), p. 42

⁶⁰ *Ronald Reagan Presidential Ad* (2016) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EU-IBF8nwSY>> [accessed 1 December 2016]- A lifted quote from a political ad run for Reagan during the 1984 presidential campaign.

⁶¹ *Bill Clinton 'Make America Great Again'* (2017) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iWS-Iszoxd0>> [accessed 16 June 2017].

⁶² Donald Trump and Kate Bohner, *Donald Trump: The Art of the Comeback* (1997) <<http://www.nytimes.com/books/first/t/trump-comeback.html>> [accessed 1 December 2016].

***'There were some dark moments. But I never had any doubt that I'd come back.'*⁶³**

The phenomena of the 'comeback' permeates through American culture. The caps origin in sports, speaks as a 'comeback' for its wearer (rejuvenation of the voter's belief in America, reengagement in politics). American sports is in many ways a distillation of the American Dream.. From 'rags to riches', 'famine to feast, 'to lose to win'. The rapid transformation of ones declining fortunes/apparent outcome is the Dream 'working'. The comeback echoes a religious-like resurrection. Trump has firmly placed himself in the category of the winner and the man who can deliver deals. This can be attributed to his own perception of the world, which has been moulded by the zero-sum game of real estate. The cap embodies the idea of America's comeback and Trumps' to.⁶⁴ (I've included a quote in the footnotes.)

The baseball cap has been used by many politicians on the campaign trail. **(Fig 19)** The cap is the only practical piece of clothing a politician could wear without having to ditch his/her suit. In comparison to previous candidates who have donned a cap on the trail. Trumps' cap works because his cap is a logical extension of his own brand.

⁶³ Donald Trump and Kate Bohner, *Donald Trump: The Art of the Comeback* (1997) <<http://www.nytimes.com/books/first/t/trump-comeback.html>> [accessed 1 December 2016].

⁶⁴ *'My personal debt of \$975 million had been reduced to \$115 million, and I had two years to finish cleaning up. There was no way to deny that things were going really great. Piece by piece, deal by deal, a beautiful picture had begun to emerge.'* - Donald Trump and Kate Bohner, *Donald Trump: The Art of the Comeback* (1997) <<http://www.nytimes.com/books/first/t/trump-comeback.html>> [accessed 1 December 2016].



Figure 19

The simplicity of the message and the cheap look/feel of the overall product are extensions of him. It's also reflective of his work- blunt imposing high rises, (usually with his name emblazoned on the side) blunt imposing caricature of himself in *The Apprentice*.⁶⁵

In the cap we see a new product line for the Trump brand. From the megalomaniac CEO he played on *The Apprentice* to the pseudo-mob casino owner and then onto a proto tyrant/presidential candidate.⁶⁶ The cap is a part of a branding exercise that quickly became too successful for its own good.

Trump's cap is as much for who it is against as who it is for. He has harnessed its potential to be both a unifier and divider of people. A divide and rule approach to politics. (Which has proven to be very effective in the binary 'winner takes all' structure of the electoral college.) A man who is out to get back at the people in a city that never fully accepted him, New York.⁶⁷

The cap fails in New York because its inhabitants are already so familiar of his antics. They have rejected him. Although he hails from Queens his taste, personality and history have seen him shunned by the 'elite' in his own city.⁶⁸ But by his supporters, the cap marks itself as a 'coat of arms', a 21st century battle helmet.

'Make America Great Again' successfully harks back to a reimagined golden age of the nation state. An effective patriotic slogan is one that infers a sense of a country's past achievements. For America, these achievements are relatively recent. The types of propaganda that support the assertion of national identity are wide-ranging. Achievements demonstrating prowess, for example in technology, space exploration or

⁶⁵ Mark Singer, *Trump & Me* (London, UK: Penguin Books, 2016), p. 47.

⁶⁶ Mark Singer, *Trump & Me* (London, UK: Penguin Books, 2016), p. 16.

⁶⁷ <<https://www.lrb.co.uk/v39/n04/sidney-blumenthal/a-short-history-of-the-trump-family>> [accessed 1 March 2017].

⁶⁸ '***The glitzier the gigantic bronze block capitals of his name...the more secure New Yorkers felt in their contempt.***' Sidney Blumenthal, *A Short History of the Trump Family* (2017) <<https://www.lrb.co.uk/v39/n04/sidney-blumenthal/a-short-history-of-the-trump-family>> [accessed 1 March 2017].

on the sporting field can contribute.⁶⁹ This form of nationalism is laced with nostalgia and affirmation of American exceptionalism.⁷⁰

The approach Trump adopted can be described as one of 'charismatic authority'.⁷¹ In that respect, it is a useful tool for politicians who want to appeal to the 'common voter'. But no candidate in American political history has taken complete ownership of the item like Trump has. Trumps cap channels a flagrant nationalism more commonly associated with dictators.⁷² In that case, the step towards a form of nationalistic collectivism (us and them) is a natural progression. Trumps cap is that material manifestation of this approach.

Contemporary nationalism relies on a previous 'golden age' to frame their argument. Things used to be great, now they are not.

***'Not only his own thoughts, but the thoughts of the men of past ages guide his hands; and, as a part of the human race, he creates.'*⁷³**

To wear the cap is to announce your supporting the team of America. Trump understands the appeal of the narrative. For the wearer, it's to identify as an outsider in an increasingly urbanized city-centric world.⁷⁴

The most successful dictatorships have always targeted connecting with disenfranchised lower and middle classes.⁷⁵ Positioning themselves against the intellectuals and liberals, blaming them for the struggles of the common man.⁷⁶ Although one could make a case for a failure of the policy makers to listen and engage with a disenfranchised lower class, history has shown us that nationalism seldom provides the answer when given

⁶⁹ David Welch, *Power & Persuasion* (London, UK: British Library, 2013), p. 27

⁷⁰ Anthony Richmond, 'Ethnic Nationalism and Post Industrialism' in *Nationalism* edited by John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith. (Oxford University Press 1994), p. 289-300.

⁷¹ Welch, David, *Power & Persuasion* (London, UK: British Library, 2013), p. 26.

⁷² Anthony Richmond, 'Ethnic Nationalism and Post Industrialism' in *Nationalism* edited by John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith. (Oxford University Press 1994), p. 289-300.

⁷³ William Morris 'Useless Work v Useless Toil', *Hammersmith Socialist Society*, 1893, p.2.

⁷⁴ Ruchir Sharmar, *The Rise and Fall of Nations: Forces of Change in the Post-Crisis World* (London, UK: W. W. Norton, Incorporated, 2017), p. 106.

⁷⁵ David Welch, *Power & Persuasion* (London, UK: British Library, 2013), p. 27

⁷⁶ Anthony Richmond, 'Ethnic Nationalism and Post Industrialism' in *Nationalism* edited by John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith. (Oxford University Press 1994), p. 289-300.

the opportunity. However, I worry where the hate and bitterness- fostered by Trump- will be directed once Trump fails to deliver on the caps promise.



Figure 20



Figure 21



Figure 22

The cap is an expression of anger, confusion and hope. The cap is a provocative combative shield. The cap protects individuals from having to say anything at all. Instead they can align themselves with the campaign and let Trump and his more vocal supporters voice their concerns. The cap becomes akin to a battle-cry when seen as a mass. Or comically speaking, like a group of children on a school trip. **(Fig 20 and 21)**

‘...our participants ended up making a consensus decision despite the fact that they weren't allowed to talk or gesture to one another.’⁷⁷

To wear this cap is for people outside this city to strike back against people they're convinced have benefitted at their expense. It has also become an object that has legitimized an atmosphere of violence and intimidation.⁷⁸

The colour of the cap, red, should be noted in this context. It can be interpreted to illustrate a variety of things, violence, anger, blood etc

It's worn by supporters during rallies to physically intimidate dissenters. **(Fig 22)** Directed at the behest of Trump. Red in a political sphere is typically read as the colour that represents a revolution. Red is the colour of the Republican party. Red is the colour of blood. The Trump red cap is a visual wedge that cuts between citizens in America. Trump was a man who was disowned by the party establishment and essentially fought it as an independent.⁷⁹

To illustrate a source of this anger led me to research the signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement.⁸⁰ (Details of this research can be

⁷⁷ <http://www.leeds.ac.uk/news/article/397/sheep_in_human_clothing__scientists_reveal_our_flock_mentality.html> [accessed 1 February 2017]. This study was about exploring the effects of large crowds can have on individual behavior. 'Flock Mentality'. What occurs is the negating of an individual's faculty to make critical decisions- deferring that responsibility to a leader or the consensus.

⁷⁸ <<http://time.com/4203094/donald-trump-hecklers/>> [accessed 15 June 2017].

⁷⁹ <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/never-trump-republicans_us_57294b6de4b096e9f08fabe8> [accessed 13 June 2017].

⁸⁰ A million manufacturing jobs were lost in that period. (1994-2000) The effects of NAFTA have occurred for two reasons. First, growing trade deficits with Mexico and Canada have displaced production that supported roughly 660,000 (manufacturing only) and 1.0 million (total) U.S. jobs since the agreement took effect in 1994. The entry of the USA into the WTO in 1995 and with China's entry in 2000 has led to further loss of manufacturing jobs in the American economy. 'Most of the jobs lost or displaced by trade with China between 2001 and 2011 were in manufacturing industries (more than 2.1 million jobs were lost)- Extract taken from report. Robert Scott, *The China Toll* (2012)

found in the footnotes) Trump on the campaign trail frequently said it was ‘screwing’ the American people. He described how it was the ‘worst trade deal ever signed’.⁸¹ (At time of writing President Trump has now begun to renegotiate NAFTA)⁸²

Deals like NAFTA illustrate the waning power of national governments to resist market forces, international competition and the increasingly easier movement of capital, goods and people.

‘The power of the old-nation states is on the wane as they become more dependent upon military, economic, legal and social structures that transcend their territorial boundaries.’⁸³

The national government becomes increasingly useless in protecting the livelihoods of portions of the population. There is now pressure from external international bodies such as IMF and the World Bank, that force national governments to conform to standardized economic measures and creeds.⁸⁴

These developments have gradually eroded the peoples’ trust in their elected government to protect them.

<<http://www.epi.org/publication/bp345-china-growing-trade-deficit-cost/>> [accessed 10 February 2017].

⁸¹ <<http://fortune.com/2016/09/27/presidential-debate-nafta-agreement/>> [accessed 3 March 2017].

⁸² <<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/18/us/politics/nafta-renegotiation-trump.html>> [accessed 15 June 2017].

⁸³ Anthony Richmond, ‘Ethnic Nationalism and Post Industrialism’ in *Nationalism* edited by John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith. (Oxford University Press 1994), p. 290

⁸⁴ ‘Agencies such as the International Monetary Fund and World Bank use powerful economic sanctions to demand conformity to international laws and agreements.’ Richmond, Anthony, ‘Ethnic Nationalism and Post Industrialism’ in *Nationalism* edited by John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith. (Oxford University Press 1994), p. 294.

The cap and its slogan vainly attempts to recreate and represent the 'golden age' (Bretton Woods Agreement)⁸⁵ when America was both the Worlds Banker and Producer.⁸⁶

The cap is an outlier. But unlike Barts' outlier red cap- which was a symbol of youthful rebellion/testing the boundaries.⁸⁷ There is an individualism that Trump deliberately inflicted upon himself.⁸⁸ His cap is an unbranded, unclear but real threat for divisive change. The most successfully pure Political Object/Symbol so far this century. **(Fig 22)**

⁸⁵ *The Bretton Woods Agreement came from the conference of the same name in 1944. With WW2 approaching its final stages- plans were required to establish a new economic order and exchange rate. The result was to put America (creditor) and the dollar linked to all currencies (debtors) and exchanges. The dollar would be pegged to gold. What followed over the next two decades was massive growth- particularly for Germany and Japan in manufacturing- this coincided with America (biggest market) develop into a more consumer led then producer led country. Buttonwood, What was Decided at Bretton Woods Summit (2014) <<http://www.economist.com/blogs/economist-explains/2014/06/economist-explains-20>> [accessed 15 June 2017].*

⁸⁶ Yanis Varoufakis, *The Global Minotaur*, 2nd edn (England: Zed Books, 2015), p. 72.

⁸⁷ Steven Keslowitz, *The Simpsons and Society: An Independent Analysis of Our Favourite TV Family and It's Influence on Contemporary Society* (Tucson, Arizona : Hats Off Books, 2005), p. 38.

⁸⁸ David C. Johnston, *The Making of Donald Trump*, 1st edn (New York: Melville House Publishing, 2016), p. 24.



Figure 23

The Handshake- Life after the red cap?

Since taking office, Trumps has begun exercising the fulfillment of the caps slogan of 'Making America Great Again'.

'An act of shaking a persons hand with ones own as a greeting.'⁸⁹
Definition Oxford Dictionary.

For Trump, the handshake is an opportunity to exert power and dominance.⁹⁰ The opening act to his and America's story to becoming 'Great Again'.

Except, he's not wearing his red cap now.

The cap continues to permeate through American and global culture. Today, it will be worn by millions throughout the world. Worn according to trend, worn for different jobs, worn to feel a place of belonging, worn to not belong.

It is also not worn, it is sat on shelves in retail outlets all over the world. Or was once used and now discarded. Like how Donald Trump has ceased to wear his cap after becoming President. So, as Bart been seldom seen to wear his red cap in The Simpsons now.

The cap, the illusive everyday 'crown' in America.⁹¹

⁸⁹ *Oxford Dictionaries* <<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/slogan>> [accessed 1 June 2017].

⁹⁰ <<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/video/2017/feb/14/donald-trumps-strange-handshake-style-and-how-justin-trudeau-beat-it-video-explainer>> [accessed 18 February 2017].

⁹¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/05/magazine/the-common-mans-crown.html?_r=0> [accessed 1 June 2017].

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