

Rusev! Crush!: American Nationalism, Russian Antagonism, and the WWE

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Why Professional Wrestling?

- According to Nielsen, *WWE Monday Night Raw* is watched by over 3 million people every week.
- The WWE Facebook page is followed by over 30 million people, more than both the NFL and NBA pages.
- Yet, scholarship is not representative of professional wrestling's popularity.

Methodology: Ideological Criticism

- Heavily influenced by Jacques Derrida's work with poststructuralist theory.
- Structuralists rely on a central point to "orient, balance, and organize the structure" (Derrida, 1967, p. 352).
- Thus, poststructuralism is to question that central point and examine the central tenets that the piece takes for granted.
- Ideological criticism is to deconstruct the belief structures that the chosen artifact accepts as true. This approach was utilized by Philip C. Wander in communication studies.

Notable Events

- **Case Study 1:** Rusev's Debut, WWE Royal Rumble 2014
- **Case Study 2:** Big Show and the Russian flag, WWE Raw September 29, 2014
- **Case Study 3:** Jack Swagger's attack, WWE Raw June 30, 2014
- **Case Study 4:** John Cena's retributive violence, WWE Raw March 9, 2015



Research Findings

- **Case Study 1:** Regardless of moral alignment, wrestlers banded together to throw out Rusev, the foreigner.
- **Case Study 2:** American wrestling fans were expected to cheer The Big Show when he desecrated Rusev's Russian flag.
- **Case Study 3:** WWE encouraged fans to cheer Jack Swagger, a racist, xenophobic character, because he was fighting Rusev, the Russian.
- **Case Study 4:** John Cena, the classic good guy, engaged in unnecessary retributive violence to get a rematch against Rusev, who won his match fairly.
- **Results:** Foreign characters are still expected to be jeered based on their nationality, even if they have all the characteristics of a classic hero. American characters that oppose them become one-dimensional and xenophobic, as a result of WWE's jingoism.

Implications

- In a globalized media landscape, portraying Americans as xenophobic heroes and valiant foreign fighters as villains creates a poor image of Americans abroad.
- WWE attempts inclusivity by portraying foreign characters as strong and courageous, but their outdated idea of the foreigner as a villain creates moral quandries and does a disservice to their American characters.

Key Research

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- Derrida, J. (1967). *Writing and difference*. London, U.K.: Routledge Classics.
- Wander, P.C. (1971). The John Birch Society and Martin Luther King symbols in the radical right. *Western Speech*, 35, 4-14.