

The Pilgrims Come to America: A Failed Mission of British Cultural Imperialism

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"I have no desire to attack your American institutions," said the Englishman, Sir Ernest Cochrane, about Association football (soccer), "but to simply point out the advantages of 'socker' football over the game played here. It once properly introduced cannot but gain a stronghold on the American public, and I feel satisfied that the day is not far off when the sport will become as popular in this country as in England."

During September and October 1905, the Pilgrims, a British amateur soccer team, made a historic visit to Canada and the United States. Within 45 days, the Pilgrims invaded a dozen North American cities and played 17 games against local club and college teams, winning 14, losing 2, and drawing 1, outscoring their opponents by 80 goals, 96 to 16.

The Pilgrims aimed to demonstrate the superiority and the advantages of soccer to the American public. They particularly wanted to introduce soccer to the leading colleges, beginning a boom for the sport to eventually replace American form of college football. To its British promoters, soccer was a superior game. It depended on scientific manipulation of the ball rather than the sheer weight and strength required in the American college game.

The chaos in American college football in the early 1900s provided the British with an opportunity for one form of cultural imperialism. The visit of the Pilgrims came at a time when there was great public concern about both the brutality and ethics of American football. President Theodore Roosevelt, under public pressure, openly criticized the unethical conduct of the college game, and a White House conference was called in order to determine its future. With the college game under vicious attack, the time was propitious for the Pilgrims to popularize soccer. Some even speculated that soccer would eventually drive American football into the background.

The exporting of sporting events as a cultural adventure was nothing new to the British, nor to the Americans. In the second half of the nineteenth century, British cultural imperialists three times sent their best cricket teams to Canada and the United States expecting that their "superior" gentlemen's game would replace baseball, the Americanized English game of rounders. By the same token, American cultural imperialists twice attempted to export baseball to England and around the world, to extend their presence through introducing the world to the superiority of American culture.

The Pilgrims' tour of North America was another attempt of British cultural imperialists to convince the American people to submit to the superiority of British culture. This essay explores the imperialistic nature of the Pilgrims visits to Canada and the United States. It focuses on the failure of the Pilgrims missionary tour to extend British cultural imperialism.

The major sources for this research come from newspaper reports published in the United States, Canada, and Great Britain, (e.g., *New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Montreal Star*, and London's *Times* and *Daily News*). The theory of cultural imperialism applied in analysing the event is based on the works of the following scholars: C.L.R. James, Brian Stoddart, J.A. Mangan, Allen Guttman, Tony Mason, Richard Holt, Ronald Hyam, Joseph Maguire, Richard Cashman, David Q. Voigt, Peter Levine, Katherine Moore, G.M. Hibbins, and Harold Perkin.