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## BOOK REVIEWS

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*Sociology of Sport Journal*, 2007, 24, 492-505  
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### ***Boxing, Masculinity and Identity: The "I" of the Tiger.***

By Kath Woodward. Published in 2007 by Routledge, London. (177 pp., \$44.95 US, paper, \$135 US, cloth).

*Reviewed by Benita Heiskanen, Assistant Professor of History and American Studies, Center for American Studies, University of Southern Denmark, Campusvej 55, 5230 Odense M, Denmark.*

*Boxing, Masculinity and Identity: The 'I' of the Tiger* is an interdisciplinary interrogation into identity formations within professional boxing. With a focus on masculinity, Woodward explores gender identities in boxing as constructions of personal and public narratives, intersections of fantasy and reality, configured and represented at various everyday and discursive scales. Borrowing a set of analytical tools from, among others, Bob Connell (*hegemonic masculinity*), Maurice Merleau-Ponty (*embodiment*), Pierre Bourdieu (*habitus*), Michel Foucault (*biopolitics*), and Judith Butler (*performativity*), she seeks to establish a bridge between sporting practices, story-telling traditions, cinematic representations, and theory as constituents of different aspects of identities and identification. A specific thread running through the book is a methodological problematization of fieldwork within boxing from the perspective of gender: the situatedness of the fe/male researcher within her/his field, self-reflexivity about one's insider/outsider positioning, and the ramifications such locations have within a larger knowledge-production process. The interdisciplinary starting point, the intersection between the everyday and academia, and the methodological discussion must be saluted as welcome additions to the existing boxing scholarship, much of which is still deeply rooted in disciplinary territorialism. Unfortunately, however, it is one thing to talk the talk, quite another to walk the walk, and Woodward fails to deliver her promises.

A conspicuous flaw that the work has is its discrepancy between the theory and practice: one does not explain but refutes the other. The book deploys a massive conceptual apparatus to define gender identities as fluid constructions only to argue that this has little relevance to male boxers' identity formations. For "boxing," Woodward claims, "is still something of an anomaly in a world of transforming gender relations and the emergence of greater social inclusion and equality in social relations" (p. 2). "Boxing masculinities," she goes on,

carry many of the features of traditional, hegemonic masculinity. It is a sport characterized by corporeal contact, courage, danger and in some cases violence, which might seem out of place in the contemporary world of change and fragmentation and the emergence of more ambiguous, less traditional, gendered identities in boxing. (p. 2)

This statement is supported with Joyce Carol Oates's 1987 (by now) classic *On Boxing*, according to which "boxing is for men and is about men, and is men" (p. 3),

John Sugden's 1996 *Boxing and Society*, in which he claims not to have encountered any women boxers during his fieldwork, and Woodward's own interviews conducted at an all-male gym in Sheffield, U.K. That Oates's work was published 20 years ago; that Sugden conducted his fieldwork over a decade ago; and that Woodward draws conclusions based on one single sporting location brings us to the book's other major flaw: its lack of context.

The appropriation of the notions of "hegemonic" and "traditional" (also referred to as "routine," "pre-emptive" or "collusive") masculinity prompts a series of questions: Boxing where? Boxing when? Boxing how? Which boxers? The book discusses "boxing masculinities" in the UK, US, and Australia without ever drawing attention to their respective cultural contexts or sporting trajectories. In the US, where women's boxing has come into being in a major way during the past decade, an increasing number of gyms are turning coed, a change that impacts not only the social space of the gym but its practitioners as well. Equally important, one wonders whether the hegemonic/traditional masculinity is always the same regardless of any shifting spatial dynamics within which the athletes operate: when one is at the gym, at press conferences, at the competition venue, or during business negotiations. Or might boxers sometimes experience ambiguity as regards such a coherent sense of self? We never find out, for Woodward neither puts the question to her interviewees (whose voices are covered by eight quotations) nor analyzes how the hegemonic masculinities are understood, performed, or represented in various sporting locations or on the silver screen.

Finally, the research is limited in its sources. A significant chunk of the discussion is spent taking issue with Loïc Wacquant's ethnographic research with journeymen boxers in Chicago. Associating Wacquant as complicit with the male boxers' hegemonic project, Woodward contends that making sense of the pugilistic culture does not necessitate taking up the sport; that there are alternative methodological possibilities (i.e., interviews) for a woman researcher to do so. But while making references to women's boxing history, celebrity female fighters (Laila Ali and Ann Wolfe), and the film *Million Dollar Baby*, Woodward seems oblivious to the body of literature and films (see for example, Katya Bankowski, Rene Denfeld, Leah Hager Cohen, Allan Moyle, Charles Mutton, Lynn Snowden Picket, and Carlo Rotella) not only on women's boxing but also by women boxers and writers. Dialogue with this existing work might have provided the author with reference points into the important issues she raises about researchers' situatedness, methodological choices, and work ethics within the idiosyncratic world of professional boxing. As things stand right now, *Boxing, Masculinity and Identity* falls into a trap of its own making—that is, "the desire to belong and to stabilize identity" (p. 3)—while *The "I" of the Tiger* gets lost along the way.

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### ***Culture, Politics, and Spectacle in the Olympics and the Football World Cup***

Edited by Alan Tomlinson and Christopher Young. Published in 2006 by State University of New York Press, Albany. (245 pp., \$65.00 US, cloth; \$21.95 US, paper).

*Reviewed by C. Richard King, Department of Comparative Ethnic Studies, Washington State University, P.O. Box 4010, Pullman, WA.*

Undoubtedly, some sport scholars wonder why the fuss about the Olympics and other mega-sporting events, believing them to be false and hollow rituals, the opiate of the masses, and/or sadly distorted by commercial and political interests. *National Identity and Global Sports Events* offers ample evidence for the importance of engaging mega-sporting events through a series of theoretically sophisticated reassessments of their cultural, political, and historical significance. Through a smartly conceived and tightly organized collection of essays, Tomlinson and Young, along with their contributors, present fresh discussions anchored around individual case studies, ranging from the Olympics staged in Berlin (1936) and Sydney (2000) to Football World Cups held in England (1966) and Argentina (1978). Throughout, the contributors provide thoughtful accounts, written almost universally in clear prose, of the articulations of cultural, national, and international politics, as well as their implications for the expression of identity, community, and history.

Thirteen chapters comprise *National Identity and Global Sports Events*, arranged in a chronological fashion. The collection opens with two solid thematic essays. In their introductory essay, Tomlinson and Young offer readers a good overview of the study and significance of mega-sporting events, highlighting the connections to modernity, nationalism, and globalization. Blending theory, autobiography, and ethnography, John MacAloon revisits, in a very productive way, his earlier work on mega-sport events, reminding scholars of the importance of grounded inquiry. Against this background, the subsequent 11 chapters each take up one mega-sporting event. Each of these case studies will repay readers. Those essays that return to familiar mega-events—like Allen Guttman's rereading of the 1936 Berlin Olympics, Tomlinson's unpacking of the commercialization of America at the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics, and David Rowe and Deborah Stevenson's

reconsideration of the 2000 Sydney Olympics—do so with fresh perspectives that allow for novel questions. More exciting still are the studies of lesser known events. Of particular note among these are Robert S.C. Gordon and John London's account of the use of football by the Italian fascist state in 1934, Claire and Keith Brewster's history of the 1968 Mexico City Olympics, and Eduardo P. Archetti's effort to come to terms with the 1978 Argentinian World Cup, held in the shadow of state-sponsored torture and terror. The Brewsters and Archetti both take up contexts and issues little discussed in the scholarship on mega-sporting events that have tended (like the events themselves) to be overwhelmingly Eurocentric. Consequently, they provide sharp insights into the dynamic tensions between national ideologies and aspirations on the global stage, as well as the ways sport and civil society work to create local and international fantasies of normalcy and peace in the face of chaos, conflict, and inequality.

If *National Identity and Global Sports Events* has a weakness, it lies in its failure to seize upon the comparative space at the core of the volume. Indeed, lacking from this wonderful collection is an effort to offer a synthetic analysis that would bring together the key findings of the individual cases studies and point toward future pathways for research.

*National Identity and Global Sports Events* is an important book that deserves a broad audience. To be sure, it will quickly become required reading for anyone concerned with the Olympics or other mega-sporting events. And its attention to the World Cup should attract a large number of scholars interested in football. Others in sport studies ignore this book at their peril, precisely because it takes up a set of key questions (nation, globalization, spectacle) in smart and accessible ways and, as such, offers tools and models certain to be of use far beyond its horizons. Although an excellent selection for libraries, it is difficult to see *National Identity and Global Sports Events* gaining a lay readership or finding extensive use in the classroom, save for graduate offerings in sport sociology.

### ***Baseball and the Media: How Fans Lose in Today's Coverage of the Game***

By George Castle. Published in 2006 by University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln (262 pp., \$24.95 US).

### ***Baseball without Borders: The International Pastime***

By George Gmelch (Ed.). Published in 2006 by University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln (326 pp., \$19.95 US).

*Reviewed by Randy LaGrange, Department of Sociology and Criminal Justice, University of North Carolina Wilmington, Wilmington, NC.*

Two releases from the University of Nebraska Press will give baseball fans something to cheer about all season long. Strikingly different in format, style, and intent, each book offers unique insight into America's national pastime. In *Baseball and the Media*, George Castle, a veteran sportswriter who covers Chicago's

two major league ball clubs, chronicles the decline in baseball reporting over the past three decades. Castle argues that meaningful newspaper coverage is being replaced by pooled wire-service reports, the internet, and the unrelenting spew of sports-talk radio. In the second book George Gmelch, an anthropologist and baseball enthusiast, has assembled a collection of essays under the title *Baseball Without Borders*. The essays are written by scholars in diverse fields who share their expertise on the game of baseball outside the United States. Without intending to, these two University of Nebraska books complement each other very well. Castle's focused study of baseball-media relations in America and Gmelch's more macro comparative work on international baseball both add to the expansive scholarly literature on baseball.

Castle's subtitle, "*How Fans Lose in Today's Coverage of the Game*," aptly conveys the general theme of the book. As a veteran Chicago sportswriter, Castle has covered the Cubs and White Sox for decades. He has witnessed first-hand how media coverage of the game has changed, often not for the better. In the not-too-distant past, baseball writers working for newspapers in the same city that hosted a professional ball club were often an extension of the team. Writers would travel with the team and stay in the same hotels. They would eat with the team, play cards, share stories, and, in general, spend time hanging around the clubhouse. This proximity to the players and coaches gave writers access to aspects of the game few modern-day baseball writers enjoy. According to Castle, few writers are either willing or able to put in the time necessary to develop the types of relationships that old-guard writers had with players. Of course time has a way of changing institutions. Today newspapers find it more cost-effective to use pooled wire-service reports than to place a beat writer at the ballpark. Professional baseball is especially costly to cover. The regular season has 162 games with half on the road. Airline tickets (writers seldom travel with their teams anymore or receive other perks), hotels, car rentals, and meals require a substantial financial commitment from the sports division. Castle notes one consequence of pulling back on professional baseball coverage—increased coverage of local high school and college sports, especially in areas that don't host a professional team. Local games are far less expensive to cover and easier on the sportswriters, who are able to sleep in their own beds at night. Local coverage also appeases readers who closely identify with local teams. As Castle jokes, for every high school kid's name that appears in the print, you can be sure the kid's mom is subscribing to the paper.

What bothers Castle most about the tense and clearly more distant relationship today between professional baseball players and the media is that the fans lose out. Watered-down, pooled reports do not provide die-hard fans the level of analysis they want or deserve. Castle devotes an entire chapter to sports-talk radio. In the air-wave battle for ratings, in which opinions frequently trump facts, charismatic media jocks entertain more than analyze or enlighten. Castle acknowledges that there is a place for sports-talk radio (and the expansive internet coverage), but in his eyes it is a question of proper balance. Castle worries about the inevitable decline of a once time-honored profession—the traditional baseball reporter and his or her personal byline.

Castle takes a realistic, sometimes harsh look at the changing dynamics between baseball's elite (players, coaches, managers, and owners) and the media. The Chicago baseball scene is his stomping ground. Castle draws from his experience in the

midwestern heartland to document his case. Castle tackles his project head-on. He names names and “tells it like it is.” However, in revealing some of the inner workings of the game, his intent is not to diminish the players or coaches, whom Castle clearly respects, but to illuminate the changing dynamics of the baseball–media contract. Castle succeeds in his primary endeavor, and in doing so has penned a book that is enlightening and entertaining.

George Gmelch’s *Baseball without Borders* brings together a collection of 16 essays covering 14 different nations. Gmelch divides the essays into four regions of the world: Asia (Japan, China, Taiwan, and Korea), The Americas (Dominican Republic, Cuba, Puerto Rico, Nicaragua, Brazil, and Canada), Europe (Italy, Holland, and Great Britain) and The Pacific (Australia). The essays are written by an array of experts—journalists, historians, economists, sociologists, and anthropologists. These scholars bring their own unique experiences and diverse professional perspectives to the book, and each essay adds to our global understanding of baseball. Gmelch himself, an anthropologist by profession and baseball scholar by interest, was once a young prospect who spent time in the minor leagues and played professionally outside the United States. Gmelch’s passion for baseball and his academic training mesh well. This reader will give baseball enthusiasts a much deeper understanding of the game.

The game of baseball, as Western fans know it, originated in United States before the Civil War. It spread to each of the countries highlighted in this book in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Gmelch notes that Americans are not entirely to be credited with the international growth of the game. For instance, the Japanese are largely responsible for introducing the game throughout Asia, and the Cubans brought the game to the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, and other Caribbean nations. Although the rules of the game are roughly the same internationally, there are important cross-cultural differences in how baseball has developed in different parts of the globe, how players and coaches approach the game, and how fans behave. We learn in the lead essay by Dan Gordon that the Japanese approach high school baseball quite differently from Americans: “High school baseball in Japan is not so much a sport as it is a philosophy and tool of education . . . building character and refining spirit.” Gordon likens the spiritual foundation of baseball to that of the martial arts. The passion and intensity of Japanese high school baseball equals the fury of Friday night high school football games in the States. Tears of joy and sorrow are common on the faces of Japanese players. Fans show up at the high school baseball games hours early to display signs, to practice cheers, and to socialize with their friends and neighbors. Entire towns seem to appear at Japanese games, especially at the season-ending championship. By comparison, high school baseball games in the United States are sparsely attended, mainly by parents and a few interested students.

Each of the essays in Gmelch’s book provide a fascinating glimpse of baseball within the country’s borders (e.g., Joseph Clark’s concluding essay, “*Baseball Down Under*,” details how Australia’s first “baseball” game in 1879 started as a pick-up game of members of the Surrey Cricket Club). Gmelch raises a particularly intriguing point in his final remarks: Is baseball really global? In other words, is baseball ever going to rival truly international sports? According to Gmelch, the answer is, regrettably, “no.” By comparison, the NBA has captured the world’s attention with games shown in over 200 countries, and 15% of the NBA’s merchandizing revenue

is generated outside of the United States. Soccer and even golf have also developed a global following, but baseball has not. Gmelch argues that the international growth of baseball has been glacially slow—and in some nations such as England, Australia, and Nicaragua, interest in baseball has declined. Indeed, baseball has been dropped from the 2012 Summer Olympic Games in London. Gmelch predicts the ongoing movement of foreign talent to the United States will continue because of the huge financial incentives.

To conclude, these two University of Nebraska Press books by Castle and Gmelch stand individually on their own merits; together they offer a multidisciplinary and multicultural examination of the meaning of baseball in present-day society. Clearly, baseball is more than just a game, and it is bigger than any player or championship event. Baseball is an integral part of US culture and, to a limited extent, part of the international landscape. Baseball bonds generations together—veteran to rookie, father to son, and legends to heroes not yet on the horizon.

### ***Out of the Shadows: A Biographical History of African American Athletes***

Edited by David K. Wiggins. Published in 2006 by the University of Arkansas Press, Fayetteville (464 pp., \$34.95 US).

*Reviewed by Rita Liberti, Department of Kinesiology and Physical Education, California State University East Bay, Hayward, CA.*

For well over a decade David K. Wiggins has made numerous and significant contributions within sport history and to the study of African American experiences in sport. The collection of 19 original essays in Wiggins' latest edited volume, *Out of the Shadows: A Biographical History of African American Athletes*, is among the author's best work. The collection's essays are sectioned, chronologically, into four parts. The first two sections highlight African American athletic experiences amid segregation during the late 19th century and first half of the 20th. The remaining two sections of the book focus attention on the civil-rights era and contemporary athletes, respectively. The essays are well written and researched, cover a good deal of ground, and capture the full extent of African American athleticism for over a century.

Wiggins acknowledges his aim to "introduce readers to relatively little known yet extremely gifted athletes while at once providing insights into the lives of athletes who have seemingly always been part of our collective historical memory" (preface, xii). The four essays in the volume's first section go a long way toward accomplishing Wiggins' goal; they examine the experiences of jockey Jimmy Winkfield, cyclist Marshall "Major" Taylor, and 19th century Amherst College football star William Henry Lewis, as well as the relatively well-known boxer Jack Johnson.

Although there are shared themes across some or all of the four essays in this section, the narratives are far from monolithic. It is particularly striking that Winkfield, Taylor, and Johnson's athletic pursuits were severely limited or completely extinguished as a result of the virulent racism in the United States around the turn

of the 20th century, leading all three men to take their skills to more appreciative audiences abroad. Clearly, each man's athletic prowess, despite the specific sporting activity, challenged the firmly entrenched racial status quo within sport and the broader society. Seen as less of a threat within elite eastern athletic college circles, William Henry Lewis appeared to move more easily within his sport during this period. However, the racist climate of the period forced him to become less radical and grow more conciliatory in his political positions, thus stifling his voice and his presence. In this and other ways, the essays in the first section encourage readers to ponder the various ways racism impacted African American men across sport and class during this historical period.

One of the more appealing aspects of *Out of the Shadows* is the significant space and attention afforded African American female athletes. In previous edited volumes, African American women in sport received scant attention, generally only appearing at the periphery of the text. If mentioned at all, African American female athleticism was confined to a single essay amid an entire collection. In *Out of the Shadows* the experiences of African American women in sport are represented in a variety of thoughtful essays about Ora Washington, Alice Coachman, Althea Gibson, Wilma Rudolph, and Venus and Serena Williams. Pamela Grundy's piece on Washington and Jennifer Lansbury's essay on Coachman are especially noteworthy as the authors skillfully utilize a range of primary source material to advance our knowledge of woefully under-examined subjects. The oral histories employed in each of the essays add strength to the articles, enabling scholars a deeper insight into the complexities of race, class, and gender in relation to female athletic experience in the early 20th century. In addition, the essays on Coachman and Rudolph highlight and underscore the role, prior to integration, of historically black colleges and universities, notably Tuskegee and Tennessee State, in promoting elite female athleticism. Finally and importantly, the essays' critical attention to the realities of institutionalized and ideological racism *and* sexism adds explanatory power to the volume.

The degree to which African American athletes considered themselves political agents of change, or were conceptualized as such by observers, is a thread woven throughout many of the entries in the volume. Tellingly, the diverseness that characterizes the entries within this volume also represents the wide range of athletes' perspectives on agitating for change. Athletes such as Muhammad Ali actively sought a public platform from which to declare his position on a range of issues, including race relations. Others include Michael Jordan, who purposely positioned himself as apolitical on a host of issues, from sweat shops to race. Fortunately, the authors in this volume are careful to portray an athlete's outspokenness (or lack thereof) as much more than an idiosyncratic position somehow shaped within a historical vacuum. Instead the volume's authors are quick to use individual athlete responses to contemporary politics as a way to shed light on the shifting dynamics of racism across different historical moments and contexts.

This volume illustrates quite well the multiple and, at times, competing expectations and tensions surrounding African American athletes for well over a century. Far from hagiographic renderings of its subjects, *Out of the Shadows* offers up a critical interrogation of African American athletic experience and in doing so provides a significant contribution to the literature and a book well worth reading.



## ***Fastest, Highest, Strongest. A Critique of High-Performance Sport***

By Rob Beamish and Ian Ritchie. Published in 2006 by Routledge, New York and London (208 pp., cloth \$94.50US; paper \$41.95US).

*Reviewed by Erkki Vettenniemi, Kurjenkuja 4, 40400 Jyvaskyla, FINLAND.*

When two sports-loving Englishmen published *War Without Weapons* (a veritable lament for the lost innocence of sport) in 1968, scholarly work on sport history hardly existed. So it came to be that traces of Chris Chataway and Philip Goodhart's journalistic imagination can still be felt in the 21st century. Thus, the so-called ideals of the modern olympic movement are taken at their face value; the deadly seriousness of today's athletic clashes is compared with the chivalrous spirit that supposedly prevailed in the past; and the scientific manipulation of performances is denounced as a capital offence against all that sport is said to stand for.

*Fastest, Highest, Strongest* is a contribution to the ongoing criticism of such warped visions of history. As the Canadian scholars Rob Beamish and Ian Ritchie repeatedly point out, any discussion about the future of sport ought to be built on a solid sociohistorical foundation. The authors actually speak of "high-performance sport," which they somehow separate from sports of lower order, as it were. Accordingly, chapter 3 begins with an insightful take on the changing meaning of "sport" since the 19th century. In the last analysis, however, modern sport is based on competition and record-keeping, and there is no pressing need to differentiate between various kinds of sports in the 21st century. From the junior level to the olympian heights, our sports are all characterized by the cult of performance and, ultimately, the linear record.

It is precisely the modern olympic movement that the authors are chiefly concerned about. Many if not most of the high-minded ideals familiar from the opening-day speeches and other pompous functions can be traced back to the French baron Pierre de Coubertin. (As the historian Douglas Booth insists, the olympic games established in the 19th century have no connection to the body cultures of ancient Olympia and are therefore not entitled to capital letters.)

The authors hold that de Coubertin's thought has been overtaken by post-World War II events in international sport, and a thorough revision of the current ban on the use of performance-enhancing methods and substances is in order. They then proceed to tear apart the flimsy arguments that the World Anti-Doping Agency was created to peddle in 1999. For example, to proclaim that an athlete using a banned substance is in breach of "the spirit of sport" signals the end of serious debate—which the sport leaders have anyway hardly ever fancied. Here the authors have no mercy on the officials and their petrified jargon. For if there ever was such a thing as the spirit of sport, it surely is the spirit of modern times, that is, blind belief in progress to be pursued by any means available.

But though it is true that the banned substances' list is fundamentally flawed, it does not necessarily follow that the olympic movement would be better off with policy adjustments as proposed by the two scholars. What is often overlooked is the crucial fact that in many countries public funding of sport is tied up with "pure sport," "sport for all," and, of course, strict adherence to "sport ethics." After a

protracted crusade for such abstract concepts, the sports community is caught in a dilemma—either to stick to worn-out rhetoric and keep up with futile efforts to “purify” sport, or to let go of the outdated notions and risk losing state support. Given that the olympic movement managed to resist overt professionalism for nearly a full century, Beamish and Ritchie should brace themselves for the long haul.

Another thing is that the critics occasionally fall back on the very same mythology that they are keen on denouncing. It is claimed, for instance, that “the calculated pursuit of victory emerged as a dominant principle” in the 1950s, and that “the cult of victory loomed ominously” above the olympic movement thereafter (p. 20). If that is the case, what on earth took place at the stadia until the mid-20th century? Did the athletes strive to balance their body and soul, as de Coubertin so dearly wished, or did they perhaps engage in brotherly contests for the benefit of universal peace and goodwill, as his followers would still have us believe?

Going by Mark Dyreson’s *Making the American Team*, which deals in a comprehensive manner with the pre-World War I games, and John Hoberman’s *Mortal Engines*, subtitled “the science of performance and the dehumanization of sport,” no halcyon days ever existed. It is somewhat disconcerting to find out how the present writers virtually ignore Hoberman’s ground-breaking monograph; instead, they refer to minor articles by Hoberman and admonish him for not examining “the socio-historical conditions of world-class, high-performance sport at the turn of the twentieth century” (p. 2). This is a baffling statement, as any reader of Hoberman’s oeuvre can confirm, though it does concur with the authors’ pretence to be the first scholars to discover the true nature of modern sport.

Apart from that, Beamish and Ritchie would have done well to indicate Pierre de Coubertin’s shortcomings as a philosopher. The baron’s writings are riddled with contradictory claims and assumptions; his ideas were not even widely known until after World War I, when the very mundane practices of olympic sport had been generally adopted; and his flowery prose always remained totally unconnected from the goings-on in the games. When the authors suggest that “a growing emphasis on performance” challenged and “eventually undermined” de Coubertin’s benign vision (p. 7), the implication is that the Frenchman’s rhetoric had actually made an impact on the ground. In the absence of any evidence, one can merely say that as far as popular sensitivities are concerned, competitive sport has been perceived as terrifyingly modern at any given time. The upcoming centenary of the 1908 games may bring back not-so-edifying memories of “the calculated pursuit of victory” that raged in London under the approving eyes of de Coubertin himself.

All of the above does not detract from the intellectual provocation that *Fastest, Highest, Strongest* is all about. Among other excursions, the contribution of Nazi Germany to “the irrational fears people hold about athletes using steroids” (p. 32) is aptly discussed. In France, the slim monograph would have been called *un livre de lutte*, and while one may disagree with this or that premise, the central thesis is absolutely correct and bears underlining. The current ban on certain substances in the immense field of performance-enhancing drugs and methods cannot be backed by any rational argument; it is an arbitrary construction that defies the inherent logic of sport.

Finally, mention should be made of the authors’ concern for the main characters in the saga of modern sport. A comprehensive reassessment of the performance-enhancement regulations would definitely be in the interest of the

athletes themselves. Until then, they will be hounded as usual by bureaucrats and journalists with no regard to the harsh realities of competitive sport. On the other hand, the obsessive focus on a selective list of banned substances “deflects attention from the wider question of high-performance sport as a set of social practices,” (p. 142) as the scholars observe. This particular point reinforces the view that no meaningful reforms can arise from within the sports movement in the foreseeable future.

Yet there is every reason to believe that two or three generations from now, the delightfully militant intervention of Rob Beamish and Ian Ritchie will be validated. A reality check cannot be postponed forever. It could also be that a new batch of historians will start feeling nostalgic about the presumed innocence of the early 21st century sport. Most of our contemporary athletes, after all, look more like vulnerable human beings than the triumphant engines they are trained to be.

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### ***Under The Boards: The Cultural Revolution in Basketball***

By Jeffrey Lane. Published in 2007 by University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, Nebraska (256 pp., \$21.95US).

### ***Lockstep and Dance: Images of Black Men in Popular Culture***

By Linda G. Tucker. Published in 2007 by the University Press of Mississippi (191 pp., \$45.00US).

*Reviewed by Earl Smith, PhD, Department of Sociology and Program in American Ethnic Studies, Wake Forest University, Winston-Salem, NC.*

Although Jeffrey Lane’s new book *Under The Boards: The Cultural Revolution in Basketball* (2007) is not an academic book, I seriously recommend that cultural scholars, hip-hop fans, and sport sociologists read this exciting book.

Lane takes over where Nelson George left off (1992). *Under the Boards* is an incisive look at the interconnections of the worlds of hip-hop, expressive culture, and basketball. Inside of six chapters and a very short conclusion, Lane addresses, in journalistic style, everything from the impact of Tupac Amaru Shakur on expressive African American culture to the “individualism” of basketball players who put themselves first, above the needs of their teams. All of this comes inside of 250 pages.

What interests me in this book is that Lane obviously is passionate about basketball. This passion oozes from every page: This young, White urban male,

possessing a baccalaureate degree from the elite Wesleyan University, puts on paper what many young males (of all race/ethnic groups) only verbally discuss on street corners, in gymnasiums, and on Saturday mornings in urban barbershops.

One of the points that Lane makes is really intriguing and has little to do with basketball but does have a lot to do with the messages delivered to connoisseurs of both hip-hop culture and basketball. Lane asks a very simple question (p. 21): “Why do drug dealers still live with their mothers?” Using an analysis ripe for statistics students in mid-level sociology courses, Lane moves quickly through the logic of the hierarchy of drug dealing as it plays out in the notorious Black Disciples male gang in Chicago. He ends this exercise noting that at the bottom rung of the hierarchy are the “foot soldiers” who at the end of the day are making about \$3.50 per hour, exactly what they could make at McDonald’s for less dangerous work. (Actually, today workers at McDonald’s make twice as much per hour).

Had this been an academic study, Lane’s analysis could have gone in the direction that shows, unlike his assumptions, that it is not in drugs, music, or the NBA that African American males succeed. This belief, passed on year in and year out, cannot be substantiated. Good empirical labor-market data shows that it is elsewhere that the *majority* of African American men make their living. Harvard’s Henry Louis Gates addressed this question recently and notes that:

Too many of our children have come to believe that it’s easier to become a black professional athlete than a doctor or lawyer. Reality check: according to the 2000 census, there were more than 31,000 black physicians and surgeons, 33,000 black lawyers and 5,000 black dentists. Guess how many black athletes are playing professional basketball, football and baseball combined. About 1,400. In fact, there are more board-certified black cardiologists than there are black professional basketball players. (2004, A10)

The sociological question I pose here is: Why do so many writers identify basketball as the sole route of success for young African American men? How many writers, motivational speakers, or Dads would say to young White males, “Boys, the route to success in America is golf?” And, you definitely don’t hear the same for young African American boys being encouraged to weave and spin their dreams around following Tiger Woods into the sport of golf. Remember, currently there are no more than 500 slots for professionals who get paid to play the sport of basketball.

One of the longest and best chapters in the book is the chapter, “The Last White Superstar.” In it Lane addresses the unbelievable insolence of the Boston sport fans by looking closely at the Boston Celtics. Still today, Lane cannot believe that some of the greatest Boston Celtics, especially Bill Russell and others, were not accepted in Boston because of their race/ethnicity—even though in Russell’s time the team was by far the best in the NBA, winning 11 titles between 1957 and 1969.

Lane weaves through this complex issue discussing, among other things, how sport fans will embrace sport players as long as they are winning. I need to add here that the issue is much more complex than this (Smith, 2007).

I start with Jackie Robinson, arguably one of the greatest baseball players from the mid-1950’s up through early 1960s. Moreso, a close examination of the Georgetown Hoyas basketball teams when Patrick Ewing played for them will show

that the fans of their games, home and away and mostly White, spewed some of the worse virulent racism seen in intercollegiate sports. Then, there is Hank Aaron closing in on Babe Ruth's home-run record in what should have been a time of great joy for Atlanta fans and others; but Aaron, as well as his family, were the recipients of death threats.

As I say in my sport sociology classes year after year: Sport is an institution that is a reflection of our society.

No one reading *Under The Boards* will come away disappointed. The details that Lane knows about players, rap artists, and their music, as well as his understanding of the intersection of sport, hip-hop, and American culture makes this little book a joy to read, and I recommend it highly for anyone interested in not only basketball but also in American culture.

The other book under review here is by Professor Linda G. Tucker, entitled *Lockstep And Dance: Images of Black Men in Popular Culture*. Tucker approaches her text as a Humanities Professor embedded within the new arguments about the social impact of *modernity*. The text itself is a curious admixture of a lot of sub-topics about African American men (chapters on prisons and lynching, for example) including their relationship to sports.

As a sociologist who studies the complexities of institutions (for example, the family), it is important to note that the self-referentiality of "popular culture" advancing as it has onto the dominant cultural stage of everyday American life makes it difficult to know exactly where it starts and where it ends.

In common parlance, though, when married to African American men the usual agencies are film, art, sport, music and, for Professor Tucker, the criminal justice system. That African American men are seen attached to the aforementioned almost exclusively as singers, dancers, basketball players—and not as coaches, owners, or managers—and criminals has been burned into the national consciousness, says Tucker. If this is true, as Professor Tucker portrays it (and there is no reason not to believe her), then it is a very sad image as *most* African American males, as Gates confirms in the quote above, fit none of these niches.

The "image" problem presented by Tucker is defined by others. Philosophers discuss and argue about this "false consciousness" (Therborn 1999), and many, many years back, W. E. B. Du Bois argued it as a form of "two-ness" that engulfs African American lives (1903). That this image is being accepted by everyone, including African American men themselves, is in and of itself demonstrative of the need for critical examination and analysis.

The Thomas dictum is at work here, and it, too, does not tell us what we need to know. "*If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences*" may not be as prophetic as it seemed in the 1920's when it was put forth by sociologists Dorothy Swaine Thomas and her famous husband W.I. Thomas (Merton, 1995). Why these images are problematic, and not simply that they exist, is what needs to be explained. More African American males are not criminals, do not engage in aberrant social behavior and can we finally say it, they do not sing and dance or play basketball, as noted in the previous quote by Professor Gates.

In my book *African American Families* (Hattery & Smith, 2007), we underscore the point that Professor Gates is making. We demonstrate both the falseness of these damaging images and their real impact on African Americans. That is, they wreak havoc on African Americans' daily lives from discrimination

in the labor market, the housing market (especially among lending institutions), and in schooling. *A priori* decisions are being made by people in power (and other ordinary Americans) based on what they heard or thought they saw and then they impose these perceptions on a whole ethnic group.

Nothing like this exists for White men. Why? Sociologists who study these phenomena know that White men are not constrained by any one image. White men have a range of opportunities open to them and they are seldom blocked from pursuing their dreams.

My question for both authors is this: what is the fascination with African American men, popular culture and sports? This overrepresentation of books and articles about African American men and popular culture—especially when this represents the lives of so few real African American men—is very perplexing. Taken together, these two books offer the reader insight into the world of African American men, hip-hop and basketball and I highly recommend both books to anyone interested in increasing their knowledge and understanding of the web created by the intersections in the lives of African American men..

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