

# **“AMERICA’S ATHLETIC MISSIONARIES:” POLITICAL PERFORMANCE, OLYMPIC SPECTACLE AND THE QUEST FOR AN AMERICAN NATIONAL CULTURE, 1896-1912**

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In 1912 *Harper’s Weekly* correspondent Edward Bayard Moss spun a tale about “America’s athletic missionaries.”<sup>1</sup> The notion of an athletic missionary represented a curious, and very significant, juxtaposition of images. Just what “mission” were Moss’s athletes, the United States Olympic team which competed at Stockholm in the fifth of the modern Olympic revivals, undertaking? The American Olympians, along with United States athletic officials, Moss, his fellow journalists, and a host of social commentators, used the Olympic spectacle at Stockholm to engage in a cultural performance with significant political and social implications.<sup>2</sup> Moss was, to borrow the insights which Clifford Geertz made concerning another culture in a similar context, giving an American reading of American experience; telling a story that Americans were telling about themselves.<sup>3</sup>

Anticipating the international athletic meet set for the summer of 1912 in Stockholm, Moss compared the American athletic missionaries to the ancient Greek Argonauts on their quest to recover the golden fleece. “Ages later, the expedition, modernized by American business methods, is duplicated in the sailing of the United States Olympic team for the international carnival of sports to be held at Stockholm,” Moss declared. Fully anticipating an American victory, Moss predicted that “the honors accorded the American athletes abroad will sink into insignificance compared to the reception that awaits them if they return with the fleece of the fifth Olympiad to add to the four already hung in our trophy-halls.”<sup>4</sup> Moss’s linkage of classical imagery and “modernized” methods, an archetypal pattern in turn-of-the-century American athletic ideology, hints at important connections between the ideas of sport, modernity, progress and the nation-state, a complex of categories which formed the structure through which Americans interpreted their experiences at Olympic spectacles.<sup>5</sup>

The late nineteenth-and early twentieth-century American intellectual and middle classes held ideas about sport which made athletics a powerful forum for modernist national self-definition. J.R. Dodge, reacting to the perceived decline of vigor in modernizing America, provided a paradigmatic middle-class rumination on the general meaning of recreation in modern civilization. “The subject is one of vital importance to the health and vitality of the American people,” insisted Dodge. “It has intimate relations with the social life and the intellectual progress of the country,” he continued. “It has much to do with its industrial development, its capacity for production, and with the just equalization of material blessings among the people,” imagined Dodge. “If to write the songs of a people is more influential than the making of its laws, the right direction of a nation’s recreations may be of more importance than we imagine”<sup>6</sup>

Dodge’s commentary underscored the growing notion that sport could shape culture. The idea of “culture,” which in the late nineteenth century replaced the older notion of virtue in republican theorizing, came to signify the sense of civic duty and national identity transcending any class, ethnic or special interest which many American political thinkers

considered the absolutely crucial component in the modern state.<sup>7</sup> The advocates of a commitment to the strenuous life conceived of modern sport as a social technology, in the terms of Martin Heidegger's definition of technology as an effort to organize the world for problem solving, which could bind the United States together into a national culture.<sup>8</sup> The relationship between making the republic's laws and choosing their games proved to be far more interrelated than Dodge imagined, since athletic reformers insisted that sport and law met at a cultural level. The prophets of "athletism"--a term coined in one of the leading journals of strenuousness, Outing--insisted that they had crafted athletic mechanisms for building a sporting republic, in the language of progressivism, a bastion of positive environmentalism.<sup>9</sup>

The inventors of the technology of "athletism" were overwhelmingly from, or sympathetic too, the new professionalizing American middle class. Struggling to engineer a cultural hegemony, empowered by their pivotal position in modern economic and political structures, they worked from within the broad parameters of bourgeois sensibility, scientific rationalism, and republican political science in their quest to construct a national culture of shared values and ideals.<sup>10</sup> Sport provided a rich body of symbols for explaining the processes of modernity. Crafted out of a variety of forms of physical culture, including Anglo-American folk games, the ideology of muscular Christianity, and republican and Victorian imagery of the relationship between vigorous activity and social practice, and blended with the emerging mass communication, amusement and consumption systems which characterized the new order; sport became a distinctively modernist and expressively ideological tool for directing human energy in "progressive" directions.

The promoters of the strenuous life proclaimed that sport could address one of the central problems of modernity, the erosion of the ideal of community. "We get easily differentiated from each other in the struggle for bread and a living," opined an Independent editor early in the twentieth century. "In fact," continued the editor, "there is no such thing as a commonwealth of intercourse remaining. A good playground seems to be exactly what we all need."<sup>11</sup> The Independent's appeal for one of the institutional features of modern sport--playgrounds mushroomed in urban areas in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century United States--made explicit the political understanding of the sport. In connecting sport to the production of a common civic language and culture, the American sporting experts borrowed liberally, and as Donald Kyle has demonstrated, inaccurately from Greek--and particularly Athenian--history to buttress their political arguments for the modern technology of sport by relating it to their mythologized vision of the interconnections between classical sport and Western political ideas.<sup>12</sup> Their histories which traced the evolution of sport from classical civilizations made it clear that vigor should be associated with republican forms of government, respect for constitutionalism and rule by law, civic virtue, the regulated life, and the genesis of the Western democratic community.

Lloyd Bryce, in his "A Plea for Sport," linked the practice of modern athletics directly with the production of a "commonwealth of intercourse" and a national community. "As a means of uniting the different classes of society in bonds of friendship, of reconciling the poor to the apparent injustice of social order as it exists, and of exorcising the demon of discontentment, exercise, in the shape of popular games, is of the greatest advantage," thought Bryce.<sup>13</sup> A legion of social commentators concurred.<sup>14</sup> A Harper's essayist averred, "I do not wish . . . to run this theory into the ground; I only wish to indicate that athletics are essentially a popular pursuit, conducive to good citizenship, and the cultivation of which, therefore, good citizenship should imply." Waxing hyperbolic, the commentator concluded that "in short, if

mankind would only realize the same fellowship in their minds and hearts that they feel in their arms and legs, the Millennium would be nearer."<sup>15</sup>

In the years after the celebration of the American republic's centennial in 1876, the Millennium seemed quite far off to most observers of the evolutions of modern civilizations. The disappearance of any "commonwealth of intercourse" served as a popular motif in fin de siècle critiques of American civilization. Images of disorder, labor wars, agrarian unrest, urban chaos, and distended communities, revealed the social cost of rapid change. Standing in stark relief to the voluminous "high" and popular culture portraits of modern "dis-ease," stood the bourgeois conceptualization of vigorous republicanism. Athletic science met political science, and dreams of the Western ideal of communitas provided a bulwark against the erosions produced by modernization.

The conception of an athletic "commonwealth of intercourse" made sport a language, one which its ardent boosters hoped would quickly become a global lingua franca.<sup>16</sup> Amongst the many technologies of modernity, sport stood out as offering unifying possibilities. "While other forces of aggregation have welded together peoples having a common ethnological origin into a nation, such as Italy, and consolidated independent states into a system, such as Germany, it has been the function of athletics to unite in a common interest the whole (Anglo-Saxon) world," wrote the author of "The Progress of Athletism."<sup>17</sup> For the American bourgeois and intelligentsia who advocated the cultivation of the strenuous life, the increasingly popular games and pastimes of mass society pointed to an athletic route for creating civic standards. They considered "athletism" a form of communication with encoded social and political meetings, and connected modern sport to the dream of a restoration of the imagined balance, order, harmony and community of mythic history.<sup>18</sup>

Incorporated into the crusade to shape national identity, sport still needed a prominent public forum. "Surely our modern public games are not unworthy of their descent from the games of ancient Greece," announced Lloyd Bryce in 1879, "nor is it altogether visionary to expect that the time will come again when the successful competitor in these contests will receive honor from his fellow citizens comparable to that paid to the Olympian victor."<sup>19</sup> Fifteen years after Bryce's call for modern public games modeled on the ancient Olympic tradition, the Baron Pierre de Coubertin extended the sporting cult beyond the Anglo-American world. In his 1894 announcement of the creation of a modern "festival" of sport based on ancient motifs Coubertin proclaimed the foundation of a new system of international communication in Olympic stadiums. Designed explicitly to meet the crises of bourgeois culture in fin de siècle Western nation-states, in Coubertin's words the "moral disorder produced by the discoveries of industrial science," the revived Olympics were engineered to provide a locale for cultural performance at the individual, national and international levels. Coubertin hoped the Olympic Games might inculcate a brand of internationalism in which a diverse plurality of nations discovered tolerance and peace through the games they played. He understood that the nation-state would serve as the primary political unit of the modern order, but he opposed virulent strains of nationalism and favored instead patriotism--a love a country which celebrated national pride without recourse to a destructive chauvinism that belittled the merits of other national cultures.<sup>20</sup> Very quickly the ideas of Coubertin and his newly formed International Olympic Committee ran headlong into the strident athletic nationalism manifested by American apostles of their "sporting republic."

In the new and modern Olympia "America's athletic missionaries" found a forum for exhibiting their athletic technology, communicating American political culture, and erecting a very

American image of communitas. The anthropologist John MacAloon has argued that the Olympic Games have become the archetypal expression of modernist cultural performance, “a spectacle par excellence.”<sup>21</sup> Olympic spectacles provided cultures with and opportunity to tell stories and ask questions about cherished myths and commonly received wisdom. For American civilization Olympic spectacles would provide opportunities for examining the interconnections between athletics and culture. Did sport really do all that the architects of the sporting republic claimed? Could it transform culture, Americanize the globe, preserve the republic, carve out an actual--and American--“commonwealth of intercourse”?

Approaching Olympia at a different angle from Coubertin, American advocates of strenuous civilization turned the Olympics into evocative spectacles for the examination and celebration of American political culture. The rest of the world was often skeptical, and frequently scandalized, by the athletic stories which Americans told about themselves. For a nation conditioned by history and tradition to think of itself as a “city upon a hill,” tolerance of national diversity and a commitment to Coubertin’s version of patriotism proved virtually impossible. In the crisis of culture which accompanied modernization the Olympics provided the United States with a secular corollary to the old Puritan doctrine of assurance, a very American trope which linked worldly success with spiritual purity.

Coubertin’s fine distinctions between nationalism and patriotism escaped American sensibilities. In fact American journalists were by the late nineteenth century already beginning to calculate national superiority based on results from international playing fields. “Genial Uncle Samuel, who loves a race perhaps better than anything else on earth, and who is by no means deficient in a fondness for coming out ahead, may be pardoned for feeling just a little complacent at present,” boasted Henry Lanier in an 1895 essay for the Review of Reviews. Lanier gave a lengthy recounting of American victories in the America’s Cup, international track meets, rowing competitions and tennis matches. With athletic supremacy over mainly English rivals established, argued Lanier in a rather questionable reading of results from Anglo-American sporting rivalries, he hailed the revived Olympic Games as the most important international meeting in history and looked forward to American domination.<sup>22</sup>

Lanier’s hyperbole reached few ears. Scheduled for the spring of 1896 in Athens, the first modern Olympics attracted only a small contingent of American athletes from Princeton University and a few “Eastern establishment” collegians who competed under the auspices of the Boston Athletic Association.<sup>23</sup> The April date, in the midst of the spring semester and intercollegiate competitions, and poor communication prohibited greater American interest. In spite of the haphazard organization of the American entry, the rather average quality of their athletic skills, and their clearly elite lineages, the American press transformed them into exemplars of the American spirit, middle-class icons who showed the decadent Old World the strength of the American social system. Explaining American dominance in the track and field events, the Atlanta Constitution cheered, “though America has none of the traditions and but little of the training possessed by these nations of the Old World, she has evinced her superiority over them in the games of their own choice, and from the heights of Mount Olympus she has transferred the laurel branch to her own distant borders.”<sup>24</sup>

The Atlanta daily obfuscated on both the training issue and the assertion that Americans defeated Europeans in contests which the Europeans chose. In fact the American press read the results from Athens extremely selectively, choosing the games which Americans both preferred and won in order to designate themselves Olympic champions. A New York Times

reporter, ignoring the wide variety of sports contested at the inaugural Olympics, asserted that American triumphs “in a programme of *events* which seemed carefully modeled on the classic pentathlon [which consisted of a discus throw, a javelin throw, and standing broad-jump, a 200 meter footrace, and a wrestling match] indicates their success not only over the Hellenes but over continental Europeans would have been yet more marked had the programme been modernized, an included, for example, a football match, which, if it had no prototype in Olympia, vividly recalls a Homeric battle.”<sup>25</sup> While football failed to make its way onto the Olympic roster, the Athens Games began the long American tradition (still, in the main, practiced) of designating track and field as the “real” Olympic Games. Even Princeton professor William Milligan Sloane, an original member of the International Olympic Committee and the American athletic official most sympathetic and faithful to Coubertin’s visions, opined “that the nucleus of the Olympic meetings must be field- and track-athletics is inevitable, because these have become the common possession of vigorous, enterprising youth the world over.”<sup>26</sup>

While a few reporters grouched about the lack of world-class competition and criticized the I.O.C. for poor planning and organization, most celebrated American track and field triumphs as proof of national superiority. One overzealous news hound went beyond celebration, manufacturing a quote from discus champion Robert Garrett of Princeton. Picked up by other reporters, the story had Garrett cabling home after his victory, “Guskos [actually Gouskous, a former Greek champion discobulus] conquered Europe, but I conquered the world.” The journalist confessed that he had fictionalized the telegram but, according to another reporter, “he took great pride in it: for he said it was what Garrett ought to have sent”<sup>27</sup>

James B. Connolly became the first Olympic champion in American history when he hopped, stepped and jumped farther than his rivals at Athens. He later made a name for himself as a writer of adventure stories and an Olympic correspondent. His “An Olympic Victor” recalled, in a supposedly fictional format, the Athens Games and the dramatic discus contest between Garrett and Gouskous. In Connolly’s retelling of the battle, Gouskous uncorked a magnificent heave on his final throw which the rabid Greek spectators cheered as insuring a national victory. But the American discus thrower still had one chance left and he strode to the center of the stadium for his last toss. “In his preparation was seen evidence of that which was making his nation so great,” wrote Connolly. “He was not to be shaken in his preparation by the cheers of the tens of thousands for the victorious Gouskous. Calmly he took position and coolly surveyed the prospect.” The American Olympian’s “eye seemed to remain glued on a point far down the centre line. At the instant of execution a panic seized the Stadium. Suppose he should throw so accurately that the discus would sail straight down the centre line? Which was exactly what he did.”<sup>28</sup>

Why did the American win the discus contest? Connolly knew the formula well, and he did not disappoint his audience. He had an Athenian newspaper pay homage to the “melting pot” as the crucible of the Olympic discus triumph. “Ah, well might the Americans say that their mixed blood was welding a nation that is to be invincible in time,” trumpeted the fictional periodical. “Their vitality to-day in the games is but symbolical.”<sup>29</sup>

Symbolical indeed; certainly Connolly understood the nature of spectacle, and used the symbolism of sport and Olympism to reinvigorate the notion of American exceptionalism. The “explanation-forms” which the media offered for American successes at the first modern Olympics set the pattern for future discussions of athletic endeavor and political culture as

Connolly and his fellow chroniclers wed the special providence of American civilization with Olympian achievement.<sup>30</sup>

In 1900 the Olympic Games began their short and troubled association with World's Fairs. International expositions, beginning with London's Crystal Palace Fair in 1851, became the focal point for Western Civilization's celebrations of science and social engineering, modern progress and prosperity. The social technology of athleticism seemingly should have found a perfect venue in the technological spectacles manufactured at World's Fairs. On that issue, however, both the I.O.C. and American athletic officialdom finally found a small plot of common ground. They both agreed that the Olympics got lost amidst the exhibitions of dynamos and aborigines. Athletic technology, they concluded, needed its own special forum.

In 1900 at Paris, with the Olympics attached to the great turn-of-the-century exposition, the American athletic missionaries, their ranks swelled to include representatives from several college and club teams, again sought to convert the rest of the world to the American style of sport and to convince themselves that, in the words of the man who would soon be their president, they were indeed the world's "strongest and boldest people."<sup>31</sup> Once again the Americans trounced the rest of the world in track and field, and then claimed a total Olympic "victory." The Chicago Tribune complained that "the facility with which the American athletes carried off prizes finally grew monotonous."<sup>32</sup> Caspar Whitney, Outing's editor, smirked, "in point of fact, the Paris games were no more, no less, than an American intercollegiate meet, with Harvard out."<sup>33</sup> Indeed Whitney claimed that "even with men of lesser prowess, America must still have proved an overwhelming victor, for the superiority of the style and form of our representatives was entirely convincing of American pre-eminence in track games."<sup>34</sup>

Such mastery of athletic technology--note the emphasis on technical "style" and "form"--demonstrated, in the minds of American sporting editorialists that their nation was the most energetic and vital on the globe, the most progressive of modern civilizations. The fact that France actually won twenty-six first places to the United States' twenty troubled commentators not at all.<sup>35</sup> Hjalmar Hjorth Boyesen discovered that the American Olympic victories had confirmed for the nation the gospel of Rooseveltian strenuousness, convincing Americans that "we are as a race comfortably sure of our physical superiority."<sup>36</sup> The American Olympic spectacle provided powerful counter-symbolism to bourgeois fears of decay and decline.

As symbols of national unity and common ground, a certain kind of decorum was expected from the American athletic missionaries. In fact the most upsetting element, for American critics, of the Paris Olympics was the lack of solidarity which the United States showed regarding the Sabbath controversy. The American teams had pushed hard to get the French organizers to ban Sabbath competitions. An agreement, at least from the American side, that no competitions would be held on Sunday, July 15, and that Saturday, July 14, would serve as the starting date, seemed to have been reached. It unravelled as the track and field events began, under pressure from Bastille Day festivities. The American teams threatened a boycott, and the French relented and allowed American contestants in field events scheduled for Sunday to compete on alternate days and have their scores figured into the final standings. On Saturday night the French organizing committee, under pressure from complaints by other nations about favoritism shown American entries, reversed its decision. Events scheduled for Sunday would have to be completed on Sunday. Some of the American athletes then refused to compete on the Sabbath, others were banned by their universities from taking part, and

still others decided to go ahead and contest. With missionary solidarity over Sabbath competition broken, an acrimonious debate about the proper etiquette required of American Olympians broke out. Athletes and officials who had boycotted blasted their teammates who failed to abstain. A.G. Spalding, the head of the United States contingent, filed a protest--to no avail. AC. Kraenzlein, a University of Pennsylvania star who won four events at the Paris Olympics, found himself challenged to a fist fight by his rival Myer Prinstein when Kraenzlein refused to jump-off for first place in the running broad jump against the favored Prinstein. Kraenzlein had won the event on Sunday while Prinstein, who was in fact Jewish, had been barred by Syracuse University from competing on the Christian Sabbath.<sup>37</sup>

The Olympic Games had become serious business for Myer Prinstein, and for America's sense of nationhood. They had tried to impose their sporting culture, including their prohibitions against Sunday sport, on the world in Paris, indicating the degree to which Americans identified athletic practice with the production of culture. The urge for nationalistic display, however, surpassed the need for religious orthodoxy. Significantly, the brouhaha over Sunday competition raged more bitterly between United States athletes who had been denied a chance at Olympic victory and those who had won on Sunday than it did between French and American Olympic officials, and their frustrations at not being able to assume the mantle of America's athletic missionaries boiled over into public recriminations.

American Olympians would have no worries about foreign mismanagement of the 1904 games. Held again in conjunction with a World's Fair, the Louisiana Purchase Exposition, the Olympics came to St. Louis. Indeed, the ruling class of American sport, long critical of the I.O.C. and "foreign" management of the Olympics, practically seized control of the entire affair.<sup>38</sup> The St. Louis Games, held in the heart of a continent far distant from other sporting nations, attracted few non-American competitors and degenerated into an "all American struggle."<sup>39</sup> So parochial did the St. Louis Olympics become that the New York Athletic Club, the Irish American Athletic Club, the Chicago Athletic Association and the Milwaukee Athletic Club engaged in a spirited competition for "a magnificent loving-cup emblematic of the Olympic championship."<sup>40</sup> The United States won its cherished track and field games, what the St. Louis Post-Dispatch called the "Olympian games proper," by embarrassing margins.<sup>41</sup> And for the first time the United States reigned victorious, by a lopsided margin, in every category of Olympic endeavor. James E. Sullivan, the leader of the American Olympic movement, proclaimed after the affair ended that "when one looks over the list of Olympic winners and then over the list of eligible men in the world, there are perhaps two men living to-day who were not in the stadium who could have won Olympic honors." Sullivan thus summarily dismissed the idea that non-Americans, if they had bothered to attend, would have changed the results and once again anointed the United States as Olympian world-beaters.<sup>42</sup>

With the international Olympic movement foundering after the association of Olympic Games and World's Fairs at Paris and St. Louis, and with the Greeks clamoring for the return of "their" Olympics to Athens, the I.O.C. staged a 1906 Athenian "Interim Olympics" in an effort to placate Grecian nationalists and revive interest in the Olympic movement.<sup>43</sup> American organizers sent their first unified "national" team to the 1906 Games and the "Interim" Olympians, in the words of their expedition leader, "spread-eagled" their old world rivals.<sup>44</sup> The press attributed victories to a combination of American mastery of the "science" of sport and democratic institutions. "Hearty congratulations to you and your team," cabled President Theodore Roosevelt to James E. Sullivan. "Uncle Sam is all right," concluded the President from reading the results at Athens.<sup>45</sup> Even The Nation, perhaps the foremost critic of the

American devotion to sport, cheered “that the Olympian games were to the Greeks a notable symbol and bond of national unity, and it is precisely in cementing racial and national feeling that athletics achieves its most useful function,” and concluded that in all modern endeavors “a nation of athletes will overcome a nation of mollycoddles.” For a country in which the Civil War was a fresh memory, and in which republicanism, bourgeois sensibility and history militated for harmony and consensus in the body politic, that was no minor linkage.<sup>46</sup>

With a claim, albeit a somewhat misleading one, as a four-time Olympic champion, American champions of strenuousness looked forward to the 1908 Olympics, scheduled for London, and a chance to demonstrate that they were the antithesis of “mollycoddles” in the homeland of modern sport against the one nation that most United States experts thought could stand on the same playing fields with American athletes. The English Outlook believed that the greatest achievement of the London Olympics would be the “code of rules drawn up for every sport, translated into three languages and accepted by every foreign nation that has competed.” According to Outlook’s editor the international code authored by the British Olympic council gave the world “an invaluable contribution to the common language and friendship of humanity.”<sup>47</sup>

Things did not work out as the Outlook hoped. Two nations which shared a common language and, in theory at least, a sporting tradition, used them to engage in a most unfriendly international exchange. An intense Anglo-American rivalry turned the London Games into what one American commentator called “the Olympic muddle.”<sup>48</sup> The rancor between Great Britain and the United States began at the opening ceremonies. Incensed that the American flag was missing from the display of national banners at Shepherd’s Bush stadium, the American flag bearer, shot-putter Ralph Rose, refused to dip the flag as he passed in front of the royal box. The British were scandalized. American scribes, although not unanimously, hailed Rose’s actions as a “patriotic gesture,” a manifestation of the “Spirit of 1776”<sup>49</sup>

A series of incidents, most notably in the tug-of-war competition, the 400 meter race and the marathon, increased the national animosity. The English essayist GK Chesterton, who had long regarded the zealotry of the self-proclaimed “chosen people” in the former British colonies with disdain, found his views confirmed by the behavior of America’s athletic missionaries. Chesterton issued an indictment of American athletic nationalism, asserting that one should look in the American sportsman “not for the light vices of vain or sensual loungers, but for the solid vices of statesman and fanatics, for the sins of men inflamed by patriotism or religion. He can not shake hands after the fight. He feels toward his conqueror as a man toward the invader who has robbed him of his God.”<sup>50</sup> While a few American commentators concurred with Chesterton that athletic nationalism was a pernicious disease, the message from statesmen confirmed that the American Olympians had been charged with a national mission. President Roosevelt received the returned athletes at his Oyster Bay, New York retreat, admonishing them to cease complaining of British unfairness. “We don’t need to talk,” the president gloated, “we’ve won”<sup>51</sup>

Once again the American press and Olympic officials claimed victory, even though Great Britain outdistanced the United States in the overall standings by fifty-six gold medals to twenty three.<sup>52</sup> Such facts notwithstanding, as the American sportswriter, companion of Theodore Roosevelt, and creator of the “all-American” football team, Walter Camp, put it, “our own satisfaction is based upon very tangible facts, for in such events as are known and understood generally as track and field events the Americans were far and away superior to

athletes of all other nations.” Camp thought it “pardonable, then, that the ‘Eagle should scream.’”<sup>53</sup>

Explanations of American superiority in the Olympic spectacle focused on the power of democratic ideals, scientific technique, the human energy produced by a national commitment to the strenuous life, and the social mobility embodied in the conception of a “melting pot.” The original American Olympic champion, James Connolly, covering the 1908 Games for *Collier’s*, assured his readers that the American champions were “typically American, of the Americans who are shaping the future rather than living in the past, and only America just now seems to be producing these remarkable athletes in any numbers.”<sup>54</sup>

The humorist Finley Peter Dunne had his “Mr. Dooley” describe the Games as “truly a glorious spectacle, waiters rushin’ with buckets iv tea fr th’ English athletes, English officials lodgin’ preliminary claims iv foul again th’ American team, an so forth.” The Americans, Dooley announced, “succeeded in rollin’ up a score iv eight pints an iliven disqualifications in more or less obsolete forms iv spoort known as field an’ thrack athletics, such as jumpin’, runnin’, pole-vaulting, hurdling, et cethery.” But the English, chuckled Dooley, had claimed the Olympic championship by winning such events as “wheelin’ th’ p’rambulator,” “th’ tea-dhrinkin’ contest,” and “th’ Long Stand-up While th’ Band Plays Gawd Save th’ King.” “Do you think th’ English are good losers?” Dooley’s fictional foil, the barkeep known as Mr. Hennessy finally asked. “Good losers, say ye? Good losers. I’ll back thim to lose anny time they start,” Dooley replied.<sup>55</sup> Mr. Dooley’s swipes at English sport underscored the idea that Olympic behavior indicated national character and victory represented national superiority had become firmly entrenched in American popular culture. Connolly, the original athletic missionary, hoped his nation would absorb every bit of the cult of strenuousness. He argued that Olympic triumphs over England should inculcate a strong sense of athletic nationalism, “for no country can find greater use for it than our own, which is standing now, awake and eager, where old Greece once slept--on the threshold of the world’s leadership.”<sup>56</sup>

John MacAloon has observed that by the late 1920s and early 1930s the Olympics had ceased to function as “mere games” and became ideologically-charged contests to prove national superiority.<sup>57</sup> For Americans they always had been. At Amsterdam, Los Angeles and Berlin the rest of the world finally adopted the structures of athletic nationalism long practiced in the United States. At the Stockholm Olympics of 1912, two years before the Great War changed modern civilization’s cultural contexts, the United States performances of Olympic spectacle as celebration of national community and American exceptionalism reached its zenith. The United States Olympians, Connolly’s representative “new Athenians,” found themselves lionized in pre-Olympic hyperbole as “typical” Americans. Edward Bayard Moss insisted that the team was “composed of all classes and conditions of men and youths,” and provided a bizarre roster in which he listed “lawyers, physicians, policemen, Indians, Negroes, Hawaiians, college men, school boys, clerks, and in fact entrants from every walk of life.”<sup>58</sup>

When the American contingent passed the royal box, they dipped their flag to King Gustav--so much for one hallowed American Olympic legend.<sup>59</sup> Still, the American press found other symbols of national identity at the opening ceremonies. Will T. Irwin complained that the European teams marched around the stadium like military conscripts. The American procession, reported Irwin, moved with the “loose springy, natural step of men in perfect control of their bodies and in perfect condition. It was the gait of the plainsmen who tamed our wilderness, of Jackson’s ‘foot cavalry,’ of Sherman’s army of athletes. Human beings were made to walk that way.”<sup>60</sup>

Once again, especially in track and field, “the American eagle screamed.” Indeed Current Literature blustered, “however you look at it, the eagle seems fairly entitled to yell her bald head off.”<sup>61</sup> Ignoring the American Olympic Committee’s own arithmetic, which gave Sweden the “overall title” with 133 points to the United States’ 129, the media focused on track and field and crowned the United States as Olympic champion for the sixth straight time.<sup>62</sup>

Explanations of the American “victory” celebrated the national community and the positive environmentalism of “athletism.” “There is no occasion to fear corrupting influences in American sport when a Y.M.C.A. youth and a boy from a country academy can win athletic honors in a world competition,” declared one observer.<sup>63</sup> Of course, superiority in athletic science also helped. “The efficiency engineer began to reconstruct the whole system of American athletics,” postulated Carl Crow in The World’s Work. “America demanded superiority” and American athletes complied, Crow continued. “It was the same spirit that made George Washington the best broad jumper and Lincoln the best rail splitter of their neighborhoods,” he insisted, engaging in a classic example of the “innovative nostalgia” which fueled American progressivism. Crow pointed to the American Olympic victors as “another -proof” of Hugo Munsterberg’s glorification of the American community as system in which the “national aim is to ‘guarantee the richest growth of human individuals.’”<sup>64</sup>

The highest echelons of the A.O.C. bureaucracy provided the clearest indication of just how explicitly ideological American Olympic performance had become. “Of course,” wrote A.O.C. leader James Sullivan, “the Americans went on a mission. This mission was to create a good feeling; to show the type of man this great country of ours produces; to bring them the type of sportsmen that comes from this glorious nation of ours, and show the world that we play the game fairly”<sup>65</sup> A.O.C. president Colonel Robert M. Thompson praised the Olympians for revealing the outline of a true national culture which transcended all ethnic, class and ideological categories. He announced that through his Olympic experiences, “I have now become enthusiastic in the strong conviction that out of the mixed blood of this country has arisen a compound which is invincible.” Thompson proclaimed the 1912 Olympians as the symbols of a modern American communitas. “This team was thoroughly democratic, representative of all sorts and conditions of men--except bad men.”<sup>66</sup> As cultural performance, if not in cultural practice, the ideal of a united polity had been erected in the Olympic stadium.

The ideal had invaded popular culture, as “Mr. Dooley” testified. “Europeens usually get their idees iv America fr’ m th’ Americans they see trudgin’ around th’ churches readin’ little red books an’ steepin’ on the heels iv old ladies sayin’ their pather an’ aves, or cursin’ th’ hotels iv Rome because they can’t get withered bran f’r breakfast, or tellin’ the Cardinal how much St. Peter’s is like th’ new coorthouse at Wanskaloosa,” grumbled Dooley. “I’d like to say: ‘These boys that ye see hoppin’ around th’ thrack ar-re th’ rile ripresentive Americans. They are our ambassdures, no th’ la-ads ye see makin’ ginufluxion before th’ king,’” declared Dooley. “An’ th’ foreigners wud look thim over an’ say: ‘What’s th’ use iv makin’ war again such a tur’ible people?’”<sup>67</sup>

Dooley celebrated the very American myth that Olympic victory confirmed that the United States was anything but a nation of “mollycoddles.” Clearly, by 1912 the Olympic Games had become for the United States a spectacular form of cultural performance. In Olympic stadiums Americans endeavored to discover their national identity, build commonwealths of intercourse, and confirm their nation’s exceptionalism. A cultural pattern, which remains

powerful, of defining national ranking by reading Olympic results began to develop at the very first modern Olympic Games. Americans saw international playing fields not as meeting grounds for engendering tolerance between diverse national cultures but as arenas for convincing themselves of their own superiority and preaching the virtues of American civilization to the rest of the world. America's athletic missionaries competed not as Coubertin's romanticized patriots but as muscular ministers of the gospel of Americanism, a spectacle which sold better in domestic than foreign markets.

Professor William Milligan Sloane, who supposedly adhered as closely as any American to Coubertin's vision of Olympism, offered a sporting history of ancient and modern civilizations in which he contended that "Greek civilization imposed itself upon the central world by an irresistible moral compulsion." The professor hypothesized that "no single factor so contributed to create this moral force as the Olympic Games."<sup>68</sup> Sloane argued that the revival had created a similar "moral force" for modern civilization. "The field therefore of the Olympic idea is not merely sportive and social, it is educational and sociological as well," wrote Sloane.<sup>69</sup> As Greek civilization had imposed itself on the world of antiquity "by an irresistible moral compulsion," so too hoped the inventors of the sporting republic might the "chosen people" shape the twentieth century. Charged with the "sociological" task of creating a national culture in the United States and convincing the rest of the world of its superiority, America's athletic missionaries believed that the modern Olympics provided the same moral forum in their world that Professor Sloane insisted the ancient Olympics had provided the Greeks. In such an arena, constructed by the cultural imperatives of American spectacle, winning was indeed everything.

## NOTES

1. Edward Bayard Moss, "America's Athletic Missionaries," Harper's Weekly 56 (July 27, 1912), 8-9.
2. My study has been greatly influenced by John J. MacAloon's scholarship on Olympic "spectacle" as cultural performance. See his "Olympic Games and the Theory of Spectacle," in Rite, Drama, Festival, Spectacle: Rehearsals Toward a Theory of Cultural Performance, ed. John J. Macloon (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1984), 241-280.
3. See Geertz's influential essay, "Notes on a Balinese Cockfight," in The Interpretation of Cultures (New York: Basic Books, 1983), 448.
4. Edward Bayard Moss, "America's Olympic Argonauts," Harper's Weekly 56 (July 6, 1912), 11-12.
5. The historians of sport were engaged in a process, typical of the progressive mentality, which Robert Crunden has labeled "innovative nostalgia." They linked their arguments for modernist reform with an historicist sensibility, grounding their programs for change within the broad framework of the Western tradition. Robert Crunden, Ministers of Reform: The Progressives' Achievement in American Civilization, 1889-1920 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984). For examples of the formula as it regards the strenuous life see George Hibbard, "The Sporting Spirit: Ancient and Modern," Outing 36 (September 1906), 599-602; H.H.M., "Greek vs. Modern Physical Culture," Outing 3 (December 1883), 211-216; Arthur Lynch, "The Greek Olympic Games Compared with Modern Athletics," Outing 44 (September 1904), 714-725; Price Collier, "The Ethics of Ancient and Modern Athletics," The Forum 32 (November 1901), 309-318.  
Some historians have begun to probe the links between sport and nationalism. See Donald Mrozek, Sport and American Mentality, 1880-1910 (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1983); Peter Levine, A.G. Spalding and the Rise of Baseball (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); and Michael Holt, Sport and the British: A Modern History (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989). On the relations between cultural motifs and nationalism see Eric J. Hobsbawm, Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990).
6. J.R. Dodge, "Rural Recreations," Outing 7 (December 1885), 307.
7. On the effort to construct a national culture see Herbert Croly, The Promise of American Life (New York: Macmillan, 1909); Walter Lippmann, A Preface to Politics (New York: Macmillan, 1914); Walter E. Weyl, The New Democracy: An Essay on Certain Political and Economic Tendencies in the United States (New York: Macmillan, 1912). The "politics of culture" is explored in Lewis Perry, Intellectual Life in America (New York: Franklin Watts, 1984), 261-275; Glenn C. Altschuler, Race, Ethnicity, and Class in American Thought, 1865-1919 (Arlington Heights, Ill.: Harlan Davidson), 99-113; and Alan Trachtenberg, The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982), 140-181. See also James T. Kloppenberg, Uncertain Victory: Social Democracy and Progressivism in European and American Thought, 1870-1920 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); Robert M. Crunden, Ministers of Reform: The Progressives' Achievement in American Civilization, 1889-1920 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984); T.J. Jackson Lears, No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture,

1880-1920 (New York: Pantheon, 1981).

8. Martin Heidegger, The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays, trans. W. Lovitt (New York: Harper & Row, 1977) 19; as explained by Thomas P. Hughes, American Genesis: A Century of Invention and Technological Enthusiasm, 1870-1970 (New York: Viking, 1989), 6.
9. The usage, as a definition of the ideology and institutions of modern sport, was clearly established in 1888. "Athletism is one of the distinctive forces of the nineteenth century," declared an American observer of the rapidly expanding late nineteenth-century sporting systems. "And of all the forces, acting upon the social, moral and physical life of the century, it is probably destined to be the most permanent in its effects." C. Turner, "The Progress of Athletism," Outing 13 (November 1888), 109.
10. According to Barbara Ehrenreich, "class is a notion that is inherently fuzzy at the edges." Fear of Falling: The Inner Life of the Middle Class (New York: HarperCollins, 1989), 13. In employing class as an explanatory device I have intentionally focused on the shared ideological and aspirational structures, as well as on relations to modes of production, while realizing--as Ehrenreich does--that class is an abstraction of historical realities--and a meaningful one. In developing my perspective on the pivotal role of the middle class in defining and shaping American perceptions, and the connections of the "new" middle class to the emerging corporate order in fin de siecle America, I have drawn on Ehrenreich's provocative work as well as the seminal studies of Robert Wiebe, The Search for Order, 1877-1920 (New York: Hill & Wang, 1967), C. Wright Mills, White Collar: The American Middle Classes (New York: Oxford University Press, 1953); Altschuler, Race, Ethnicity and Class in American Social Thought; Howard Mumford Jones, The Age of Excess: Varieties of American Experience, 1865-1915 (New York: Viking, 1970); Loren Baritz, The Good Life: The Meaning of Success for the American Middle Class (New York: Harper & Row, 1989); Crunden, Ministers of Reform; Daniel T. Rodgers, The Work Ethic in Industrial America, 1850-1920 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978); and Paul Boyer, Urban Masses and Moral Order in America, 1820-1920 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press).
11. "Play for the People," The Independent 62 (February 28, 1907), 514.
12. Donald Kyle, "E. Norman Gardiner and the Decline of Greek Sport," in Donald G. Kyle and Gary D. Stark, eds., Essays in Sport History and Sport Mythology, (College Station: Texas A&M University Press), 7-44.
13. Lloyd S. Bryce, "A Plea for Sport," North American Review 128 (May 1879), 523.
14. A prototypical exposition of the creed reads: "Now, in all civilized countries of the modern world, and especially in countries of advanced economic development and of a form of government like that of the United States, success and progress depend chiefly on the presence of certain personal characteristics," proclaimed H. Addington Bruce in an essay entitled "Baseball and the National Life." "Physical fitness, courage, honesty, patience, the spirit of initiative combined with due respect of lawful authority, soundness and quickness of

- judgement, self-confidence, self-control, cheeriness, fair-mindedness, and appreciation of the importance of social solidarity, of 'team play'--these are traits requisite as never before for success in the life of an individual and of a nation. "H. Addington Bruce, "Baseball and the National Life," Outlook 104 (May 17, 1913), 105.
15. "The Building of Muscle," Harper's 69 (August 1884), 385.
  16. John J. MacAloon has made some provocative insights into the structure of games and sports as "semantic/symbolic/ communicative systems" and the idea that sport performs as an important semiotic "code" in modernizing societies. See his "Olympic Games and the Theory of Spectacle in Modern Societies," in Rite, Drama, Festival, Spectacle, 255-256.
  17. Turner, "The Progress of Athletism," 109.
  18. The symbols of community and modernist energies met in explicit conjunction in Bryce's "Plea for Sport. "We have engrafted on classic times the steam-engine, the telegraph, and the telephone, whose result is the progress of the nineteenth century," he surmised. The modern world needed the culture-building power of sport thought Bryce. He believed that "athletism" might produce a global culture of shared norms, arguing that the America's Cup had done more than the diplomatic arbitration of economic claims for cementing Anglo-American friendship. See pages 518-524.
  19. Bryce, "A Plea for Sport," 524.
  20. John MacAloon, "Olympic Games and the Theory of Spectacle in Modern Societies,;" and This Great Symbol: Pierre de Coubertin and the Origins of the Modern Olympics (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).
  21. MacAloon, "Olympic Games and the Theory of Spectacle in Modern Societies," in Rite, Drama, Festival, Spectacle, 245. Spectacle, a genre of cultural performance in which visual and symbolic codes gain primacy, designed for public display in mass society, and peculiarly and directly coded to the modern dilemma of distinguishing appearance from reality, symbolizes the modernist tension between the hoped for consensual community and the demand for individual autonomy. Participation in spectacle is a voluntary decision which opens the possibility, according to MacAloon, of "a strange double dynamic." He argued that spectacle both reduced experience to "mere appearance" and opened windows to see behind and beyond stereotyped images by "re-presenting" them in "evocative" new forms.
  22. Henry Wysham Lanier, "In the Field of International Sport," Review of Reviews 12 (November 1895), 575-578.
  23. "For the Olympian Games," New York Times, March 22, 1896; "Princeton Will Send Team to Athens," New York Times, March 17, 1896, 6; Richard Mandell, The First Modern Olympics (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976).
  24. "The New Olympic Games," The Chautauquan 23 (July 1896), 263.
  25. "The Olympian Games," New York Times 25.2, April 8, 1896, 4.

26. "In regard to field- and track-athletics there is likely to be less national jealousy, than in other forms of contests," continued Sloane. "From the very outset, in the first Olympic gathering at Athens, common ground for friendly emulation was easily established." William Milligan Sloane, "The Olympic Idea: Its Origin, Foundation, and Progress," The Century 84 (July 1912), 409-410.
27. Rufus B. Richardson, "The New Olympic Games," Scribner's 20 (September 1896), 281.
28. Connolly, "An Olympic Victor," August 1908, 210.
29. Ibid.
30. In historical studies Gene Wise pushed for a new strategy for understanding the relationship between ideas and experience in human life based on the cognitive creed. Wise labeled the technique "perspectivism," and urged scholars to concentrate as much of the inside of "explanation-forms," as they do on the outside--the social context. An "explanation-form" is the perspective, the frame of reference, or in Thomas Kuhn's jargon, the paradigm, through which people apprehend experience. Wise realized that all historical data is impressionistic. Historical statistics provide certain impressions, and give certain "explanation-forms" to experience. Religious tracts give different impressions, and provide different explanations. Gene Wise, American Historical Explanations: A Strategy for Grounded Inquiry, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1980).
31. "I preach to you, then, my countrymen, that our country calls not for the life of ease but for the life of strenuous endeavor. The twentieth century looms before us big with the fate of many nations. If we stand idly by if we seek merely swollen, slothful ease where men must win at hazard of their lives at risk of all they hold dear, then the bolder and stronger peoples will pass us by, and will win for themselves the domination of the world." Theodore Roosevelt, "The Strenuous Life," a speech before the Hamilton Club, Chicago, April 10, 1899; cited in Herman Hagerdorn, ed., The Works of Theodore Roosevelt, Vol. XIII: American Ideals, the Strenuous Life. Realizable Ideals (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1926), 331.
32. "Seven More Victories," Chicago Tribune, July 17, 1900, 9.
33. Caspar Whitney, "The Sportsman's View-Point: Mug Hunters and Disregarded Agreements at Paris Games," Outing 36 (August 1900), 566.
34. Caspar Whitney, "The Sportsman's View-Point: Records of American Athletes Abroad," Outing 36 (September 1900), 677.
35. Bill Henry and Patricia Yeomans, An Approved History of the Olympic Games (Sherman Oaks, Cal.: Alfred, 1983), 47-48.
36. Hjalmar Hjorth Boyesen, "The Most Athletic Nation in the World," Cosmopolitan 37 (May 1904), 83.
37. "Yankee Athletes Barred," New York Times, July 16, 1900, 5; "Americans Win at Paris," Chicago Tribune, July 16, 1900, 8; "Americans Again Lead," New York Times, July 17, 1900, 5; "Paris Games Terminate," New York Times, July 23, 1900, 7. Prinstein and Kraenzlein were long time rivals. The sports columnist for the New York Mail & Express, Malcolm

- Ford, reported that Prinstein wrote him to claim that Kraenzlein “broke faith with him personally” in the Olympic long jump incident. Bernard Postal, Jesse Silver, and Roy Silver, Encyclopedia of Jews in Sport (New York: Bloch, 1965), 480-482.
38. Charles J.P. Lucas, The Olympic Games: 1904 (St. Louis: Woodward & Tiernan, 1905); “Olympic Games in America,” New York Times, July 28, 1900, 5; James Edward Sullivan, “Review of the Olympic Games of 1904,” in Spalding’s Official Athletic Almanac for 1905, Sullivan, ed. (New York: American Sports Publishing, 1905); John Lucas, The Modern Olympic Games (New York: A.S. Barnes, 1980), 67-71; Allen Guttmann, The Games Must Go On: Avery Brundage and the Olympic Movement (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 12-22.
  39. “Olympian Games Begin Today,” Chicago Tribune, August 29, 1904, 8.
  40. “World’s Championship Trophy for N.Y.A.C.,” New York Times, November 22, 1904, 7.
  41. “The Olympic Games,” St. Louis Post-Dispatch, August 28, 1904, United States Olympic Committee Archives, Scrapbook 1904 B, Colorado Springs, Colo.
  42. Sullivan, ed., Spalding’s Almanac for 1905, 161.
  43. D. Karopothakes, “The Olympic Games,” The Nation 82 (June 7, 1906), 466-467; James B. Sullivan, “American Athletes in Ancient Athens,” American Review of Reviews 34 (July 1906), 43-48.
  44. James E. Sullivan, “American Athletes Champions of the World,” Outing 48 (August 1906) 625-627.
  45. James E. Sullivan, ed., Spalding’s Athletic Almanac for 1907 (New York: American Sports Publishing, 1907), 218.
  46. “The Higher Athletics,” The Nation 85 (December 5, 1907), 510. Godkin retained the editorship until 1899. After Godkin stepped down from his command post in 1899, his long time partner, managing editor Wendell Phillips Garrison (the third son of William Lloyd Garrison) continued the anti-athletic stance of commentaries by the influential critical weekly. Frank Luther Mott, A History of American Magazines, 5 Vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1938), III: 331-356.
  47. “The Athletes of the Nations,” The Living Age 257 (June 13, 1908), 699.
  48. “Chronicle and Comment: The Olympic Muddle,” The Bookman 28 (October 1908), 104-105.
  49. Caspar Whitney, “The View-Point: Olympic Games American Committee Report,” Outing 53 (November 1908), 244.
  50. “The Olympic Squabbles,” Collier’s 41 (September 12, 1908), 10.
  51. “Mr. Roosevelt and the Athletes,” New York Times, September 2, 1908, 6.
  52. The Associated Press and Grolier, Pursuit of Excellence: The Olympic Story (Danbury, Conn.: Grolier, 1979), 64.

53. Walter Camp, "The Olympic Games," Collier's 41 (September 5, 1908), 22.
54. James B. Connolly, "The Shepherd's Bush Greeks," Collier's 41 (September 5, 1908) 12.
55. Finley Peter Dunne, "'Mr. Dooley' on the Olympic Games," American Magazine 66 (October 1908), 615-617.
56. James B. Connolly, "The Spirit of the Olympian Games," Outing 48 (April 1906) 104.
57. MacAloon, "Olympic Games and the Theory of Spectacle," 262-263.
58. Edward Bayard Moss, "America's Olympic Argonauts," Harper's Weekly 56 (July 6, 1912) 11.
59. "Col. Thompson Praises America's Olympic Athletes," New York Times, August 25, 1912, sec. 5, p. 10.
60. Will T. Irwin, "The Olympic Games," Collier's 50 (August 10, 1912), 9; Will T. Irwin, The Making of a Reporter (New York: G.P. Putnam's, 1942), 182.
61. "The Stars and Stripes at the Olympic Games," Current Literature 53 (August 1912), 131.
62. James Edward Sullivan, The Olympic Games: Stockholm 1912 Spalding's "Red Cover" Series of Athletic Handbooks No. 17R (New York: American Sports Publishing, 1912), 220.
63. "Our Olympic Laurels," Literary Digest 45 (July 27, 1912), 132.
64. Carl Crow, "America First in Athletics," The World's Work 27 (December 1913) 191-194.
65. Sullivan, ed., The Olympic Games, 101.
66. "Col. Thompson Praises America's Olympic Athletes," sec. 5, p. 10.
67. Finley Peter Dunne, "Dooley on Supremacy of the English in Athletics," New York Times, July 28, 1912, sec. 5, p. 9.
68. William Milligan Sloane, "The Greek Olympiads," in Report of the American Olympic Committee, 1920 (Greenwich, Conn.: Conde Nast Press, 1920), 59.
69. William Milligan Sloane, "Modern Olympic Games," in Report of the American Olympic Committee, 1920, 83.