

Whorton, James C. *Crusaders For Fitness: The History, of American Health Reformers*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982. Pp. 359. Index, notes, illustrations, \$19.50 (cloth).

Need to count calories? Watch the old waistline? Wear stripes to look thinner? Join the crowd! Get in step with the body oriented culture of modern America! Imbue your body with health and vitality through diet and exercise as you do your mind through reading!

Being less glib and a bit more introspective for a moment, I find it extraordinarily difficult to envision a contemporary American who, to some extent, does not have a concern about his body relative to general health, fitness to function in job, and appearance image to others. When pondering such a grossly consuming phenomenon one is inevitably led to wonder how it all started. A substantial response in the way of providing a thoroughly researched and well expressed answer is the subject of a new book written by James C. Wharton, entitled, *Crusaders for Fitness*.

Whorton, of course, is no stranger to readers of the *Journal of Sport History*. His articles on the subjects of muscular vegetarianism and athlete's heart, two themes that make partial contribution to the absorbing message of *Crusaders For Fitness*, appeared in *JSH* in 1981 and 1982, respectively. An associate professor of biomedical history at the University of Washington in Seattle, Whorton brings to his current work no mean reputation as an historian of medical health and fitness themes. A significant previous work, *Before Silent Spring: Pesticides and Public Health in Pre-DDT America* (Princeton, 1974), rendered early evidence of Whorton's skill at penetrating research and writing in a lively and entertaining manner. For the history of health and physical education in America, Whorton's new book is both a handsome and important dividend of those earlier expectations of his future contributions.

But, about the book itself. Of all those colorful and omnipresent characters bred by 19th and early 20th century American culture, Whorton tells us that few were the recipients of more attention in the form of both public ridicule and passionate private embrace than were missionary health fanatics. Mark Twain's jocular description of them was a depiction of "men who ate what they didn't want, drank what they didn't like, did what they'd druther not, all the while announcing themselves to be energetic, joyful, and certain of long life, and exhorting their errant neighbors to reform" (p. 3). Men (and women) of Twain's typology, a number of whom are championed as "Crusaders" in Whorton's analysis, included such health extremists as Christian physiologists, unorthodox physicians, muscular vegetarians, enlightened hygienists, some early American physical educators, and feverish espousers of specific exercise and calisthenic systems. The identification of such zealots and an investigation of the major themes of health extremism and their linkage to the broader intellectual and social scene of America between 1830 and 1920 forms the crux of Whorton's admirable effort.

Whorton presents a convincing argument that the health and fitness movement spawned in early 19th century America was certainly no fad nor short-lived ideology. Seeded in the Jacksonian Period, and fertilized by religious ideal, scientific idea, and common sense thinking, the movement aimed resolutely at the search for man's perfection. True, few Americans accepted the exhortations of the zealot crusaders with complete and unrestrained commitment. But, at the same time, Whorton has argued that few Americans were left unaffected to some extent as far as change in lifestyle that reflected attention to diet, exercise, and personal hygiene habit. In time, the substantive elements of the various faddist messages became accepted practice. The trifling and ridiculous were ignored.

Although some of Whorton's "Crusaders" are names well known to health, physical education, and even sport historians (Beecher, Lewis, Alcott, et al.), the greater number are individuals of lesser familiarity to us—Christian physiologist Sylvester Graham (of Graham cracker fame), muscular vegetarian John Harvey Kellogg, enlightened hygienist Horace Fletcher, and feminist health espousers Mary Neal Gove and Elizabeth Blackwell, to cite only a few of those prominently highlighted in Whorton's book.

A central Whorton thesis focuses on the argument that during the Jacksonian Period, an era characterized by reformist ferment and social optimism, American public spirit enlarged the constituency for various perfectionist campaigns, one example of which was the health and fitness crusade. In fact, Whorton demonstrates that the Jacksonian Period far outstripped the Gilded Age in importance for laying the basis of what is evident today pertinent to an American infatuation with body fitness and appearance. Whorton's treatment of health and fitness reform activity during the Jacksonian Period should be of particular interest and some surprise to health and physical education historians, in that his message modifies the popularly-held conventional wisdom that prior to post-Civil War America and its Gilded Age, little of a substantial nature occurred in the way of health and fitness reform that had any wide-scale, penetrating impact on the American masses and their lifestyle. The Gilded Age, so ripe and bursting with American public awareness of sport, proved to be a quiescent or transitional period for body health and fitness reform activity, stark in contrast to the Jacksonian Period before and the Progressive Period following.

The chronology of American health and fitness reform history investigated by Whorton ends with an analysis of the Progressive Period. Any historian envisioning a study of the years since 1920, embellished as they have been by increasing attention to individually tailored health and fitness approaches, rather than mass-applied considerations of "yesteryear," would necessarily have to be appreciably sensitive towards history's earlier health and fitness events. As Whorton himself reflects: "Anyone who would understand present-day health reformers would (have) to 'know where they're coming from,' as the current idiom has it" (p. 12). After reading *Crusaders For Fitness*, a work reflecting voluminous citation of source materials and creative interpretations drawn from them, there is little doubt in my mind that James Whorton knows better than any "where they're coming from." So, what's keeping you Professor Whorton? I invite you to get started! In the meantime, watch your meat consumption! Chew your food well! And eat plenty of Graham crackers!

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