

Guttman, Allen. *Games & Empires: Modern Sports and Cultural Imperialism*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994. Pp. 275. Photographs, index. \$24.50 cb.

With this book, *Games & Empires*, Allen Guttman, Professor of American Studies at Amherst College, adds to his already-prodigious writing record. His books span an impressive array of topics, and include *The Conservative Tradition in America*; *American Neutrality and the Spanish Civil War*; *Communism, the Courts, and the Constitution*; *The Wound in the Heart: America and the Spanish Civil War*; *The Jewish Writer in America: Assimilation and the Crisis of Identity*; *Korea and the Theory of Limited War*; *Korea: Cold War and Limited War*; *A Whole New Ball Game: An Interpretation of American Sports*; *From Ritual to Record: The Nature of Modern Sports*; *Sports Spectators*; *Life of George Washington/Washington Irvin* (co-edited, with James A. Sappenfield); *Removal of the Cherokee Nation: Manifest Destiny or National Dishonor?* (with Louis Filler); *The Games Must Go On*; and *Women's Sports: A History*. As the previous titles attest, the breadth of his oeuvre is remarkable.

The phenomenon of sport has, over the past seventeen years, come under Guttman's ferocious scope. His most recent work, *Games & Empires: Modern Sports and Cultural Imperialism*, is designed as a "set of exemplary case studies" (p. 11) which lead to a discussion of the question: "Can the diffusion of modern sports from Europe and the United States to the rest of the world be considered a form of cultural imperialism?" (p. 6). In its discussion of diffusion and resistance in modern sports, the book is unevenly divided. Guttman's bias toward the diffusion aspects is demonstrated in six chapters; forms of resistance are covered in two chapters; and Guttman's final assessment is produced in a single, penultimate chapter. Of course, this imbalance might reflect a modern bent toward cultural diffusion; regardless, it helps to produce the impression that resistance is less prevalent in modern society.

Having chosen a timely and complex topic (the globalization, Americanization, Mundialization, and/or diffusion of sport throughout the world has been discussed heartily in the *Sociology of Sport Journal*, among others), Guttman's use of secondary sources seems to be limited to those entries which advance his final chapter's argument. Thus, we see cricket (Ch. 1) as part of a worldwide global encroachment by the British Empire, yet the resistance of such "subject nations" as the Trobriand Islands (encapsulated in the symbolic refitting of cricket by the Islanders themselves) is not discussed until the final chapter. This technique—the style of dramatic narrative, of holding back substantive information—makes for more compelling, suspenseful reading, yet I am convinced, at least for an academic audience, that a more deliberate weaving of all the pieces throughout would have been more effective. As the work stands, the reader is left hanging, reading through descriptive secondary accounts of cricket, soccer, baseball, basketball, American football, and the Olympic Games for a tautological discussion of sports which have diffused internationally, and reading parallel

discussions of the Turner movement and “traditional” sports as exemplars of sporting forms of resistance.

It is vaguely unsatisfying, reading such selective accounts, though I agree with many of Guttman’s conclusions in the final chapter. However, they seem to come from obstinate and forced premises, rather than from deliberate, rational, and well-thought-out arguments. Guttman’s style is to tease the reader, and I generally savor this tack, but in this work, I find the lack of follow-up of and to arguments to be mildly frustrating.

For example, Guttman discusses the diffusion of soccer geographically and temporally. His argument for the phenomenon of “rapid diffusion” in North Africa is that “Arab nationalists [realized] that sports clubs were an excellent nucleus for political organization” (p. 69). He goes on to say that “By 1928, Algerian soccer had become a predominantly Arab sport with unmistakable anticolonial overtones” (p. 69). Yet, this excellent point regarding resistance and the complicated appropriation of sport forms is undercut by the structuring of Guttman’s book, and by an insistence on closure. Since we find this support for resistance within a chapter in the diffusion section, the resistance element is quickly dismissed and glossed over: “In any event, the scholastic amusement that began on the greens of nineteenth-century Oxford and Cambridge is now the passion of the stadia—and the back streets—of Genoa, São Paulo, Nairobi, and a thousand other cities” (p. 70). The sly aside and quick mention of “the back streets of Nairobi” apparently should suffice for the reader to recall that resistance to a dominant imperialistic power was accomplished through adaptation and perfection of soccer by colonized peoples.

It is this insistence on closure by Guttman—on a neat, generalized view of things—that I find most bothersome in *Games & Empires*. As Alan Klein puts it (cited in Guttman, p. 70): “culture is competed for.” This pull and push and ebb and flow of power and resistance is fascinating work—it is the stuff of which life is made—and to reduce it to mere listing and categorization and classification seems to draw from it its very lifeblood. Certainly, a similar—though substantially different in its subject—attempt at discussion of the mishmash of diffusion, theory, empirical “data,” and change which seems to have come off much more successfully is Clifford Geertz’ oftentimes confusing and confounding (and fascinating) *After the Fact: Two Countries, Four Decades, One Anthropologist*. In this book, Geertz tackles many of the same issues Guttman does, yet recounts them in many of their complications, in most of their messiness, in all of their complexities. For Guttman to limit himself to discussion of baseball only as it demonstrates diffusion, for example, and not as it demonstrates resistance (and why are these seeming oppositions?), seems to me arbitrary and unjust.

Having said all this, however, in Guttman’s defense I must add that he has anticipated many of my arguments and disappointments in his introductory chapter. He states that he has “opted for selective narration—how *some* modern sports have been diffused to *some* more or less representative places” (p. 10). He

writes that “parts I and II [are] intended to provide a data base... for the argument that follows in part III” (p. 11). Of course, his goal in this book is not to provide an “encyclopedic account” of diffusion in sport, but *this* reader would wish, at the very least, for a more extensive theoretical discussion of the nuances and subtleties of cultural diffusion, cultural hegemony, cultural resistance, and cultural imperialism in modern sport.

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