

LA FEBER, WALTER. *Michael Jordan and the New Global Capitalism*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1999. Pp. xxiv + 191. Notes, illustrations, bibliography. \$22.95 cb., \$12.95 pb.

A renowned historian using Michael Jordan as a vehicle for explaining the complexities and inequities of contemporary global capitalism is certainly a mouth-watering prospect for anyone interested in furthering their understanding of sport's position and influence within the late capitalist global economy. This is particularly true when the aforementioned historian has, in his previous works, tackled such weighty issues as U.S. foreign policy, U.S.-Japanese relations, and the Cold War. Walter LaFeber's turn to basketball in general, and Michael Jordan in particular, demonstrates a heartening recognition (one that would seem to be presently sweeping across the humanities and social sciences) that as a stratagem for critical socio-cultural inquiry, there is much to be gained by taking sport seriously. To be sure *Michael Jordan and the New Global Capitalism* is not an advanced academic treatise replete with profound theoretical and methodological insights. Nor does it pretend to be. The book is neither inaccessible ivory tower scholarship nor is it crass populism designed solely for mass-market appeal. Rather, LaFeber has chosen a "third way," producing a meticulously researched and carefully written text whose focus and tone are designed to appeal to, inform, and indeed challenge, mainstream sensibilities.

As well as providing a fluid descriptive chronology of Jordan's career as superlative basketball player and unrivalled global celebrity, more importantly, LaFeber's "short book on some large subjects" (p. 13) simultaneously identifies the Michael Jordan phenomenon as—in some senses quite literally—the embodiment of the intersecting economic, cultural, political, and technological forces that shape the *new* global capitalism (I stress "new" advisedly because, as economic historians have demonstrated, from genesis capitalism has always been, to some degree, a global phenomenon). In his own words, "The history of basketball, especially in the era of Michael Jordan, helps us understand this era known as the 'American Century'" (p. 23).

While underscoring the central piece of America within the new global order, LaFeber is circumspect enough to point to the pitfalls associated with America's increased influence on the world stage. For example, he contextualizes Michael Jordan within this late capitalist moment in such a way as to expose class, race, and nation-based inequities that lie at the heart of the contemporary global capitalist order; both at the moments of production and consumption. LaFeber thus provides an engaging socio-cultural history of the present moment in the evolution of civilization by demonstrating how the lives of Michael Jordan himself, the chronically underpaid South East Asian workers who manufacture Jordan-branded products, and the cohorts of global youth who represent the primary consumers of the commodified Jordan, are all lived expressions of "the new post-industrialist era" (p. 93). LaFeber's critical historical consciousness is also mobilized to particular effect in his discussion of Nike's status as an archetypal transnational corporation. By positing late nineteenth-century multinational firms against late twentieth-century transnationals, such as Nike, he points to the broader changes that delineate late capitalist economies (in-

creased overseas manufacture, reliance on knowledge/information production and circulation, turn to world consumer markets, centrality of marketing and advertising, and largely unregulated corporate strategizing).

In summation, within this project LaFeber points to the political value of histories of the cultural present, for his eloquent polemic subtly counters the commodity fetishism that routinely accompanies the consumption of omnipresent figures such as Jordan, in both their material (Air Jordan sneaker) and symbolic (media coverage) manifestations. He thus provides a substantive exemplar of Miller, Lawrence, McKay, and Rowe's political directive: "Before you buy the sneaker, or sign on for the TV package, follow the life of the commodity sign through its history, keeping citizenship and labor at the forefront of your thoughts" (*Globalization and Sport: Playing the World*, p. 129). As he himself implores, "In the new tightly wired world, Americans cannot escape these questions. They can only begin to deal with them by understanding the history of how we all became part of a global market economy and market society" (p. 164). Thus, LaFeber demonstrates how writing histories of the sporting present can be an explicitly political practice that cuts to the core of the global capitalist formation. Cynics may accuse LaFeber of utilizing the "Jordan factor" in order to provide his publishers with a highly marketable text; however, I prefer to view him as a concerned public pedagogue who, through this widely read book, has made an important contribution to popular understanding by challenging people to question the derivation, nature, and effects, of their everyday existence.

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