

History of Physical Education in the United States (2005). Written, produced and directed by James Holzknrecht. Castalia Media. Distributed by Insight Media. 30 mins.

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The use of film has become an accepted part of History of Sport and Physical Education classes. The vast majority of historical films available, however, focus on traditional sport, thus it was interesting to see a film, actually a DVD, that focuses solely on the history of physical education. This DVD is part of a projected series of DVDs based on John D. Massengale and Richard A. Swanson's book, *The History of Exercise and Sport Science* published by Human Kinetics in 1997.¹ James Holzknrecht contacted Massengale to inform him of his interest in producing a series of films to go along with the chapters in the book and solicited Massengale and Swanson's cooperation on the history portion of the project. They appear as two of the "experts" in the DVD.² This first installment is based on the first chapter of the text entitled, "Exercise and Sport Science in 20th-Century America." A second DVD on the sport sociology chapter has also been completed.

The history of physical education DVD begins with a discussion of events in other parts of the world that are considered influences on the development of modern physical education in the United States. Topics include brief discussions of Greek and Roman sport and the Church of England's influence on sport. The scene then moves to late nineteenth-century America where the influence of Swedish gymnastics on women's physical education is examined. The inception of the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation, Dance (AAHPERD) in 1885 followed by the evolution of the "new" physical education is presented. Then, the DVD quickly moves through the periods involving the First and Second World Wars and the Cold War. The DVD ends with a discussion of the current "status" of physical education in the public schools. Periodically, some highlights of sport history (the development of baseball and intercollegiate sport for men, for example) are introduced.

Some parts of the DVD were interesting and could potentially be useful in a history of physical education class. A variety of topics that are frequently overlooked in "traditional" sport history texts were emphasized in the film. Unfortunately, there are a number of factual errors, interpretive errors, and errors of omission.

There are numerous spelling errors throughout the DVD. The correct spellings are Per Henrik Ling not Pehr Heinrich Ling, Mt. Holyoke not Holyoake, Dudley Allen Sargent not Dudley Alan Sargent, Donna Lopiano not Lapiano, and Kraus-Weber not Klaus-Webber. Other factual errors include the date of the first Harvard-Yale crew race that was held on August 3, 1852, not in 1853. The initial name in 1885 of today's AAHPERD was the Association for the Advancement of Physical Education, the word American was added in 1886. Jesse Feiring Williams was not the last medical doctor/physical educator to lead today's AAHPERD in 1932-1933. It was Margaret Bell, M.D., who served as the president of AAHPERD in 1939-1940.

One of the experts in the video correctly asserts that Roman sport was basically spectator sport; however, the DVD text argues that Romans were interested in the development of virtuous behavior through physicality but does not really support this contention. I believe most scholars would argue that gladiatorial contests and chariot races for Romans were bloody spectacles, not virtuous behavior.

Not all religious groups were against sport in the reformation period as was stated in the video. For example, the Church of England was very supportive of leisure. King James I and King Charles I in *The King's Majesty's Declaration to his Subjects Concerning Lawful Sports to be Used*, published in 1633, upheld the notion that sport was to be used as a method of control and distraction for the people.

The contention that the profession of physical education was started by medical doctors, though not entirely false, is a bit of an overstatement. At the 1885 meeting of today's AAHPERD, sixty people were in attendance, and forty-nine became members that day. Only eleven of the forty-nine persons were M.D.s. Nevertheless, physicians were very influential in leadership positions of AAHPERD during its formative years. According to Mabel Lee and Bruce Bennett's "This is Our Heritage," the only president who was not a medical doctor during the first fifteen years of the organization's history was William Blaikie.³ At this point the film should have provided an analysis of why M.D.s were no longer as involved in AAHPERD, particularly after the 1930s, when the growth of education influenced the field and Teachers College-Columbia University began offering doctoral programs.

Alexander Cartwright is better recognized as an innovator of the game of baseball. Claiming he and his friends as the primary developers of the sport in 1845 is not as bad as the Abner Doubleday myth; however, students should be made aware that historical records show us reports of baseball-like games in the 1820s in New York City and as early as the late 1700s in Western Massachusetts.

Dance was not a factor in the development of men's physical education; it only affected women's physical education, but the film contends it influenced the profession generally. Finally, the First World War is usually recognized more than the Second World War as the point at which state legislatures recognized the need for mandatory physical education in public schools because of the high number of draftee rejections.

The work of Galen or Hippocrates was not mentioned as contributing to the ancient connection to physical education. When discussing Catherine Beecher, no mention is made of her sister, Harriet Beecher Stowe, author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, a work with which students should be familiar. The DVD fails to point out that men's and women's and girls' and boys' physical education programs and athletics were completely separate at their inception in virtually every institution, and most did not merge until the 1970s when *Title IX* legislation took effect.

Amy Morris Homans is briefly mentioned, but she should be discussed in the same breath as Mary Hemenway when analyzing the Boston Normal School of Gymnastics (BNSG). She was the guiding force behind the BNSG from its inception. In discussing female physical education advocates, the DVD describes Kate Barrett as an effective contributor, but other good examples are Ann Jewett, Linda Bain, Claudine Sherrill, or Karen DePauw among a number of other women.

From a “critical” reading of the film, the reviewer needs to make two points, one is very subtle, the other a bit more obvious. The obvious critique is about race. There is virtually no mention of race in the entire DVD. The historical work on the experience of African-American physical educators by Sherry Salyer and David Wiggins could have been included in the production.⁴ It is ironic that the African-American female “expert” in the film was the one discussing the early nineteenth-century prohibitions on physical activity for women. These proscriptions were focused exclusively on upper- and middle-class white women. African-American women forced into slavery and poor immigrant women were not given lighter physical work loads because they were considered to be the “weaker sex.”

My final critique is based on a more subtle reading of gender, race, and power. One of the things that jumped out at me as a viewer was the gender breakdown of the “experts.” At first glance it seems that the experts are balanced in terms of race and gender, but a closer look raises several issues. First, all of the males were white, and three of the four were clearly identified as “Dr.,” giving them a level of prestige. The fourth male, although identified as a lecturer, was given higher status by referring to him as a “scientist” and surrounding him with impressive-looking exercise science equipment.

The three female “experts” presented a racially diverse group—white, African American, and Latina. However, these three women were all “lecturers,” and not “Drs.,” and all were very casually dressed. Could the producers not find a single female sport historian with a Ph.D. available to speak on the video? Jan Todd, one of the foremost sport historians in the world, also works at the University of Texas at Austin, where the lecturers were from; perhaps she was not available? There are at least a dozen other female sport historians who would have added a great deal to the DVD.

I suggest that historians of sport and physical education still use other videos in their classrooms such as *Fit: Episodes in the History of the Body* and Modern Marvel’s *History of Fitness*, rather than this one. Although these do not necessarily focus on the history of the physical education profession, they provide a much more nuanced analysis on the history of the body and physical activity. If one chooses to show this film, it is important to point out the errors and fill in the omissions.

Of greater concern is the fear that this DVD will be used in *Introduction to Physical Education* courses as an easy substitute for a lecture on our history. Will it be much worse than some of those lectures? Probably not—however, the errors and omissions will most likely go uncorrected and unchallenged. Of even greater distress to me is the fact that a generation of students will be led to believe that historians of sport and physical education are mostly older, white males. I hope that these issues are addressed and corrected in future versions of this DVD.



¹John D. Massengale and Richard A. Swanson, eds., *History of Exercise and Sport Science*. Champaign, Ill.: Human Kinetics, 1997.

²Dick Swanson indicated that a number of issues that I have discussed above—particularly the omissions from the DVD—were a part of his interview with the film’s writer, but they obviously ended

up on the cutting room floor. The “experts” did not have an opportunity to review a version of the film before it was finalized.

³Mabel Lee and Bruce Bennett, “This is Our Heritage,” *Journal of Health, Physical Education, Health and Recreation* 31 (1960): 25-85.

⁴Sherry Salyer, “By the Limitations of White Tolerance: African American Participation in the 1942 AAHPER National Convention,” *North American Society for Sport History Proceedings*, 2005; David K. Wiggins, “Edwin Bancroft Henderson: Physical Educator, Civil Rights Activist and Chronicler of African American Athletes,” *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport* 70 (1999): 91-112.