

# GRADUATE STUDENT ESSAY AWARD

## Ain't Misbehavin': The Montreal Shamrock Lacrosse Club Fans, 1868 to 1884

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Within Canada's large industrial centre of Montreal, between the years 1868 and 1884, as many as 10,000 supporters watched, discussed, and gambled on Shamrock Lacrosse Club matches each Saturday afternoon. The Shamrock Lacrosse Club was composed of members of Montreal's Irish Catholic working class during a time when the playing fields were the domain of the English and Protestant middle class. Shamrock matches appear to have been an integral component of the social life of both the middle and working class.

This paper has focused upon the Irish-Catholic and working class male Shamrock Lacrosse Club fans who hailed from Montreal's slum of Griffintown. Its purpose was to determine what drove an indeterminate number of Griffintowners to endow passionate support upon the Shamrocks. It was hypothesized that attending Shamrock matches provided Griffintowners a momentary escape from the banality of working class existence and, secondly, that Shamrock matches provided a vehicle for the enhancement of Irish-Catholic and working class pride.

Evidence suggests that Shamrock matches provided a physical escape from the grimy, congestion of Griffintown; however, class biases and ethnic prejudices, paramount to those experienced in the 'real' world, were not escaped while upon the lacrosse grounds. The middle class purveyors of lacrosse believed that working class involvement challenged the traditional, gentlemanly code which, for them, constituted 'proper' behaviour at lacrosse matches. It was theorized that if lacrosse matches were understood as local community rituals, then Griffintowners were not escaping their environment but enhancing it. The Shamrock match, as a ritual performance, provided a challenge to the dominant code of fan conduct.

Victor Turner's theory of ritual anti-structure was used to support this study. Central to Turner's thesis is his insight that within the liminal phase of the ritual the participant is liberated from behavioural norms and cognitive rules and is offered the possibility of a potentially unlimited series of social arrangements. One may experience what ought to be as opposed to what is.

It was concluded that Shamrock fan behaviour, in the form of trespassing, vandalism, partisanship, verbal assault, and physical assault, was construed as irrational and ambiguous 'misbehaviour' by the middle class; however, it was not considered as such by those engaged in it. Further, by challenging the middle class code of fan behaviour the Griffintowners enhanced their pride in themselves. Their displays of hedonistic enthusiasm, vociferous partisanship, and physical assault were demonstrative of their class and ethnic values. These values included winning at all costs, solidarity, participation, masculine aggression, and an 'us' versus 'them' ideology.