

Ancient Greeks and Native Americans: Concepts of Physical Culture

Amy Hribar
University of Illinois, Urbana

This paper examines the historical comparisons made between native North Americans and the ancient Greeks in the context of physicality, athleticism and cultural emphasis on games and sport. The literary and philosophical movements of classicism, romanticism and primitivism greatly influenced these comparisons which were made by a number of Euro-American observers. The forming notions and beliefs of these movements along with the Euro-American search for authenticity helped to create an ideal model of man found in the ancient Greeks, which was subsequently reinvented and applied to native Americans. These images and ideals, and the way in which we describe them, are very powerful forces which shape the way in which we view Native American and ancient Greek cultures. I draw upon the works of George Catlin, David Sansone and others to illustrate these comparisons.



Native American Sport Session Participants