

Bodybuilding, Nationalism, and Ideology in the Popular Press, 1880-1905

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During the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the United States became increasingly susceptible to an imperialistic mentality that located the apotheosis of civilization at a specific cultural point: the upper-middle-class, white, male, body. This fascination and belief system may be seen in a large range of cultural productions. This paper examines the obsession with bodybuilding, the conflation of physical fitness with military dominance, and the part played by the popular press in distributing images of these expressions via sports coverage, contests, and images of male bodies. A number of domestic and international phenomena converged to encourage and fix this tendency. The major influences were: The influx of immigrants who did not speak English and were not Protestant; The rise and fall of Reconstruction and the creation of the so-called "uncontrollable" sexual African male; The relentless progression of positivist science and its influence on the emerging social sciences, especially anthropology; The ideologies of the eugenics movement with its twin dictates of Anglo-Saxon race dominance and millennial victory; Military/governmental/economic invasions by Europe of Africa and Asia; the influence of Germanic and Prussian techniques of the body and their representations of the military image; and, the U.S. obsession with the development and display of the white male body, with an increasing emphasis on quantification of anatomical symmetry, muscle size, weight, and strength for its own sake.

This paper discusses these issues as they influenced the United States and its self-image as a nation among nations, a self-image that ignited a desire to be a contender in the international political ring. A sense of competition with other nations and the desire to compete and to dominate developed during this time, explained and justified by an increasingly inflexible ideology of race superiority. This ideology was shored up by the methods of anthropometry and by theories of racial characteristics and civilization, which made their way into visual representation in the press. These cultural movements both normalized and made "necessary" the dominance of Asia and Africa by Western Europe and by the United States.

The interaction examined is threefold: the rise of gymnastics, bodybuilding, boxing and wrestling as ways to display the male body; the increasing acceptance of anthropometry, eugenics, and imperialism by the masses; and the concomitant visual representation of statistics and ideal (and often, military) male bodies in the popular press. This interaction sheds light on a kind of nationalism exemplified by the physical development and "beefing up" of white middle-class men, and the adoption of a kind of "strong-man act" by the middle class and by national leaders. By connecting these cultural issues, this paper discusses the visual representation and its power to create beliefs and "information" about the correct ordering of social structure, both domestically and internationally.

Re-Creation Through Recreation: Physical Activity and Regeneration in Atlantic Canada and Northeastern United States, 1860-1910

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In Victorian Atlantic Canada and the Northeastern United States many people believed that both standards of health and society were degenerating. While individual and social deterioration were spiralling, however, Victorians took comfort that there was a chance for regeneration. Physical perfection would be encouraged through exercise programmes and through athletic games. First, the individual body would be re-created; then, society. And it all would be achieved through specific forms of recreation: exercise programs and athletic events.

For Victorians individual regeneration meant social improvement. This concept of regeneration often has been discussed in the national context or in a more spiritual context. Ramsey Cook, for example, has explored the religious and intellectual connotations of regeneration in Canada. Similarly, Robert Nye has