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## ***Sport and Ethnic Divisions: The Case of Scottish Soccer***

This paper is a critical appraisal of some recent claims made about the relation between football (soccer) in Scotland and historical and contemporary ethnic divisions. A steady stream of papers and books asserts the enduring significance of religious identification and 'sectarianism' in Scotland, and soccer's prime place in maintaining, marking or, even, producing this. These works seek to trace the history of ethnic division in Scottish soccer and gleefully/gloomily warn that Scotland 'could be' like Northern Ireland, that the two 'tribes' of protestants and catholics might really go to war, that many of those born in Scotland have had 'Irish' or, at the least, 'dual' identities forced on them by the 'racism' and 'prejudice' of their forbears, and so on. Among other things, they suggest that Celtic fans do not support the national side of Scotland, preferring instead the team of a totally different political state—Eire. They point to Rangers' policy—only changed in 1989—of not playing Catholics in their team. They tell their readers of catholic players being booed by the (supposedly protestant) crowd when playing for the Scottish national team. They describe the flags waved and the chants and songs sung in the two Glasgow stadia. This kind of interpretation is dominant around the world.

This review highlights weaknesses both in the arguments of this literature and the evidence upon which it is based. It sets the case of Scotland into an international comparison with other places—Belgium, Spain, the former Yugoslavia—where ethnic divisions have played a part in sporting arrangements, and assesses where Scotland stands on what could be conceptualized as a continuum of severity of ethnic division. I indicate the kind of historical and contemporary evidence necessary to support the aforementioned arguments, and stress the need to contextualize evidence culled from sport within evidence drawn from other sectors of social life. The paper argues that texts linking Scottish soccer with ethnic division vastly overstate the weight of this link and provide a biased and inadequate 'history' to support their case. I also consider the way academics use 'history' and 'historical argument' to 'prove' the contemporary salience of certain social divisions in which they are interested. In other words, I make an argument about the political use of history. The paper attempts to correct the dominant understanding of Scottish soccer in sports history, and shows that there are many other important topics requiring historical investigation than ethnic division.