

CLASS

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The Politics of Boxing: Resistance, Religion, and Working-Class Assimilation

This study examines and analyzes boxing as a political tool and as a means of assimilation for a variety of American social groups during the early twentieth century. It considers the variables of ethnicity, race, religion, social class, politics and labor activism in its analysis of the process by which subordinate groups accommodated with the dominant group to forge a pluralistic and more democratic culture.

The study establishes boxing as an ethnic and working class activity by virtue of its active participants. It portrays boxing as a resistive social force at odds with the dominant culture and its political system, which was largely controlled by middle class, white, Anglo, Protestants. Boxing also served a variety of ethnic and racial groups as a means of self-assertion, as well as being a way for them to win recognition and esteem against intra-class rivals. To that effect this study explores boxing as an agent of change in the promotion of different, and ultimately congruent, ethnic, racial, and religious values.

The process of ethnic, racial, religious, and class accommodation through boxing is detailed in the political and religious alliances its promoters forged. The paper describes the work and purposes of particular individuals in effecting such unions. The particular role of religion and religious promoters, who fulfilled the role of Gramsci's organic intellectuals to bridge alternative cultures, is central to the discussion. The study concludes that religion superseded ethnic and class interests in effecting the assimilation of subordinate groups and reducing their potential threat to the established political system. Boxing, however, allowed the retention of alternative group values, even as it became a national enterprise that also fostered patriotism and incorporated non-Protestants within the mainstream. The process of mutual accommodation through boxing culminated in a popular culture that proved to be a more democratic and pluralistic one.

The study uses sources that include both primary and secondary works, newspaper, archival collections, and Catholic archdiocese records to add a new analytical element—religion—to previous work on boxing.