

“WHO ONLY CRICKET KNOW”: SPORT, IDEOLOGY AND EMANCIPATORY  
POLITICS

by  
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## ABSTRACT

Sport is considered to be apolitical. But nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, sport and discourses around sport support and sustain dominant hegemony in various ways. This is just as true for the public school origins of modern sport as it is for contemporary global sport. Whether it be the capitalist ethic of the American Dream, or the imperial, British, ethic of ‘fair play,’ sport does not exist independent from ideology. Instead, sport is used as a social disciplining tool that underhandedly justifies, disciplines, and “normalizes” social behavior, culture, and dominant ideologies. This thesis begins with an examination of the role of sport as a tool for social disciplining but, alongside, also delves into instances when sport has provided individuals the opportunity to reconstitute their identities and subjective autonomies against dominant cultural hegemonies. Through analyses of nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first century cultural texts (literature and film), I argue that sport functions to both interpolate us as subjects and awaken us from docility in order lead us to critically engage with the world. The aim of this project is to identify these different functions of sport as social discourse *and* theorize a route by which sport can become more authentically emancipatory in the global present

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## INTRODUCTION: TOWARDS A LITERARY SPORT

If soccer players were to form a nation, they would be the 5<sup>th</sup> largest in the world.<sup>1</sup> The Olympics are viewed by half the world's population. The NFL claims to own Sundays. These facts speak to the fervor, held globally, for sport. However, in literary studies sport escapes us; discourse on sport rarely appears in conferences and sport stories quickly become relegated to 'feel good' stories and are seldom critically analyzed. Imagine, for example, the academic interest in a novel read by billions every year, or a film screening which sold out, weekend on weekend, even when the entrance fee represents a considerable outlay for most viewers. This lacuna leaves the discourse on sport—which *does* attract billions of spectators every year—left shamefully uncontested.

The importance of reading the discourse of sport within the field of literature is only intensified when we recognize sport's leverage and potential within current socio-political struggles. From the NFL's supposed support of the Black Lives Matter movement to the Premier League's Rainbow Laces campaign, sport is becoming aware of its own agency, and, I claim, is attempting to become a useful tool in contemporary emancipatory efforts. However, such a movement can only be completed in earnest if sport is able to recognize its history and privileged position within hegemonic structures. As such, I propose a study of sport literature, film, and cultural texts which seeks to reveal and contest past and current definitions of sport, so that sport might become

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<sup>1</sup> FIFA's most recent study puts the total soccer-playing population at roughly 250 million (FIFA).



authentically useful to us in a moment where social antagonisms are at the forefront of almost every novel, news broadcast, and sporting event.

To complete this reading, I use a range of texts from the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries to claim that, despite sport's history as a tool of social discipline, it *can* become authentically useful as we seek to disrupt the ideological state apparatuses that define life in the global present. It is, therefore, essential to write on the history of sport, in order to understand sport's current position within the socio-political realm. To complete a reading in sport invested in historicity, I will dedicate each chapter to a distinct argument which furthers my understanding about sport, its history as a tool of social disciplining, and its potential to articulate politics that are antagonistic to dominant ideology. Simply put, the arguments I make are these:

- 1) Sport has been used as a tool of social discipline by those in power;
- 2) Despite sport's use as a tool of social discipline, sport has also been a space where subjects can constitute their identities against dominant powers;
- 3) In order to grasp sport's emancipatory potential, we must find ways to divorce it from (or, make it antagonistic to) hegemonic power—for us, that means pitching sport against capitalism.

What I present here is a discussion of sport as a tool of social disciplining, followed by an exploration of how sport allows individuals to reclaim marginalized subjectivities, and, finally, conclude with a discussion on sport, capitalism, and hegemony.

## Two Definitions of Sport

Before beginning, it is essential to define what I mean by sport in this thesis. My argument is primarily interested in sport as a socio-political text, and so I provide the following definition: sport is a popular texts which are sites of hegemonic interpolation. This definition is directly at odds with the current movement in sport which claims sport to be an ‘equalizer’ and a space that exists outside of political tension and frustration. Instead, this definition recognizes that sport, as texts, currently belongs to hegemonic power, rather than the individuals who play them. For example, as I explore more fully in my first chapter, sport has been used to universalize the ethics of the British Empire, the ‘natural’ order of capitalism, and blind us to the failings of both projects.

However, for the sake of common understanding, I provide the following, ontological, definition of sport: sport is a space in which temporal and spatial conditions are manipulated to create material antagonism. This definition essentially restricts sport to particular times/spaces (a field, a board, a boundary, 90 minutes, 5 days, etc.), and that time/space as being an expression of antagonism (the subject who plays might be antagonistic to another player, to a time limit, to a material object, etc.). As such, this definition of sport captures traditionally popular sports like soccer (temporal/spatial: 120 x 75 yards; 90 minutes. Antagonism: the other team), while also working in conjunction with sports that are traditionally held outside of the privileges of being considered a sport, like Esports (liminal: the boundaries of the virtual arena; typically, under 30 minutes. Antagonism: the other players).

I wish to emphasize that the definitions of sport work best when we understand sport as a discourse or discourse community. I cannot analyze or explicate the raw play of

athletes, but I can analyze and contest the way other members of the sport discourse community represent sport. As such, it is representation of sport—in film, novels, documentaries and memoirs—that is the subject matter of this thesis.

### **Contextualizing this Project**

While there is a distinct lack of scholarship on sport's literature and its representation in popular media, I am certainly not the first to consider sport from a cultural studies perspective. There is, in fact, a growing field of sports studies which utilizes historical criticism. As such, I take much of my secondary analysis from journals such as *The International Journal of Sports History*, *Aethlon*, from journal special issues such as *Moving World's* "(Con)figuring Sport" and books such as "Out of Left Field: Social Inequality and Sports". This allows me to align my work with the fledgling field of sport studies, while attempting to contribute something new to the field in the context of current tensions in social relations. In this thesis, I am inspired by J.A. Mangam who, after providing hundreds of pages of historical scholarship in multiple journals on sport, leaves this nugget of academic inspiration to conclude his essay on imperialism and sport: "Attempts to locate modern sport near the center of British imperial culture will be awaited by those already involved in this propaedeutic effort with eagerness and satisfaction" (2010, 33). I take this statement earnestly and Mangam's challenge seriously by theorizing a mode of sport that utilizes the sum of sports studies' findings and attempts to make a meaningful impression on sport in its current, global, capital driven condition.

To examine an industry so large as sport I must recognize that sport *is* aware of contemporary social antagonisms. In the past five years, sport *has* made symbolic strides

in aligning itself with today's issues. Athletes kneeling in support of the Black Lives Matter movement and the NFL's sudden U-turn to support them speaks to a desire to appear progressive. The Premier League airing free-to-view games amidst the COVID-19 crisis appears to be aimed towards appeasing the British working class. There is, symbolically, wide support of LGBTQ+ communities via the display of rainbow flags across all major sport. These recent moves recognize that sport isn't "just a game" and seem to suggest that global sport can keep up with, and has a responsibility towards, today's social issues. However, in reality, each of these responses are tokenized efforts to appear progressive, and are ultimately profit-oriented acts, rather than authentically emancipatory ones. The NFL's support of the Black Lives Matter movement is carefully calculated to support 'good' protestors while sidestepping the demands of 'bad' protestors (and Colin Kaepernick, at the time of this writing, *still* doesn't have a job in the NFL). The Premier League is the wealthiest league on the planet, yet all teams milk the pockets of their fans and charge outrageous, unaffordable, prices to attend matches in person. There continues to be an inexcusable lack of out LGBTQ+ players at any level of professional competition (somehow, there is not a single out LGBTQ+ player active in the Premier League, the NFL, the MLB, La Liga, the NBA, or the IPL). However, my goal is not to chide the tokenized efforts of the sport industry, but rather to see them as a starting point from which we can create more authentic discussion around sport and its relation to ideology and emancipatory projects.

To consider the emancipatory quality of sport in an age where symbolic gestures seemingly carry more weight than material reality, I read sport alongside contemporary theory and criticism with the same rigor that we afford to novels, film, or poetry. As such,

in my first chapter I align my readings with *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on The Left* (2000) (in particular, its final chapter, Slavoj Žižek’s “Holding the Place.”). In this chapter, Žižek (via Lacan), claims that there is no big Other, or symbolic authority guaranteeing meaning in life and writes “[Lacan’s] point is precisely that there is no a priori formal structural schema exempt from historical contingencies” (310). Žižek continues this point, asking us to take historicity seriously in our understanding of ideology and universality, so that we might understand the Real as being “far from opposed to historicity, the Real is its very ‘ahistorical’ ground the a priori of historicity *itself*” (310). I take this passage to serve as a reminder that we are bound to historicity and that, as such, our theorizations shouldn’t seek to rediscover a pre-ideological utopia, but rather should seek meaning within the bounds of historicity. It is this recognition of all things as historically bound that ultimately and supports the idea that the true emancipatory struggle today is one for ideology, rather than representation.

This renewed attention to historicity and ideology leads me to consider *Tom Brown’s School Days* (*School Days*) (published in 1856) alongside *Pele: The Birth of a Legend* (*Pele*) (Jeff and Michael Zimblast, 2016) precisely because they are historically bound to one another by ideology. Both texts—despite being released 169 years apart—use sport as a means to universalize the ethics and ideology of dominant power structures. For *School Days*, this meant a universalization of Victorian, Imperial ethics via Tom Brown’s sportsmanship at Rugby school; in *Pele* the universalized ethics of capitalism are used to justify Pele’s poverty and our critical focus is moved away from capitalism’s exclusions (the argument being the oft-repeated ‘rags-to-riches’ story which problematically sidesteps the issue of ‘rags’ in the first place). Throughout my thesis, I

return to this notion of ideology and universality/historicity to critically interpret the function of sport in society.

Following this discussion of sport as a tool of social disciplining (one which reifies the center of a culture's ideology), I consider the ways in which sport have been of use in emancipatory struggles. For this purpose, I focus on Ernest Hemingway and C.L.R. James. In Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*, Hemingway details a vision of sport that aligns clearly with modernism and its rejection of enlightenment/classical philosophy. Similarly, in *Beyond a Boundary*, James leverages sport to oppose hegemonic ideologies: James details a vision of cricket in the West Indies that reveals cricket as more than a sport and a legacy of British colonial rule, but as a means to eke out a postcolonial consciousness and subjective agency for the Caribbean people whose lives bear strong imprints of British colonization. Taken together, these texts complicate the idea that sport functions purely as a tool of social disciplining (as charted in the first chapter). They show that though hegemonic structures are pervasive and widely universalized, these cannot ever act linearly, often failing to cover up the cracks in their own logic.

The final progression of my argument seeks to add a caveat to these seemingly antagonistic realities; that is, that sport is a tool of social discipline, yet can also be a space where hegemonic ideology can be contested and disrupted can occur. I will claim that neither approach is necessarily 'true' in the universal sense but both are 'possible'. As a result, we must continue to take sport seriously as a kind of popular text that can reify the center of ideology. In this chapter, I take Muhammad Ali as a primary text and guide my reading through Frantz Fanon's *Black Skins, White Masks*. In particular, I read Muhammad Ali's boxing career and political commentary in adjacency to Fanon's

thoughts on emancipatory projects in a racialized society. Primarily, this reading is guided by Fanon’s identification of a “zone of non-being . . . where an authentic upheaval can be born” (10, Fanon). This reading of Ali, I claim, goes beyond representation and instead challenges the ontology of anti-blackness that David Marriott identifies as “not representation, but the structure by which racial ontology is literally inscribed on each act of enslaved, non-sovereign being . . . anti-blackness is the thing against which the universal, the human, the ideal, etc., is enunciated and created” (x). By centering Marriott and Fanon in my reading of Ali, I hope to portray a mode of sport that is at once controlled by hegemonic power, yet is also able to meaningfully disturb the smooth functioning of hegemonic structures. Here, the hegemonic power is racialized capitalism, and—although Ali’s career is largely shaped by capitalism—Ali is able to utilize his position as product to unsettle, question, and disturb the structure which underwrites his boxing career).

### **Structure of Arguments**

#### Chapter One

In the first chapter, I firmly reject the notion that sport is apolitical. I argue that sport, beginning in the nineteenth-century, have been used as tools of social discipline through which the dominant ideology of any given culture universalizes and therefore hides its most depraved elements within the rules and ethics of sport. As such, the truth of sports’ relationship to politics, thus far, is one of subservience, in which sport is used to universalize the ugly center of any given political ideology. This intervention is timely as the political-right roundly claims that athletes shouldn’t advocate for political change—particularly in response to Colin Kaepernick’s 2016 season-long protest during the

national anthem. By contrast, the neo-liberal left (if such a thing exists) uses athletes as poster-boys for the possibilities afforded to us by capitalism.<sup>2</sup> Ultimately, I reject both claims, and argue that sport, in its current formation, are incapable of creating the real change we need in society.

To develop my argument, I begin with the British Empire's deployment of 'fair play' as a means to justify colonization abroad and classism at home. To complete this reading, I focus on Pierce Egan's *Boxiana* (a multivolume work which details boxing in the first quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century) and Thomas Hughes' 1857 novel *Tom Brown's School Days*. Both texts center the fantasy of 'fair play' in sport to justify the social order of the British Empire both at home and abroad, while, in reality, leaving out any sense of authentic fairness from the political ideology of the British Empire. In this way, sport comes to justify the Empire to itself, as the very ethics that govern the sport in the British Empire are also used in sport as a means to universalize the ideology of the Empire.<sup>3</sup>

I then consider the current political ideology of capitalism, and claim that sport is used to hide the ugly underbelly at the center of capitalist ideology. To ground this claim, I turn to the film *Pele: The Birth of a Legend (Pele)*. *Pele* essentially represents the fantasy of the American Dream (much like the *Rocky* movies) in which a kid from nowhere becomes a multimillionaire and global sport icon through hard work and discipline. In short, capitalism, which claims to offer us emancipation through hard work,

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<sup>2</sup> The 2020 NFL draft epitomizes this neo-liberal use of sport: players taken in the first few rounds were given a short film on their lives, in which many reflected upon financial hardships—instead of questioning why we continue to produce a states of poverty, the illusory 'rags-to-riches' story is repeated and we ignore the cyclical nature of poverty and the reality that wealth is tied to systemic inequities

<sup>3</sup> This argument draws directly from seminal essay "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism", in which Spivak claims "It should not be possible to read nineteenth-century British literature without remembering that imperialism, understood as England's social mission, was a crucial part of the *cultural representation of England to the English*" (emphasis added, 1985, 243).



uses sport as a way to justify the current social order, while neatly side-stepping the fact professional athletes represent a minuscule of the overall sport-playing population. I further this critique of capitalism and sport by focusing on the real performance of athletes.

Firstly, I turn to the NFL Draft's 2020 coverage, in which seemingly every athlete had some kind of adversity they overcame to be in the NFL. Then I look to professional sport's fetishizing of philanthropy—the PGA tour's charitable COVID-19 donations, the Premier League's supposed support of LGBT rights, or the NFL's sudden stance that they are behind the Black Lives Matter movement. This use of philanthropy, I claim, is pure tokenism, and must be severed if sport truly wishes to become emancipatory in nature.

## Chapter Two

In the second chapter, I seek to understand the Hegelian assertion that our experience of the world is created from, and mediated by, history and what this means for the scope of reclaiming subjectivity through sport. To navigate this question, I frame my thinking around C.L.R. James' cricket-memoir *Beyond a Boundary*, from which I also take the title of my thesis, in which James formulates an understanding of cricket that is, at once, deeply affected by political reality and also, conversely, a space where we might, to a degree, be freed from the hegemonic expression of that political/historical reality that frames our lives and desires.

This chapter is, in many ways, a rebuttal of the first chapter in which I work from the assumption that all things are, and always have been, political. I argue that sport tests the boundaries of such an assertion that universalizes the political realm, while also acknowledging that no game of, say, cricket could ever occur without the foundation of

politics. To traverse this tension, I turn to Ernest Hemingway's novel *The Sun Also Rises* and his non-fiction book *Death in the Afternoon* and claim that both texts understand sport as both political in their formation, but also as activities that allow individuals to stand outside of the political realm.

### Chapter Three

In the final chapter, I question the efficacy of representation, and posit that sport can go beyond representational politics to confront the ideologies and structures that govern life in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. More specifically, in this chapter I recognize that sport is, in a sense, becoming aware of its own wound: in aligning itself with the Black Lives Matter movement, for example, sport is attempting to move away from a tool of social discipline and move towards a mode of being that is emancipatory in nature. However, despite this desire to appear progressive, sport cannot really take up an authentically progressive position due to commercial interests, which weigh every move according to their monetary worth and risk. To complete this reading, I take the critique of chapter one, (in which I claim PGA Covid-19 fundraisers, the NFL's insistence it was always for the Black Lives Matter movement, and the Premier League's supposed support of LGBT rights, are—in reality—tokenized, and therefore meaningless, gestures) and imagine these tokenizations as a starting line from which sport turns in on itself and its centrality within the political realm. Further, I claim that—if sport is successful in radicalizing itself against the hegemon—it must come from the realization of our fundamental difference and the possibilities afforded by this realization.

In attempting to move sport beyond tokenization/co-option of activism I turn my analysis to the ontology of social antagonisms. To complete this reading, I utilize Sam

Selvon's 1994 short story "The Cricket Match" and the 1996 documentary *When We Were Kings*. The success of these texts, I claim, is not to look for emancipation in representation, but rather use sport as a tool of disruption, so that the illogic of capitalism and imperialism is laid bare. Moreover, in both texts, I claim that the real revolutionary act is found in unsettling the unity or sovereignty of the hegemon, so that we might come to question structures which appear universal.

Sam Selvon's "The Cricket Match," turns representational politics somewhat on its head. Selvon *doesn't* appeal to some sense of an authentic West Indian cricket, but rather gives us the story of Algernon—a West Indian who immigrated to England and, at the outset of the narrative, has little interest in cricket. However, as the narrative develops, Algernon is given the opportunity to play against an English cricket club, and plays extraordinarily well despite our expectation that he would easily get out. The 'joke' here is on the English cricket club: the English club is a product of "English culture," and so we assume the English local side to be well-trained, capable, and to bowl out cricketers who haven't played in some years. However, Selvon's short story points towards a more disruptive, unsettling truth: that the English team, despite its control over the symbolic order, really *isn't* what it believes itself to be.

Following this movement towards exposing negativity in the social order of England, I read Muhammad Ali's career (particularly his 1972 bout with Joe Frazier) alongside Frantz Fanon's 1952 *Black Skins, White Masks*. In particular, I claim that Muhammad Ali, as a boxer and a socio-political commentator, was able to leverage himself as a commodity within capitalism, before somewhat hijacking the supply line: instead of providing Muhammad Ali the butterfly-like boxer, Muhammad Ali appeared

on TV shows, radio broadcasts, and in newspapers to criticize the United States' involvement in Vietnam and roundly decry white supremacy. Again, Ali's aim is not to attempt to transcend capitalism, or to represent Blackness in some authentic way, but rather to challenge the arrogance of hegemonic ideology which presents itself as universal in the United States.

### Final Note

In writing this thesis, I do not wish to claim I stand back and observe sport as it objectively 'is'; I am in this analysis and am content to exist within it. Sport has shaped my life almost entirely: I moved 4,500 miles in order to work for a college football team; I spent my entire savings to make a move towards sport possible; I have likely invested more time into sport than into any other activity other than breathing. But, largely, I did so under the pretense that sport was a kind of pure, post-ideological, arena. I bought into the idea that sport were post-racial, that they existed outside of society or politics as a kind of utopian space of freedom and expression, and that they weren't subject to cynical markets. I drank that Kool-Aid and only recently noticed its sourness. It came as a necessary shock to unpack sport and to question the ways it was represented to me as a package of neo-liberal utopia. As such, to see the ways that sport has been shaped by the political and to witness the uncomfortable reality that—although sport have been sites of momentary defiance—they are largely bent to the will of hegemonic power, is an essential activity. In many ways, then, this project is shaped by disbelief; by a guilt which is both problematic yet also exists and can be made productive. I am unsettled by the sport which I now see, but I do not disavow it. Instead, I intend to witness sport so that something more honest might come from sport and so others might also be unsettled.

CHAPTER ONE: IDEOLOGY BENEATH THE CAP: SPORT'S  
UNIVERSALIZATION OF POLITICAL SYSTEMS

In this chapter I understand sport as a modern, political tool. As a premise, this idea takes sport beyond games and entertainment, and argues that sport is as full of ideology as any other recognizable aspect of modernity. Moreover, I argue that sport are an intimate tool of social discipline, which, when wielded to their fullest political potential, affirms the existence of contemporary political structures. To this end, sport, as a political agent, universalize the ugly underbelly of any given society, hiding the most immoral elements of that society in plain sight. Of course, there are significant cracks and issues with this reading—namely, that sport *can* be a catalyst for identity formation against political systems (this is the subject of my second chapter)—but these cracks and inconsistencies only reminds us that no culture exists a priori, and serve to give us hope that we can remold sport in a way that is valuable to addressing today's social antagonisms. To ground this argument, I pay attention to the imperialist roots of modern sport and argue that sport functioned to justify the British Empire, before considering our current, capitalist, society in which sport is used to justify the illogic of capitalism and the fallacy of the American Dream.

I am, of course, not the first to recognize sport's use as a political tool. I owe much to J.A. Mangam, whose work on the material conditions of sport in the British Empire during the nineteenth century has traced the origins of modern sport to public

schools, and who has exposed the use of sport as a tool of social disciplining.<sup>4</sup> However, here I'd like to take the sum of Mangam's arguments and claim that sport are used to universalize the ethics and ideologies of the dominant political system. This argument draws from Louis Althusser's understanding of the Ideological State Apparatus, as it is outlined in his 1970 essay "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses". In that essay, Althusser writes, "Ideological State Apparatuses function 'by ideology'" and that the ideology inscribed in the Ideological State Apparatuses (hereafter, ISA) "is the ideology of the ruling class" (81). Simply, the state's use of the ISA functions to discipline populations (particularly the working class) to the state's will and seeks to reaffirm the legitimacy of the status-quo.<sup>5</sup> This line of reasoning finds resonance with the idea that the true emancipatory struggle is not a struggle for identity/representation but rather is a struggle for universalization/ideology. In other words, today's real struggle is to claim the cloak of universality, so that ideology is hidden and emancipatory politics are privileged. As I have asserted earlier, sport is central in modern politics and is therefore a political tool used to universalize the ethics of the dominant group and to hide the ugly underbelly that supports any given society. More specifically, I claim sport, wherever they are constructed, exist under the domineering supervision of politics. Accordingly, they are

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<sup>4</sup> In particular, Mangam's works "Imitating Their Betters and Dissociating from Their Inferiors: Grammar Schools and the Games Ethic in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century", "Imperial Origins: Christian Manliness, Moral Imperatives and Pre-Sri Lankan Playing Fields", "Muscular Militaristic and Manly": The Middle-Class Hero as Moral Messenger", and "Britain's Chief Spiritual Export: Imperial Sport as Moral Metaphor, Political Symbol and Cultural Bond". These works form the materialistic backbone of my argument

<sup>5</sup> Althusser himself recognizes sport as a part of the Ideological State Apparatus, listing it as part of "the cultural ISA (literature, the arts, sports, etc.)" (80). My intention here, though, is to place sport under the same intensive criticism that we readily give to literature and the arts.

made legal (or illegal), used as tools of discipline, and appropriated for political ambitions.

### **Representing “The English to the English”: Sport as the Empire’s Text**

The opening sentence of Gayatri Spivak’s 1985 essay “Three Women Texts and a Critique of Imperialism” seeks to disrupt and expose the imperial history of English literature. Spivak writes “It should not be possible to read nineteenth-century British literature without remembering that imperialism, understood as England’s social mission, was a crucial part of the cultural representation of England to the English” (243). In this thesis, I wholeheartedly agree with Spivak and make one adjustment to Spivak’s declaration, to declare, “It should not be possible to read nineteenth-century British *sport* without remembering that imperialism, understood as England’s social mission, was a crucial part of the cultural representation of English to the English”. Sport, like literature, was used by the British Empire to universalize the ethics of the empire, and underhandedly reaffirmed the fundamentally unethical practice of colonization. In this way, Britain forced sport to submit to the rule and desires of the Empires’ politics and became a key feature of the Empire’s ISA.

One such example of sports’ submission to politics is in the codification of boxing during the early nineteenth century in Britain. Pierce Egan’s multivolume *Boxiana*, published between 1810 - 1829, not only documents the lives, practices, characteristics, and diets of successful boxers, but the book also attempts to renew the image of boxing, codifying the fundamentally brutal practice into a ‘civilized’ science.<sup>6</sup> To do this, Egan

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<sup>6</sup> For the purposes of this thesis, I will be exclusively focusing on the preface and opening chapter of *Boxiana*. I make this decision for two reasons: First, it is in the introduction and opening chapter where Egan most clearly envisions the sport of boxing as a vehicle for communicating British, Imperial, ethics.

appeals to the ideologies that are most hidden, but also most important, in British imperialism: Taking the raw action of bareknuckle fighting and intentionally centering the violence inherent to its practice in order to show a British gentleman how he might learn skills that are valuable within the British Empire. Egan, then, uses *Boxiana* as a text through which he advocates for boxing not only as entertainment or exercise but as an activity latent with political potential for the British empire. Beyond being rhetorically savvy, *Boxiana* gives us a window into sports' relationship to the political realm and shows us that sport—activities that we so often take to be apolitical—are, in fact, completely shaped by the political realm.

The preface to *Boxiana* is written in the form of a letter to Robert Barclay Allardice (“Captain Barclay”), and immediately introduces themes of nationalism and ‘Englishness’. Egan writes, “In viewing you, Sir, as a lover and patron of those sport that tend to invigorate the human frame, and inculcate those principles of generosity and heroism, *by which the inhabitants of the English Nation are so eminently distinguished above every other country*” (iii-iv, emphasis added). Egan’s opinion here is not a simple reproduction of nationalism but is rhetorically motivated: as a preface, this letter squats over the remainder of the volume—casting its shadow over the boxers and events transcribed in the following volume. This shadow, rather than being empty, is filled with political awareness—Britain is entering the height of its imperial power, and, as such, any sport that hopes to prosper should appeal to the ideologies that fuel the Empire.

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Second, the scope of this Master’s thesis will not allow for a full reading of one—let alone nine—volumes of *Boxiana*. While I hope to complete a thorough reading of all nine volumes in future work, it seems best here to narrow my focus in order to present a close reading of the most vital passages in *Boxiana*.



With the Empire in mind, Egan's *Boxiana* can be viewed as a text as savvy and tactful as Muhammad Ali's famous Rope-a-Dope over 120 years later: Like Ali in the ring, Egan uses his opponent's strengths against themselves. Only, instead of a one-two from gloves, Egan leans on the bread-and-butter of British Imperialism: 1) the notion of 'fair-play' and 2) discipline. Of discipline, Egan writes that "Englishmen are not automata, and however the advantages of discipline may serve . . . it would ultimately lose its effects, were it not animated by that native spirit, which has been found to originate [from] *vulgar Sport*" (v). Here, Egan is almost too candid for his purpose. He not only puts his finger directly on the brutality that underwrites the British Empire, recognizing that the so-called enlightenment Empire is "animated by that native spirit", but he also claims that this notion of civilization is saturated with the same material as "*vulgar Sport*". It appears, then, that in appealing towards discipline, Egan parallels the vulgarity of colonialism to boxing and, in essence, asks: Are these activities not so different? The reality that we recognize 200 years later is to respond "yes"—boxing is a far more enlightened and honest practice. However, it shows us, today, that sport must do all it can to squeeze itself into the dominant ideology of the political system. Here, that system is the pseudo-humanism of the enlightenment and British imperialism.

On 'fair play', Egan gives Barclay, and therefore the reader, a strange comparison between a British Sailor, and the kind of 'fair play' one might expect to find in boxing. Egan depicts a scene in which a British Soldier who, "being in possession of two swords," catches a Spanish soldier unaware: "and suddenly meeting an enemy destitute of any weapon of defense, with unparalleled manliness and generosity, *divided* the instruments of death with [the Spanish soldier] (v). Egan follows this passage up with the

assertion that “Sports, Sir, which can produce *thoroughbred* actions like the above, will outlive all the sneers of the fastidious, and *cant* of the hyper-critics” (vi). While this account is intended to serve as a piece of pro-imperial propaganda,<sup>7</sup> on re-reading the passage, one can actually see the way in which it works to undo the image of Britain as a civilized, enlightened nation, and reminds the reader that violence is foundational in British Empire (for the implied ending here is that the British soldier kills the Spanish soldier). Like his appeal to discipline, Egan’s appeal to ‘fair play’ works a little too perceptively. He links boxing with conquest and, in doing so, shows us that boxing is, in fact, far more ‘enlightened’ than the Empire itself—after all, the boxers know the rules of the bout and get to leave the ring alive.

Egan keeps his finger on the pulse of British Imperialism and its ideology throughout the description of boxers and their customs. Most notably, the term “science” is used hundreds of times in the first volume alone. However, Egan uses the work not in terms of the scientific principle of objectivity achieved through the scientific method but instead in a way that speaks to a moral nature and finds more resonance with “tactics” than objective science. In *Boxiana*’s first full chapter, Egan describes the state of boxing as an emerging sport which contains the same ethical material as science. He writes, “That precedent . . . we shall refer to in this instance—NATURE! And to whom a more interesting foundation cannot be traced that we owe the trait of **boxing**” (2). Egan develops a notion that boxing, like science, emerges from a temperance of nature, continuing “wounded *feelings* brought manly *resentment* to its aid—and *coolness*

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<sup>7</sup> Egan’s representation of the British Soldier is taken from Captain William Dalrymple’s account of a British Soldier who, apparently, offered a sword to a Spanish soldier caught unawares at Fort Omoa (*The Political Magazine and Parliamentary, Naval, Military, and Literary Journal*).

checking fiery passion and rage, reduced it to a perfect science” (2). Egan’s claim, then, is that boxing becomes a “perfect science” not because it aspires to objectivity or uses a method of material analysis in an attempt to find some knowledge about truth, but rather because boxing and science are methods of *controlling* nature: where science seeks information to gain control over some aspect of the world, boxing—for Egan—gives us the skills to take control over “fiery passion and rage” (2), or, in other words, gives us control over our own nature.

Egan continues to blend science and boxing by introducing the idea of ‘Britishness’ into the fray. He writes “never let Britons be ashamed of science” and later that “the manly art of Boxing has infused that true heroic courage, blended with humanity, into the hearts of Britons, which have made them . . . terrific, and triumphant, in all parts of the world” (3). This passage reminds us that the British Empire’s pursuit of science is not inspired by emancipation but rather is an ideology wielded to maintain control and discipline. Likewise, boxing is not a practice directly interested in the kind of discovery science might afford us, but instead is interested in the application of knowledge, so that it might be used as a tool of social discipline.

The alignment of boxing and science is, of course, of rhetorical importance to Egan who writes in Britain, during the eighteenth century, and therefore must justify his sport by the values of imperial Britain. Within the context of British Empire, science (and the enlightenment before it) is *presented* as an emancipatory practice, despite the fact it contains no real moral value in itself. The reality is that science was used as a method of social control through which knowledge is assimilated in the power structure of the British Empire—this is a point Egan knows well and works into his exploration of

boxing. Following his mini-treatise on the value of science, Egan writes “the manly art of Boxing has infused that true heroic courage, blended with humanity, into the hearts of Britons, which have made them . . . terrific, and triumphant, in all parts of the world” (3). The blending of science that Egan is speaking of here clearly is not the science of *Rocky 3* in which the formidable Ivan Drago uses every ounce of the Soviet’s post-Sputnik science to produce the perfect fighter. Instead, the science Egan appeals to is the same pseudo-science that interests the British Empire: that of social control, power over Nature, and as a justification of the Empire’s racism.

By appealing to fair play, discipline, and science, Egan produces a text which aligns the sport of boxing with the values of the British Empire. There is, of course, nothing essentially similar between the Empire and the sport of boxing. However, by crafting a connection, Egan creates a vision of boxing wherein the most striking element *is not* striking itself. Instead, the boxing contained within *Boxiana* is about the idea of ‘fair play’, about the creation of men who are athletically capable, as well as social adjusted to meet the needs of the Empire<sup>8</sup>, and about the reaffirmation of Britain’s superiority as a race. As such, Egan molds literal fist fighting into a sport which reaffirms the fantasy of the Empire and, in doing so, becomes itself a fantasy used to justify the unjustifiable Empire to itself.

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<sup>8</sup> The sad reality is the boxers who were made into the image of the British gentleman were not able to capitalize on the fantasy of their identity portrait by Egan. Instead, even *Boxiana*’s poster-boy—Tom Cribb—failed to make the movement from working class to middle class. Cribb, who serves as the poster for *Boxiana*, fell into debt post-boxing and never lived up to the gentlemanly fantasy ascribed to him.

### **Sport in Public Schools as a Tool of Social Discipline**

For Britain, the time of the empire was a catalyst for modernity, and, it is fair to say, raised the material conditions for many living in the British Isles. However, the Empire was, of course, founded upon and funded by an ugly underbelly: colonization. As Dr. Shashi Tharoor notes in his 2016 book *Inglorious Empire*, prior to colonization by the British “India’s share of was 23%, as large as all of Europe put together . . . by the time the British left, it had dropped to just below 3%(3).<sup>9</sup> Britain’s colonial history is, obviously, a moral tragedy that spanned hundreds of years, engulfed millions of lives, and encompassed thousands of square miles. However, my intent in this chapter is not to expose the British Empire’s moral degradation, for the reader is certainly already familiar with the depraved mechanics and failings of colonialism.<sup>10</sup> Instead, I argue that the classism and colonialism that formed the backbone of the British Empire was universalized and therefore hidden and claimed as essential by British sport and the ethics it purports to champion. It should come as no surprise, then, that two of the world’s most popular sports—cricket and football—were used to universalize the ideology of the British Empire.

Football, in its British origins, was a rudimentary sport. Teams of hundreds of players tussled a ball from one village wall—perhaps say, the Church wall—to an opposing village’s wall—perhaps the wall of a school’s chapel. Over hundreds of years, it was banned, shunned, and even granted a line which recognized its brutality in

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<sup>9</sup> This is to say nothing of the violence with which Britain colonized and governed India and other colonies.

<sup>10</sup> I also do not mean to claim moral high-ground here. Being educated within the British school system, I knew little of Britain’s Empire before being introduced to Frantz Fanon, Edward Said, Homi K. Bhabha.

Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors*,<sup>11</sup> before finally nesting itself in the ideological heart of British imperialism. Moreover, football in Britain moved from a counter-culture pastime, to become a sport which actively reaffirmed imperialism through its codification of brutality and the creation of "fair play." In Thomas Hughes' 1857 novel *Tom Brown's School Days* (hereafter, *School Days*) the ethic of 'fair play' is a central theme throughout the novel, both for the narrative and for the novel's protagonist, Tom Brown. Through sport, Tom Brown—presented as the fantasy of the British public schoolboy—achieves success not from intellectual endeavors, but more clearly from his ability to uphold the Victorian 'fair play' ethic through his athleticism.

The idea of fair play appears to have gained some amount of sophistication since its employment by Pierce Egan. Nonetheless, 'fair play' is still, at its core, a justification of brutality and an ideological tool by which the British claimed unjust violence to be civilized. Within *School Days*, 'fair play' is presented as an innocuous, gentlemanly, and moral ideal: it curbs the boy's apparently brutish nature, and provides them with a code by which they negotiate sport, education, and lives more broadly. J.A. Mangam's scholarship on the roots of fair play finds that, prior to the creation of "fair play", British public schools were a Hobbesian nightmare, stating public schools were "nasty, brutish, and certainly for some not short enough and, as a result, "rebellion was not uncommon"" (152, "Muscular Militaristic and Manly"). Mangam's analysis of mid-nineteenth century schools goes on to explain that, in order to give the boys a legalized outlet for their aggression, sport became mandatory, and the myth of the British gentleman became

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<sup>11</sup> DROMIO OF EPHEBUS: "Am I so round with you as you with me, that like a football you do spurn be thus?" (2.1).

endowed with a “national instinct for ‘fair play’” (152, “Muscular, Militaristic and Manly”).

‘Fair play’s’ importance within *School Days* is emphasized by the fact that the novel is essentially bookended by sporting events that draw their meaning from a sense of fair play. In the opening pages, Brown plays ball games and wrestles with village boys, and, in closing, Tom Brown captains Rugby school’s cricket team as they face the Marylebone Cricket Club. While his journey from preschooler to sixth former takes many twists and turns, the unifying narrative throughout is the formalization of Tom Brown’s “gentlemanly” character who reflects and reproduces the moral code of ‘fair play’ through his dedication to sport.

In the opening passages of the novel, Tom Brown appears to be consumed by athletic pursuits: “there were very few days in the week in which he and the village boys were not playing” (5) and he “thought about [wrestling] at his meals, in his walks, when he lay awake in bed, in his dreams” (6). Within the narration of *School Days*, these athletic pursuits appeal to Brown, and he is described as “naturally active, and strong, and quick of eye and hand” (5). Moreover, Brown’s “natural good temper” allows him to overcome the only boy left in his crew of friends who can out-wrestle him. By focusing on Brown’s predisposition to sport, sport becomes a natural element of Brown’s life. However, this presentation of facts erases the reality that Tom Brown’s development occurs within the context of Imperial Britain, and makes the reader blind to the imperial context in which Brown grows up.

When re-reading these passages with the context of Brown’s imperial existence in mind, it becomes apparent that Brown’s obsession with sport isn’t some kind of natural,

essential development that “all real boys so long to make” (5). The reality, however, is that sport’s true function is as a tool of social disciplining, so Brown might become a “brave, helpful, truth telling Englishman, and a gentleman, and a Christian” (17).<sup>12</sup> Moreover, the second full paragraph of *School Days* foregrounds Brown’s familial, imperial, history. Hughes writes, “Wherever the fleets and armies of England have won renown, there stalwart sons of the Browns have done yeoman’s work” (1). Tom Brown, then, is born into a family which, through violence,<sup>13</sup> upholds the heart of imperialism. However, engaging with this reality head-on is too intense for the Browns. As a result, Tom Brown’s active nature is channeled into sport, with the belief that sport brings some quality of fairness to his relationship between village boys and himself. The key idea here being that, through sport, Brown—and those readers who sympathize with his social position—comes to see himself, and the privilege of his class, as moral and fair while, in reality, the nature of his relationship to the village boys is predicated on the violent history of his family’s past and their privileged position within the rigid class system of imperial Britain.

In an effort to reveal the class structure that underwrites Brown’s play with the boys, it is vital to note that which is left off the page. When recounting Brown’s earliest interactions with the village boys the narrator asserts how Brown’s father “encouraged Tom in his intimacy with the boys of the village, and forwarded it by all means of his

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<sup>12</sup> These are Tom Brown’s father’s final words to Tom Brown before he leaves for rugby school. They sum up the notion that education in Britain divorced from a romanticized education like that described Plato’s republic. Instead, the British education system disciplines its students in the ways of imperialism both domestically and abroad.

<sup>13</sup> “The yew bow and clothyard shaft . . . brown bill and pike . . . culverin and demi culverin . . . hand grenade and sabre, and musket and bayonet” (1)



power, and gave them the run of a close for a playground, and provided bats and balls and a football for their games” (4-5). As such, these interactions only ever occur on the Brown’s terms. What lies tacit in these lines is the deceptively obvious fact that the land upon which the village boys (who are implied to be working class) play is the private property of the middle-class Browns. As a result, the games in *School Days* become underhandedly depoliticized (at least, on the surface), and the Browns—and therefore the sympathetic, middle-class reader—uses sport to convince themselves of their own morality; that their place is good and earned, rather than arbitrary and established by imperial conquest. In this way, the British are able to justify themselves, and the rigid class system that underwrites imperialism disappears within a cloak of universality.

In addition to reaffirming the social order of the British Isles, sport functioned in imperial Britain to create military leaders who fought for and maintained colonialism.<sup>14</sup> Within the narrative of *School Days*, Brown’s first interaction with football at Rugby School creates a clear connection between the sporting field and the battlefield. We are told that Brooke—current captain of the boy’s football team—organizes his team in a manner similar to generals organizing their men while at war. Brooke “wisely and bravely ruling over willing and worshipping subjects . . . full of pluck and hope, the sort I hope to see in my general when I go out to fight” (46). Beyond crafting an obvious metaphor between war and sport in the Empire, Brooke is fashioned into a vision of moral rule, and the novel establishes the idea that, by becoming an effective leader, Brooke is also a moral leader. These lines take on further importance when we remember

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<sup>14</sup> “Realize the importance of games . . . be proud of your reputation for efficiency in games—it is the source of higher imperial efficiency” (Duckworth, 138).

*School Days* was published at the height of the British Empire's militaristic endeavors.<sup>15</sup>

As such, Brooke becomes more than the captain of a school team; he becomes the stand in for all good, English, generals within the colonial project. Clearly, the idea here is to further convince the British that their colonial invasions were, in any sense, moral—for how could good, trustworthy, Brooke commit the atrocities that are necessary to create an Empire as powerful as Britain's?

Tom Brown begins *School Days* as the young student in awe of Brooke, but he leaves the school as a sterling example of Imperialistic morality. The chapter "Tom Brown's Last School Match" introduces, through a kind of chapter-epigraph, the past and present of British imperialism. The narrator reports, "As the old scenes [of Rugby School] became living . . . [so] too many a grave in the Crimea and distant India, as well as in the quiet churchyards of our dear old country, seemed to open and send forth their dead, and their voices . . . were once again in one's ears" (270). The epigraph goes on to ruminate more on the dead and the narrator's schoolboy memories. This epigraph hangs over the remainder of the chapter, specter like, reminding us of the melancholia of the narrator and, indeed, the remainder of narrative. The net result of this frame is to jostle apart Tom Brown's final game as captain of Rugby School so that cricket becomes more obviously an activity that reaffirms the morality of the Empire and colonialism.

Tom Brown performs as the gracious captain of Rugby School in his final game. However, throughout the chapter which details Brown's last match, the actual play of cricket slips into the periphery, and the idea of cricket takes center stage. After being

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<sup>15</sup> Between 1830 (roughly, the setting for *School Days*) and 1857 (the year *School Days* was published), the British Empire engaged in 25 separate wars.

bowled out, and while sitting with the school master, Brown states, “it’s more than a game. It’s an institution” (282). The schoolmaster continues the thought with the assertion that “The discipline and reliance upon one another which it teaches is so valuable I think,” before Brown finishes the thought by stating “football and cricket . . . are such much better games than fives or hares-and-hounds where the object is to come in first or to win for oneself” (282). Soon after this reflection, conversation moves to East—Brown’s oldest school friend—who is serving the military in India. The conversation moves on, but we may enter this dialectic ourselves, and provide the final element of Brown and the school master’s analysis of cricket: that cricket’s teachings are valuable because they help the Empire. Moreover, by using cricket to understand the empire, “discipline and reliance upon one another” becomes the chief moral ideal, against which critique of the Empire can only ever be seen as antagonistic to the success of the imperial project.

There are many ways to define modernity, but perhaps we have stumbled across a new one: a nation has entered modernity when it can wield sport as a tool of social discipline. In both *Boxiana* and *School Days*, Pierce Egan and Thomas Hughes both claim to be ruminating on sport in and of itself; however, we soon discover they are not talking about sport as an activity dislocated from the political. Instead, they are writing of sport directly as a political agent, so much so that the sport itself often goes missing for pages on end, even though the spectacle of the game is supposedly the subject. It is, however, clear to see the reality of sport’s ideological employment after 200 years of retrospection. Far more difficult, but far more important, is to remind ourselves that we are not in an age of emancipation but rather our existence is still shaped by the

deployment of repressive political ideology. That ideology is, of course, capitalism. Like the British Empire's use of sport as an imperialistic tool, capitalism uses sport to justify its own illogic; telling us that we can find emancipation via philanthropy (emphatically: we can't) and that the American Dream is available to us through sport: all you have to do is work hard, and you, too, can become a 6'10" power forward in the NBA.

### **Pele, Politics, Class and "Ginga":**

The 2016 film *Pele: The Birth of a Legend* (Pele) is a prime example of sport's use as a tool of social discipline within the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The 2016 biopic follows the early life of Pele until the 1958 world cup where he made his debut as a 17-year-old, was voted the tournament's 'Best Young Player', and won the World Cup with Brazil. This narrative, however, renders inequality as an essential element in society and appears to take the line that, without the poverty which Pele grew up in, he wouldn't have become the player he was. Beyond being deeply patronizing, this formation of society universalizes and essentializes inequality, thereby justifying the ideology of capitalism while neatly side-stepping the repression of the working class and the cyclical nature of poverty in capitalism.

It is, of course, worth pointing out that at the time of Pele's childhood, Brazil was entering a period of political turmoil, culminating in military coups. Certainly, Brazil in the 1950s, was *not* capitalist in nature. However, the more important timeline to my analysis is not the reality of the 1950s, but rather the capitalist, neo-liberal, ideology of the 2010s in which the film *Pele* was produced. As such, *Pele* doesn't focus upon the ethics of Brazilian politics in the 1950s but rather centers on the neoliberal ideology of 2016.

*Pele* begins with a joyful, capoeira-inspired, game of football through the streets of Tres Corações. Quickly though, Pele is forced to reckon with poverty. Pele and his friends form a team and play in a local tournament which culminates with Pele's team—shoeless boys, with no money for uniforms—playing against “The Kings”—a team of upper-class boys who play in matching uniforms, with gleaming new football boots. Before the game, Pele's team are taunted by the upper-class boys, who use their class privilege to insult Pele's team for their lack of football boots and their general appearance. In response, Pele's teammates steal coffee beans to buy football boots, and play in a way that is less expressive and more similar to the upper-class boys. As a result, Pele's side goes 6-0 down before halftime. (17-00-18:35). However, after half time Pele's team throw off their new boots, and play as they know how—as shoeless street-boys (the film even cuts between moments of the real game and moments of Pele playing on the streets of Tres Corações). By embracing their so-called identity, Pele's team are able to come back and score 5 goals in the second half—culminating with Pele's name being chanted by the crowd surrounding the game. While it is somewhat heart-warming to see Pele and his team defeat the arrogant side “The Kings”, it must be remembered that a more underhand universalization of neo-liberalism is at work here: one in which the social-antagonisms of capitalism are sidelined, and through embracing their poverty, Pele's team is rendered equal of “The Kings”. As such, any critique of the system that puts “The Kings” at a distinct advantage—both on the field and in life—is rendered mute.

Pele's assent continues to focus on the ethics of hard-work and further essentializes the abject conditions Pele grows up in. Rather than advocating for political change, *Pele* eradicates any potential radical meaning through sport, instead suggesting

that through hard work one can rise through the systems of oppression. Nowhere is this more evident than Pele's practice with mangos (31:15). After the death of his friend, Pele turns his back on football and refuses to practice. In time, his father shows Pele that he can practice with the mangos which grow outside while on lunch-breaks from their janitorial work. In the film, this moment is rendered as a catalyst for Pele's talent, and is somehow used to convince a talent scout of Pele's ability. Admittedly, the real Pele did practice with mangos, but, within the context of a 2016 biopic birthed in an American production studio, directed by Americans, and distributed by an American distribution company, this Rocky-like mango-practice montage serves to silence any question of why Pele didn't have access to training, to coaching, or to real footballs—after all, he had mangos! In this way *Pele* again embraces neoliberal politics, thus muting any cry for radical change by fetishizing the position of the working-class.

Later, at Santos FC, Pele is instructed to give up his expressive style of play in favor of a European, straightforward style. This instruction is intended to remove “ginga”—an expressive style of play associated with the history capoeira—from Pele's play. Pele, however, rebels against this instruction and plays with the “ginga” style and the scene cuts between Pele playing for Santos FC on the pitch and playing in the streets of São Paulo (40:00-50:00). While this moment of rebellion does represent the kind of self-recognition possible through sport, in *Pele* the “ginga” style is used again to divert the actual problem at hand: that of racism within Brazil, both in 1958 and in 2016. This diversion of the real issues is completed shortly after Pele is selected to play for Brazil. Pele's father tells Pele “now is a critical time for our country . . . we have been shamed. The spirit of our people is dying, but now you can change all that” (52:00 – 52:06). As

such *Pele* takes the potential for social, political critique, and buries it within the footballer Pele, thus turning the narrative of poverty away from systemic, cyclical, oppression, and instead repeats the old lie of the American Dream.

### **Conclusion: Sport's Tokenized Emancipatory Acts**

While it is easy to pick apart *Pele's* didactic narrative, it is slightly harder to do the same in reality. Namely because reality resists any sort of smooth definition, and all deployments of ideology have some amount of resistance. This message is clear through sport which at once rejects the ideas of racism/sexism/classism, but simultaneously reifies the existence of these social antagonisms. In this sense, sport as an industry comes into the same slippery position as Bill Gates and George Soros—both claim to be progressive but, in reality, they are the very people that cause the social issues they claim to care about.

Nowhere is sports' precarious relationship to revolution clearer than it's love of philanthropy and 'social justice'. At the time of writing, the Premier League claims allegiance to the LGBT movement, the NFL tweets daily in favor of the Black Lives Matter movement, and the PGA Tour has raised millions in the effort to fund hospitals in response to the Covid-19 pandemic (for the children, of course). While these fundraisers/symbolic gestures appear to be useful they are, in reality, ineffective in creating genuine change. Fundraising in the name of healthcare completely detracts from the reality that many health-care systems under capitalism are broken; tweeting in support of the Black Lives Matter movement represents a positive change in attitude, yet the NFL's rendering of the BLM movement, in reality, takes the revolutionary sting out of the movement and replaces it with a neoliberal humanism—just as many have done with

the radical aspects of Dr. Martin Luther King; the Premier League’s “rainbow laces” campaign is complete representational politics—although it even fails here, as no players in the Premier League align themselves with the LGBT+ community (or, at least, none which have claimed themselves as such). Instead of getting to the heart of the issues they claim to care about, sport in the 2010’s only distracts from the issue—making us believe we are post-emancipation when, in material reality, we clearly are not.

For the past 200 years, sport has taken up a cherished position in our minds, our politics, and our pockets. It is, however, most disturbing to see sport jostled between a fantastical space devoid of politics and as a space that reflects our supposed utopian, emancipated, neoliberal world. Both accounts of sport falsify the reality of sport and the conditions it finds itself in when considered as a political tool. On closer inspection, we find that the very rules and ethics which dictate our game blind us to the depravity of culture—this is as true in 2020 as it was in 1820. However, as the old cliché goes, sport isn’t played out on paper. No matter how fiercely we debate them on Fox News, CNN, or within this thesis, sport continue to resist the didactic lessons we use them for. In the following chapter, I find relief in this realization, and argue that, while sport’s horizons are dictated by politics and history, what we might find within those horizons resists straightforward dogma, and pitches us into chaotic experience.



## CHAPTER TWO: BULLS, BODYLINE, AND BOUNDARIES: SPORT AS A SITE OF IDENTITY RE-CONSTITUTION

Reading sport purely as a political tool allows us to see the ways in which seemingly innocuous elements of society are, in fact, shaped by the political realm and the ideologies which govern it. However, this reading belies the reality that, for many, sport is a space in which identity can be reconstituted. Subjects are able to find out for themselves that political ideology *changes* when the symbolic boundary between all that isn't sport is crossed and the subject enters a liminal space we call "sport."<sup>16</sup> Indeed, when we enter "sport", it appears that dominant hegemonic ideology gets jumbled up, becomes confused, and even refuted in the mere act of playing. To put it simply, while sport itself is constituted by the political, once the player crosses the symbolic boundary from not-sport into sport, a significant chunk of dominant ideology is left at the edge of the sporting arena, where it can only lurk and wait for the players to play.

As with all cultural texts, twentieth century reproductions of sport were deeply affected by the emergence of Freudian psychoanalysis, and, in the latter half of the century, the decolonization of the globe. Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* exemplifies the movement away from classical philosophies' insistence on finding Truth about Knowledge, (and vice-versa). *The Sun Also Rises* gains further merit as a

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<sup>16</sup> Perhaps the simplest illustration of the boundary between not-sport and sport is evident in rugby: if one were to tackle, grapple, and hit a member of the public outside of the liminal space of rugby, it would certainly be called "assault" and likely carry a hefty fine if not imprisonment.

modernist, anti-enlightenment, cultural text on sport in that it champions the dangerous, poetic play of Pedro Romero, and scorns more “rational” bullfighters who only feign an authentic engagement with bullfighting. Later in the twentieth century, C.L.R. James’ *Beyond a Boundary* squared up to the imperial history of cricket and argued for a vision of sport which is at once formulated by the political but that also offers a vision of emancipation from colonial conditions via an investment into cricket. In this way, James’ cricket reclaims the colonial sport I described in my first chapter, so that it might serve as a rally against the colonial interpolation of the West Indian population.

### **Chaos, Poetry, Bullfighting: A Critique of Rationalism in Hemingway’s Sport**

Sport is central to Ernest Hemingway’s 1926 novel *The Sun Also Rises*. Pedro Romero’s bullfighting inspires awe, Cohn’s boxing forces homosocial tension to its climax, and fishing relieves tension in male relations. However, sport does more than progress the plot: it allows the characters to navigate the impossibility of knowing one another, and it establishes an ontology of the world that privileges poetics over pragmatism, setting a dynamic stage for characters to descend from the symbolic construct of language into the chaos of the real. Each of these movements, distinct in their own ways, are thematically tied in one way: they work against rationalism, against enlightenment rationality, and against the very idea of objective Truth.<sup>17</sup> As such, Hemingway represents an understanding of sport which conflicts with the idea of

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<sup>17</sup> These movements are, broadly, modernist ones. It is a movement summarized neatly by Michael Lackey, where he writes “psychology’s emancipation forced modernists to choose between philosophy’s metaphysical mind, which has the capacity to apprehend non-normative and non-relative Truth, or psychology’s culturally embedded psyche, which has the capacity to know only in relation to its culture’s provisional truths” (77)

knowledge about truth, and instead attempts to that peels back fantasy, revealing a world that is random and arbitrary.

*The Sun Also Rises* is narrated by its protagonist, Jake Barnes. Barnes' narration begins without temporal location but with a focus on Robert Cohn's boxing trainer, Spider Kelly. Spider Kelly is said to have "taught all his young gentlemen to box like featherweights, no matter whether they weighed one hundred and five or two hundred and five pounds" (4). The implied distinction here is one of poetics versus pragmatism. If Kelly were to take an entirely pragmatic approach, his heavyweight boxers would box with their physical strengths in mind. But Kelly is not interested in heavyweight slogging; he is interested in the poetry of the sport—in the rhythm, the movement, of boxing. In other words, Kelly is invested in a "purposefulness without purpose" (Edgar 122)<sup>18</sup>—he is aiming at something other than outcomes, and instead is invested in the aesthetic movements of play itself.

Barnes' short reflection on Spider Kelly dominates the first chapter; neither Kelly nor boxing appear again in any meaningful way for the remainder of the narrative. The point, however, of this reflection is not to progress plot in some way, but, rather, to open up the possibility of poetic sport wherein the boxer can recognize its own absurd position and *choose* to fight poetically.<sup>19</sup> This recognition forms a kind of hierarchy, wherein poetic sporting actions are privileged over pragmatic ones. As such, all characters who

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<sup>18</sup> This quote comes from a larger text on modernism and sport, in which Edgar breaks apart the classical aesthetics of the enlightenment and argues for a modernist aesthetic of sport. The reality that our performance in sport often serves absurd outcomes is a fundamental recognition in his essay and serves as a logical basis for this analysis of Hemingway's sport, also.

<sup>19</sup> It is important to note that Barnes' representation of Cohn is deeply anti-Semitic (as is much of *The Sun Also Rises*). Jeremy Kaye's "The 'Whine' of Jewish manhood: Re-Reading Hemingway's Anti-Semitism reimagining Robert Cohn" analyzes Barnes' anti-Semitism in conjunction with his boxing past.

engage with sport are measured up against Kelly's poetics, and a subtle logic is used to judge their play: those who play with pragmatic ends in mind are blind to the absurd reality of their actions, whereas those who play poetically are able to see the reality of their condition, critique their place in society, and transcend their fantasies in favor of a pre-symbolic being. This schema of sport is reflected and expanded throughout *The Sun Also Rises*, becoming most poignant in the difference between Pedro Romero and Robert Cohn.

Pedro Romero appears within *The Sun Also Rises* as a bullfighter of prowess who is able to flourish both as a matador in the bullfighting ring and as a sportsperson who authentically understands himself through his relationship to bulls and bullfighting. On seeing Romero, Barnes immediately recognizes "this is a real one" (131). Romero's style in the ring is described as "the whole show . . . how Romero worked close to the bull . . . never made contortions . . . gave real emotions . . . [holds] purity of line through maximum exposure . . . while he dominated the bull [and] prepared him for killing" (134). Key in this passage is the idea that Romero doesn't *need* to risk so much or act with such poetry of movement—he could be like the other bullfighters who feign danger. Instead, he *chooses* to bullfight poetically (in the same fashion that, earlier, contributed to the death of another bullfighter—Joselito—because fighting in this way inherently more dangerous) because to do otherwise his killing of the bull may as well be slaughter on a farm. Romero, then, comes to symbolize an authentic engagement with poetic, modernist, sport: he sees the absolute absurdity of bullfighting and the fallacy inherent in bullfighting (a bullfighter *doesn't actually fight a bull*—the act is closer to an on-stage drama than it is to an encounter with a wild bull). His bullfighting, as an act, is a kind of

rage against the settled order: where other matadors are calculated, almost scientific in their reduction of danger, Romero is the opposite: his acts are authentically dangerous and centralize the poetry of bullfighting over the pragmatism of getting the job done.

Pedro Romero not only *acts* in a way that represents an authentic engagement with the chaos of the bull, but also *thinks* of the bull in dialectical terms, thereby establishing his own identity from and against the bulls. This, in itself, is a kind of Hegelian, anti-enlightenment, approach to bullfighting<sup>20</sup>. Romero knows that in order for his engagement with the bull to be authentic, there must be some possibility of a real struggle for mastery between himself and the bull (which, pointedly, will end in the death of one of them). This authentic struggle for mastery bubbles to the surface of the narrative when Barnes taps the wooden table for good luck, but Romero rebuffs Barnes' act, stating "No. Don't do that. The bulls are my best friends" (149). This is a moment of recognition for Romero: both he and the bull are trapped within the middle ground of bullfighting. Romero is expected to perform, and claims to only kill the bull, his friend, "So they don't kill me" (149).

Barnes then pushes Romero on his understanding of English (which is uncommon in bullfighters). Implied in Barnes' questioning of Romero's English is the idea that Romero, a bullfighter and therefore a symbol of Spain, shouldn't speak English. But Romero equivocates Barnes and tells him that he is trying to "forget English" because he knows that speaking English "would be very bad, a [bullfighter] who speaks English" (149). Romero is aware that he shouldn't know English, because English makes him a product for tourists to interact with, rather than a symbol of Pamplonian tradition. Next

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<sup>20</sup> For Romero, it is not so much "I think therefore I am," but, rather "a bull exists therefore I am."

Barnes asks Romero “What are bullfighters like?” and Romero replies “Like at the table . . . No, I must forget English” (149). By telling Barnes bullfighters are like the table Barnes just knocked on for luck, Romero expresses the idea that both are absurd fantasies: just as knocking on the table has no relation to luck, neither does the reality of his identity with bullfighting and the culture of Spain. Instead, the position of a bullfighter, understood as a symbolic fantasy of Spanish culture, is thrust upon him and is, as all identities are, essentially arbitrary and empty. However, this social position *does* have meaning for Romero in the social realm, in that it traps him within culture’s expectations. Romero, then, realizes he is trapped as much as the bulls are trapped, only his enclosures are welded from language and culture. The key point for us, however, is the recognition that this stems from Romero’s experience in bullfighting: the dialectic of matador and bullfighter, though not academic—not even nearly scientific—teaches Romero about ontology, about his epistemology, about logic, and about ethics. It is sport that gives these insights, rather than formalized knowledge and its fields.

If Romero is Hemingway’s modernist sporting visionary, Robert Cohn is the character that serves to define that which sport *is not* about. Cohn, a collegiate boxer in the US, has also emigrated to Europe after WWI, and is part of the famous lost generation. Cohn’s sport, though, is in a stark contrast to Romero’s. Where Romero sees the fallacy of his bullfighting, Cohn takes his boxing to be real fighting. As such, when he comes into a real fight (actually with Romero), he cannot handle all that is *not* formal boxing—it is as though he has invested himself too deeply into the science of boxing, is an effective boxer because of it, but—as a result—misses the fundamental non-relation between boxing and fighting. As a result, Cohn’s boxing education is somewhat

fettered—he knows the movements, the techniques, but he doesn't know life in the same way Romero knows life due to his bullfighting.

Because of *The Sun Also Rises*' first-person narration, our account of Romero vs Cohn/ poetics vs pragmatism comes from Mike Campbell. We are told Romero was “knocked down about fifteen times” was left bloodied and bruised by Cohn, but that “Cohn couldn't knock him out” (160). In the end, Cohn feels “it would be wicked [to hit Romero again].” Romero then throws a weak punch at Cohn, falls to the ground, and tells Cohn that he'll kill him if Cohn tried to help him up or wasn't out of town by the end of the morning. At this, Cohn breaks down and tries to shake Romero's hand. The action concludes with Mike stating, “he ruined Cohn” (161). Cohn leaves Pamplona dejected, while we're told that “The fight with Cohn had not touched [Romero's] spirit” (175). That Romero leaves Cohn's sense of self broken speaks to the metaphysical quality of their contest wherein each sought to have the other recognize themselves as master. Cohn, though physically victorious, fails to see that despite his boxing ability, he cannot win the fight for mastery over Romero. On encountering the reality of his condition, Cohn is forced to realize that boxing and fighting have a fundamental non-relation. This lesson, coming from the realm of the real, shatters Cohn's sense of self and provides a neat dividing line between Romero and Cohn: Cohn fights solely to win, while Romero fights with the same poetic understanding of the real with which he fights the bulls. Thus, Cohn loses the dialectical contest for mastery, and, unable to reckon with this reality, leaves Pamplona and the narrative of *The Sun Also Rises*.

Within this fight, there is a rather garish amount of machismo at play—they even believe they are fighting over the love of a woman. Concealed within this, however, is the

schema of sport that Hemingway has built, manipulated, and expressed within *The Sun Also Rises*. This schema operates the dominant norms of society's schema. Instead of easily digestible commodities, we are given Romero and his anguish as a symbol of Spain, instead of technical, science-like, points on play, we are given a proto-mysticism that never seeks to fully symbolize that which makes a good bullfighter. Sport, then, becomes as fragmented as any other aspect of modernism. It rallies against the dominant hegemony of rationality and gives us a vision of salvation from enlightenment dogma. That this salvation exists somewhere between the folds of Romero's cape and a bull's horns is a fitting tribute to Hemingway and the lost generation.

### **Who Only Cricket Know?: Representational Politics in *Beyond a Boundary***

C.L.R James' 1963 memoir *Beyond a Boundary* is driven by a central question which explodes our thinking on sport. James, in the foreword to the book, asks "What do they know of cricket who only cricket know?" (xviii). From this question, the semi-autobiographical inquiry into cricket expands and contracts, so that myriad question bubble to the surface of James' writing.<sup>21</sup> For the purposes of this chapter, though, I wish to divide *Beyond a Boundary* into two distinct arguments: first, that James invests himself into detaching cricket from colonialism.<sup>22</sup> Second, that James asks us to consider what we might find in cricket, once it has been surgically separated from the British Empire and its colonialist ethics.

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<sup>21</sup> Some of these "myriad questions" are contained within Mike Brearley's 2013 keynote speech titled "Mike Brearley: Socrates and CLR James."

<sup>22</sup> This movement draws parallels to Salmon Rushdie's assertion that "The English language ceased to be the sole possession of the English some time ago" (Rushdie, 70).



On the very first full page of *Beyond a Boundary*, James himself lays out the colonial reality of the West Indies, while also giving a glimpse into the emancipatory potential of the game. His vision for sport within the postcolonial context begins with a story about his neighbor, Matthew Bondman. James describes Bondman as “an awful character” who “was generally dirty” and didn’t work but had one “saving grace—Matthew could bat” (4). James even describes a kind of pull shot played by Matthew “on one knee.” Every time Matthew played this shot “a long, low ‘Ah!’ came from many a spectator, and my own little soul thrilled with recognition and delight” (4). Though seemingly insignificant, this story cuts to the chase of sport within the colonial context. At once, Bondman is constructed into the stereotypical subject of the West Indies—he is described as lazy, dirty, and quick tempered—but within the boundaries of the cricket field, Bondman leaves his constituted position behind; his cricket stroke is a stirring aesthetic movement that thrills young James and connects him to the aesthetic value of an activity like cricket. Bondman, then, becomes a kind of guide for readers to understand the effect cricket might have on the newly formed post-colonial Trinidad and Tobago.<sup>23</sup> Bondman, though constituted as a colonial other, contains the potential of artistic expression in a way that is unique to him and to the cricketers in the West Indies.

Before rushing too quickly into James’ aesthetic appreciation of cricket, it is vital that we listen to his thoughts on the relationship between politics and cricket. As with Tom Brown’s political convictions, James’ political life seems to have been born somewhere between the cricket crease and the binding of novels. James describes being

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<sup>23</sup> *Beyond a Boundary* was originally published in 1963; Trinidad and Tobago gained their independence from the United Kingdom in 1962. It would be an oversight to read these facts as mere coincidence.

educated not only in languages and fields of knowledge, but also in “a code, the English public school code” (24). The public-school code seeps into James’ moral understanding of the world, so much so that he describes himself feeling as though “two people lived in me: one, the rebel against the family and school discipline and order; the other, a Puritan, who would have sooner cut off his finger than do anything contrary to the rules of the game” (28). James, then, is politically split between an intellectual rebellion against the conditions of post-colonial Trinidad and an idealized realm of sport as it is presented in a kind of public-school “code”. On the one hand, he cannot accept the condition of being a postcolonial subject, but, on the other, complete rebellion would jeopardize his moral ideals.

To negotiate this knot of logic, morality, and racism, James turns to literature and cricket in equal measures. In doing so, he unsettles the pitying, liberal, reader and begins the process of cutting cricket from its colonial origins. First, he takes T.S. Eliot (and his claim that to write is to forget, and that to forget is to be emancipated) to task. James firmly asserts that he cannot merely leave the traumatic past behind. He writes, “I do not want to be liberated from [the past]” because “I am not recording tragedy” (59). James expands this claim into the world of cricket, at once recognizing the imperial dogma weaved into the game,<sup>24</sup> while surgically removing any potential pity the reader might feel for him, for his countrymen, or for his nation’s game. He even goes as far to write, “I haven’t the slightest doubt that the clash of race, class, and caste did not retard but stimulated West Indian cricket” (66). In short, James recognizes the history of cricket

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<sup>24</sup> “The British tradition soaked deep in to me was that when you entered the sporting arena you entered left behind some of the sordid compromises of everyday existence. *Yet for us to do that we would have to divest ourselves of our skin*” (66, emphasis added)

and its relation to the British Empire, *but* he will not let you—or anyone—take cricket, as he knows it, from him. For James' purpose is clear; he is reconstituting the very game of cricket so that it might become an activity that fills West Indian minds with a new consciousness, devoid of the Empire's sporting dogma. In short, James tells the reader to keep their pity to themselves, for it serves neither him nor the West Indies.

After comparing literature and cricket in order to create a sense of emancipation that is outside of the purview of liberalism, James largely drops literature and instead writes about a kind of literary cricket. In the following chapters, James describes cricket as a key element of his political philosophy. James details the tensions in choosing between Maple C.C. and the other clubs on the island (and how this tension was primarily formed through the signifiers of race, class, and caste). James also describes the ephemeral but highly talented, Piggot—a wicket keeper who was excluded from the national team in order to preserve some illegitimate sense of racial 'balance'. These stories share similar themes of triumph, skill, guile, and poise. Also, thematically, these stories detail the political life of the players beyond the boundary—a political life shaped by, or against, colonialism.

By choosing cricket over literature as the language of emancipation, James recognizes that though literature was fundamental to the construction of his identity, literature "filled pages not minds" while, instead, it was cricket that was "the greatest cultural influences in Britain in the nineteenth century" (64).<sup>25</sup> Now, James wishes to invoke that

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<sup>25</sup> Here, it is implied that the nineteenth century was century of social progression on the British Isles

same emancipatory spirit in the West Indies and, to do it, he elevates sport—particularly cricket—a pitch above literature.<sup>26</sup>

Throughout *Beyond a Boundary*, James references the idea that cricket gave him insight into political philosophy in a way that wouldn't have been possible to gain in other, more formalized, contexts. For his own part, James writes that “Cricket had plunged me into politics much before I was aware of it. When I did turn to politics I did not have too much to learn” (65). However, James appears to have relegated the use of himself as a case study within the text, instead, elects to describe the all-rounder and politician Learie Constantine in significant detail.

The facts of Constantine's life go something like this: born in 1901; debuted with the West Indies cricket team in 1923; secured a professional contract with Lancashire in 1928; worked as a Welfare Officer during WWII; qualified as a barrister and helped in founding the People's National Movement in 1954; served as Trinidad's High Commissioner from 1961 – 1964; knighted in 1962. Even within this extremely condensed version of a biography, one movement is clear: Constantine was led, like James, from cricket to politics.

Unlike James, Constantine's political education seems to have been more clearly drawn from cricket than from literature. In responding to James' reports of “low West Indian cricket morals”, Constantine firmly remarked, “You have it all wrong. You believe all you read in books. They are no better than we.” (112). In this statement, which

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<sup>26</sup> This recognition is similar to Supriya Chaudhuri's argument that the “literature of sport repeatedly raises a question literature fails to answer—that of the popular” (36). Chaudhuri, like James, goes on to capture the emancipatory nature of sport, and argues that sport gives us a way to exist against the cultural hegemony, and with the recognition of our futility (36-37).

James repeats later for emphasis, three independent conclusions might be drawn. First, that James had been subjected to an interpolation that privileged Englishness. Second, that this interpolation rooted from James' reading of English literature. And, lastly, that through cricket, Constantine recognized that his play, or the morals of it, as a West Indian, was no better or worse than the morals or play of an Englishman. This ethos—that there is no fundamental moral difference between West Indian cricketers (or people) and English cricketers—gains traction and expression on the cricket field itself.

While Constantine's assertion of equality is striking, it isn't quite so memorable as his expression of equality on the cricket field. In the 1928 tour of the West Indies, English bowlers delivered a series of short, body-line bowls, to the forty-eight-year-old H.B.G Austin. Austin was a part of a "cricketing trinity" for Constantine, and so when it was the West Indies turn to bowl, Constantine "let loose one or two that went past [an English batsman's] head" (107). Constantine was talked out of bowling more fast bouncers to the English batsman by James and others (here, one feels the political realm managed to invade the pitch for pragmatic purposes), but the message—the ethos, even—of those short deliveries sent a clear message: though the West Indian bowler is a colonial subject and expected therefore to hold an even higher standard of morality to prove they are not the depraved other, on the cricket field these pretenses fall away, and the morality of the day is that this is a contest, and polite humanism simply won't cut it.

Whilst Learie Constantine's expressions of equality seek to undo the dialectic between colonizer and colonized, his mode of political protest is not the only mode of political opposition presented in *Beyond a Boundary*. Indeed, through George John,

C.L.R James presents a brief glimpse into politics more concerned with disturbing the ontology of the colonialism.

C.L.R James first describes George John as part of “a new generation of black men bowling fast [which] was more sure of itself . . . the greatest of them all [was] George John” (73). James explains, too, that John was “a man of the people” who, due to World War I, was unable to capitalize on the prime of his cricketing career. Physically, John “was just the right height, about five foot ten, with a chest shoulders and legs on him all power and proportion” and, as a fast bowler, “proposed to defeat you first of all by pace and sheer pace . . . thunderbolts they were” (74). Though descriptions of John’s bowling endeavors are rousing, James turns the screw even further and gives John’s bowling a complete affect in and of itself. James writes “John had to be seen to be believed . . . John was not hostile, he was *hostility itself*.” and that “Almost every ball he was rolling up his sleeves like a man about to commit some long pre-meditated act of violence (75, emphasis added). Throughout these descriptions, James truly turns up grace and forcefulness of his own literary prose. The result is twofold: first, and most obviously, the prose is more enjoyable. Second, we come to realize that the violence and gusto with which John bowls is entirely un-signifiable—instead we are led to the limits of language and expressly told that John had to be “seen to be believed” (75).

Following these rousing descriptions of John as cricketer of great intensity, James’ descriptions of John leap beyond the cricketing boundary, as James describes how, after being left out of the side, “He went and sat in a remote corner . . . like Achilles in his tent” (75). When told by a teammate “John you don’t seem very pleased with things’,” John replied “What you complainin’ about?” The teammate sent to console John

seems, then, to have made some comment about John's facial expression, to which John state "My face is my own and I'll do what I like with it'." Here is where John begins to appear as an individual who is *not* concerned with representing the self in cohesion with others, but rather is quite satisfied to reject the terms of dialectics.<sup>27</sup> Instead, John invests himself into his own identity, and didn't carry "a desire to prove" because he was "above or below it. Yet in his in his rejection of all standards and interests except his own I see in his fast bowling more dynamite than in all the Shannon eleven together" (80).<sup>28</sup> Here, provided that we remember James is using sport as a kind of literature of emancipation, George John comes to represent the possibility of an identity which has dismantled (not forgotten) the symbolic order. Unlike Constantine, George John, in his cricket, doesn't want to 'represent' himself or a people, and he refuses the illogic of colonialism. Instead, within the boundary of a cricket field, he appears to have experienced a kind of fast-bowling emancipation. He bowls fast, he bowls for himself and his team, and he takes a lot of wickets.

James' description of cricket's social tensions, personal anecdotes on the game, and reflections on identity reconstitution via cricket make it clear to the reader that James recognizes the influence of imperialism, politics, colonialism, and class on cricket. However, politics only dominates the stage that exists *off* the field (or beyond the boundary). For James, it appears that this distinction—that the sport itself can be a field of expression that is formed by, yet free from, colonial powers—is key.

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27 In saying this, it is also essential to note that James does not represent John as a kind of maniacal actor. To the contrary, James takes great effort to describe that John "had inner-discipline, and it had been hard earned" (77).

28 Shannon was a cricket club for black low-middle class cricketers in Trinidad. James earlier described their bowlers as the best among all the islands.

James' description of cricket's social tensions, personal anecdotes on the game, and reflections on identity reconstitution via cricket make it clear to the reader that James recognizes the influence of imperialism, politics, colonialism, and class on cricket. However, politics only dominates the stage that exists *off* the field (or beyond the boundary). For James, it appears that this distinction—that the sport itself can be a field of expression that is formed by, yet free from, colonial powers—is key.

Despite writing over 200 detailed pages in which James “made great claims for cricket,” and has “integrated it within the historical movement of the times” (196), the full analysis of the game, and the boundaries of its existence, does not end with criticism. Instead, after proving the cultural worth of cricket to the emerging West Indian post-colonial nations, demonstrating that the trappings of the game to be caught up in a web of Englishness which obfuscates the games' integrity, and—perhaps most importantly—establishing cricket as an activity which helps politically constituted subjects realize their basic equality, James turns the book somewhat on its head, and asks, like Tolstoy, “What is Art?”. James then storms the field of art, and firmly throws cricket into the mix of aestheticism, so that Grace, Worrell, and Walcott, sit neatly beside Goya, Michelangelo, and Caravaggio.

James' argument that “cricket is an art, not a bastard or a poor relation, but a full member of the community” is clearly a bold one (196) and for good reason: for James, cricket, when understood as an art, is a force which can move us beyond our prescribed social relations and structures. James, in establishing cricket as an art, makes three main claims: First, cricket is a space of drama unlike any other art form or sport; second,



cricket is a stage for human expression and artistic interpretation; third, cricket is embedded within an aesthetic tradition which transcends context.

James' first argument in the chapter "What is Art" is to claim that cricket is structured to create drama, and, in doing so, is unlike any other art form or sport. To establish cricket-as-drama, James writes "[Cricket] is so organized that at all times it is compelled to reproduce the central action which characterizes all good drama . . . two individuals are pitted against each other in a conflict that is strictly personal but no less strictly representative of a particular group" (196). Here, two important distinctions arise: cricket is both a space where players are pitched against each other as individuals *and* it is a space where those same individuals represent more than themselves alone. James furthers this notion of individuals representing more than themselves by writing:

The batsman facing the ball does not merely represent his side . . . he is his side.

This fundamental relation of the One as the Man, Individual and Social, Individual and Universal, leader and followers, representative, the part and the whole, is structurally imposed on the players (197).

The game of cricket, then, is founded upon drama: it seeks it out, forces it into existence, and demands it as part of the game itself. Moreover, cricket, to James, is *structured* to create drama and is unique in doing so.<sup>29</sup> Seen as a structured drama, cricket emerges as a unique kind of performance; it pitches individuals (a bowler vs a batsman) against each other both as individuals and as representatives of a group (two opposing teams). This tension between individual acts and representations of larger groups is part

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<sup>29</sup> James directly compares drama in cricket to drama in soccer, running, baseball as well as the dramatist, the novelist, and the choreographer, ultimately finding that while drama might momentarily appear in other sport and in other arts, nowhere is it structurally embedded as it is in cricket (196).

of a larger, artistic and political, notion in which cricketers—as artists and athletes—are able to *represent* ideas as broad as the nation, ethnicity, and identity.

After identifying cricket's drama-inducing structure, James describes how cricket utilizes this dramatic structure to create a stage of observable, yet unpredictable, spectacle. James writes “in all dramatic spectacles . . . the total spectacle consists of . . . a series of individual, isolated episodes, each in itself completely self-contained” (197). James translates the idea that a spectacle consists of a series of episodes, each of which is self contained, into the sport of cricket by writing “each [spectacle] has its beginning, the ball bowled; its middle, the stroke played; its end, runs, no runs, dismissal” (197). Aware that this series of actions and outcomes might seem rather reductive, James notes that, within this series of events, each event “fraught with immense possibilities” (197). As such, cricket emerges as a stage upon which players express unpredictably dramatic acts within the confines of a determined series. The result: cricket does not only produce drama at random intervals, but is filled with the unpredictable possibility of drama whenever the series of events begins; the batsman takes guard, the bowler turns and begins the run-up, and the fielders walk-in.

This spectacle, as with all spectacles, is contingent upon *spectators*. As James writes “the structural enforcement of the fundamental appeals to which all dramatic must have is of incalculable value to the spectator” (197). Here, it appears that James is attempting to guide our—the spectator's—eyes back towards ourselves, so that we might become aware of the way in which cricket can be appreciated as an art. James writes that cricket “Appreciation of cricket has little to do with the end,” and that “what matters in cricket, as in all arts, is not the finer points but what everyone with some knowledge of

the elements can see and feel” (197). As I understand it, this point is an attempt to understand cricket as an aesthetic transcendence—once we are able to understand the broad structure of the game, we are able to transcend the idea of cricket as a game, and understand it, instead, as an act of expression and representation.

But what is being represented and expressed within cricket? Here is where James’ analysis of cricket-as-art takes full flight. James first compares cricket to ballet. He writes “Cricket, of course, does not allow that representation or suggestion of specific relations as can be done by a play or ballet and dance (198). The idea here being that ballet, dance, and drama all set out with themes and ideas to express or represent. Nonetheless, for James cricket *does* draw from “elemental human activities, qualities and emotions—attack, defence, courage, gallantry, steadfastness, grandeur, ruse” (198). Indeed, James nails this point home by writing “any art which by accident gets too far from [elemental sensations] finds that it has to return or wither. They are the very stuff of human life. It is of this stuff that the drama of cricket is composed” (198). These remarks recapitulate James’ overall thesis that cricket is a drama upon which the players express themselves. He identifies a kind of universal artistry at play in the structure of cricket, and helps the reader to see the value of serialization in the creation of any artistic expression.

As with much of *Beyond a Boundary*, James is not exclusively interested in talking about art-for-art’s-sake (or, cricket-for-cricket’s-sake). Instead, for James, understanding cricket as an art form is of particular interest to the newly formed West

Indian nations.<sup>30</sup> James—after acknowledging the importance of representation, as I have noted—writes

We may some day be able to answer Tolstoy’s exasperated question: What is art?—but only when we learn to integrate our vision of Walcott on the back foot through the covers with the outstretched arm of the Olympic Apollo (211)

With this paralleling of Clyde Walcott and the Olympic Apollo, James’ vision for cricket-as-art in the West Indies becomes most clearly crystalized. Here, I believe James recognizes that representation via art/cricket is a vehicle for the West Indian nations to gain respect within increasingly globalized international politics.

The importance of cricket-as-representation continues as a theme throughout the remainder of *Beyond a Boundary* and is most forcefully communicated within a letter which James wrote to the Queens Park Cricket Club (who, at the time, governed the West Indian national cricket team) while James advocated for Frank Worrell to become the West Indian cricket captain (he would be the second Black West Indian captain—and the first outright captain as George Headley had shared captaincy twenty years prior). James writes “You are exercising a public responsibility, the importance of which seems to have exceeded your comprehension” (242). Rhetorically, from this the reader is already aware the any pretensions of cricket as “just a game” are out of the question, and James continues to push home the importance of cricket in the West Indies by writing “It is equally clear . . . that cricket has made mighty strides among our people” and that “from a small island like this you can get well over 30,000 people . . . that is a circumstance

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<sup>30</sup> *Beyond a Boundary* was published in 1963. Trinidad and Tobago (James’ home nations) gained their independence from the United Kingdom in 1962.

which, as far as I know, is unprecedented in its scope and implications” (242). After presenting the magnitude importance of cricket as a representation of a people, James criticizes the Queen’s Park Cricket Club’s handling of West Indian cricket, “There have long been murmurings . . . that the management of the international cricket has grown to such remarkable proportions that it should no longer be in the hands of what is a private club” and that the West Indian side should be run by a democratically elected board (243). This mis-management, however, is not a simply solved thing, but rather is an issue deeply connected to representational politics. Among a list of grievances, James writes “The public is profoundly irritated by its conviction that the captaincy of the West Indies teams for years has been manipulated in a manner as deliberately to exclude black men” and that “Finally, there is a deep seated conviction that the Queen’s Park Club represents the old regime in Trinidad and that it is indifferent and even hostile to what the masses of the people think” (246). These two points, which come half-way through James’ letter, clearly speak towards the notion that cricket—as an art or otherwise—*represent* a people and when a team fails to represent its people the consequences should be “strategic, comprehensive and final” (249). Towards the end of the James’ letter, however, James rhetorically reaches back out to the Queen’s Park Club board, and appeals to a shared sense of community in cricket. James writes “Here as everywhere else I am primarily concerned with the building of a truly national community” (248). This open letter utilizes cricket’s position within what James calls “modes of apprehending the world, history and society” and proves that, as far as public interest goes, cricket more than holds its own as a form of representation.

As an argument, James' belief that cricket can represent a people invigorated adds significant and necessary nuance to the argument I set down in my analysis of *Tom Brown's School Days* (that sport is a tool of social discipline), and it is a point I could not agree to more wholeheartedly. James writes,

I can no longer accept that Peisistratus encouraged the dramatic festival as a means of satisfying or appeasing or distracting the urban masses on their way to democracy. That would be equivalent to saying that the rulers of Victorian England encouraged cricket to satisfy or appease or distract the urban masses on their way to democracy. The Victorian experience with cricket suggests a line of investigation on the alert for signs both more subtle and more tortuous. (210)

This passage nuances the Althusserian critique of sport I provided in my first chapter (essentially, that sport was a vital tool of the state ideological apparatus), and vigorously reimagines the ontology of. One in which ruling classes might be able to dictate the shape of the boundaries, *but* none can guess what kind of anti-interpellation work might occur within those boundaries. Instead, the playing of cricket connects James, and therefore the reader, to a kind of humanity that does *not* forget the political realm, but, rather, unsettles the contemporary political order, and aspires to a deeper, more universal, "line" of aesthetic, un-signifiable, value.

While James' reflection on cricket-as-art leaves does prompt serious metaphysical questions, contextually—within his reflection on cricket-as-art—is the idea that can defy hegemonic systems of power. For, when James writes of cricketers, he does *not* qualify Worrell as a great *West Indian* captain, he is merely a great captain. In kind, James does *not* apply some more human quality to W.G. Grace because he is an English batsman but,

rather, recognizes that both are men. Whereas, in the field of literature (or, criticism generally) we often jump to qualify human expression. For example, despite the fact Tupac Shakur's lyrics and poetry are *often* metaphysical, we are quick to box it within the "black experience" of America. This is a kind of patronizing, reductive, move we would never make against the canonized Dickens, despite the fact that much of his work is invested in a kind of "working class experience" of nineteenth century Britain.

In cricket, however, identitarian reduction holds little meaning. We watch Brian Lara because he's the greatest batsman and biggest hitter of the modern era. We watch Chris Gayle because of his ability to hit the ball beyond the eye's capacity to see. We watched Viv Richards because of his poetry and timing of his hook shot (and sledging abilities). None of these batsmen are qualified with terms like "West Indian talent"—we might even cringe at such a qualification, as the mental image of Viv Richards appears, ready to dispatch any such pretensions. They are merely cricketers playing cricket with aesthetic, human, value.

### **Conclusion**

I set about this chapter with the aim of nuancing the argument of my first chapter (in which I claimed sport is a tool of social discipline). As such, this chapter does not contradict the idea that sport can be used as a tool of the ideological state apparatus, but rather asks that we see how sport can help us oppose the deployment of the ideological state apparatus. As such *The Sun Also Rises* and *Beyond a Boundary* both provide sterling examples of sport as a space where subjects can reconstitute their identity and represent themselves against hegemonic ideology.

Through Hemingway and James, it becomes clear that no matter how much analysis one might embark upon, sport always resists complete interpretation. It is, instead, an activity that aspires to basic human impulses, connects us to narratives of struggle and joy, is founded upon complete absurdity (which we willfully ignore), and communicates a mode of education that is more closely tied to a pre-symbolic—or pre-language—than any kind of formalized academic pursuit. All these reflections, however, leaves us oriented towards the past. They might make us think twice about clichéd headlines, but they don't make an immediate mark upon our world and our action within it. This is all too comfortable for a world in which hypocrisy reigns as a kind of supreme ideology and does a disservice to the political murmurings coming from the field of sport in the last fifteen years.



## CHAPTER THREE: IN THE SLIPS AND THE ROPE-A-DOPE

While C.L.R James' route to political consciousness is precise in its critique of the failings, tensions, and conflicts of interest inherent in Britain's colonial endeavors, James' idea that, broadly, emancipation via representation (or, aesthetics) is possible via cricket seems to miss its own mark. James, after detailing the systemic and hegemonic power of colonial oppression, somehow offers cricketing aesthetic representation as a route to psycho-social and economic emancipation. This vision of emancipation-via representation is certainly inspiring and hopeful, but ultimately impossible for the simple reason that quality judgements are always subjective, muddy, and deeply connected to the political (which is structured on anti-blackness, as David Marriott argues in *Whither Fanon? Studies in the Blackness of Being*—I will further this claim shortly). Indeed, through the 1950's and 60's when James was writing his book, even West Indian cricket's achievements were disregarded and slighted, chalked up to a kind of "calypso" cricket in which West Indian cricketers are stereotyped as playing without discipline, hard work, or focus—without, then, all of the things that makes a cricketer a cricketer. And in the late 70's and 80's, when West Indian cricket and cricketers were champions, they were accused of unsportsman-like play. More to the point (and with the aid of retrospection), in the fifty years that unfolded since the publication of *Beyond a Boundary*, we have seen no traces of anything like a genuine global emancipation through cricket (or any other sport). It appears, then, that the emancipation James imagined is in fact impossible to accomplish—sport cannot, by itself, liberate us, nor can

it liberate itself— and, even if it were possible, it certainly won't come from a place of representation and transcendence. Instead, in this chapter, I propose a similar study of sport and emancipation, but intend to place ideology and structure at the core of emancipatory efforts, instead of representation.

I am aware that such a disavowal risks leaving us back at square-one. However, in place of C.L.R. James, I propose to follow sport afresh with Fanon and who, in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), attempts to construct a route into “the zone of non-being . . . in which an authentic upheaval can be born” (10). Moreover, I add to Fanon the more contemporary criticism of David Marriott who, in *Whither Fanon: Studies in the Blackness of Being (Whither Fanon)*, writes that “anti-blackness is the discourse through which a singular experience of the world is constituted” (x). Understood in this way, I hope to leverage my analysis on the dialectic of being and hope to argue for a route to emancipatory acts that inverts transcendence-to-emancipation and instead grows from the incompleteness of identity, denies that the other is a knowable text, and recognizes the impossibility of sovereignty as universal and inescapable.

In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Frantz Fanon writes:

There is a zone of nonbeing, and extraordinarily sterile and arid region, an utterly naked declivity where an authentic upheaval can be born. In most cases, the black man lacks the advantage of being able to descent into a real hell (1952, 10).

As I understand it, the zone of nonbeing is a surprising articulation of the potential productivity of negativity. That is, although the zone of nonbeing *cannot* be neatly rendered in language, it *is* the space which defines and dictates all relations in racialized society. More to the point, Fanon recognizes that the zone of nonbeing is not

available to the black man, but, if he were to access the zone of nonbeing “an authentic upheaval can be born”. The issue at stake, therefore, is that the black man is made into a homogeneous illusory other, and is ascribed an identity (black) that does not exist. As such, in racialized society the black man cannot negate himself, for he is already always overdetermined with too much positive content and, therefore, is typically unable to access the zone of nonbeing.

Fanon describes the ontology which denies the black man access to the zone of nonbeing in two brief statements. He writes, “The white man is sealed in his whiteness. The black man in his blackness” (11). Further, Fanon recognizes a symptom of this racialized ontology when he writes “There is a fact: White men consider themselves superior to black men.” And “There is a fact: Black men want to prove to white men, at all costs, the richness of their thought, the equal value of their intellect” (12). As such, blackness exists only within an imagined dialectic with whiteness, where it functions to convince whiteness of its own legitimacy and superiority.<sup>31</sup> The only move forward, then, is a kind of radical negativity wherein Fanon theorizes a route by which the black man might liberate himself by descending into the zone of nonbeing—into a space of “utter declivity where an authentic upheaval can be born” (10). Indeed, unlike James’ representational politics, Fanon’s conception of the zone of nonbeing undercuts the notion that emancipation is possible via representation. Instead, Fanon, revises the possibility of emancipation itself and, in turn, forces us to revise Hegel’s dialectic in which the master (here, white) relies upon the slave (here, black) for its self-definition.

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<sup>31</sup> These articulations by Fanon, and my use of them, are descriptive *not* perspective. That is, blackness or whiteness are not essentialized identities, but rather are straightforward descriptions of racialized society.

However, Fanon is clear when he writes “For the future of the black man there is only one destiny. And it is white”.<sup>32</sup> This seemingly depressing statement, might, in fact, be a somewhat positive (or at least, productive) one. Recognizing that the future of blackness (impossible; fictitious) is white necessitates that blackness’ expression in the world (as something with positive content) also coincides with its destruction. This is of particular importance when we recognize that there is no correspondence between whiteness and blackness—only non-relation. Representation alone, then, is futile for two reasons: First, representation assumes that there *is* a relation between whiteness and blackness (and, as such, all we need do is learn the “truth” about the negated other and the problem will go away—clearly, in what is hailed as the age-of-information, this is not true). Second, no amount of representation can change the prescriptive ontology of anti-blackness that dictates our racialized society.<sup>33</sup> Instead, it is necessary to reimagine and eradicate the ontologies that gives life to racialized society—to the identities of whiteness and blackness. To do so is to enter into a kind of zone of nonbeing, in which we do not attempt to transcend negation, but instead attempt to structure our relations through a basic understanding that all relations—including whiteness and blackness—are fundamentally non-relations.<sup>34</sup> With non-relation as a starting point, we might genuinely be able to unsettle the master’s position.

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<sup>32</sup> David Marriott’s *Whither Fanon: Studies in the Blackness of Being* opens with this quote as an epigraph. I will return to Marriott in the following paragraphs.

<sup>33</sup> This is an analysis echoed in Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s 1988 essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” The answer is yes, the subaltern *can* speak, but its speech is not registered or heard by hegemonic power.

<sup>34</sup> Broadly, this theory of non-relation draws from Lacan’s statement “there is no sexual relation”. To say there is no sexual relation *is not* to say that sexual preferences are different (or that sex itself does not exist—obviously it does), but rather is an ontological statement: there is no real sexual relation even between relationships we consider normative. Non-relation, then, is an ontological assertion in which we recognize all relations are driven by antagonism and that, as such, our current climate of humanism (which

David Marriott advances this idea of radical negativity in *Whither Fanon*.

Marriott, in the introduction to questions whether emancipation through representation is *even possible*. Marriott, through Fanon, recognizes that when we talk of emancipation, we fall into an ontology of anti-blackness in which whiteness is at the end of emancipation. Marriott, echoing Fanon, writes “to see whiteness as the destiny of blackness is to question everything. To see the future of blackness in its absolute disappearance is also to imagine it as a thing obliterated” (ix). Marriott again pushes the reader to recognize the ontology of anti-blackness in our world by writing that “the essence of anti-blackness is not representation, but the structure by which racial ontology is literally inscribed on each act of enslaved, non-sovereign being” and that “anti-blackness is the thing against which the universal, the human, the ideal, etc., is enunciated and created” (x). This structure—in which anti-blackness defines whiteness—recognizes that whiteness requires disavowal in order to exist and that this disavowal, in our history, is anti-blackness. The more productive move to make, in order to meaningfully disrupt whiteness and anti-blackness, is to ask, “But what happens to this future whiteness when, blackened, it too learns of its origin?” (ix). As opposed to representation, in which we attempt to fill blackness with positive content but never obliterate the racial binary itself, the unsettling of whiteness can more productively question the structure of a world built on a through anti-blackness.

It is not the goal of this project to fully comprehend or detail negativity, blackness, or negation. Instead, I hope to utilize Fanon and Marriott’s thinking to further

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strives for sameness, unity and rights) is always destined to fail. For further discussion on non-relation as a starting point for understanding social relations, see Alenka Zupančič’s 2017 essay “Sexual is Political”.

my own analysis of the discourse of sport—particularly as it relates to our racialized society. As such, in this chapter, I approach hegemony, ideology, and sport through Sam Selvon’s 1994 short story “The Cricket Match” and the 1996 documentary *When We Were Kings*, which focuses on Muhammad Ali’s bout with Joe Frazier in 1974. In both texts, sport is used to meaningfully disrupt the smooth functioning of hegemonic ideology, so that the sovereignty of that hegemony is undermined. In “The Cricket Match”, Selvon weaves a narrative which uses cricket to subvert England’s control over the symbolic order. In *When We Were Kings*, Muhammad Ali leverages his position as a boxer to publicly critique and challenge American imperialism, militarism, and racism.

### **Selvon, Stereotype, and the Structure of English Cricket**

Sam Selvon’s short story “The Cricket Match” (1994) follows Algernon—a West Indian who immigrated to England and works “in a tyre factory down by Chiswick” (91). As the title suggests, the narrative centers around cricket, first as international matches on Algernon’s radio, then locally, as Algernon is asked to organize and play a match against a local English team. The narrative that unfolds unsettles the security of Englishness and identity, ultimately forcing the reader to witness the utter ridiculousness of the entire symbolic order upon which such colonial identities are formed.

From the outset, the reader knows that Algernon has little interest in, or formal knowledge of, cricket and is largely performing his cricketing knowledge as a kind of social currency. The narrator describes how “the people in [England] believe that everybody who come from West Indies at least like [cricket],” but that Algernon was among those West Indians “that don’t like the game at all,” and his sudden interest in cricket was really “a chance to give the Nordics tone” (91). Moreover, Algernon hasn’t

played cricket since he was a boy, when he played with “a bat from a coconut branch, a dry mango seed for a ball, and pitchoil tin for a wicket” (92). Nonetheless, he goes on with “another West Indian fellar name Roy getting on as if they invent the game” and claims to have played “first class cricket” (92). Algernon knows, then, that despite having little connection to cricket, he can leverage the stereotype of the West Indies as cricket-loving to his advantage within the tyre shop to gain in some kind of social respect.

However, soon after Algernon’s postures as a source of cricketing knowledge, he’s thrown into jeopardy when Charles, an Englishman who also works in the tyre shop, asks if Algernon could organize a team to play against his team. Despite trying to avoid the match, Algernon and Roy realize that “If we back out of this now them English fellars will say we are only talkers” (93), and so the pair manage to form a team of eight (even this, though, comprises of only one serious player, Wilky, who even has to show one of the other men how to hold a bat correctly (93)).

One might expect “The Cricket Match” to finish with the “West Indian” team, comprised mostly of men who haven’t played cricket or who haven’t played for an extended period of time, being embarrassingly beaten by the English village team. However, what unfolds is described as “a historic day” in which the English village team bowled “some nice hop-and-drop that they boys lashed for six and four” (94). Algernon even goes out and hits a “swipe so hard that when the bat collide the ball went right out of the field and fall into the road” (94). Rain eventually stops play, and the “West Indian” team are “sixty-nine and one” (this means the West Indian team scored sixty-one runs, and only one of their batsman got out—the beginning of a rather good innings at the local

level). Algernon even leaves the days play “feeling as if he is a Walcott and Valentine roll into one” (95).

A traditional, humanist, analysis of this story might lead us, like James, to declare that the West Indian men—despite their inexperience—accessed some fountain of aesthetic brilliance and, by doing so, proved their equality to the English team. However, I propose to engage in an analysis rooted in historicity and claim the exact opposite: if there is a realization to be had, it is that the English team—despite the symbolism of organization and respectability—are actually just as lost, disorganized, and frankly as bad as the “West Indian” team. They, too, are living within a lie about themselves and their identity as knowledgeable, skillful, or ordered. We *know* that the “West Indian” team is not really a team at all, and that they have only one good cricketer amongst them. Yet they perform much better than the English side. The realization, then, is not that the “West Indian” team is inspired by their identity as West Indians, but that the English team, for all its control over the symbolic order, is really not cut from some higher cloth but is just as hypocritical, deceitful, and pretentious as Algernon and Roy.<sup>35</sup>

The use of humor and wit in “The Cricket Match” hides the negativity radiating from its core. Humor, within the short story, allows the reader to laugh a little about the subversion of expectations and stereotypes then move on. However, if we interrogate the ‘joke’ a little more, we find a story deeply engaged in socio-political upheaval—one which is directly invested in Marriott’s question, “But what happens to this future

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<sup>35</sup> Selvon does not present the game itself as a kind of deceitful or pretentious game—in many ways it just sounds like good fun—but the build up to the game clearly shows Algernon is *not* ready to back-up his bragging. As such, when Algernon plays so well against the English, the penny drops and we realize that the English club are also bragging with little substantiation.



whiteness when, blackened, it too learns of its origin?" (ix). This kind of reversal—where representation isn't the aim—is the same kind of reversal that occurs in "The Cricket Match". Nowhere in the narrative are we instructed to see Algernon and Roy any differently—we know they lie about their cricket experience and knowledge. Instead, we come to recognize that the "the white man is sealed in his whiteness" (Fanon, 11) and that the whiteness that exists in a racialized society is dependent upon imagined, impossible, Blackness. As such, the dialectal relationship of race in "The Cricket Match" is collapsed, so that we might come to recognize a different universal: that all identities are constructed, empty, and dependent upon the symbolic.

In this way, might identify blackness in "The Cricket Match" as a kind of projection from "whiteness": just as the English cricketers project their whiteness through the symbolic order (they certainly don't play with mango seeds or show up to matches with eight men), so, too, does whiteness function to project the illusion of blackness. The reality, however, is that the entire ontology of anti-blackness is a projected one: a kind of denial of the reality that the English—who are supposedly civilized and organized in their games as well as anything else—are, in fact, just as base and incomplete as anything or anyone else.

While "The Cricket Match" exists as fiction, it—like any fiction—speaks to and of reality. In this way, we might look again to the current contemporary initiatives I critiqued in the opening chapter (Rainbow Laces campaigns, the NFL's support of the Black Lives Matter Movement, the PGA's fundraising for children's healthcare) and ask if these causes can take a similar route into a "Zone of Non-Being" as the one I find in "The Cricket Match", for their causes are certainly worthy ones. However, to make this

kind of negative effort within contemporary sport's social justice missions, we must reckon with the unifying factor of capitalism and the ways by which it shapes, controls, and maintains sport in modernity. To do this, I turn to perhaps the most recognizable athlete in the most recognizably capitalist sport: Muhammad Ali in the sport of boxing.

### **Float Like a Butterfly: Fanon to Ali**

It is no coincidence that boxing is also known as prizefighting. Unlike cricket and football (the other sports included in this thesis), boxing puts money at the surface of its appeal: before a fight is even made, we know the value of the purse and the wealth the fighters are able to attain if they win their fights. Moreover, professional fights only ever happen so long as they follow the logic of capitalism: as demand for a fight increases, so too does the chance that it will be made. On occasion, the logic of capitalism even supersedes the logic of the sport itself, as fighters give up their belts and titles if a larger sum of money can be made on a different fight. Capital then, drives, shapes, even dictates boxing and in doing so pitches fighters into realms of global politics, just as it did in the 1974 bout between Joe Frazier and Muhammad Ali, famously dubbed "The Rumble in the Jungle."

Muhammad Ali is a sterling example of an athlete's ability to meaningfully unsettle the cultural hegemon of oppressive regimes—in this case, that of American imperialism. The real genius of Ali, though, is in his recognition that his position in society is an impossible one. Ali—whose connections to Malcolm X are well documented—recognized the impossibility inherent in his position as both a high-profile boxer, a multi-millionaire athlete, a Black man, a Muslim, and a citizen of the United States of America in the throes of the Vietnam war. On the one hand, Ali cannot suddenly

be liberated or emancipated by the history that constitutes him as a subject. But, on the other, he cannot accept that the history he inhabits (in which America's imperial mission extends to Vietnam, racism is rife, and the pursuit of capital extends beyond human interest) is essential, acceptable, or in any way justifiable. As such, Ali is tactful in his use of sport; he unsettles the order of American imperialism and leverages his marketability as a poet, boxer, and icon to *force* the center of American society to talk about colonization, racism, and capitalism. In this way, Ali uses sport to go beyond symbolic representation and instead uses his representation to directly disrupt the ideology of America and the West broadly.

In attempting to write about Muhammad Ali, I realized that I must constrain my scope. Studies of Ali—arguably the most iconic sportsman of the 20<sup>th</sup> century—could likely fill an entire thesis. As such I wish to narrow the scope of my analysis of Ali to make two arguments: first, that Ali recognizes the inescapable and dialectic of anti-blackness thrust upon himself as a Black man but is able to disrupt the ideology that creates that position; and second, that Ali recognizes the historical and present day oppression of Black people as being synonymous to the oppression of colonial subjects—in particular, this is evident in his resistance to the Vietnam war. Taken together, these two claims can be homogenized into one broad thesis: Ali, through sport, presents Black Consciousness in such a way that material reality could not slip by unquestioned or unaltered as it does in many of sport's current progressive missions

Like any of us, Ali did not think alone. Indeed, his connection to Malcolm X is well documented and comes through clearly in his speeches and actions. While Ali's relationship to Malcolm X is an academically lucrative one, I wish to side-step their

connection in this chapter for one key reason: Ali and Malcom X's relationship was one which changed over time, and I do not wish to write biography in this chapter (it would be impossible to consider Ali with Malcolm X without dedicating pages to the evolution of their connection). For the purposes of this chapter, I acknowledge the relationship exists, but it is one that deserves study beyond the scope of my thesis. Similarly, I am sidestepping Ali's faith and his connection to the Nation of Islam in this chapter. Instead, I take Ali as a primary text, and put him into conversation with today's contemporary Black Studies. By making this move, Ali is given room to breathe as a stand-alone text, and becomes relevant in today's struggles and the theorizations of those struggles.

I am aware, also, that by emphasizing Ali above scholars and authors such as Frantz Fanon, Chinua Achebe, Saidiya Hartman, W.E.B. DuBois, bell hooks, and Cedric Robinson, I risk doing a disservice to the field of Black Studies. However, I remain steadfast in foregrounding Ali, as I am primarily interested in sport and its value to/within academia. I also don't mean to make Ali into an apostle, nor take his thoughts as gospel. Instead, although my thoughts on race and anti-blackness deviate, sometimes greatly, from Ali's, I take him earnestly as my primary text and as an example of the authentically possible routes by which athletes, and therefore sport, might become antagonistic to the logic of modernity—here, that antagonism takes place through Ali as he meaningfully unsettles the smooth functioning of ideology in the creation of an ontology of anti-blackness which supports imperialism and colonialism.

Before analyzing Ali alongside contemporary Black Studies thinkers, it is important to establish what exactly Ali's understanding of blackness is. However, cornering Ali's approach to race and anti-blackness is essentially impossible, as his views

changed throughout his life. Instead of attempting to capture an entire life invested in discourses on anti-blackness, I intend to focus on his most prevalent and publicly available positions, which come from the 1960s and 1970s, and will draw primarily from *When We Were Kings* (1996)—a documentary which follows Ali up to, during, and after his 1974 bout with George Foreman. Broadly, Ali’s ideas in these decades fall in line with black nationalism, and are primarily concerned with the creation of a new Black Consciousness.

While the narrative of *When We Were Kings* is driven by Ali’s upset victory over Foreman, it is also a space where Ali talks about Blackness, boxing, and his position in society. Blackness, as a topic of conversation, drops in and out of focus as the documentary, starting with Ali stating “Yeah, I’m in Africa. Yeah, Africa’s my home. Damn America and what America thinks. But Africa’s the home of the black man and I was a slave 400 years ago and I’m going home to fight among my brothers” [0:22 – 0:40]. *When We Were Kings* then cuts away to show Ali’s rise through the boxing rankings and scenes of Zaire’s colonial past before returning, sporadically but poignantly, to Ali and the ontology of anti-blackness inscribed into both his/our history and present.

In particular, Ali identifies anti-blackness within the education system and makes the point that racism is part of the ideological state apparatus and is learned. Ali states, “We have a lot of problems that we have to solve among ourselves . . . knowledge of self; the black people don’t have no knowledge of self. We have been made like white people mentally . . . until it’s hard to teach [black people] about themselves”. In this moment, Ali presents the idea that the target or direction of society is to inculcate black people into whiteness. The key issue here being, obviously, one of erasure. Following the idea that

racism is a facet of the ideological state apparatus, Ali recognizes that one cannot somehow be de-ideologized, but that instead “we must re-brainwash”—in other words, we can only hope to reclaim control of ideology. For Ali, this means replacing anti-blackness with a discourse of Black pride; one which he feels can really “teach [black people] about themselves” [1:14:22 – 1:14:55].

### Ali and Vietnam: Blackness and Imperialism

In 1966, Muhammad Ali refused to be drafted into the US military during the Vietnam War. As a result, his boxing license was revoked and he was sentenced to five years in jail. Ali was unable to fight between the ages of 25 and 29 and returned to boxing as a slower version of himself. However, it is in Ali’s sporting absence that his political pursuits are most meaningful. Not only did he represent the “the notion Black radicalism does not have borders, boundaries, racial qualification” (Cedric Robinson, 9:48 - 10:00), but he actually leveraged capitalism against itself—he was the biggest show in boxing, but nobody could pay to watch him box in his prime. This in itself is a strange kind of boycott that actually cuts supply from demand. Before moving too quickly, though, I wish to turn my analysis briefly Ali’s conscientious objection as a historical event.

Ali’s conscientious objection is born, as I have mentioned earlier, through a recognition that oppression—and resistance to oppression—transcends national and ethnic boundaries. In his own words, Ali states, “My conscience doesn’t let me go shoot my brother or some darker people, or some poor hungry people” (0:15 – 0:35, “Muhammad Ali on Vietnam, Hardships & the True Opposer & Enemy of Justice”). Ali, therefore, seems to recognize that the struggle of Black Americans and Vietnamese

people is synonymous as each struggle against a common oppressor. Ali states, “No Vietcong ever called me n—” and, speaking to a white crowd at a university, he elaborates, “My enemy is the white people . . . you’re my opposer when I want freedom. You’re my opposer when I want justice. You’re my opposer when I want equality.” Ali, in another interview, says, “No. I will not go ten thousand miles to help murder and kill another poor people simply to continue to domination of white slave masters over the darker people of the earth . . . the real enemies of my people are right here [in America].” (02:19 – 02:40 “Muhammad Ali Refuses Army Induction 1967”). His refusal to fight in Vietnam, then, is based on an understanding of struggle against whiteness, one which recognizes that history continues to permeate and inform the current moment. As such, his refusal to fight in Vietnam can be understood as a refusal to accept the cultural hegemony of the West (particularly, the global hegemon of the U.S.’s power), and is, in turn, a refusal to further the history that has created, and continues to create, racism both in its ideological and material expressions.

While Ali’s actions and speeches are commendable and have become—in retrospect—widely popular even within traditionally conservative circles (George Bush actually awarded Ali the medal of freedom during his presidency; perhaps the greater shock is that Ali accepted the medal from Bush), Ali isn’t necessarily all that unique in his criticism of America and whiteness. Indeed, as I mentioned earlier, it is really something of an affront to Black Studies to pitch Ali on the same level as scholars and activists. However, what is unique about Ali is the way he leveraged himself as an actor within the system of capitalism. Ali, being an icon unlike many, had a unique tool available to him that few others hold: as an individual, he is able to create genuine

economic demand, but he is also able to control, albeit only to a degree, the shape and ideology of the supply. In this way, Ali is able to make a more genuine descent into Fanon's "Zone of Non-Being," embracing the inescapability of capitalism, blackness, and the psycho-social conditions they create, but finding a way to unsettle, revolt, and advocate for a new humanism.

Norman Mailer, in conversation with Ali amidst a somewhat bizarre interview with Dick Cavett and Muhammad Ali in 1970, says "when America gave you that bad shake, they hurt you plenty, but they hurt themselves more" (5:32 – 5:40, *The Dick Cavett Show*). While I disagree with the notion that America was hurt in a way that might create some immediate sense of resentment, I wish to take Mailer's statement one step further by remembering, intentionally, that America is a land of capitalism like no other. As such, Ali's absence creates a space of strange drama within the typical monotony of supply and demand. Ali, through his forced absence, became a kind of boycott in which no product or industry was boycotted, but the effect and affect of boycott occurred nonetheless. Ali's absence, then, can be understood as psycho-social in that popular demand is cut from the supply of boxing entertainment: the demand for Ali as a boxer remains, but the supply that is produced is Ali the political commentator. Ali as a political commentator doesn't supply boxing entertainment, but instead produces an intellectual capital which critiques America's hegemonic ideology.

### **Conclusion**

Throughout this chapter I have been working from the premise that utopian emancipation is not possible. This is largely informed by Slavoj Žižek's reading of Lacan, in which he states "[Lacan's] point is precisely that there is no a priori formal



structural schema exempt from historical contingencies” (310). This statement, as I understand it, means that we cannot suddenly escape historicity, and—seeing as our current moment is informed by a history of oppression, Leviathanic violence, and exploitation— we cannot suddenly become egalitarian and emancipated, no matter how much we think we wish to be. Although this perspective appears to be unbearably pessimistic, I hope to have shown that sport offers us a positive mode of being, even when we authentically recognize the abjection of the history we are born into. In “The Cricket Match”, we come to recognize the hidden, yet universal, ugliness of humanity (and thus disrupt the privileged center of ideology). Through Ali, we find a route towards being that accepts the dire confines of politics and history, yet resists and unsettles those ideological confines. In short, sport—far from being the humanist, equalizing, activities we are told it is—help us recognize the lack, shortcomings, and negativity inherent in being human.

## CONCLUSION: IMAGINING FUTURE (NEGATIVE) PROJECTS

In the introduction to this thesis I asserted two definitions of sport: one which defines the ontology of sport and a second which defines sport within the socio-political realm (ontological: sport is a space in which temporal and spatial conditions are manipulated to create material antagonism; socio-political: the discourse of sport is a popular texts which are sites of hegemonic interpolation). Throughout this thesis, I've primarily worked from the second definition, attempting to expose the way ideology manifests in and is expressed through sport. However, I have never stated that sport as an ideological tool is a "bad" thing, or that we need to de-ideologize or politicize sport. Simply put, I believe such a move would be impossible, for we are ideological beings and cannot escape this reality. Instead, rather than disavowing sport and ideology, I postulate that sport can become an unlikely ally in today's struggles. To make this move, I wish to posit a future project, in which I more intentionally blend my ontology and politics in order to emphasize the basic negativity inherent in sport.<sup>36</sup> Whilst this move may sound impossible, I ask the reader to remember that the mechanics of the British Empire were not simple yet were clearly represented through sport and that imperialism is a deeply

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<sup>36</sup> Here, I define negativity as our basic ontology. That is, our experience of the world *appears* to be whole and filled with positive content, but is in fact reliant upon negation and is, therefore, a fundamental (non-relation). For example, in sport, we know how to act because of what we are not: soccer is soccer because you *cannot* use your hands (it is not rugby). Moreover, sports exist in a negative mode already: we do not essentialize the rules of games, and are to varying degrees, willing to accept changes when history dictates that they should be made; i.e. we change the rules to match our understanding of reality. For example, in American Football, tackling and blocking have been changed significantly in response to a deeper understanding of concussions and their effects on players.

illogical means of production, yet where else do we see the narrative of ‘rags to riches’ as often as we see it in sport?

I pitch this future project, too, at a time where contention over sport from the space of the academy is essential. As I have noted previously, sport as a global activity doesn’t quite know what it wants to be: is it a tool of social discipline, or is it an act that allows us to work against our social interpellation? The maddening answer is something like ‘both’ and ‘neither’. For some, it is a tool of social discipline, for others it has been an act that refutes hegemonic structures. To be clear, however, this reflection does not lead us to yet another expression of ‘centrism’ that we are so fond of today but rather opens up a space that forces us, again, to recognize that today’s struggle is one for universality, rather than for representation. Moreover, this realization (that sport can be a pedagogical tool which rejects our current universalized ethic of capitalism) helps us to understand sport’s central role in disturbing contemporary ideology so that new universalities can be established.

However, before sport can be considered as an emancipatory or progressive act, one major barrier stands before us: sport is no longer a local activity but a global one. Spectators don’t watch village cricket, they watch multi-national leagues that are backed by billionaires and run as for-profit business. Hopefully this does not come as a shock to anyone. However, the *more* shocking reality is that the current structure of global sport cuts us—the vast majority of the population who are spectators—off from sport as an anti-interpellation mission. We cannot derive the same rich meaning from global sport, as

it is carefully calculated, mediated, and precisely measured in terms of its profitability.<sup>37</sup> If sport is to move away from the center of our current capital driven structures, we must reinvest ourselves, and our sport, into the local.

I am aware, too, that I am by no means the only one thinking about sport, capital, and hegemony. Indeed, in the past year, sports and the athletes who play them *have* garnered much momentum behind movements that critique the current social order. By no means do I mean to disparage these movements, which always take place against the intolerable and ignorant chorus of “shut up and dribblers”.<sup>38</sup> I do not wish to embolden the baseless opinion that athletes should just be athletes and not contribute politically to our society (I hope, in fact, that my thesis proves that athletes do *not* have the choice to be apolitical, as choosing to be “apolitical” is a political choice in itself). However, what I am *not* willing to do is leave the conversation largely to high-profile athletes/celebrities when so much can be gained at the local level in the effort to disrupt the universality of today’s political ideologies. Rather, in these ongoing projects, I wish to consider the alternative ways we might make sport into a popular text that delivers society a new politics of negativity (or, non-relation).

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<sup>37</sup> Even this year’s sudden movement by the NFL to support the Black Lives Matter movement smacks of a profit-venture. Simply put, the NFL didn’t support Colin Kaepernick’s 2016 protest because it wouldn’t boost profits.

<sup>38</sup> “Shut up and dribble” was the rallying call of Fox News host Laura Ingraham. This statement is meant to silence Black athletes who voice their concerns before, during, and after their play on the court, and has taken on a life of its own. It appears as though every athlete’s protest is met by the ignorant general remark that athletes “should just play sports”, while the Right do as the Right do and build a fantasy of a time/space where sports were somehow apolitical—hopefully this thesis in itself refutes any possibility of that fantasy. Just to ensure fair ire is spread to around: the left, at the time of writing, does little more than make symbolic gestures in favor of the Black Lives Matter movement through sport’s advertising, and widely does so in order to ensure revenues aren’t negatively impacted.

In reimagining sport at the local level, I hope to blend a trifecta of theoretical texts: Supriya Chaudhuri's 2012 essay "Literary Modernism and Subaltern Sport", Alenka Zupančič's "Sexual is Political", and Lee Edelman and Laura Berlant's 2013 dialogue *Sex, Or the Unbearable*. These texts scaffold together in this potential future project to build a foundation of theory which drives my belief in the emancipatory potential of sport.

In her 2012 essay "Literary Modernism and Subaltern Sport" Supriya Chaudhuri recognizes "through the course of the twentieth century . . . football came to bar the burden of the subaltern histories of struggle" (29) and that sport has the potential to consider questions "the academic has never resolved—that of the popular" (36). For Chaudhuri, sports' (particularly football; more particularly, in Calcutta) potential to exist as a popular text for interpretation is most useful in that "the philosophy of football is generated, an ethic that places high value upon struggle and moral responsibility while recognizing their general futility" (36). This, in the context of subalternity of Calcutta, gives great import to sport and its meaningful effects on populations.

Chaudhuri, while considering the global phenomena of sport, asserts that "The pleasures of globalized sport, consumed through television and advertising has turned an entire generation away from Calcutta football to support the superior skills of the English Premier League or the Spanish La Liga," the distinct problem here is that "football itself . . . has not gained from this exposure, and the literature of sport has not acquired a sports writer to rival Nandy<sup>39</sup>" (38). Chaudhuri, then, aligns neatly with my assertion that sport

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<sup>39</sup> A prolific sport writer in the 1960's who wrote of "the deep commitment to football among the urban poor as a vehicle for aspiration for its players and anguished pleasure for its spectators" (37)

can be an essential tool of political discourse when applied to local contexts. However, she adds much nuance to my general belief in the ideological import of sport, and guides my thinking into the local, so that sport—removed from the pursuit of capital—might become more authentic in its expression of emancipatory ideology.

Where Chaudhuri gives me a path to rediscover sport’s emancipatory potential in the twenty-first century, Lee Edelman and Laura Berlant theorize a potential political ontology that I claim lies dormant within sport and which offers us a chance to reignite politics in the popular public conscious. Edelman, in the preface to their 2013 book-length dialogue *Sex, Or the Unbearable* describes sex<sup>40</sup> as, on the one hand, “subject to legal sanction, social judgment, unconscious drives, and contradictory desires,” but that it also gives us a kind of vitality through difference and thus “raises the possibility of confronting our limit in ourselves or in another, of being inundated psychically or emotionally” (vii). These descriptions of sex seem, also, to describe the ontology of—and possibilities afforded to us by—sport. To be clear, I do not mean this in some kind of seedy mingling of sex and sport, but rather am thinking about the ways we experience sex and sport in similar ways. For example, when we play sports, we, too have to exist “subject to legal sanctions” (rules, laws of the games, and etiquettes dictate sport as they do sex), we are operating under the pressures of “social judgement, unconscious drives, and contradictory desires”. I understand this statement best in sport as, when we play, we become aware of our being watched and judged; unconscious drives are most clearly exhibited in celebrations, where a player can move from a state of observable composure

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<sup>40</sup> Here, I am *not* talking about intercourse, but rather am thinking about the ontology of sex: and its effects on politics, relations, the economy, and, here, sport.

to one of pandemonium,<sup>41</sup> and it is in sport, more than any other space, where we see people risk their bodily health for some contradictory goal. A kind of surplus enjoyment emerges from, for example, a footballer who sacrifices their body to stop or score a goal, a cricketer who falls down at the end of bowling their over, or a judoka winning gold with a serious injury).<sup>42</sup>

Because Laura Berlant and Lee Edelman's work on negativity could more than fill an entire dissertation, I aim to focus their findings into two, concrete, outcomes for sport. First, that sport helps us recognize "the fantasy of sovereignty" and helps us see non-sovereignty as a force which "allows for the possibility of change" (viii). Second, that sport can recognize our fundamental non-relation to the world, and therefore become conscious of "misrecognition of our own motives and desires" (viii). Key to understanding the importance of these revelations is this notion that politics of negativity can be politically *mobilizing* rather than defeating; it can help curb our acts that suppose unity and helps us move forward with issues, arguments, and conflict at the heart of political discourse *without* replicating something like the acts of terror displayed on January 6<sup>th</sup>, 2021. Indeed, imagine a world where, instead of falling prey to QAnon, hundreds of thousands of political subjects recognized that they can't achieve a state of unity, and that there is no great conspiratorial lie that needs to be solved. Moreover, imagine if these same people found this revelation to be a relief, rather than cause for panic. Certainly, five lives would not have been lost to the Capital riots, but perhaps we

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<sup>41</sup> "'Here's Hogg . . . Deeney!'", <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6TnKvIQ2h7s>

<sup>42</sup> "The Incredible Gold of Judo Legend Yasuhiro Wamashita".  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HBhmrEVxfMU>

would be at inhabiting a more progressive movement generally within politics, rather living through a great swing back to politics of the 1950s.



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