

***The 1904 Anthropology Days and Olympic Games: Sport, Race, and American Imperialism.* Susan Brownell, ed. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008. 490 pp.\***

Reviewed by Andi Johnson

Written by an impressive set of scholars on the history of sports and race, this book promises to be both interesting and important. It is. For those unfamiliar with the reputation of the 1904 Olympics, as I was, the common narrative within the history of sports goes something like as follows: the 1904 St. Louis Olympics were a failure. They were a largely American affair, blatantly commercial and utilitarian, organized to demonstrate the superiority of America rather than to educate and uplift the world or to promote a new form of internationalism, as intended by the founder of the modern Olympic movement, Baron Pierre de Coubertin. A short program within the much larger 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition (LPE), the third modern Olympic Games were ignored by most countries. In addition, the 1904 St. Louis Games became known as a failure because they were held in conjunction with a two-day, 18 event “Special Olympics” for “Native” peoples of the world, an event otherwise known as “Anthropology Days.” And Anthropology Days was the real travesty: a show dressed up as science and marketed as entertainment that only served to buttress a growing American imperialism and belief in white supremacy. The results of individual “Native” athletic performances during Anthropology Days were used to rank “primitive” peoples within a hierarchy of cultures. The 1904 Games were such a failure that the 1906 Athens Games became known as the Games that “saved” the Olympics.

This book seeks to undo this reputation of the 1904 Olympics—partly. That is, the contributors aim to show how these Games *were* American, imperialist, and racist, and yet they argue that to dismiss the St. Louis Games simply as a failure is to misunderstand the ways in which the 1904 Games were a product of 19th century thought and practice and at the same time pivotal to several 20th century developments in science, sport, and politics. For example, Anthropology Days depended upon 19th century ideas about evolution and civilization but also embodied a shift from science as display to science as experiment. In addition, while the commercial and utilitarian aspects of the 1904 Games may have been dismissed at the time, over the course of the 20th century the Olympics became increasingly influenced by American capitalism.

I consider the book to have three parts: mid-level framings, case studies, and connections to 21st century sport studies. The introduction and first three chapters work together to provide mid-level framings of the 1904 LPE, Olympic Games, and Anthropology Days. Susan Brownell, for example, situates these events within the contexts of 1) the modern Olympic movement; 2) Wild West shows, world’s fairs, circuses, and other forms of ritual and spectacle common at the end of the 19th century; and 3) the fledgling scientific disciplines of anthropology and physical education, both of which used Anthropology Days to professionalize and popularize their sciences to the public. The chapter by Nancy J. Parezo then contextualizes the Anthropology Days experiments within the contemporary debate over whether “Caucasians” were superior in physical endeavors or whether “Native” people were “natural” athletes. Both views held sway at

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the time. Parezo argues that the Anthropology Days experiments were thoroughly flawed, from faulty statistical claims to logically impossible interpretations. Mark Dyreson's chapter also situates the 1904 Games within a larger conversation about racial science at the turn of the 20th century. He defines "race" as it was used in early 20th century America—an important contribution to the volume as most readers may come to the book with vague or incorrect ideas about what the term meant in this particular time and place. Dyreson's chapter also illustrates the interconnections of the disciplines of anthropology and physical education at the time. The chapter by Otto J. Schantz then provides insight into why Coubertin himself denounced the St. Louis Games.

The second part of the volume includes five case studies of specific populations represented, not represented, and misrepresented during the sporting events: Filipinos, Canadian Indians, Fort Shaw (Montana) Indians, Germans and "racial others," and Greeks. Explaining why there was a Philippines Exhibit at the LPE, Gerald R. Gems reminds readers of the recent American imperialist expansion into the Pacific. One of the most popular performances given at the LPE was that of the Philippine Constabulary Band, which became a symbol of American success at civilizing and assimilating "Natives." Christine M. O'Bonsawin argues that, though the Canadian Kahnawá:ke Mohawks were a widely known and respected lacrosse club at the turn of the century, they were *not* invited to participate in Anthropology Days because these so-called acculturated Indians did not fit into an event bent on demonstrating that United States Indian policy (not Canadian Indian policy) was most effective at civilizing efforts. On the other hand, as described by Linda Peavy and Ursula Smith, the female basketball players from the Fort Shaw Indian School from Montana became one of the most popular attractions at the LPE and Anthropology Days, attracting more than fifty-thousand spectators per day. Tracing the career histories of several individual athletes, Suzuko Mousel Knott demonstrates convincingly that *club* membership was more salient than national identity or citizenship in 1904. This would soon change, as Alexander Kitroeff shows in his chapter, as national identities became solidified in subsequent decades. This shift happened in part through the Olympic Games, which for the first time in 1906 required athletes to march in a "Parade of Nations." Mousel Knott's treatment of the issue of representation is a must-read for anyone interested in understanding the stakes of nationalism at the turn of the 20th century.

The last part of the volume explicitly relates the 1904 Games to discussions of race, science, and sport today. John Bale tracks the measuring and recording of athletic performances of African "Natives" by Europeans from the early 1800's through to today. Bale's point is that the Anthropology Days experiments were not unusual, and he questions the extent to which the colonial gaze lives on in some 21st century scientific studies of sport. Jonathan Marks asserts that biological races do not exist according to scientific standards that have developed since the time of the 1904 Anthropology Days. One would imagine that this chapter is not necessary, yet Marks points out how the idea that race determines athletic achievement persists today. The chapter by Henning Eichberg is a series of five, loosely connected thought-pieces that each offer a theoretical framework for analyzing the Anthropology Days. Among other things, Eichberg offers two critiques of sports history. First, he criticizes historians who take sport records and a "natural" history of progress for granted, a criticism that Brownell echoes in the afterword. Similarly, Eichberg argues that sports historians have paid too much attention to the "serious" side of sports, to the organizers and the athletes, to the production of records and progress and so

on. “But there was also a further type of people engaged in the encounter,” Eichberg contends, “the enthusiastic spectators and media-journalists of the anthropological spectacle. These ‘unserious people’ are often overlooked by the ‘serious’ scholars of sport, who still often have problems moving beyond the Olympic colonial thinking of the early twentieth century” (p. 369). Eichberg also makes much of reports that “Natives” often laughed and joked around during Anthropology Days, threatening to subvert the scientific and sportive goals of the event organizers. Indeed, the challenge to reflect upon the “seriousness” of science is a recurrent theme of the volume.

The chapters variably draw from the papers of the event organizers; proposals, reports, and the Daily Program of the LPE and Anthropology Days; scores of newspaper articles; and interviews with descendants of participants. A key strength of this book, then, is the way the contributions balance perspectives from organizers, spectators, and participants.

I have two minor criticisms. First, the volume is at times redundant, as each author explains the origins of Anthropology Days. Second, several authors conclude that the efforts of W J McGee and his colleagues were “not science” or “pseudoscience.” Such an assessment seems to me to partly undo the contribution of this volume. To dismiss epistemologically and socially problematic acts of knowledge-making as “not science” implies that these investigations are not historically constitutive of “real” science today. They are. It is possible one would miss out on understanding as many social and intellectual problems by labeling the Anthropology Days experiments as non-science as one would by dismissing the 1904 St. Louis Games a failure.

Through their analyses of the 1904 Games, the authors convincingly interrogate—and connect—categories of science, sport, race, and nation at the turn of the 20th century. Together, they suggest that the control and interpretation of human movement and emotion helped spur the development of a Euro-American sense of modernity in the 20th century. The book will appeal to a number of audiences, including scholars interested in the histories of anthropology, museums as well as world’s fairs and other forms of display, science, sport, colonialism, imperialism, and national and international movements. More profoundly, this book will connect these audiences to each other.

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