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Series Editors' Introduction

REGNA DARNELL AND STEPHEN O. MURRAY

The Louisiana Purchase (Centennial) Exhibition in St. Louis in 1904 had far less influence on the concepts and institutions of anthropology than did the 1893 Columbian Tetracentenary Exhibition in Chicago. One might conclude that scrutiny of the “living exhibits” of various cultures and the displays of athletic prowess of various “Others” (of non-European descent) would be, therefore, of only antiquarian interest. But editor Susan Brownell and the sophisticated historians of sports and anthropology (coming to the project from a range of disciplines) contributing to this volume frame the very Americanness of the 1904 Olympics, with their strange and generally ethnocentric shows, in a larger, even global context that is often missing from purportedly critical histories of anthropology.

In 1904 St. Louis, the “tribal games” or Anthropology Days were juxtaposed awkwardly with the third modern Olympic Games. These were grounded in the certainty of Anglo-American racial superiority. The universalism of the ideals of neoclassic revival clashed with non-European entries to the Olympics as well as with the “primitive” anthropological living exhibits. In both cases, a “scientific racism” still familiar today emerges from attributing athletic performances to differences of “race.” Brownell and her colleagues emphasize the intercultural spaces created by both Anthropology Days and the Olympics. The “sport, race, and American imperialism” of the volume’s subtitle crossed both domains. Moreover, boundaries between the scientific and the popular imaginaries were very blurred with racial stereotypes prominent in pre-academic anthropology, as carried to St. Louis by WJ McGee (who

preferred no periods or spaces between these initials), then president (the first one) of the American Anthropological Association.

The cultural construction of the ethnological gaze and its imperialist context played out in ambiguous and conflicting ways. If so-called savages excelled, as did the Blues—the Native American women’s basketball team from Fort Shaw, Montana—the victory must be due to physical superiority compensating for the mental inferiority that came from “civilization.” Less threatening to beliefs in Euro-American superiority were track events in which racial Others with no previous experience of the rules, such as how to stop at the end of foot races and how to attend to lines painted on the ground, were disqualified. The results of poor performance at unfamiliar tasks provided quantitative corroboration of mental as well as physical inferiority of non-whites, in general, and the particular peoples inveigled into participation. Since “primitive peoples” were believed to lack individual differentiation, those whose sense of racial superiority was bolstered by these Euro-American athletic “victories” did not see any reason why pitting the best athletes from Euro-American communities against persons from other human communities who happened to be in St. Louis was any obstacle to drawing conclusions about racial differences.

Historians of anthropology recall the impresario of the Anthropology Days, WJ McGee, as an advocate of outdated evolutionary racism, soon to be relegated to the junk pile of anthropological theory by Franz Boas. “World” fairs and big exhibitions of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were exercises in nationalism. Visitors were offered public pedagogy valorizing the superiority of America and its frontier vision. Challenges to this self-congratulatory exceptionalism were inevitable with the European influx of the Olympics superimposed on the ethnographic living museum exhibit as object lesson for an American audience.

Introduction

Bodies before Boas, Sport before the Laughter Left

SUSAN BROWNELL

This volume reunites two strands of history that are usually treated separately: the histories of anthropology and the Olympic Games.¹ It does so by looking back to a time at the start of the twentieth century when the discipline of anthropology, the phenomenon of modern sport, and the performance genre of the modern Olympic Games were just starting to take a definite form. It was a time of “polymorphous performativity”² when the distinctions between “education” and “entertainment” were not as institutionalized as they are now—when the lines between museums, zoos, circuses, historical reenactments, sports, Wild West shows, Olympic Games, and world’s fairs were not as clear as they are now. In the last decade or so, histories of the Olympic Games, world’s fairs, museums, zoos, and circuses have come to constitute minor historical genres. However, this is an artificial separation that it is now possible to make in hindsight, after a century in which the divisions between them became institutionalized and culturally crystallized. It is only possible to understand these histories by examining their earlier shared history, as well as the forces that ultimately drove them apart. And by understanding the forces that drove them apart, we will arrive at a greater understanding of our contemporary times and the great cultural performances that define them. Why do Olympic Games now attract much greater global attention than world’s fairs, when a century ago they were only a minor side event? What does this reversal tell us about the times in which we now live?

John MacAloon argues, “The modern social sciences and the Olympic Games were born of the same historical era; it is hardly surprising that their root problematics are identical. . . . Olympic history illuminates the origins of modern social science.”³ The discipline of anthropology and the Olympic Games both emerged out of a mash of theories and performance genres that were fermenting at the fin de siècle. This mash had been first stirred together in the mid-nineteenth century by the forces of exploration, colonization, imperialism, industrialization, and capitalism. The feature shared by anthropology and the modern Olympics was that they were ways of making sense out of the cross-cultural encounters between human beings that began to take place on an unprecedented scale. In the encounter between the West and “the Rest,” sports were used as “intercultural spaces” or “contact zones.”⁴ The fascination with savages strengthened the identity of the West by defining “who we are not.” It proceeded in tandem with a fascination with ancient Greece and Rome that defined “who we are” by constructing a history of “Western civilization.” The modern Olympic Games emerged out of the neoclassical revival that began in the Renaissance and gained momentum from the French Revolution and the Greek war of independence; philhellenism provided the West with a shared ancestor, ancient Greece, which defined the West in opposition to its Others—the Orient and the exotic “savages.”

One of the sources of the Olympic Movement⁵ was what John MacAloon has called “popular ethnography,” a “crosscultural voyeurism” that became accessible to the mass public for the first time in the late nineteenth century.⁶ At the same time that “scientific” ethnology was being organized by intellectual elites, “popular ethnography” was being elaborated by nonintellectual elites as well as entrepreneurs from all walks of life, including the “savages” themselves who took advantage of the popular interest in them for their own profit. Philhellenism and anthropology were complementary poles of the same phenomenon: both Western civilization and its opposites were reflected in the popular ethnography of the times—for example, circuses and world’s fairs typically included classical “living statues,” chariot races,

and gladiator combat as well as displays of exotic animals and humans from Asia, Africa, and North America.

Toward an Interconnected History of Anthropology, Sport, and the Olympic Games

Through examining the unique association of the Olympic Games with an event called “Anthropology Days” at the Louisiana Purchase Exposition (LPE) in St. Louis in 1904, it is possible to look back at a moment in time before specialized performance genres had emerged out of the hodgepodge of popular ethnography. The Olympic Games are described in detail in the chapters by Nancy Parezo and Mark Dyreson. In brief, the official sports program during the fair was contested from May 14 to November 19. It was organized by the director of Physical Culture, James Sullivan, one of the founders of the Amateur Athletic Union (established in 1888), who was perhaps the most powerful figure in U.S. amateur sports at that time. Over nine thousand athletes competed in four hundred events ranging from high school interscholastic meets to national championships. Almost all of them were labeled “Olympian,” while the “Olympic Games” that took place from August 29 to September 3 entailed only 80 competitions, with 687 entrants, of whom the vast majority were American. They were all men but for the six women who competed in archery. The International Olympic Committee (IOC) never generated an official report, so today historians debate which events constituted the “real” Olympic Games and which nations competed in them, an effort that matters for modern bureaucratic recordkeeping, but which anachronistically imposes today’s Olympic structure on an event that did not conform to them.⁷

Parezo asserts that, contrary to what is stated by other historians, Anthropology Days was Sullivan’s idea. WJ McGee, director of the LPE Anthropology Department and the publicity office of the exposition, had emphasized the athletic prowess of the Natives on display.⁸ But James Sullivan believed in the superiority of Caucasians. He proposed a “Special Olympics” in which Natives

would compete in a selection of sports, and their performances would be measured against the existing records (he controlled the keeping of American records because he was the editor of the national arbiter of records, *Spalding's Official Athletic Almanac*). McGee recruited the participants from the living villages at the fair and several foreign pavilions, the Philippine Reservation, the Indian School, and the ethnological concessions on The Pike and paid them to participate in trials. The top three placers were selected for the final, where they were not paid to participate because of Sullivan's requirement of amateurism—and so many Natives refused to participate, though the top three in the finals received prize money. Between the competitions, Natives staged dance competitions, sang, or performed dramatic enactments—and these were organized by the Natives themselves. The *Daily Official Program* and contemporaneous media state that these events were held on August 11–12, but McGee gave dates of August 12–13 in the final report of the Department of Anthropology filed on May 10, and Sullivan repeated these dates in *Spalding's Official Athletic Almanac* for 1905. Though these dates were apparently incorrect, they are the ones most frequently cited by later historians.

The accounts of the time show that the spectacle of white men trying to persuade Natives to engage in sports that they did not understand was regarded humorously by the spectators as well as many of the participants themselves. In his official report, Sullivan complained, “The Pigmies from Africa were full of mischief. They took nothing whatever seriously outside of their own shinny game and the tree climbing.”⁹ There was a conflict between the seriousness with which people like Sullivan and McGee regarded their games and the tricksterism of the indigenous peoples who refused to conform to “civilized” rules in sport, as well as in their lives on the fair-ground (described in Parezo's chapter). The performances by the Natives were far below the existing records and the Olympic performances, and Sullivan gloated over his ideological victory. Parezo recounts that McGee felt he needed to regain face, so he held another set of contests in September, preceded by training meets, and with prize money as remuneration.

The results of this “anthropological meet” have been lost and it is often overlooked by historians.

Already there was a tension surrounding the 1904 Olympic Games and Anthropology Days indicating trends to come: physical educators and anthropologists with serious professional aspirations for their fields sought to separate out scientific anthropology and Olympic sports from their popular ethnographic sources. Both sports (as pushed by Sullivan) and anthropology (as pushed by Franz Boas) were undergoing a process of professionalization that was intended to give greater social legitimacy to anthropologists and physical educators, and which also reflected the changing class structure in the United States as a whole (Sullivan was Irish and Boas Jewish, two groups that were both striving for legitimacy in the United States at this time). In the names of “science” and “education,” they attempted to distance themselves from the popular entertainments that served new markets in the expanding global consumer economy. Ironically, as they strove to create professional, salaried niches for themselves as educators, serious anthropologists tried to distance themselves from profit-seeking “Show Indians,” while serious physical educators tried to use the ideology of “amateurism” to distance themselves from professional athlete-entertainers. In other words, they sought to secure financial stability for themselves while denying it to Natives and working-class athletes who were not “pure” enough for their brand of science. The excesses in St. Louis helped to crystallize their thinking. This is the source of the historical importance of the 1904 World’s Fair to both the history of anthropology and the Olympic Games.

The juxtaposition of civilized and savage was the key symbolic dichotomy at the fin-de-siècle expositions and was reflected in their organization of space, architecture, rhetoric, and multiple other symbolic expressions. But the juxtaposition of the civilized and the savage in Anthropology Days ultimately aroused the disgust of many of those involved. Pierre de Coubertin, the founder of the first modern Olympic Games in 1896, later wrote that “the only original feature offered by the program was a particularly embarrassing

one,” and called Anthropology Days “a mistake,” “inhuman,” and the Olympic Games “flawed.”¹⁰ Echoing a common sentiment among European historians, Pierre Boulongne summed up the significance of the 1904 St. Louis Olympic Games and Anthropology Days with a note of Old World condescension: “The St. Louis Olympic Games, the first to be held on the American continent, were a success in sporting terms and benefited from the crowds attending the World’s Fair. Alas, their memory remains tainted by the ‘anthropological days,’ for all they were not part of the official program. But this was 1904 in the United States of America.”¹¹

There are a number of scattered articles on the Anthropology Days of the St. Louis World’s Fair, but the topic has never been systematically treated in one place, and only Henning Eichberg has treated it with theoretical sophistication.¹² Anthropology Days expressed an ideology of evolution, civilization, and progress that was widely shared, and which underpinned all the international expositions from 1851 on. Why, then, has Anthropology Days been regarded so negatively? The contributors to this volume offer different answers to this question. Adopting Eichberg’s position (this volume), I would like to suggest here that perhaps this stark juxtaposition in the bodily world of sports exposed tensions in the underlying cultural logic that were not so evident in the other realms. The “sportive body” that displays standardization is different from the “spectacular body” that displays strangeness. The seriousness of the Olympic Games, which embodied the essence of Western civilization, could not stand up to juxtaposition against the ridiculous spectacle of untrained and unmotivated Natives halfheartedly attempting to follow the rules of the sports of “civilized” men. Anthropology Days exposed the arbitrariness of Western sports and even Western civilization as a cultural construction. It raised the question of whether the Natives could ever be like civilized men—or worse, whether they even wanted to. This was an unmentionable question in those times when colonialist and imperialist aspirations still reigned. Anthropology Days embodied sport before the laughter had left.¹³ The events in St. Louis hastened its departure.

Frames and Cultural Performances

Several of the authors in this collection utilize the idea of “ramified performance genres” developed by John MacAloon, who focuses attention on the interpretive “frames” that distinguish types of cultural performances.¹⁴ The notion of a “frame” is elaborated by Erving Goffman: it refers to the basic elements that people use to organize experience by creating definitions of social events and their subjective involvement in them. A frame is the answer to the question, “What is it that’s going on here?”¹⁵ If, for example, someone asked this question while observing two scantily clad men running in a large circle, a fellow spectator might answer, “a sport,” thus revealing one of the cultural frames in which such behavior could be understood. Depending on the cultural context, there would be definite behaviors, practices, and meanings that mark the event as a “sport.” If the spectator were not familiar with these rules, she or he would be left just as confused as before. Indeed, this was part of the problem with the 1904 Anthropology Days, as will be seen: the uninitiated Native participants did not understand that they were engaging in “sports,” certainly did not understand the basic rules of the game, and thus did not behave as expected. The same initiated spectator could also have answered to the confused observer, “the Olympic Games,” thus revealing that multilayered levels of interpretation, or frames, can be attached to the same event; frames exist within frames. Goffman’s concept of the frame is useful because it emphasizes the arbitrariness of the meanings that are assigned to a given “strip” of experience: they can be contested; change over time; are often defined by processes of social negotiation; they can even, in retrospect, be “wrong.”

As attested to in the various chapters in this book, a sport contest could be framed as a living museum display, a freak show, tribute to an imperial power, a scientific experiment, a method of education and assimilation, an amusing game, a serious pursuit of records, a contest for national honor, and a host of other interpretations—often more than one at the same time.

An important contribution of this volume is to document the tremendous variety of interpretive parameters within which sports were framed, each shaped by a cultural logic that extended outward to broader worldviews. “Science”—scientific inquiry, research, and the worldview that is disseminated as the result of them—is one of the primary frameworks that people around the world now use, to greater or lesser degree, to organize large chunks of experience. But the scientific framework was not as systematized in 1904 as it is now, making it possible to see some of the cracks in its structure that still persist today in the realm of sports. These cracks are discussed by a number of the authors in this volume, particularly Jon Marks and Nancy Parezo. The afterword will return to this theme.

MacAloon proposes that frames of “spectacle,” “festival,” “ritual,” and “game” embrace each other in a series of concentric frames, moving from the most inclusive (spectacle) to the most basic (game), and serve as the main interpretive frameworks for understanding the performance system of the Olympic Games as it became elaborated over time.¹⁶

In MacAloon’s formulation, spectacles are characterized by grandeur bordering on excess and are primarily visual, watched by “spectators.” Festivals are above all joyous. The Olympics have been characterized as a “festival of humanity” from their inception to today. Rituals invoke sacred forces and effect social and spiritual transformations. Games have fixed and public rules that separate them from everyday life, are “fun,” and are rich in symbolism.¹⁷

MacAloon concentrates on the “metagenres” or “megagenres”¹⁸ that have been meaningful to social scientists and sophisticated thinkers like Coubertin. His meta-analysis allows him to describe the Olympic Games as a neatly ordered system of nested frames, which reflected Coubertin’s effort to create a “whole system” united by a single principle, which he sometimes called “eurhythmy.”¹⁹

Olympic scholars have generally been content to stop at MacAloon’s metalevel of analysis and as a result have failed to adequately fill in the abstractions.²⁰ The on-the-ground reality was that world’s fairs and Olympic

Games were creative combinations of various performance types that did not encompass each other, but were thrown together in a hodgepodge that was never completely systematized. As will be seen below, the Olympic Games were by no means a unified “performance system” in 1904, but the events in St. Louis spurred their development in that direction.

Further, these labels had their own culturally specific meanings, which changed over time and varied across the nations of Europe and North America, which should not be confused with MacAloon’s social-science abstractions. So, for example, in American circuses since the late eighteenth century, “spectacle” (or “spectacular”) referred to the grand entry pageant that opened the show.²¹ It was also used to describe events, of large or small scale, seen by the eyes that challenged comfortable categories: thus, a world’s fair could be a spectacle, but so could Anthropology Days or, in Coubertin’s famous formulation, the sight of women engaging in sport.²² “Festival” and “ritual” were categories that were meaningful to Coubertin—as well as to sport organizers who sought to continue his legacy—because he was raised in a “culture of festivals” with origins in the French Revolution (*Festkultur* in Schantz’s analysis), out of which the Olympic Games emerged, and was inspired by that tradition to try to create a secular religion, *religio athletae*, out of their revived form.²³ But despite Coubertin’s effort and its legacy among Olympic organizers, it is not clear that the Olympic Games have ever been clearly recognized as a festival or a ritual by their popular audiences.

The important methodological conclusion from MacAloon’s work is that paying attention to actual *performances* is a much-needed exercise because it was the performance quality of the genres considered here that gave them such a powerful popular impact. Scholars writing about world’s fairs, museums, the Olympic Games, and so on, have tended to give priority to the intellectual histories that shaped them as institutions and have not analyzed them as events in ongoing social processes. For example, sport historians have failed to contextualize the Olympic Games within the vibrant milieu of nineteenth-century neoclassical reenactments in the West—such as classical

Greek theater, the “hippodramas” in circuses, and so on. There seems to be a general academic distaste for linking any performance with cultural or educational pretensions to lowbrow forms of entertainment such as circuses, world’s fairs, vaudeville, or burlesque. Yet in their heyday circuses and world’s fairs touched more people than any other popular cultural genres. In 1903, on the eve of the Louisiana Purchase Exposition, there were ninety-eight American circuses—more than at any time before or since, and the circus reached almost every American.²⁴ The exposition in St. Louis covered 1,272 acres, a greater area than any other world’s fair before or since.²⁵ According to official attendance figures 19,694,855 people passed through the turnstiles between April 30 and December 1, 1904, equaling 26 percent of the population of the states and territories (76,303,387 in 1900).²⁶ Circuses and world’s fairs exerted a tremendous influence on the development of mass culture, and high-cultural forms like museums and classical Greek theater, and the intellectual disciplines that accompanied them, arguably were as much shaped by them as they shaped them.²⁷

In the following sections of this introduction, I will outline the neoclassical revival and anthropological theory that gave meaning to and derived meaning from cultural performances at the fin de siècle. I will next summarize the performance types in existence at the turn of the century that formed the broader context for the 1904 St. Louis Olympic Games and Anthropology Days. I will conclude by making a few suggestions as to why the Olympic Games eclipsed the world’s fairs in global attention by looking at the specific case of the Parade of Athletes, and will comment on what this tells us about the character of intercultural interactions in our times.

The Neoclassical Revival

Neoclassicism occupied a central role in the French Revolution as revolutionary thinkers took the pagan practices of ancient Greece as inspiration for the construction of new social forms to take the place of the rejected forms of medieval Christianity, associated with the toppled monarchy. They

CONTRIBUTORS

year of graduate work at San Francisco State University. Her scholarly work has focused on the lives of women and children. She has co-authored nine books with Linda Peavy, including *Dreams into Deeds* (1985), *The Gold Rush Widows of Little Falls* (1990), and *Frontier Children* (1999). They have also published articles in popular magazines and juried journals, including *Montana: The Magazine of Western History*, where their first article on the girls' basketball team from Fort Shaw Indian School appeared in the winter 2001 issue.