BOXING THE BOUNDARIES:
Prize Fighting, Masculinities, and Shifting
Social and Cultural Boundaries in the United State,
1882-1913

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Abstract

Leisure and sports are recently developed research topics. My dissertation illuminates the social meaning of prize fighting between 1882 and 1913 considering interactions between culture and power relations. My dissertation understands prize fighting as a cultural text, structured in conjunction with social relations and power struggles. In so doing, the dissertation details how agents used a sport to construct, reinforce, blur, multiply, and shift social and cultural boundaries for the construction of group identities and how their signifying practices affected the ways in which power was distributed in American society. Accordingly, my dissertation examines how cultural autonomy affected the socially organized forms of power. As an intersectional study of prize fighting, my dissertation also criticizes the reductionist, structuralist, and binary conception of culture, power, and social relations and stresses interconnections between social history and cultural history.
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Introduction

In 1972, Clifford Geertz defined culture as an “ordered system of meaning and of symbols, in terms of which social interaction takes place” and contrasted culture to the social system, which is the “pattern of social interaction itself.”¹ This anthropological definition of culture has two significant implications for scholars. First, while everyone has his or her own methods for creating and distributing symbols, culture is no longer synonymous with high art or elite culture. Second, because culture is constructed by practices of making, understanding, and distributing symbols, “interpretative agency” becomes a focal point for the study of culture. Accordingly, Geertz’s definition of culture contests the old assumption that culture is subsidiary to or derived from social structure and another layer of social system.

While Geertz’s hermeneutic study of culture referred to cultural autonomy, it failed to address critical points about culture. For instance, Geertz argued that the cockfight is a ritual reflecting social divisions and underlying psychological tendencies among the Balinese, and exerting influence directed back on Balinese society. However, while Geertz focused on local people placed in a web of shared meanings, he overestimated the stability of cultural structures and underestimated cultural diversity in a society. Accordingly, in Geertz’s study about the cockfight, the cockfight appeared as a means to psychologically intensify and appease individual

competitions. This single reading of a ritual for the Balinese overlooked the contested nature of cultural structures. Geertz understood that culture and society (social structures) are only analytically distinct and that social realities are subjectively constructed. However, his anthropological study of culture could not provide perfect theoretical tools to explore the dynamic relationships between culture and social structures and, more specifically, between culture and social relations in modern society where social and cultural grouping multiplies. As a result, his study did not fully illuminate the textuality of culture and its relationships with persisting social relations and power struggles.

In modern society, culture has two conflicting roles at once. Culture both unifies and divides people by categorizing people and producing cultural boundaries. Cultural boundaries shapes social structures (institutionalized social practices including social relations) and power struggles. Considering the dynamic

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3 Social structures refer to a “set of habitual and institutionalized social practices that assume a systematic existence beyond the actions of any one individual.” However, social structures mean not only the “reproduced outcome of human agency” but also the “medium” of construction of social practices. William John Morgan, Leftist Theories of Sport: A Critique and Reconstruction (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 66. Accordingly, social structures are often classified into relational structures (social relations like class, gender, ethnicity, and race) and institutional structures (institutions like families, schools, fraternities and so on). These two concepts of social structures are inseparable because institutional structures produce knowledge supporting social relations. With the emergence of theories about structuration, social structures also refer to embodied structures, which means repeated social actions grounded in social actors’ situated responses on the basis of the knowledge available to them. See José López and John Scott, Social Structure (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2000), chapter 3, 4, and 6. All these present definitions of social structures stress the impersonality of structural forces. But these definitions also relate culture to the construction of social structures and, therefore, the hierarchies of power.
4 Some anthropologists have noticed these problems in Geertz’s studies. See George E. Marcus and Michael J. Fisher, Anthropology as Cultural Critique: An Experimental Moment in the Human Science (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986); Ronald G. Walters, “Signs of the Times: Clifford Geertz and Historians,” Social Research 47, no. 3 (Fall 1980); Roger M. Keesing, “Anthropology as Interpretive Quest,” Current Anthropology 28, no. 2 (April 1987).
relationships among culture, social relations, and power struggles, my study illuminates the social meanings of a cultural and historical phenomenon, prize fighting in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Functionalists, who first made sports a research topic, tended to define a sport as a means to solve social problems and help people adjust to society. Later, modernization theorists suggested that modern sports were egalitarian, meritocratic, democratic, pragmatic, and organized institutions. They contrasted modern sports with premodern sports, which were hierarchical, traditional, and unorganized. However, recent scholars equipped with critical social and cultural theories have begun to research sports in connection with social relations and power struggles.\(^5\) In order to explore this connection, my dissertation will illuminate nineteenth and twentieth century prize fighting as a cultural text that was structured in conjunction with power relations and struggles. Benefiting from the cultural and linguistic turn of recent sports scholarship, my dissertation will explore how agents used a sport to construct, blur, and shift social and cultural boundaries for the construction of group identity and the competition of power and how their signifying practices affected the ways in which power was distributed in American society.

Modern prize fighting, which originated from irregular fairground activities, began in the 1740s when Jack Broughton codified the first set of rules to distinguish it from street fighting. While prize fighting was based on traditional plebian culture, its most important patrons in the late eighteenth century were aristocrats and gentlemen. But pugilistic encounters continued to attract working-class spectators. Prize fighting became a form of male bonding across social divisions but it did not last long. In the 1830s, corruption and crowd violence drove prominent patrons away. English prize fighting began to be patronized mainly “by persons in the humbler classes.” Throughout the nineteenth century, the English middle classes, who viewed prize fighting as an anachronism against civilization, repressed this plebian, bloody, and disorderly sport. The establishment of the local police struck a final blow to English prize fighting.

While prize fighting barely survived in its homeland, America became a center of prize fighting by the late nineteenth century. While southern slave owners already made their slaves fight for purses, the first public ring outside the South took place between Jacob Hyer and Tom Beasley in 1816. American prize fighting began

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6 Derek Birley, *Sport and the Making of Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), 118, 156.
7 Adrian Harvey, *The Beginnings of a Commercial Sporting Culture in Britain 1793-1850* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2004), 140.
to flourish with the influx of Irish and English immigrants in the mid-nineteenth century. Its brutality made all participants punishable for assault and battery or for the violations of penal codes. The illegality of prize fighting kept it from being a major spectator sport, yet prize fighting steadily attracted followers throughout the antebellum years. While public interest in prizefighting dwindled during the Civil War, in the 1880s, prize fighting sparked excitement again with the emergence of a new heavyweight champion, John L. Sullivan. The gradual introduction of gloves and a more civilized set of rules (the Marquis of Queensberry rules) gained the sport some respectability, and, starting in the late 1880s, some cities and states allowed gloved contests for members of athletic clubs. The disguised prizefights flourished in clubs. The American ring had provided opportunities for poor young men from all over the world and drew its patrons from all social strata. Nevertheless, prize fighting continued to be a controversial sport until it was legally permitted in the 1920s. In the 1920s, prize fighting became one of the most popular forms of entertainments in the nation.

Prize fighting is an interesting topic for the study of U.S. culture in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. During this period, prize fighting became a cultural space in which class, ethnic, racial, and gender relations were highly visible and interactive. Because prize fighting was closely related to the ways in which power was distributed in the United State, it is a cultural text that illuminates the dynamic interactions between class construction and reconciliation, ethnic reproduction and Americanization, racialization and male bonding, and masculinism
and women’s agency in late nineteenth and early twentieth century United States. Considering its unique position as a space of social and cultural interactions, it is somehow surprising that prize fighting of the period has only occasionally been a subject of scholarly work. My dissertation on prize fighting will fill this gap in the study of boxing.

Popular culture, by which I mean the urban masses’ culture in the industrial age, is an important key term in this study. The term was coined to refer to the widening division between middle-class and working-class cultures and their distinctive leisure practices in the late nineteenth century. Popular culture meant culture of the uneducated. It also meant vulgar culture. While middle-class people segregated themselves from public entertainment, and enjoyed high culture by spending their free time before artistic paintings and orchestras displaying polished manners, the working classes enjoyed popular culture which, at the time, was the other side of high culture.12 John Storey argues that the middle-class invention of popular culture as the “other of high culture” was the “institutionalization” of the “connection between class and culture” by stigmatizing popular cultural forms and making a “visible connection between cultural taste and social class.”13 In the late nineteenth century, Matthew Arnold, who worried about toppling middle-class cultural hegemony, viewed popular culture as a revolt of the urban masses against

12 In late nineteenth century America, high culture meant “culture in a sense of cultivation and refinement, of formal education and trained aesthetic sensibility.” It represented a “higher sphere of activity associated with class privilege and with the older Anglo-Saxon America, a sphere distinct from the crudeness and vulgarities of common life, of trade and labor.” Alan Trachtenberg, The Incorporation of America (New York: Hill and Wang, 1994), 9.  
cultural norms.¹⁴ In contrast, scholars of popular culture in the twentieth century often viewed popular culture as serving dominant groups and perpetuating existing power relations. For instance, the Frankfurt School scholars and orthodox Marxists defined popular culture as a commodity, which was produced by the culture industry and passively consumed by the masses.¹⁵

Existing studies of prize fighting in the U.S. have focused mainly on two social categories, class and race, and seems to rework these two conflicting frameworks of popular culture discussed above. Several scholars notice the antagonism of the middle classes toward prize fighting and the unusual legal status of prize fighting in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Their studies imply that prize fighting was an anti-hegemonic interactive culture in which working-class men articulated their collectivity and distinguished themselves from middle-class men. In these studies, a popular cultural institution was not a medium for ideological domination or the reproduction of existing power relations. Therefore, these studies appear to avoid a structuralist conception of culture and power relations by stressing the instability of middle-class cultural hegemony and the cultural autonomy of the subordinate classes.¹⁶

¹⁵ This concept of popular culture has influenced critical scholars like C. Wright Mills, David Riesman, Frederic Jameson, and Guy Debord.
Nevertheless, these studies fail to answer several questions. Was prize fighting simply a space for working-class men to construct their unique class culture? How much did prize fighting empower working-class men? Did the illegal status of prize fighting symbolize unbridgeable cultural differences or irreconcilable power struggles between the middle- and working classes? Did this apparent cultural polarization signify a clear and stable social positioning of the dominant and the subordinate groups in socio-economic relations? Does the long repression of prize fighting signify a unilateral and vertical power relation in cultural fields? Was the legalization of prize fighting a coincidence or an inevitable result of historical and cultural changes? How did prize fighting relate to gender, ethnicity and race?

In fact, while they illuminate the changing legal status of prize fighting, the above-mentioned studies begin to recognize the interconnections between class and gender boundaries and the process of incorporation. Nevertheless, these studies do not detail the convergence of masculinities in prize fighting. In addition, though these studies also deal with the gradual incorporation of the sport, they failed to detail the long process of cultural exchanges between classes. As long as studies narrow their topic to legal questions, they fail to illuminate the mediation between gender and class boundaries and shifting class boundaries.17

Another problem with these studies is the omission of women. In these studies, the concept of masculinity is used merely to illuminate class struggles and

17 However, as I will show in this study, prize fighting was a commercial and popular entertainment in which different classes and class values interacted. These characteristics of prize fighting prevented it from becoming an antipode to dominant culture. Even though prize fighting was illegal for a long time, it was also a space where working-class males and middle-class males shared in some cultural traits and increased their commonness.
negotiations among men rather than to illuminate how masculine culture produced gender domination in working-class and middle-class cultures. Thus, these studies do not illuminate that working-class men shifted positions between the dominant and the subordinate within an interlocking system of multiple social hierarchies. What is lacking in these studies is an acknowledgement that power is circulating in cultural fields and social boundaries mediated each other.

Many of the existing studies of race and prize fighting are also entrapped in the reductionist and binary model of social relations and the structuralist model of culture. For instance, biographical studies of black fighters tend to focus too narrowly on racial relations and depict black fighters only as victims of racial discrimination.18 Because these reductionist studies view prize fighting mainly as a reflection or a reproduction of existing racial relations and as a method of ideological domination, they cannot illuminate the diverse social roles of prize fighting of the day. For instance, prize fighting inspired its supporters to embrace anti-capitalistic sentiments and ethnic identity. Additionally, these studies assume a racial binary (based on skin color) between the dominant and the subordinate, and they do not explore how black men’s participation in a masculine institution influenced their relationships with white

men and white and black women. For instance, viewing prize fighting simply as a racist institution overlooks that black men in the ring could be a privileged group over women when they earned respect for fighting among other men.

While prize fighting had been also constructed as an ethnic tradition by immigrants and one of the most masculine sports in the late nineteenth century, it is surprising that only a small number of scholarly works have been devoted to the relationship between ethnicity and prize fighting and between women and prize fighting in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

In this sense, Elliott J. Gorn’s *The Manly Art: Bare-Knuckle Prize Fighting in America* (1988), is a rare and inspiring study. In this comprehensive analysis of prize fighting in the nineteenth century, Gorn illuminated prize fighting without being entrapped in a reductionist model of culture and power relations. Accordingly, Gorn positions prize fighting in relation to class and ethnic cultures. He also implies that masculine working-class culture could be anti-hegemonic but also sexist. In so doing, Gorn hints at ethnic working-class men’s shifting position in multiple social hierarchies and creates a more complex picture of nineteenth century U. S. culture.

However, while Gorn views the history of prize fighting in relation to class, ethnicity, and gender, his study does not fully engage how these categories affected and mediated each other. As a result, his study does not illuminate how the interconnections of social and cultural boundaries continuously reinforced and

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19 There are several good biographical studies about prize fighting in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. For instance, Michael Isenberg’s *John L. Sullivan and His America* (1988) is a thoughtfully written biographical study. However, Elliott J. Gorn’s *Manly Art: Bare-Knuckle Prize Fighting in America* still remains only a comprehensive study about American prize fighting about the nineteenth century.
destabilized respective social categories and situationally constructed people’s complex and multiple identities. Therefore, in Gorn’s study, social groups also appear to be stable and homogeneous. Even though Gorn notices some gray areas between cultural boundaries, his study focuses largely on the cultural differences between working-class and middle-class men and represents them as two considerably stable social groups. In addition, Gorn does not address cultures of non-Irish ethnic working-class groups and oversimplifies the term (ethnic) working-class men.

Gorn’s study also fails to fully illuminate cultural interactions and negotiations between the working classes and the middle classes and the incorporation of prize fighting in the 1880s and the 1900s. The last chapter of Gorn’s book stresses the convergence of masculinities through the sport craze among middle-class men in the late nineteenth century and implies emerging cultural unity among men across social divisions. However, Gorn overlooks that middle- and working-class men still were not a homogeneous group. In addition, Gorn does not demonstrate how race divisions among men limited the convergence of masculinities. This omission of race in his study is a serious flaw, especially because racial tensions dominated the ring in the late 1900s. 20 Gorn also maintains that prize fighting dramatically displayed gender differences. However, his study deals with women not only as a homogeneous group but also as a victimized group.

20 While men emerged as a social group, men of subordinate social groups continued to be stigmatized. The concepts of hegemonic, marginal, and subjugated or stigmatized masculinities illuminate the hierarchies of masculinities according to social divisions. See R. W. Connell, Gender & Power: Society, the Person and Sexual Politics (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987).
While his study makes social boundaries synonymous with cultural boundaries, Gorn does not pay enough attention to agency and cultural autonomy. As a result, even though his study begins to avoid reductionism, it unintentionally supports the assumption that the cultural is directly derived from the social. This oversimplification and synchronization of social and cultural boundaries is partly caused by the chronological formation of the book, which dutifully distinguishes the characteristics of respective periods. By stressing historical change, Gorn’s study relates prize fighting to cultural trends such as increasing class divisions, the Americanization of Irishmen, and an emerging common masculine culture among men. In so doing, however, his study reduces contemporary people’s experiences to several cultural trends rather than illuminating their diverse and even conflicting experiences.

Another reason that Gorn’s study becomes entrapped in a binary and structuralist model of culture is that he does not pay enough attention to the textuality and discursivity of prize fighting. The recognition of the textuality and discursivity of prize fighting would have been “interpretative agency” a focal point in the study of prize fighting. In signifying practices, agents strategically construct, reinforce, blur, multiply, and shift cultural boundaries. Cultural boundaries of a social group are constructed, mediated, and blurred in that process.\(^{21}\) This process complicates power relations. Gorn’s failure to study the textuality and discursivity of prize fighting

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diminishes the importance of cultural autonomy, which is a key to understanding the fluidity of identity and culture and shifting power relations expressed in the multi-vocal construction of prize fighting.

While this dissertation is situated in boxing scholarship, it is more intersectional, more inclusive, and goes beyond the conventional division of time. The goal of my dissertation is to illuminate the diverse constructions of prize fighting and its dynamic relations with the reconstruction of social groups from 1882 to 1913. The time span, which began with the heavyweight championship winning battle of the first working-class public idol, John L. Sullivan, and ended with the involuntary exile of the first black heavyweight champion, Jack Johnson, witnessed a significant transformation of prize fighting. The period also overlapped with the era of industrialization and rational organization, urbanization, a masculine crisis, class conflicts, the Women’s Movement, ethnic diversity, Americanization, nationalism and expansion, and racial segregation. Prize fighting was closely related to the transformation of the United States which continuously reconstructed social relations. Avoiding a structuralist and binary conceptualization of culture and social relations, my dissertation will discuss how agents diversely interpreted the social transformation and how their interpretations affected the construction and deconstruction of social and cultural boundaries in the multi-vocal and multivalent construction of prize fighting. Therefore, my dissertation will engage in a theoretical discussion about culture, social structures, and power relations without ignoring cultural autonomy.
The dissertation is divided into five chapters. The first two chapters will illuminate how prize fighting was discursively constructed in relation to class. The other chapters will deal with the relationship between prize fighting and shifting gender, ethnic, and racial relations, respectively. While these chapters focus on agents who discursively constructed prize fighting in order to compete for power in society, my dissertation will not stress the stability of these conventional social divisions. Rather, as an intersectional study of prize fighting, my dissertation will illuminate how these social boundaries were stabilized, mediated, and destabilized by cultural activities. More specifically, these five chapters will examine contemporaries’ perceptions of masculinity and their roles constructing and disintegrating social and cultural boundaries in this “manly sport.”
Chapter 1

A Christian Gentleman, a Natural Man:

Prize Fighting and the Construction of the Middle Classes

In *German Ideology* (1845), Karl Marx established a hierarchized binary between economy (base) and culture (superstructure) to explain class domination and social development. Marx’s economism was influential. As Dennis Dworkin points out, up to the 1970s, “class theory and analysis in humanities and the social science” had been “dualistic, founded on the distinction between an objective social-economic structure and forms of consciousness and action shaped by it.”

However, orthodox Marxists’ economic determinism has been contested. In his famous studies about capitalism, Max Weber questioned the mechanical and one-directional relationship between base and superstructure (culture). Weber argued that class-consciousness is not automatically derived from common economic conditions. Recently, critical left-wing scholars have questioned a hierarchized binary between base and superstructure. E. P. Thompson stresses the importance of culture in the formation of class. Influenced by Antonio Gramsci, Raymond Williams and Stuart Hall notice the concept of cultural autonomy. By defining class as a cultural phenomenon, the studies of the European bourgeoisie even contest the traditional

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assumption that class is an economic group and destabilize the ontological divide between economy and culture in the study of class. These studies commonly argue that class is a cultural expression of economic differences.

If a class is an economic categorization, which is constructed by the perception of cultural homogeneity and exclusivity, it involves agents’ signifying practices. Accordingly, the new perspective of class not only changes the focal spaces of class studies but also reevaluates agents’ cultural activities in class studies. Agents’ perceptions of the world and their signifying practices have a mutual relationship with social-economic structures. Structure (economy) is not something prior to culture. While structure is refracting for agents’ signifying practices, class is not defined by impersonal social structures. In the new perspective of class, class is constructed by agents’ signifying practices and their repeated social actions shaped by signifying practices. The evaluation of “interpretative agency” and signifying practices makes class a dynamic process. Accordingly, what the study of class has to illuminate is, not how people in common economic situations share values and attitudes and what type of values they share, but how people who have different values and attitudes diversely create and maintain class boundaries and how these cultural diversities among them make class boundaries mediated, unstable, and changeable.

In the first two chapters, which illuminate the dynamic relationships between the formation of class and prizefighting, I illuminate signifying practices, which created, diversified, and destabilized hegemonic and working-class cultures. The diverse constructions of prize fighting represent class construction, the multiplicity of
identities among classed people, shifting class boundaries, emerging male bonding, and the transformation of dominant and working-class cultures in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Accordingly, the first two chapters attempt to understand class without being entrapped in a structuralist and binary conceptualization of culture. Focusing on the mediation between cultural boundaries, the chapters also criticize a reductionism which focuses only on class as a basic social division.

Chapter 1 illuminates the formation of the middle classes as a cultural process in relation to the cultural construction of prize fighting, focusing on a period from the 1880s to the 1900s, in which I believe a major transformation of middle-class perception of the world and prize fighting took place and the foundation for incorporation of the sport was laid. While some studies argue that the middle classes were being formed in the late nineteenth century, the conclusion might be a structuralist conception of class without the careful examination of shifting class boundaries. The middle classes were being constructed, but they still shared many cultural traits with the working classes. Class boundaries were also shifting when the culture of the middle classes was diversified. In the process, middle-class culture interacted with working-class culture and was gradually transformed. Prize fighting was a space to see this cultural dynamic. In order to illuminate the dynamic process, this chapter first situates prize fighting in hegemonic processes which pursued civility in human relations. It explains why prize fighting was so problematic to many middle-class people throughout the nineteenth century.
1. The Victorian Moral Order, Prize Fighting, and Class Construction

In his *The Civilizing Process* (1939), Norbert Elias traced a long-term historical transformation of the European societies into what he argued were more disciplined, civilized, and humane ones. The civilizing process, which Elias defined as the increasing “social constraint toward self-constraint,” began with political changes at the eleventh century. Centralized European states started to repress bloody competition among aristocrats and monopolized the use of violence. Courtly circles, which consisted of subordinated aristocrats, began to read etiquette books and learn civilized manners about bodily functions. Disseminating feelings like embarrassment, shame, and repulsiveness, the civilizing process also made violence and cruelty, which were common in human relations, as abnormal and barbaric. Violence and cruelty began to be pushed behind the scenes along with many bodily functions. The process was often disrupted when a state needed cruelty as a technique for domination. However, when the bourgeoisie secured political and cultural power in the nineteenth century, Europeans experienced the process more intensively through institutions like churches, schools, and social reform organizations and multiplied advice books. In the civilizing process, the

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26 In *Discipline & Punish* (1975), Michel Foucault devotes the significant portion of his book to the description of a public torture and execution, which was held in a festive mood in eighteenth century France.
middle-class social control. Elias’s theory helps us notice the gradual emergence of “civilized” societies and a modern technique of domination by the liberal dominant class in the nineteenth century.27

However, because of its abstract aspect, Elias’s theory has to be seen as a starting point of specific studies, not as a complete explanatory model of the modern West. Middle-class civility and social control were historically specific. Victorianism, which was named after Queen Victoria (1837-1901), dated back to the evangelical moral reform movement for the promotion of piety and virtue in the late eighteenth century. The idea of moral reformation extended to humanitarian causes to prohibit the excessive display of violence and cruelty. The movement encouraged the elimination of flogging in the army and the navy, the abolition of the pillory and public whipping, and the prohibition of cockfighting, bullbaiting, bearbaiting, and the slave trade. It also initiated the penal reform.28

Victorianism began as a culture of “the segment of British society identified with bourgeois evangelicalism.”29 But it became a transatlantic culture. In America, Victorianism originated in the Protestant evangelical awakening of the 1830s.30 Like their English counterparts, American Victorian reformers “deplored physical violence in such varied contexts” as schools, families, ships, plantations, prisons, and insane

asylums. Victorians viewed human nature as divided between animal passions and the civilized, higher faculties of reason and self-discipline. While Victorianism was not a cohesive set of values and morals, Victorians supported the self-control of passion, natural desire, violent and sexual impulse, and self-improvement. In the nineteenth century, Victorianism regulated the American middle classes’ public and private life. Now humanitarian causes against brutality and cruelty became securely placed in the dominant classes’ comprehensive social and cultural ideals. The liberal middle-class culture also consolidated a new technique of domination through Victorianism. As Daniel Walker Howe argues, “the tendency of Victorian culture was away from sanctioning the use of violence in human relationships, and toward the substitution of persuasion as a means of social control.”

However, in spite of moral reformers’ efforts, Victorianism did not culturally unify Americans. Rather, it had a “class derivation.” Victorianism was “bourgeois.” According to Gareth S. Jones, while in England, before the 1790s, “social distinctions abounded at every level,” there was “no great cultural divide between the middle class and those beneath them.” For instance, the leisure style stressed cultural affinity between these groups. “All classes shared in passions for gambling, theater, tea gardens, pugilism, and animal sports.” However, during the Victorian era from the

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32 Howe, “Victorian Culture in America,” 17, 19, 21-22. Victorianism was not purely a self-generating process. It accommodated to the nation’s need of labor for economic survival and political security in America. It was also structured by the market revolution and emerging capitalism in the nineteenth century. See Karen Halttunen, Confidence Men and Painted Women (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 18-19 and Stephen Mennell, The American Civilizing Process (Cambridge: Polity, 2007), 34-36. Accordingly, Victorianism supported refined manners, work ethic, postponed gratification, soberness, self-help, thrift, a high valuation on time, and moral seriousness.
33 Howe, “Victorian Culture in America,” 9.
1790s to the 1840s, the distances between the London middle class and those beneath them increased. The propertied class increasingly turned to Victorianism and strived toward “gentility.”

In America, a similar process took place throughout the nineteenth century. According to Stuart Blumin, the American middle classes were an “intermediate social group,” which was “located between a formally aristocratic upper class and a decidedly plebeian lower class.” Accordingly, they had economic and cultural differences internally. Nevertheless, the American middle classes gradually constructed common values and class boundaries throughout the nineteenth century. In the late nineteenth century, the middle ranks “translated their economic differences into significant differences in life-style, outlook, and aspiration” and distinguished themselves from both the aristocratic classes and the working classes. Victorianism played an important role in drawing class boundaries.

36 According to Daniel Walker Howe, Victorianism was a transatlantic culture. The study of boxing recognizes the existence of transnational culture. Boxing itself was a transatlantic culture. Anti-prize fighting laws were also imported from England to America. When prize fighting was shared by both nations in the mid-nineteenth century, respectable English and American citizens expressed their antagonism toward the sport. Accordingly, Victorianism is an important organizing concept to understand widely held antagonism toward prize fighting in both nations. But while Victorianism was a hegemonic process in America, its influence should not be exaggerated. As a grand paradigm to explain nineteenth century America, the term the Victorian era is no longer appealing. For instance, recent studies of the antebellum era question how much Victorianism was influential. Many middle class men and women violated the Victorian rules of work ethic, self-control, and domesticity. See Karen Halttunen, Confidence Men and Painted Women; John Kasson, Rudeness and Civility: Manners in 19th Century Urban America (New York: Hill and Wang, 1990); Ann Fabian, Card Sharps, Dream Books, and Bucket Shops: Gambling in 19th Century America (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990). In the postbellum era, middle-class culture was not homogeneous. There were multiple hegemonic processes. Many middle-class men culturally interacted with working-class men, especially in leisure. I
While Victorian ideals gradually transformed the American middle classes into a cultural and historical phenomenon, class differences were constructed in cultural spaces. Leisure was one of these cultural spaces. In England, pre-Victorian popular leisure consisted of a remarkable range of games, including ball games, running races, varieties of fighting, and animal sports. Because pre-Victorian European societies were permissive of violence, brutality, and cruelty, “the level of violence tolerated in sports” like street football, animal sports, prize fighting, and cudgeling was “remarkable.” These violent sports and games were the outlets for aggressiveness and cruelty for players and spectators. These sports were often disorderly and riotous. Participants were sometimes antagonistic toward emerging capitalism, violating property ownership and disrupting commerce. The state control of leisure activities began with regulations on hunting and disorderly pleasure-seeking will show the cultural interactions in first two chapters dealing with the relationships between class construction and the diverse constructions of prize fighting.

37 The middle classes are an ahistorical concept with unclear boundaries. Who belongs to this intermediate social group is never agreed. Accordingly, while this social group is an economic categorization, it cannot be understood without the concept of cultural autonomy. That is, because this intermediate social group has significant internal economic differences in income and occupation, the formation of the middle classes necessarily needs the construction of cultural unity to overcome these internal differences. Accordingly, the boundaries of the middle classes expand and shrink. In this study, I used the term to refer to a class in America which was comparable to the bourgeoisie in late nineteenth century Europe. The bourgeoisie was a divided class which included industrialists and the petty bourgeoisie. It was a culturally constructed class which valued the sense of progress, thrift, the importance of time, future-orientation, self-organization, humanism, and refined manners. However, though I do not object to American scholars’ use of the term the bourgeoisie, I am reluctant to introduce the term in my study. While the bourgeoisie is a historical term to refer to an intermediate class between the working classes and the aristocracy in the nineteenth century, I don’t want to blur the differences in class formations between America and Europe. Nevertheless, in America, the middle classes were also a culturally constructed intermediately class. The middle class distinguished themselves both from below and from above. For instance, while the American middle classes supported character-building sports in the late nineteenth century, they expressed antagonism toward rich people’s sport, horse racing, and many working-class entertainments.


activities on the Sabbath day. However, the regulations increasingly targeted the brutality, riotousness, and dissipation of lower classes’ leisure activities. By the Queen Victoria’s accession (1837), Victorian culture had become hegemonic in England. The major change in the regulation of leisure took place. Brutish dissipations of both the working and upper classes began to be repressed. In England, cock fighting was made illegal in 1849. Street football was prohibited in many regions. Prizefighting was also repressed.

Early settlers did not transplant the violent and disorderly pre-Victorian leisure culture in their homeland to America. Many early colonists were “committed to the ideological primacy of labor and to the broader reformist Protestant tradition linking labor and leisure.” However, in the early eighteenth century, the archetype forms of prize fighting and animal sports resurged among English settlers. These revitalized popular recreations expressed “oppositional interests” against early regime in the New World, which imposed religious decorum and enforced labor.

In the mid-nineteenth century, the Victorian middle classes viewed leisure as dissipation. Victorian culture focused on disciplined lifestyles and work ethic rather than the disorderly satisfaction of emotional needs and immersion in plays and sports. Highly religious, respectable, individually competitive, and capitalistic culture began to dominate middle-class people’s lives. The emerging middle classes frowned on

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41 Kasia Boddy, Boxing: A Cultural History (London: Peaktion, 2008), 76.
42 Birley, Sport and the Making of Britain, 208.
both established class and working-class sports.\textsuperscript{45} Of all working-class men’s sports, prize fighting was most controversial. Many middle-class people viewed the brutal entertainment as a symbol of anachronism against Victorian culture which originated from humanitarian reform movements. Accordingly, the legal repression of prize fighting was transplanted to America. Nevertheless, prize fighting, which had both working-class and ethnic origins, began to flourish as an alternative leisure style in the mid-nineteenth century.

In 1849, the first fight on American soil, which caught national attention, was held between an Irish immigrant, “Yankee’ Sullivan, and a descendant of British immigrants, Tom Hyer. The fight appalled the middle classes, who were eager to maintain cultural and moral order in the era of incipient urbanization and the first massive immigration. According to a report, the fight between two “rowdies” was completely a “brutal” and “loathsome” event against the law and “all right-minded people.” The report also defined the “most brutal” and “most savage” fight as the “humiliating exhibition of human depravity.”\textsuperscript{46} A famous writer, Lambert A. Wilmer, described the 1858 fight between John Morrissey and John C. Heenan as the “most demoralizing, beastly, disgusting, and scandalous affair of the kind that took place in any half-civilized country.”\textsuperscript{47}

\textsuperscript{45} Accordingly, until the late nineteenth century, horse racing, boxing, and cockfighting brought sports under public scrutiny and into controversy. Harry Jebsen, Jr., “The Public Acceptance of Sports in Dallas, 1880-1930,” Journal of Sport History, 6, no. 3 (Winter, 1979), 6.
\textsuperscript{46} Milwaukee Sentinel and Gazette, March 14, 1849, p. 3.
\textsuperscript{47} Lambert A. Wilmer, Our Press Gang; or, a Complete Exposition of the Corruptions and Crimes of the American Newspapers (Philadelphia: J. T. Lloyd, 1859), 168.
Respectable American citizens dismissed the first international championship fight between John C. Heenan and Tom Sayer, which was held in England a decade later. The New York Times, which catered to the middle-class taste, defined the “brutal” fight as the “best of a bad business.” Accordingly, prize fighting, which challenged the middle-class ideals of humanity, the self-discipline of violent and cruel impulses, and commitment to work and self-improvement, rarely attracted avid supporters from cultural elites in the antebellum America. Middle-class people denied fighters’ claim of prize fighting as the “manly art.” Rather, they perceived it as one of the “evils of the city” in the postbellum era.

While prize fighting gained wide popularity in the 1880s, this underground sport emerged as a subject of middle-class discourse through newspapers. Throughout the decade, law enforcement was adamant to repress prize fighting. Bare-knuckle fights for purses could be held only in remote places away from cities. Improvised fights in the saloons of working-class residential areas were so spontaneous that no one could easily gain access to them. In the 1880s, the newspaper became a main medium which produced discourse about the sport on account of its invisibility. However, reports of prizefights had been highly controversial. In 1837, the New York Times, May 17, 1860, p. 4.


Spectator set an early standard for the report of prizefights. “It should be only in the briefest and most pointed language of reprobation.”

Old Victorian morals remained in fight reports in the 1880s. Fight reports often accompanied moral apology and criticism. Fight reports also tried to be exempted from criticism by focusing on the violence of fights. The headlines of fight reports were full of words like “savage,” “cruel,” “brutal,” and “bloody,” which emphasized the repulsiveness of fights. These reports stressed the brutal and bloody nature of fights. An 1885 report depicted a fight held on the outskirts of Boston as “one of the latest of that cultured city’s sensations.” The fight was brutal. “Thirteen savage rounds were fought, until one of the combatants was almost killed.” The report resented that the Hub policemen were “not the most alert of their class.”

An 1885 report described the brutality of a fight as follows: “The round was marked by heavy slugging, both men being bathed in blood when time was called. . . . There was a yell of triumph for the Doyle faction, as he waiving his blood-besmeared hands.” Fight reports of the days were flooded with descriptions of bloody scenes: “The fight was vicious one. Three towels soaked with blood were found in the field.”

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51 New York Spectator, August 24 1837, p. 3.
52 See New York Sun, May 4, 1884, p. 2; Omaha Daily Bee, December 31, 1887, p. 1; Cleveland Herald, November 21, 1881, p. 3; February 5, 1884, p. 3; Rocky Mountain News, February 8, 1882, p. 6; December 20, 1886, p. 1; Milwaukee Daily Journal, November 20, 1884, p. 1; Daily Evening Bulletin, April 4, 1887, p. 3; Galveston Daily News, September 16, 1885, p. 1; North American, July 12, 1887, p. 1; Daily Inter-Ocean, July 22, 1887, p. 2; Milwaukee Sentinel, November 22, 1887, p. 1.
54 Milwaukee Sentinel, June 30, 1885, p. 3.
A report of the match between George Ducharme and James Dohagany in 1887 also stressed the unlimited brutality and repulsiveness of the prizefight. “The fight was so fierce and the blows so severe, many of the spectators weakened and were obliged to leave the room.” Spectators who remained until the last round, “were covered with blood from head to foot.”

These reports also caused repulsiveness about the fight, detailing how boxers were mutilated during a match. A report under the title “A Bloody and Disgraceful Mill” described the Joe Goss-Paddy Ryan fight in 1880 as follows: “Deep gashes marred faces that never were classical, while swollen lips and black eyes evidenced the fierceness of the fight. Here and there over the naked breasts and arms of the men were stains of blood which gave them the appearance of painted savages.” A report of the 1882 bout between Paddy Ryan and John L. Sullivan detailed the lost champion’s disfigurement after the brutal fight. “Ryan was lying in an exhausted condition on a bed, badly disfigured about the face. His upper lip was cut through, and his nose disfigured. He did not move but lay panting.” An 1883 report under the title “A Prizefight Unexamined for Its Brutality” vividly described mutilation in the “sickening spectacle.” “Each blow received laid the flesh open like the cut of a butcher’s cleaver and blood ran down their naked bodies at the belts in long red icicles. Their faces were unrecognizable, each representing the appearance of raw

56 Omaha Daily Bee, December 31, 1887, p. 1.
57 Forth Worth Daily Gazette, February 19, 1887, p. 2.
58 Milwaukee Daily Sentinel, June 2, 1880, p. 3.
59 Rocky Mountain News, February 8, 1882, p. 6.
Another 1886 report was also repulsive. “In the eighteenth round Fogerty’s nose was broken by a quick upper cut…. When he got on his feet, Dempsey gave him another on the mouth which opened his lip so that it hung down on his chin. A broken jaw soon followed. From that time to the twenty-fourth round, Dempsey pummeled his opponent all round the ring. Blood was flowing in stream, from the victim, and the victor’s body was red with his opponent’s blood.”

In the age of moralism, many newspapers tried to support middle-class moral austerity by placing fight reports in the crime and trial sections. However, newspapers, which vied for wider readership in an era of declining illiteracy, were already utilizing “the paralyzing sequences of all brutal exhibitions on the general conscience, whether of legalized execution, or bull-fight, or the prize-ring.” In fact, the fight reports of the 1880s were sensational in their detailed description of violence and mutilation. An 1882 editorial of the *Rocky Mountain News* resented the public interest in the prizefight as a “ghastly sarcasm on our boasted civilization.” The editorial also criticized sensational fight reports. A journalist, John Boyle O’Reilly, also noticed the dualism of the fight reports of the 1880 Ryan-Sullivan fight. “Every paper in the country published a detailed report of the contest, even though the editorial columns condemned the affair as brutal and degrading.”

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60 Milwaukee Sentinel, December 29, 1883, p. 3.
63 Rocky Mountain News, July 23, 1882, p. 4.
Some fight reports more directly contradicted the contemporary moral standard. While the sensational description of brutality and violence in many reports already appalled moralists, some reports expressed ambivalent attitudes toward prize fighting. An 1885 fight report stressed that the fight was “of a very brutal nature,” but the report also described the fight as “wonderful short-arm fighting.” In the report, fighters were seen as displaying “gameness” in the “tug of war.”\textsuperscript{65} In another report of 1884, fighters were seen as aggressive thugs, but they were depicted as possessing the “desperation of tigers.” The report made fighters’ magnificent masculine physiques compensate for their moral deficiency. In addition, the report acclaimed two fighters’ fairness and courage.\textsuperscript{66} An 1887 report, which kept a moralistic judgment on prize fighting, placed its emphasis on a fighter’s masculine body and his determination. “Howitt was regarded as being in the best condition, his figure being compact and hard and his skin shining with a healthy glow that told of excellent training…. He had light hair and mustache, rather spare and high cheek bones, and his face was that of a determined man.”\textsuperscript{67} In some reports, fighters who took punishments were “cool and game.”\textsuperscript{68} In spite of their moral judgment of prize fighting, some fight reports could not deny fighting men’s physical manhood and courage in the ring. These reports became texts in which middle-class men’s moralism and their hidden desire for toughness coexisted.

\textsuperscript{65} Galveston Daily News, September 16, 1885, p. 1.
\textsuperscript{66} Milwaukee Daily Journal, July 1, 1884, p. 1.
\textsuperscript{67} Rocky Mountain News, November 19, 1887, p. 2.
\textsuperscript{68} Milwaukee Sentinel, January 25, 1888, p. 2; Daily Inter-Ocean, July 22, 1887, p. 2; Rocky Mountain News, January 25, 1888, p. 6.
In the late nineteenth century, class divisions between the middle- and working classes were more clarified in economic sectors. Cultural tastes were also increasingly divided and stratified. According to Pierre Bourdieu, a hegemonic social group relationally constructs itself, valorizing its own culture as respectable and refined, and stigmatizing the cultures of other groups as vulgar and coarse. He argues that the construction of the binary of cultural taste affirms class stratification and cultural hegemony.69

In the nineteenth century, the American middle classes were still being formed through the bourgeoisification of dominant culture. Leisure was also a space where the middle classes were constructed. While middle-class people saw leisure activities more positively in the late nineteenth century, they constructed class boundaries in their leisure activities. In the 1890s, the American middle classes patronized orderly theaters, orchestras, and arts museums. Some studies illuminate the retreat of the middle classes from disorderly public entertainments and the division of cultural taste in the increasing hierarchies between popular culture and “high” culture during the decade.70 Middle-class people also began to embrace sporting activities but enjoyed these common activities in a class-conscious way and in their exclusive suburban athletic clubs. Middle-class people’s leisure activities were increasingly individual,

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family-oriented, orderly, sober, civilized, reflective, politically solemn, and non-commercial.  

By contrast, by the mid-nineteenth century, American working-class men constructed their own leisure styles in emerging urban subcultures. Working-class men participated in their bloody and highly masculine sports and play, hard drinking, and gambling. In the late nineteenth century, working-class men still maintained a distinct, insular, and alternative leisure style, which was collective, violent, hedonistic, vulgar, disorderly, riot-inclined, and present-oriented. Working-class men’s distinctive leisure styles were threatening to middle-class cultural norms. Accordingly, to self-approving middle-class people, how to spend free time was not a matter of personal preference but a social issue. Contemporary middle-class moralists and reformists waged a cultural war against the saloon, the billiard hall, gambling houses, and vulgar sports. To Victorian middle-class moralists, prize fighting had all the negative characteristics, which degrading entertainments were supposed to have. Prize fighting was the most brutal and cruel entertainment. It contradicted the core ideal of middle-class culture.

However, leisure was a space open to cultural interactions and contests. The bourgeoisification of the American middle classes was being challenged in sports. While middle-class people had clarified class boundaries through the cultural

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construction of prize fighting, the cultural binary between humane civility and retrogressive brutality regarding prize fighting was already toppling in the 1880s. Newspapers were not moral guardians. Prize fighting gained its popularity among “respectable” men. Bankers, lawyers, doctors, and journalists were often found in the crowd at a match.\textsuperscript{73} In a fight venue of the 1880s, gentlemen and poor men without tickets were wrestling for better spots under the “prevailing effect of the sport on people of all classes.”\textsuperscript{74}

In the 1880s, the court began to distinguish the sparring match from the prizefight. As a result, starting in the late 1880s, gloved boxing contests for exercise in athletic clubs became legally protected. Indebted clubs brought professional fights to their clubhouses. Clubs introduced gloves and the Queensberry rules to construct professional fights as civilized. Gloves, which were often called mufflers, were invented by an English professional fighter, Jack Broughton, in the late eighteenth century.\textsuperscript{75} The use of gloves was enforced by the new set of rules, which originated from England. John C. Chambers, who established the Amateur Athletic Club and promoted the “manly art” as a physical program among gentlemen, revised the London Prize Ring rules in order to eliminate brutalism and potential bodily harm. In 1868, Chambers and John Sholto Douglas (the Marquis of Queensberry) published the Marquis of Queensberry rules to regulate gentlemen’s contests in three classes. Professional boxing business accommodated to the middle-class rules. In clubs,

\textsuperscript{73} \textit{Daily Inter-Ocean}, May 30, 1881, p. 2. Also see \textit{Daily Evening Bulletin}, August 10, 1883, p. 4; July 27, 1886, p. 3.
\textsuperscript{74} \textit{Rocky Mountain News}, July 24, 1882, p. 4.
fighters put on not less than five ounce gloves and fought under the set of rules, which had presided over gentlemanly boxing contests. Local politicians, judges, and policemen, who had connection with clubs, protected these disguised professional bouts. Accordingly, prize fighting had many middle-class patrons in the late 1880s and 1890s.

This entertainment, which increasingly blurred class boundaries, caused concern among many middle-class moralists, who were ready to wage a war to protect their cultural norms and hegemony. Religious and civic organizations like the Society for the Suppression of Vice and the Women’s Christian Temperance Union actively worked to repress prizefights, which were promoted as “scientific boxing contests.” Mayor Charles A. Shieren of Brooklyn, who objected to professional boxing in athletic clubs, tried to segregate prize fighting to a special class and police class boundaries. “I believe these exhibitions at Coney Island are degrading. There are, of course, many decent men among the spectators on these occasions, but I understand that a great many others who witness these fights are not of this class.”

However, other middle-class moralists who were opposed to prize fighting aimed not only to police class boundaries but also to expand class boundaries for the consolidation of cultural hegemony. California governor R. W. Waterman recognized this double role for moralists. In a letter to Attorney General G. A. Johnson, which was sent to stop the proposed fight between George La Blanche and Charley Mitchell at California Athletic Club in 1890, Waterman disclosed his intention to protect both

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76 Daily Alta California, August 13, 1889, p. 1.
“those in the higher walks of life” and “those in the lower walks of life” from the demoralizing effect of the brutal entertainment.78 Accordingly, anti-prize fighting discourse tended to refrain from addressing class as an economic term. However, moral reformers’ efforts to make Americans’ cultural taste homogeneous conversely identified the differences between respectable and vulgar taste, and, therefore, relationally and culturally constructed and reinforced class boundaries through leisure and sports.

Anti-prize fighting discourse tended to define fighters and fight followers as classes of immoral character and vulgar taste. In anti-prize fighting discourse, fighters were popularly depicted as “rowdies,” “pugs,” and “toughs.” Fight fans were also diversely stigmatized. They were depicted as people of violent and disorderly taste like “ruffians,” “toughs,” “rowdies,” and “thugs” who had their admiration of a “coarse” and “brutal” fighter with “superlative physical endowments.”79 In the late 1880s and 1890s, middle-class moralists strengthened the cultural binary through multiplied anti-prize fighting discourse to achieve their conflicting social missions of class construction and class expansion. Class construction accompanied the process of blurring class boundaries for the affirmation of cultural hegemony.

In the multiplying anti-prize fighting moralist discourses of the late 1880s and 1890s, cultural tastes were stratified in a binary between humane and moral citizens and barbaric and retrogressive fight followers. To support the binary, anti-prize

78 Daily Evening Bulletin, June 17, 1890, p. 3.
79 See San Francisco Morning Call, October 23, 1892, p. 8; Daily Picayune, March 11, 1888, p. 6; New York Times, October 6 1893, p. 9; Outlook, 60, no. 14 (December 1898), 802.
fighting discourse constructed a cultural division between humane and brutal, between moral and immoral, between rational and emotional, between disciplined and impulsive, between productive and hedonistic, and between progressive and retrogressive. Anti-prize fighting discourse in newspaper articles, publications, courts, sermons, and political speeches were full of words like “immoral,” “degrading,” “demoralizing,” “disgusting,” “brutal,” “savage,” “barbaric,” “disgraceful,” and “dissipating.” Anti-prize fighting discourse not only naturalized class boundaries but also relatively constructed middle-class identity. Anti-prize fighting discourse, which was based on a cultural binary, decreased internal differences among middle-class people. As I will show later, the producers of anti-prize fighting discourse were not exclusively Protestant or whites. While many of their countrymen were involved in prize fighting as fighters, managers, seconds, and fight followers, Irish Catholic moralists never accepted prize fighting in their culture. Black intellectuals were also critical of the brutal business.

In order to construct a binary of cultural taste, anti-prize fighting discourse of the late 1880s and 1890s focused especially on the brutality and cruelty of the sport and used the rhetoric of civilization to segregate and repress the cultural form threatening to the cultural hegemony of the middle classes. In spite of the transformation of prize fighting, to middle-class moralists, the bare-knuckle fight and

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the gloved boxing contest did not have basic differences. These moralists did not find any quality in prize fighting. In both contests, as a reporter wrote, “each contestant had for his sole object the infliction of as much physical punishment upon his adversary as possible, even to the reducing of him to a state of insensibility.”

Accordingly, anti-prize fighting discourse, which was produced in diverse cultural spheres, defined prize fighting as a brutal, inhumane, and repulsive entertainment incompatible to middle-class gentility. In an 1889 editorial of *Harper’s Weekly*, George William Curtis criticized prizefighting as a “brutal, inhuman, and disgusting performance” and lamented its popularity. A novelist, George W. Cable, argued that the problem of prize fighting was not only the fighters’ physical degeneration and self-destruction but also the submission to “ferocious cruelty.” Legal discourse also reflected the worldview of the middle classes and continuously defined the brutality of prize fighting as abnormal. In *Seville v. State* (1892), Marshall J. Williams, chief justice of the Ohio Supreme Court, confirmed that the goal of the boxing law was to “surpass all prize-fighting on account of its brutality, and consequent danger to human life, and its demoralizing tendencies, and pernicious effects on the peace and good order society.”

Moral reformers and ministers who were appalled by the brutality of prize fighting were the most ardent detractors of prize fighting. In 1893, as other moral

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81 *Morning Oregonian*, September 20, 1892, p. 4.
reformers, R. Bennett, secretary of the Society for the Suppression of Vice, was concerned about the brutality of prize fighting. Another moral reformer, Charles Lincoln Bovard, denied some fight fans’ claim that prize fighting taught men courage. He criticized that prize fighting made participants “rejoice in mere inexcusable brutality for itself alone.”

There were numerous ministers who blamed the brutality of prize fighting for its violation of humanity. To Bishop S. M. Merrill of Chicago, prize fighting made respectable citizens “ashamed for humanity.” In 1897, the Reverend T. Magill of Reno complained that prize fighting disseminated “brutality in its worst form.” He was one of the middle-class moralists who felt that their cultural hegemony and hegemonic institutions were threatened by the “brutalizing” and “demoralizing effect” of prize fighting. According to him, the ethos of prize fighting was “diametrically opposed” to the “moral teachings of Christianity, the public school and of every lodge and benevolent order in the land,” which taught the “humanities.”

While they often strayed from the standard of moral conservatives, many newspapermen also criticized the exhibition of brutality in prizefights. In 1890, the editorial of the *New Orleans Daily Picayune* argued that “the spectacle of two half naked men mauling each other” constituted “obscene brutality,” which was “far from calculated to inspire to thoughts and sentiments ennobling and purifying.” A report

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87 *Chicago Tribune*, September 11, 1892, p. 34.
88 *Daily Nevada State Journal*, February 4, 1897, p. 3; *San Francisco Call*, March 15, 1897, p. 4.
89 *Daily Picayune*, September 18, 1890, p. 4.
in the *Boston Daily Advertiser* was direct in criticism toward this brutal, vulgar, and repulsive entertainment. “It is seldom that many days elapse without the announcement of one of these vulgar contests in which one or both parties have suffered such maceration and mutilation as decent people cannot read of without a shudder; nor is it many days, usually, between one prize ring slaughter and another.”

While moralists were antagonistic toward the brutal and beastly nature of the prizefight, prize fighting was a class problem that decreased racial differences. In 1893, Frank White, a white and former featherweight champion, sued a black fighter, Dominick F. McCaffrey, who refused to pay him fifty dollars for his service as a second in a prizefight. Judge John Jerolomon of the Eight Judicial District of Brooklyn denied White’s claim of the fights as “a scientific glove contest.” Jerolomon defined the match as a “vulgar, brutal prize fight” and a “brutal display of physical manhood.” He ruled that White, who abetted an illegal fight, was not eligible for compensation. Anti-prize fighting discourse tried to control the leisure activities of the multiethnic and multiracial working classes by designating what was normal in leisure activities.

In the middle-class notion of sports, sports were not a means to express excessive virility. Rather, sports were supposed to be a means by which players learned self-control, subordinating themselves to the written and unwritten rules. For instance, amateurism made gentleman players accept a special way of playing and

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90 *Boston Daily Advertiser*, May 27, 1891, p. 4.

91 *New York Times*, November 17, 1893, p. 5.
controlling the primitive desire for winning. Physical educators encouraged the learning of science in sports for the balanced development of physique and intelligence. However, while some middle-class moralists embraced physical culture in the 1890s, they still believed that prize fighting challenged the middle-class notions of disciplined and rationalized virility on sporting fields. The brutality of prize fighting was seen as a sign of a fighter’s lack of rationality and self-control and his degradation into an animal. Accordingly, anti-prize fighting discourse denied fighters’ claim of gloved boxing contests as sporting activities for a scientific display of manly courage. Middle-class moralists denied any moral, intelligent, and manly qualities in prize fighting and affirmed a cultural binary regarding prize fighting.

Middle-class moralists argued that all brutal fights were “under the guise of athletic sport.” The Reverend John Tallmadge Bergen’s remark was very conventional in the respect. He argued that prize fighting was not only “a disgrace to civilized communities” but also “an outrage upon true athletics.” To him, prize fighting was “savagery” and “barbarism.” It was not a sport because a contestant aimed to make the other “helpless and mangled.” A famous feminist, Susan B. Anthony, also saw the claim of a “manly sport” as a brazen attempt to sanction the performance of brutality and barbarism in the ring. Anthony argued that prize

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93 Daily Inter-Ocean, August 26, 1893, p. 16.
fighting, which had the “ever-present possibility of death,” was never a sport.96 To the Reverend J. Russell Taber of New York and Archbishop John Ireland of St. Paul, there was no difference in brutal nature between the bare-knuckle fight under the London Prize Ring rules and the “gloved boxing contests” under the Queensberry rules. Neither one was a sport.97 Religious people argued that all pugilistic contests were merely the exhibitions of uncontrollable brutalism as long as they involved violence, intended injuries, and the goal of a knockout.98

In middle-class moralists’ eyes, prize fighting lacked science and rationality. A pastor of San Francisco, Dr. Hemphill, argued that it was not a “manly art,” and was simply the “brute’s art.”99 A fighter was a man who was likely to lose self-control in quest of brute. Hemphill argued that a fighter indulged “in a spasm of indignation” and its brutality made a prizefight a “cowardly exhibit.”100 A religious magazine, the *Overland Monthly and Out West Magazine*, also denied the claim of the manly art. The magazine viewed prize fighting simply as “the highest exhibition of brute strength,” which made a “vulgar false hero.”101 An 1892 report of the bout between Peter Maher and Joe Goddard also denied fighters’ claim of prize fighting as a display of scientific skill. The wild fight was never a model of a “scientific play.” The report said, “It was a case of terrific slugging. Science was cast to the wind, and

96 *Chicago Tribune*, May 28, 1893, p. 40.
98 *Southwestern Christian Advocate*, December 10, 1891 p. 1; *Daily Inter-Ocean*, August 26, 1893, p. 16; *New York Times*, November 17, 189, p. 5.
99 *San Francisco Call*, March 15, 1897, p. 4.
101 “ETC,” *Overland Monthly and Out West Magazine* 34, no. 201 (September 1899), 284.
it was now evident to all that brute strength alone would score the victory.”

While fight followers called skilful fighters “professors,” anti-prize fighting reports could not endure the nickname. A report said, “The talk about pugilism as a ‘science’ is on par with the title of ‘professor’ as applied to a boot-black.”

Likewise, California governor R. W. Waterman denied that prize fighting displayed rationality in the name of “ring science.” He was resolute to stop the “so-called scientific contests between so-called scientific athletes,” which in fact relied on simple “brute force.” He contended that “scientific boxing” was “lost in desire to inflict bloody violence on others and earn the enormous rewards.”

Anti-prize fighting discourse also pointed out that the brutal entertainment dissociated not only fighters but also all participants from the world of rationality and pushed them back to the evil world of violent instinct and passion. To moralists, prize fighting aroused the “worst passions of the spectators” and, therefore, corrupted “the taste of their patrons.” As many other middle-class moralists, the Reverend Dr. Reese F. Alsop, a New York pastor, argued that a prizefight was “an encouragement to the brutal element in human nature.” Accordingly, a prizefight was seen as a chance to “make a fortune out of the evil passions of men.”

De Witt of Brooklyn believed that the prizefight imbruted the people. Moralists

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103 Boston Daily Advertise, May 27, 1891, p. 4.
104 Daily Evening Bulletin, June 17, 1890, p. 3. Also see Governor R. W. Waterman to the Attorney General of the California, John Neely Johnson, Daily Alta California, June 17, 1890 p. 4.
105 Daily Picayune, March 12, 1893, p. 4.
argued that “brute instinct in human nature” revived in spectatorship and readership of prize fighting.\textsuperscript{108} In moralists’ eyes, the bloody nature of prize fighting also seemed to incite the crowd toward violence and riotous excess.\textsuperscript{109} Violent and riotous fight fans, who were excited by brutal events, not only symbolically threatened domination in bourgeois society based on self-discipline. They also raised a threat to “public order and protection to persons, rights and property.”\textsuperscript{110}

Anti-prize fighting discourse constructed another cultural binary regarding prize fighting to police class boundaries. According to Elias, the term “civilization,” which was coined in late eighteenth century France, was a self-approving term of the West to proudly address its own ideas about the civilizing process. In America, the term of civilization was often constructed in racial hierarchies. The term constructed whites (especially, Anglo-Saxon) against people of color, who were believed to lack the ability of self-government and self-control.\textsuperscript{111} But the existence of prize fighting among whites challenged the racial binary between civilization and barbarism and the cultural expression of racial superiority in terms of civilization. A Cuban writer, Jose Marti, who witnessed the 1882 fight between Paddy Ryan and John L. Sullivan, viewed the fight as a symbol of the uncivilized and retrogressive nature of American

\textsuperscript{108} St. Paul Globe, November 18, 1900, p. 6.
\textsuperscript{109} New York Daily Tribune, March 21, 1893, p. 2. A report in the New York Times wrote about the “brutalizing effect” of the sport among fight followers. The report described fight followers, who swarmed to Hudson City to witness the bout between Frank P. Slavin and Jake Kilrain, as follows: “It drew to the city more than 20,000 of the worst characters to be found in this country…. They kept the saloons open all night and made the place hideous with their shouting and profanity. They fought among themselves and they assaulted peaceful citizens. Robberies and assaults were committed by the score.” New York Times, August 5, 1893, p. 9.
\textsuperscript{110} Daily Picayune, September 18, 1890, p. 4; New York Times, October 2, 1893, p. 2.
life. In fact, American middle-class people already perceived the problem of the racialized term. A report in the Chicago Tribune admitted that prize fighting was a white sport. The report said, “Russians, Turks, Chinese, Persians, Hindoos, Hottentots, Indians know nothing of prize-ring. It is rooted in Irish and English soil.”

While prize fighting proved the brutality and impulsiveness in “English and Irish blood,” civilization was also a classist term.

When civilization was a term used to police class norms, leisure and sports had special meaning to middle-class people. As early as 1878, an editorial of the Daily Picayune pointed out the inseparable relationship between civilization and pastimes. It argued that “the civilization and morality of any people” might “be correctly measured by their public pastimes.” Civilization became a term to segregate and stigmatize certain popular pastimes, which violated middle-class cultural norms. By judging popular pastimes in relation to civilization, middle-class people tried to construct themselves as not only a morally superior but also a historically progressive class.

113 Chicago Tribune, February 8, 1882, p. 4.
114 The editorial also said, “Nations addicted to brutal and beastly shows are essentially beastly and cruel.” Daily Picayune, May 27, 1878, p. 2.
115 According to Eric Dunning, in Western nations, leisure was a space in which a class binary was constructed. “The self-image of most powerful Western nations” acquired in the connection to racist connotation was constructed not only in relation to what Westerners called the ‘primitive’ or ‘barbaric’ non-Western societies they have conquered, colonized or otherwise subjected to domination, but also in relation to ‘less advanced’, that was less powerful, societies, and outside groups in the West itself.” Dunning, Sport Matters, 42.
116 In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Darwinian evolutionary thought was influential in America. See Carl. M. Degler, In Search of Human Nature: The Decline and Revival of Darwinism in American Social Thought (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 3-31. While many moralists were religious people, they embraced evolutionary thought to justify their ideas. The rhetoric of civilization based on evolutionary thought and moralism affirmed middle-class cultural hegemony.
While moralists related the brutality of prize fighting to natural impulse and instinct, which they ardently tried to control, they also constructed fighters and fight followers as primitive men, dominated by natural impulse. In moralists’ eyes, the “brutalizing” effect of prize fighting blurred the distinction between human beings and animals, and placed men at the low ladder of cultural evolution. In anti-prize fighting discourse, prize fighting stood against civilization, which was a higher stage of evolution. Moralists often defined prize fighting as “a disgrace to civilized communities,” or a “disgrace to the civilization of the age.”

According to the Reverend Dr. T. De Witt, it was impossible for men to witness such brutal exhibitions without being demoralized, whether they took any part in them or not. He argued that in order to prevent the demoralizing effect of “brutalities,” prize fighting had to “pass outside of civilization.”

Silas M. Giddings, who wrote a letter to New York governor Roswell P. Flower to stop the fight between Jim Corbett and Charley Mitchell in 1893, believed that he was fighting against the “outrage upon decency and civilization.” Another moralist, San Francisco businessman John Jicha, also argued that there was “no place in a civilized community” for prizefighting. While he tried to prevent the proposed fight between Corbett and Kid McCoy, Governor James A. Mount of Indiana announced that

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120 *San Francisco Morning Call*, October 23, 1892, p. 8.
prizefighting was “a disgrace to our boasted civilization.”\textsuperscript{121} The Reverend J. Russell Taber also characterized prize fighting supporters as bolstering a lower civilization against high culture.\textsuperscript{122}

Utilizing the evolutionary and self-approving meaning of civilization, moralists often made a cultural connection between the brutality of prize fighting and the bygone past stage of human history. To them, prize fighting was a legacy of the brutal past and an attempt to reverse the civilizing progress of Western societies. Some moralists related prize fighting to the untraceable past and viewed brutality in prize fighting as signifying the degeneration of human beings into a primitive era. The Reverend Dr. T. De Witt of Brooklyn stressed that prize fighting stood against civilization by making human beings comparable but inferior to animals. He argued, “The ox, the bear, and the lion are stronger than man, and the deer can outrun him, so that mere muscular force amounts to nothing unless it can be harnessed for the improvement and elevation of society.”\textsuperscript{123} While R. G. Ingersoll objected to prize fighting as a “savagery,” Dr. E. P. Goodwin, a pastor of Chicago, saw prize fighting as a “relic of the old barbaric times.”\textsuperscript{124} When Nevada actually legalized prize fighting in 1897, the \textit{Daily Nevada State Journal} lamented that Nevada stood disgraced “before an enlightened and moral nation.” The newspaper’s criticism continued, “The Legislature and executives have by this act, turned back the wheels

\textsuperscript{121} \textit{Logansport Journal}, September 24, 1898, p. 5; \textit{Chicago Tribune}, September 24, 1898, p. 1. However, Mount was not the only politician who used the rhetoric of civilization in anti-prize fighting discourse. See \textit{New York Times}, October 1, 1891, p. 5; \textit{Chicago Tribune}, October 24, 1895, p. 12.

\textsuperscript{122} \textit{New York Times}, October 2, 1893, p. 2.


\textsuperscript{124} \textit{Boston Investigator}, August 19, 1891, p. 5; A subscriber to the Editor, \textit{New York Times}, July 31, 1895, p. 6.
of civilization to barbarism.”

For the Reverend Dr. E. Horner Wellman of Brooklyn, prize fighting inherited “the rough cruelty of the past generation.” Unlike other moralists, he did not deny that there might be refined skill for prizefighting. But Wellman still believed that prize fighting, which was originated from military exercises in the ancient times, had “degenerated into a beastly trial of strength and scientific bruising.” Wellman also stressed the retrogressive aspect of prize fighting supporting old Victorians’ distinction of moral and brute. “This is an age of mind rather than muscle: of arbitration, not brute force.”

Moralists also stressed its retrogressive aspect by relating prize fighting to a special historical period, which they regarded as the era of brutalism. The cultural relationship between prize fighting and brutalism of the ancient Rome was a recurring theme. In his 1895 interview, R. G. Ingersoll made an analogy between modern prize fighting and bloody gladiator shows of the old Roman days. He stressed that these fights were “enjoyed only by savages.” In his sermon, “The Prize Ring and Its Brutality; or, Cruelty to Men and Animals,” the Reverend Theodore Clifton of Milwaukee also made an analogy between prize fighting and the Roman gladiatorial contests. According to Clifton, prize fighting not only signified the “degeneracy” of human amusement for centuries. The popularity of prize fighting also signified that

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125 *Daily Nevada State Journal*, January 4, 1897, p. 3.
126 *New York Times*, October 2, 1893, p. 1. In anti-prize fighting discourse, intellectual and moral supremacy was often addressed as a symbol of civilization against physical violence, which prize fighting signified. “It is as we use the mind, and not the physical force, that great questions are eventually settled, and in the degree we decide these question mentally, so is the measure that we leave barbarism behind. As long as brute force is the ultimate appeal there can be no very high civilization; hence the suppression of prize-fighting would tend to the moral, intellectual and social advancement of the race.” *San Francisco Morning Call*, October 23, 1892, p. 8.
humans were cruel by nature and the artificial control of human nature by humanity, pity, and religion was failing. He saw the popularity of prize fighting as a signal of the defeat of civilization.\textsuperscript{128} The analogy between prizefights and cruel and savage Roman gladiatorial shows was also supported by Archbishop John Ireland.\textsuperscript{129} A reporter for the \textit{Francis Messenger} related prize fighting to another dark age. He argued that the prize fight made Brooklyn seem “to have swung backward a thousand years into the Middle Age.”\textsuperscript{130}

Charlotte Perkins Gilman, a feminist, stressed the incongruity of prize fighting in a civilized society in another way. She made prize fighting an anachronism by constructing a binary between barbarism and civilization based on geography, not the flow of time. To Gilman, “the lure of the boxing hall signaled civilization in decay.” She regretted that “decent men were abandoning the cardinal virtue of self-restraint when they bought tickets for a boxing match.” Gilman defined prize fighting as a “scene of savagery which would not have been out of place in the heart of Africa.”\textsuperscript{131}

2. The Diversification of Middle-Class Culture and the Reconstruction of Class

In the late nineteenth century, middle-class moralists’ anti-prize fighting discourse policed class boundaries and expanded them through the construction of

\textsuperscript{128} Milwaukee Sentinel, September 5, 1892, p. 7.
\textsuperscript{130} Quoted in New York Times, October 8, 1893, p. 12. Also see North American, September 3, 1892, p. 4.
cultural and moral binaries regarding prize fighting. But, in the unprecedented social transformation of the late nineteenth century, internal conflicts in American middle-class hegemonic culture increased. In the first half of the nineteenth century, Victorian middle-class men constructed their manhood on refined manners, rationality, self-discipline, moral seriousness, and work ethics. Victorian hegemonic culture required a man to prove his manhood by winning individual competitions on market. Self-help and economic independence was a sign of grown manhood. Accordingly, a Victorian man had to abstain from all dissipating desires and activities and train himself to have strong character for self-discipline to win intense individual competition. For this reason, in the antebellum era, hard-working middle-class folk generally opposed the alternative culture of the sporting fraternity, which derived their manly self-image through vile amusement.\(^{132}\) The Victorian era was one in which men’s pale face and lean body were highly valued.

However, by the mid-nineteenth century, some middle-class men were already disillusioned with Victorian restraints. The romantic idealization of primitivism began from “self-criticism about civilization of incipient industrialization,” which was characterized by increasing bureaucracy, industrial smoke, too much comfort, and the clock-dominated lifestyle.\(^ {133}\) Thomas Hughes’s novel, *Tom Brown’s Schooldays* (1857), became a bestseller in America and heralded muscular Christianity for


middle-class men. Some famous figures like Oliver Wendell Holms, A. A. Livermore, and Thomas Wentworth Higginson became the missionaries of physical training. The idolization of old Western simplicity and Western heroes followed. The intellectual trend already laid a foundation for the idealization of physical culture among middle-class men even before large-scale industrialization and urbanization in the late nineteenth century.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, Victorian manhood, which was based on the principles of rugged individualism and economic independence, became an unfulfilled promise. Small-scale, competitive capitalism declined. Between 1870 and 1910, the proportion of self-employed middle-class men dropped from 67 percent to 37 percent. While corporations increasingly controlled the economy, a recurring round of severe economic depressions between 1873 and 1895 resulted in bankruptcies of self-denying small businessmen. The self-made man, with his firm sense of personal autonomy and economic independence, gave way to the bureaucrat or manager and the salesman, who felt all the more enclosed and confined in the corporations that were growing ever larger. Like their poorer counterparts, middle-class men began to see leisure and sports as primary spaces where their manliness could be displayed.

135 Thomas Wentworth Higginson, Outdoor Papers (Boston: Tickno and Fields, 1863), 195-196.
Other social problems also made middle-class men disillusioned with Victorian ideals of manhood. Middle-class men’s ideal of reflective and rational manhood was eroding when their social authority faced an onslaught not only from big capitalists but also from (immigrant) working-class men and freed black men competing with them for control over the masculine arena of politics. Women increasingly penetrated middle-class men’s place. The Women’s Movement also challenged their authority. Losing social authority and their own public spaces, many middle-class men searched for a new way to prove their manhood by straying from Victorian cultural norms.

Middle-class men began to appreciate traditional masculine traits and valorize primitive and physical masculinity by linking (Victorian) civilization to feminization. Middle-class men complained that a belief in Victorian middle-class women’s moral superiority allowed them to oversee education and overcivilize men. “Effeminate” men who had lost their masculine traits would fail to regain power in the social, political, and economic spheres. Accordingly, to many middle-class men, civilization was increasingly seen as bondage and artificiality against a “natural man.” The idolization of a natural man took different shapes—preservation, indifference to looks, the articulation of the frontier theory, the popularity of Western novels, the curiosity

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of the noble savage and Indian Warriors, and outdoor and sports activities. Among them, sports and outdoor activities emerged as an important space of male socialization in the 1880s and 1890s. Many middle-class men made sporting activities a symbolic attempt to regain superiority in political, economic, and social spheres by translating physical and athletic superiority to middle-class men’s domination over other social groups. As a result, while the Victorian man in the mid-nineteenth century appreciated sobriety, self-control, self-discipline, mental training, strong character for the achievement of economic independence, middle-class men of the late nineteenth century appreciated martial spirit, physical virility, and (properly controlled) aggressiveness.

Middle-class men subscribed to sporting ideologies to protect the newly found male space when being known as an athlete was still “to be tainted with something of the reputation of a rough.” Muscular Christianity played an important role in turning men’s need of physical strength to legitimized desire. While the advocates of Muscular Christianity tried to make the church a more masculine institution, many Protestant clergies changed their negative attitudes about bodily exercise and even

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celebrated athletic virility.\textsuperscript{142} Some ministers and religious people advocated even amateur boxing as a sport for young men.\textsuperscript{143} For instance, the YMCA introduced boxing programs and held tournaments in the 1880s. While middle-class men were obsessed with traditional and physical masculinity and searched for sporting experiences for the valorization of new masculinity, some religious people began to see manly traits in prizefighters.

In his sermon a day before the match between John L. Sullivan and Jake Kilrain in 1889, a pastor admitted that the two fighters gave religious people a lesson: Look, next, at the courage of these two men. We hear of Sullivan’s boasting and Kilrain’s self-confidence…. Well, it takes courage to walk into a prize ring and stand up before a human catapult, and take the chance of having your jawbone knocked out of recognition. But did you ever hear of prize fighters ever failing to come to time?...

Take another lesson from their courage, Christians!… Look at the toughness of these two men…. They are not to be paralyzed by a scratch. They stand up as that man in Brooklyn did and take ox-felling blows. What contempt these men in their toughness have for suffering!\textsuperscript{144} Another minister, the Reverend S. J. McPherson, was more brazen in advocating prize fighting. In 1892, he argued that there was a “good and bad side to pugilism.” He said, “I think that the chief objection to prize fighting is that it tends to make with less proof upon brutality: but it is, to my mind, better for

\textsuperscript{142} Putney, \textit{Muscular Christianity}, 54.
\textsuperscript{143} \textit{National Police Gazette}, January 28, 1888, p. 7.
humanity to have the men of the world leaning toward a condition tinged with brutality rather than effeminacy.”  

Physical educators and medical experts also helped sporting middle-class men criticize the old binary between mind (morals and intelligence) and physicality (the athletic body) in middle-class cultural ideals. In the first half of the nineteenth century, Americans feared the emergence of European-style hierarchized society. They distrusted the educational system, which produced professionals. Many states also repealed licensing laws. However, in the 1880s, urbanization and industrialization propelled professionalization. While licensing laws revived, rigorous training for professionals was introduced. Honor and authority attached to professional jobs increased. While the new middle classes emerged through the professional education of public administration, engineering, and social science, medical and physical experts gained high authority. The sports craze and professionalization represented that anti-intellectualism and rationalization coexisted in middle-class hegemonic culture. Two conflicting elements differently valorized primitive and physical masculinity.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, modern professionals in medical science and physical education were never value-free. For instance, medical

145 Daily Inter-Ocean, September 12, 1892, p. 5.
science and physical education were still classist disciplines. They supported the balanced development of intelligence, health, and morals.\textsuperscript{148} They were also sexist disciplines stressing physical differences between sexes and valued the male body. In 1905, a famous sportsman, Lou Houseman, complained that science had been used to stigmatize prize fighting and fighters.\textsuperscript{149} It was true that some physiologists had variously stressed a fighters’ intellectual inferiority. Nevertheless, Houseman oversimplified the interests of medical experts and physical educators. These professionals, who increasingly separated their knowledge from religious moralism, were changing the ways the fighters’ bodies were perceived. In the 1880s, these experts were eager to conduct examinations of famous fighters. These examinations tended to make the boxer’s body a symbol of ideal physical masculinity, which was naturally developed and constructed by training.

Medical experts’ valorization of the boxer’s body reflected many middle-class sporting men’s view of the male body. While they celebrated sporting activities as a means to gain new masculinity, middle-class men also started to see their muscled and highly trained body as a symbolic container of their regained power and authority.\textsuperscript{150} Accordingly, among middle-class men, the male body was an object of surveillance and classification. John Boyle O’Reilly asked his readers to “visit a Turkish bath to find abundant evidence of the muscular collapse.” More and more middle-class men viewed “fatness and softness” as “sensuous expressions, or

\begin{thebibliography}{10}
\bibitem{StPaulGlobe1903} \textit{St. Paul Globe}, November 9, 1903, p. 5.
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symptoms of disease,” and admired “the firm and massive muscles” of sportsmen.151 To O’Reilly, John L. Sullivan, who was the heavyweight champion, possessed the ideal male body.152

In the 1880s, it was not only O’Reilly and other sporting men who saw Sullivan as a perfect symbol of new masculinity. Medical experts and physical educators also constructed Sullivan’s body as a symbol of new masculinity. Dr. Louis F. Sayre pointed out that Sullivan’s body “embodied strength, vitality and activity.” After his examination of Sullivan, Dr. Henry Lessing said, “As to Sullivan, I regard him physically as a wonderful specimen of manhood…. These [muscles used in his action in the ring] are not only perfect in size and proportion, but also admirable in quality and endurance. Much of this is due to sagacious training, but more, to my mind, is due to inheritance.”153 A famous physical educator, Dr. Dudley A. Sargent, who had a great interest in the muscular development of athletes’ bodies, also measured Sullivan’s height, neck, chest, breadth, calves, ankles, feet, biceps, and lung capacity. Sargent believed that Sullivan was a magnificent specimen of physical manhood. While Sullivan was still overweight from his unorganized lifestyle, Sargent scientifically advocated that Sullivan’s “sluggish and indolent” lifestyle was a way “men of power” conserved “their energy for great occasion to fully arouse them from their apparent stupor.” Sargent also affirmed gender order and blurred class boundaries among men through his scientific discourse of Sullivan’s body. As a

151 John Boyle O’Reilly, Ethics of Boxing and Manly Sport (Boston: Ticknor and Company, 1888), 102, xvi
152 Ibid., 77-78.
153 Quoted in William E. S. Fales, “A Careful Analysis of the Pugilistic Champion’s Merits,” Atchison Daily Globe, October 10, 1887, p. 3.
physical educator, he never objected to women’s physical activities for heath, however, he wanted women to be healthy as the reproducers of a masculine race. Sullivan’s bulk came from mother, not from his father, who was a small man. Sargent used Sullivan’s body to address the importance of women’s role as a reproducer. Reflecting Sullivan’s case, Sargent argued that a woman, “usually considered the weaker vessel physically … impressed her progeny with the strong points of her own physique.” Sargent stressed women’s special role as the producers of the “brawn and sinew” that conquered both “opponents and environments” and sustained the “race.”\textsuperscript{154} Accordingly, women’s social role would be realized only through male physicality.

The champion boxer’s body continued to be a physical wonder in the 1890s. After conducting a physical examination of Jim Corbett in 1897, Carson physician Dr. J. Guinan proclaimed that “his whole physical machinery” was “in splendid condition.” Guinan concluded that Corbett was “the most perfect specimen of physical manhood.”\textsuperscript{155} Sargent also measured the next heavyweight champion, Jim Jeffries in 1899. He concluded that Jeffries was “one of the best proportioned men” that he had measured.\textsuperscript{156} At the same year, Jeffries became an object of another physical examination by Dr. J. W. Seaver, director of the Yale gymnasium, who constructed Jeffries as a great symbol of physical manhood. In his examination of Jeffries before the fight with Gus Ruhlin, another San Francisco physician saw the


\textsuperscript{155} \textit{San Francisco Call}, March 6, 1897, p. 5.

\textsuperscript{156} \textit{Chicago Tribune}, February 2, 1899, p. 4.
essence of manliness in the champion. “It is marvelous…. He will travel miles and miles over the ranges loaded down with rifle and hunter’s paraphernalia and frequently come back to camp with a dead deer strapped on his shoulders. Instead of complaining of fatigue, as an ordinary individual would do, he will jump into a game of baseball with all the zest of a boy just out of school, or he will go into the gymnasium and put in an hour or two bag punching and boxing, as if his exertions for the day were merely beginning.”

Medical discourse supported the convergence of masculinities stressing fighters’ physical manhood and policing gender boundaries. However, medical experts also projected middle-class men’s concept of rationalized and disciplined masculinity into a boxer’s body not to stigmatize a fighter, but to advocate him. In so doing, they still both blurred and policed class boundaries. Dr. A. P. O’Brien, who examined Corbett in 1897, announced that Corbett was the “most perfect specimen of physical manhood” without “one single flaw in his anatomy.” According to O’Brien, Corbett’s body was constructed “through a hard and persistent course of training.”

In his examination of Battling Nelson, Sargent stressed that, while he was a typically aggressive fighter, Nelson had high intelligence. He believed that Nelson’s high forehead and brain size attested to it. Accordingly, while he tried to find exceptional features from successful boxers’ anatomy, Sargent also attributed boxers’ success to their ability to think quickly and fast. To Sargent, athleticism made a boxer not

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158 *Denver Evening Post*, February 13, 1897, p.7.
simply a model of physical manhood but also a model of discipline and mind control. “Nelson is a chap who is not easily excited. It takes more than a good strong blow to make him mad. I believe he could do almost anything under almost any circumstances, and still keep his head. That may be attributed to his heart and also to the fact that he has trained his mind to obey the orders of his brain.” While he still stressed the role of inheritance, Sargent also maintained that Nelson’s athletic body was not naturally given. It was a result of constant training. Medical discourse made successful boxers the exceptional exemplars of manhood and disproved middle-class moralists’ claim of prize fighting as a self-destructive act.

Physical aggressiveness and martial spirit penetrated the middle-class cultural spaces in the rapid rise of interest in sports fraternities and intercollegiate athletics in the 1880s and 1890s. On sporting fields, middle-class men turned to the primitive sources of manhood with new regard; the marital virtues attracted admiration and competitive impulse was transformed into male virtues. The valorization of male physicality and aggressiveness decreased a distinction not only between men and animals but also between men of different classes. In this process, the leisure pursuits of late nineteenth century middle-class men and working-class men “paralleled one

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161 Rotundo, *American Manhood*, 222. 239.
another in their separation from the feminine domestic world.\textsuperscript{162} While middle-class men appreciated the self-conscious and aggressive expression of physical masculinity, violence became common among middle-class and working-class men on sporting fields. Traditional class boundaries were contested when many middle-class men started to advocate football and “de-evolutionary” masculinity.\textsuperscript{163} College football allowed middle-class men to display aggressive masculine traits, which had been attributed to working-class men and the brutal past. Accordingly, it emerged as a social problem for many middle-class moralists in the 1890s.\textsuperscript{164} Harvard professor Charles Eliot Norton saw football as “the invasion of modern barbarism and vulgarity.” He criticized that “this football generation” did not appreciate old values like “moderation,” “self-control,” and “temperate living.”\textsuperscript{165}

But middle-class men became more permissive of martial spirit and attendant aggressiveness and violence. To them, effeminacy was worse than brutality. A famous amateur sportsman, Casper Whitney, compared football to a mimic battlefield and advocated the martial-spirited sport.\textsuperscript{166} Walter Camp saw the gridiron as a testing place to prepare young men for wars of the business world.\textsuperscript{167}

\textsuperscript{163} John Pettegrew, \textit{Brute in Suits; Male Sensibility in America, 1890-1920} (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), 129.
\textsuperscript{164} For instance, \textit{The Nation}’s editor, E. L. Godkin, was one of strong critics of football. See “The Athletic Craze,” \textit{Nation} 57 (December 7 1893), 422-423; “Football and Manners,” \textit{Nation} 59 (December 27 1894), 476; “Football Again” \textit{Nation},57 (November 30 1893), 406.
ridiculed moralists’ cries against the brutality of football. Roosevelt argued that football was the place where feminized men were converted to brawny ones and “masculine supremacy” was “incontestable.” These football advocates made moralists’ cultural and moral binary obsolete. In fact, moralists’ anti-football discourse also ironically identified all men as impulsive and violent, and admitted that discipline and rationality was artificial and acquired.

However, while some football advocates seemed to revolt against old class norms, they were never free from a classist’s perspective. Football advocates were often critical of contemporary civilization and obsessed with gender differences. For this reason, they embraced violence and aggressive masculinity in sports. Nevertheless, they still viewed football as a means to cultivate national and business leaders. The process of the convergence of masculinities through the valorization of physicality, violence, primitivism, and martial spirit on sporting fields did not totally blur class distinctions among men. The dualism was also reflected among many middle-class amateur boxing lovers.

The popularity of boxing among middle-class men was another sign of the convergence of masculinities. However, middle-class boxing lovers’ attempts to construct the distinction between amateur and professional boxing reflected class divisions. In England, the term “amateur” originally meant middle- and upper-class gentlemen who played common sports in a class-conscious way. Fair play was the

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watchword of the gentlemen amateur. Amateurs never subscribed to the idea that winning was the only thing. They learned how to lose, as well as how to win with dignity, by downgrading the mere winning of games. Practicing too much undermined natural grace and talent. Gentlemen were not supposed to toil and sweat for their laurels. The supporters of amateurism criticized the fanaticism and violence of working-class sports and the seriousness and intensity with which it was taken by members of their own class. In the early nineteenth century, the terms “gentlemen (amateurs)” and “players (professionals)” also came to distinguish middle-class players from lower-class players, who pursued material rewards from their play. In the mid-nineteenth century, amateurism was introduced into American universities. American amateur sportsmen denounced excessive training and competitiveness which were the trademarks of professional athletes. The American Athletic Union, which was founded in 1880 by amateur sportsmen, ardently policed class boundaries between amateurs and professionals.

While boxing had a working-class origin, it was incorporated into middle-class amateurism in the late nineteenth century. For this reason, many middle-class educators still saw this appropriated cultural form as a suspicious sport. Boxing clubs in colleges often faced a ban from school authorities. Nevertheless, while they still viewed boxing with reservation, some physical educators believed that amateur boxing could be distinguishable from professional fighting. N. S. Shaler of Harvard University argued that the “violent form of exercise” was valuable training during

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times of peace. He valued contact sports which cultivated “swift judgment, endurance, and self-confidence” and achieved “the educational value of the diversion.” Shaler also argued that all contact sports had to combine “rude strength” with modern rules to “limit the importance of mere brute force in contest” and “increase the value of the skill in individual action and perfection of combination among players.” While Shaler still believed that pugilism (amateur boxing) had less merit and more brutality, he did not deny that it became a sport as a display of science.

While they disagreed with moral conservatives’ unconditional aversion to all types of violence in sports, amateur-boxing supporters also questioned the value of prize fighting as a sport. They tried to distinguish amateur boxing from professional fighting and policed class boundaries. Nevertheless, a cultural binary between classes was toppling in the artificial distinction between amateur boxing and prize fighting. While working-class professional sportsmen, who viewed winning as everything, had valued skill over character building, amateur boxing lovers constructed amateur boxing as a safe display of skill and science and relegated professional fighting merely as a “display of brute.” These amateur sportsmen already strayed from old amateurism and partly embraced working-class professionals’ ethos to make their game class-specific.

While the popularity of amateur boxing rose among middle-class men, the rules, which presided over amateur boxing contests, were designed to make the game

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a display of skill and science and distinguish amateur matches from fierce, brutal, and slugging prizefights. Amateur boxing was based on the Queensberry rules, which had some provisions to lessen fatality and injury and make sparring a display of skill. Under the Queensberry rules, three-minute rounds with one-minute rests divided a match. The rules encouraged a limited number of rounds and allowed a referee’s decision. The rules introduced the middle-class concept of time and made a match similar to a daily work schedule in an office and a factory. Furthermore, the new set of rules prohibited wrestling, which made games in brutes’ advantage and prevented the development of skill. When the rules were accepted in English clubs, the “underlying motive” of the rules also marked a “distinction between professional and amateur.” English middle-class sportsmen welcomed the new set of rules as “less prolonged and more humane in their conditions than the prize fights of the old.” In this sense, the new rules reformed old fighting “in the name of bourgeois manliness.”

However, in the late 1880s, some American professional boxers used the Queensberry rules to maintain knockout matches under legal protection and pretended their slugging matches were scientific boxing matches. Amateur boxing supporters continued to revise the Queensberry rules to construct a distinction between amateur boxing and professional fighting. The Amateur Athletic Union Rules, which was the
most popular set of rules for amateur boxing contests, were designed to make a match a safe physical exercise. The rules required boxers to put on more than eight ounce gloves. The rules also limited the number of rounds to three and specified weight divisions to prevent a mismatch. While the Queensberry rules did not clarify who was a winner when the bout ended without a knockout, the AAA rules designated a contest purely as a point game. The regulation 13 said, “In all competitions the decision shall be given in favor of the competitor who displays the best style and obtains the greatest number of points. The points shall be: For attack, direct clean hits with the knuckles of either hand, on any part of the front or sides of the head, or the body above the belt; defense, guarding, slipping, ducking, counter-hitting or getting away. Where points are otherwise equal, consideration to be given the man who does most of the leading off.” The rules clearly valued skill associated with not only offense but also defense, and devalued a knockout punch and the aggressive lead. The rules placed science over power and more clearly distinguished amateur boxing contests from professional matches.

David R. Blanchard’s American Fair-Play Rules was also popularized in the late 1880s. Like the AAA rules, the rules had many safety regulations to prevent injuries to the contestants. The rules prohibited “wrestling, clinching, hugging, butting, or anything done to injure an opponent, except by fair and manly boxing.” The rules also prohibited any attempt to knock out an opponent. Blanchard specified

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that his set of rules aimed to make a boxing contest a display of pure skill.\textsuperscript{177} A journalist, John Boyle O’Reilly, acclaimed Blanchard’s rules as the American rules that governed a “fair and manly pugilistic contest” by ruling out “brutality and cowardice.”\textsuperscript{178}

Individual clubs also continued to revise the Queensberry rules and the AAA rules. In 1889, a famous amateur athletic club of California, the Olympic Club, published a set of rules that governed its amateur contests. “The points for decisions” was “based upon direct clean hits with the knuckles and for defensive moves such as guarding, slipping, ducking, counter-hitting or getting away.”\textsuperscript{179} These sets of amateur rules tried to expel the style of slugging (simple toe-to-toe hammering), which was popular in professional fights. As a style, slugging devalued skill (especially defensive skill) and encouraged reckless aggressiveness. With their rules, amateur boxing supporters constructed rationalized and disciplined virility as hegemonic masculinity against the fighting style of professional boxing. In a cultural phenomenon of the convergence of masculinities, class was still diversely constructed in sporting activities in relation to ideal masculinities.

In the late 1880s, middle-class men had more opportunities to witness professional boxers in the ring when clubs brought fights to their clubhouses and public exhibitions became popular. Accordingly, many middle-class boxing lovers emulated the aggressive and non-scientific style of slugging. It was problematic to

\textsuperscript{177} Thomas S. Andrews, \textit{Ring Battles of Centuries: Only and Most Complete Record of the Roped Arena from Figg, 1719 to the Present Day} (Milwaukee, T.S. Andrews, 1914), 57-58. 
\textsuperscript{178} O’Reilly, \textit{Ethnics of Boxing and Manly Sport}, 90. 
\textsuperscript{179} \textit{Daily Alta California}, March 4, 1889, p. 8.
boxing instructors. In fact, these boxing instructors, most of whom were former professional fighters, were class aspirants. Hired by athletic clubs, they were proud of their association with respectable pupils.  

Accommodating to the middle-class view of sports, boxing instructors tried to elevate the status of amateur boxing as a character-building sport and a display of skill and science. For instance, Prof. Alf Austin believed that there was a “wide distinction between a prize fight between two professionals and a boxing competition between two amateurs.” Concerned that that amateurs’ styles were increasingly “coarse” and “brutal” like those of prizefighters, Austin argued that “skill and refinement alone” rendered amateur boxing “worthy of being classed as an art.” These instructors hoped that gentlemen in clubs internalized a certain style that displayed science and self-control.

Some middle-class boxing lovers faithfully practiced boxing in a class-conscious way as boxing instructors expected. They valued science and made the ring a testing place of self-control. Edward A. Moseley was a member of the Cribb Club in Boston. His friend James Morgan saw an ideal amateur boxer in him. Morgan acclaimed him as the best boxer in the club, but Moseley showed more in the ring. Morgan wrote, “Nothing so inculcates self-control as sparring. The humiliation of a blow is hard to eradicate, but a boxer quickly realizes that it is essential not to lose his temper, no matter how hard hit.” In this respect, Moseley’s performance in sparring

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181 A. Austin, “Theory and Practice of Boxing,” *Outing*, 15, no. 6 (March 1890), 413.

182 A. Austin, “A Plea for Style in Boxing,” *Outing*, 19, no. 2 (November 1891), 140.

matches was idealistic. His self-discipline in the ring symbolized the character of his class and the revelation of a gentleman’s behavior out of the ring. It clarified differences between a middle-class gentleman and a working-class thug. “A man who can receive a blow in the face and preserve his equilibrium, is not apt to get angry, although he may simulate it, when called out of his name; neither, if he is a sparrer, conscious of his power and skill, does he feel called upon to whip the aggressor to prove himself not a coward.”

In the 1890s, amateur boxing supporters ardently constructed amateur boxing contests as displays of skill and science and a test of self-control to distinguish them from prizefights, which were seen as a display of brute. In 1892, R. C. Macdonald’s Boston A. A. rules were another attempt to maintain a distinction between an amateur boxing contests and a professional fight, which was a “stimulating … paying exhibition.” The set of rules were designed to make men spar as “gentlemen” and show only “superior science.” Macdonald clarified that contests be decided entirely on scientific points under his rules, and the question of aggressiveness, endurance, condition, or strength would not be considered. While McDonald knew that his rules were actually based on the “pre-Sullivan method (the rules of professional fighting),” he seemed to successfully draw a distinction between two types of boxing. Professional boxers expressed strong antagonism toward his rules.

Amateur boxing fans clarified a distinction between two types of boxing. Congressman John R. Russell argued that boxing was an old tradition of English-speaking people, but he advocated only amateur boxing, which was free from the “brutality” and “immorality” in professional fighting.\textsuperscript{186} In 1891, Police Judge Hale Rix of San Francisco, who was an amateur boxer himself, lent his support to moralists’ cries against prize fighting. Rix defined prize fighting simply as a display of brute force, “There is no good that come out of it [prize fighting]. I think it is brutish, cruel, and inhuman, and has no place among true sports.” Like conservative moralists, Rix also depicted fight followers as a “gang of loafers and hoodlums” and criticized the demoralizing effect of prize fighting among young men.\textsuperscript{187} A San Francisco physician, Dr. R. Beverly Cole, admitted that the obedience of animalistic instinct (fighting spirit) was not immoral. While Cole supported amateur boxing, he had an “unqualified opposition to prizefighting,” which cultivated “the brutal nature to the exclusion of those qualities” which elevated the man and distinguished him from the brute.\textsuperscript{188}

In the twentieth century, amateur boxing had enormous popularity among middle-class men. Amateur sportsmen continued to construct their boxing contests as exhibitions for “point” and a “demonstration of skill” as opposed to a prizefight, which meant a display of brute force and a bloody spectacle for money and

\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{186} National Police Gazette, January 28, 1888, p. 7.
\item\textsuperscript{187} Daily Evening Bulletin, February 23, 1891, p. 2.
\item\textsuperscript{188} San Francisco Morning Call, October 23, 1892, p. 8. Also see Overland Monthly and Out West Magazine, 34, no. 201 (September 1899), 284.
\end{itemize}
Straying from old amateurism, amateur boxing supporters imbued the ethos of the era of industrialization and scientification to an emotional and violent sport to distinguish their sporting practices from prize fighting. In so doing, amateur boxing supporters continued to value rationalized and controlled aggressiveness and policed class boundaries. However, their attempt to construct a new cultural binary was continually contested.

While at the turn of the century the boom of amateur boxing did not totally eliminate cultural differences between middle-class and working-class men, there were also divisions within middle-class culture. In fact, the era of progressivism from the 1890s to the 1910s did not provide favorable environments for commercial sports. Many of progressives were still moralists. In the 1890s and 1900s, they successfully attacked political machines and grasped power in many municipal and state governments. Moralists and reform-minded politicians repressed prize fighting and cock fighting, which machines had protected. Moralists finally won a decisive victory in New York. The Lewis law, which became effective in 1900, prohibited all types of boxing contests in the state. Several states followed the step. The passage of the law aimed to protect middle-class cultural hegemony but also clarified cultural

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189 *Chicago Tribune*, April 24, 1907, p. 8.
190 For instance, David S. Hill of Clark University admitted that boxing was suitable for an educational purpose for young men. However, he argued that in order to make amateur boxing educational, there had to be a “difference between boxing as a sport and exercise for gentlemen with decent manners, and prize fighting.” According to Hill, amateur boxing utilized “primitive tendencies.” Nevertheless, it had to control brutality and focus on the cultivation of skill for bodily practice to fulfill its educational function. David S. Hill, “An Experiment with Pugilism,” *Pedagogical Seminary*, 13, no. 1 (March 1906), 128.
differences among middle-class men. Middle-class amateur boxing supporters in New York unified to repeal the Lewis law, which prohibited even amateur tournaments. In 1911, their lobby ended up in the Frawley Law, which allowed non-decision bouts in the state.

The diversity of middle-class culture became clear when some amateur boxing supporters redefined such concepts as “man” and “civilization,” and expressed ambivalent attitudes toward professional fighting. Their worldview fluctuated between the idolization of a natural man and their social responsibility as rational and respectable middle-class men. In middle-class culture, class boundaries were constructed, and, at the same time, became unstable in interactions with gender boundaries.

The famous Irish American journalist, John Boyle O’Reilly, already expressed an ambivalent attitude toward prize fighting in the late 1880s. As an ardent advocate of athletic masculinity, O’Reilly was an “all-round athlete” and a “fine boxer.” While O’Reilly argued that gloved boxing was “the best of all exercises for physical development,” he criticized the professionalism in (bare-knuckle) prize fighting and its “evil association of betting and gambling.” According to him, prize fighting was appealing to “the low lives of too many of its professional followers.” As many other amateur boxing supporters, O’Reilly wanted amateur boxing to be a skillful

192 Evening World, February 9, 1900, p. 8.
193 Amateur boxing supporters tried to distance themselves from both moralists and prizefighters. Caspar Whitney, “The Sportsman’s Viewpoint,” Outing, 39, no. 6 (March 1902), 731.
195 O’Reilly, Ethics of Boxing and Manly Sport, 166. xvii.
display of art, which was distinguishable from prize fighting. Nevertheless, he did not
suppose an unbridgeable binary between the amateur boxing contest and the
professional gloved fight. To him, a prizefight might be brutal but beautiful. “The
bruise and the scars and the blood” were “the price of a precious and beautiful thing.”
He said, “The professional boxer who fights an honest fight, with skill and courage,
and without the savagery of bare hands or cestus, is not, thereby, a moral monster and
an outrageous example.” O’Reilly went on to say that prize fighting had even moral
effects. A clean prizefight was the “supreme test and tension of such precious living
qualities as courage, temper, endurance, bodily strength, clear-mindedness in exited
action.” According to O’Reilly, whether professional or amateur, a clean and skillful
fight was a “manly exercise.” O’Reilly saw an ideal model of a courageous and
skillful boxer in his countryman John L Sullivan.

While the redefinition of man and civilization became popular among middle-
class men, some middle-class men’s ambivalence toward prize fighting had a
theoretical basis at the turn of the century. In 1899, Thorstein Veblen argued that
contemporary sports were a residual manifestation of the predatory temperament in
human beings. But many middle-class men, who were influenced by social
Darwinism celebrated “primitive” virility and idealized a “natural man” in sports.
For these middle-class men, Brook Adams’s *The Law of Civilization and Decay* (1896) was inspiring. Adams argued that, like animals, human beings almost invariably obeyed an instinct at the moment of action and reflected after action ceased. According to Adams, human societies were originally “forms of animal life,” which were endowed with the “energetic material.” When a race entered on the phase of economic competition to accumulate wealth, it had reached “the limit of its martial energy.” As a result, intellectualism prevailed and “the emotional, the marital, and the artistic type of manhood” decayed. Racial decline was a result of decayed manhood. Adams, who was critical of Victorian and modern civilization, found a solution in the revitalization of aggressive and primitive masculinity.

Likewise, patrician Henry Cabot Lodge also felt that all civilizations were “highly artificial.” He said, “From the most sacred rights of humanity to trivial questions of manners and of dress, all is artificial.” Lodge never argued that human beings had to sink back to the condition of the men of the caves, but he believed that primitivism had to be preserved in men to overcome overcivilization and advance a nation and a race. As a social Darwinist and expansionist, he justified that a nation and a race had to revive aggressive masculinity for their survival. To Lodge, manly

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In America, William Graham Sumner (1840-1910) became a main supporter. Social Darwinism supported anti-modern masculinists and expansionists.


201 Ibid., x-xi

sports, which cultivated natural desire for victory and marital spirit, became the proper testing place of aggressive masculinity.\textsuperscript{203}

The criticism of contemporary civilization gained popularity, especially among the Anglo-Saxon gentility, who worried about racial decline. Figures like Brook Adams, Henry Cabot Lodge, Henry Adams, and Theodore Roosevelt raised a banner of “strenuous life” against “overcivilization” and the “genteel tradition,” and embraced athleticism as a solution to national and racial problems.\textsuperscript{204} While they were strong advocates of manly sports, especially football, the motto of “strenuous life” did not make them have the same opinion about prize fighting. A historian James Parton shared the critical view of contemporary civilization, but he objected to brutal prize fighting. Nevertheless, as a social Darwinist and masculinist, he did not think that the brutal sport would be extinguished. He said, “The recent revival of interest in prize fights may be a reaction against over culture in special directions, which tend to effeminacy and the diminution of the human animal.” However, Parton was still a classist. He believed that plenty of men in Harvard University were “far better animals than Sullivan and Kilrain.”\textsuperscript{205}

However, while another historian, Theodore Roosevelt, shared the view of civilization with Parton, he had an more ambivalent and even conflicting attitude toward professional fighting. Like historian Frederic Jackson Turner, Roosevelt

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{203} Ibid., 293.
\textsuperscript{205} \textit{National Police Gazette}, January 28, 1888, p. 7.
\end{footnotes}
constructed the West and the westward movement as an engine of American civilization. In so doing, he translated cultural simplicity into an ideal national character and criticized the East-led civilization, which was characterized by commerce, refinement, intellectualism, materialism, and feminity.\textsuperscript{206} As His \textit{Winning of the West} represented, in Roosevelt’s civilizing process, the greatness of a nation was based not on moral teaching and modern technology but on primitive and aggressive masculinity, which could subordinate barbarians.\textsuperscript{207} Roosevelt, who viewed aggressive masculinity as a basis of civilization, was an ardent supporter of manly sports. He valued football, rowing, sailing, wrestling, and boxing.

To Roosevelt, boxing was a first-class sport for young men and a “vigorously, manly pastime,” which had a “distinct moral and physical value.” Roosevelt defined boxing as encouraging “essential virtues like courage, hardihood [sic], endurance, self-control.”\textsuperscript{208} By stressing the moral values of boxing, Roosevelt stuck to old middle-class sporting ideals and tried to find a balance between natural man and rational man. Moreover, as many other middle-class sportmen, he did not embrace professional sports. Roosevelt argued that professionalism was the “curse of manly athletic sport, and the chief obstacle to its healthy development.” Roosevelt also criticized a prizefight as a “brutal and degrading” event. He was concerned about the brutalizing effect of the sport. “The people who attend it, and make a hero of the prize

\textsuperscript{207} Rudyard Kipling’s “White Man’s Burden” reflected American middle-class masculinists’ aggressive nationalism and racism. Rudyard Kipling, “The White Man’s Burden,” \textit{McClure’s Magazine} 12, no. 4 (February 1899), 290.
\textsuperscript{208} Theodore Roosevelt, \textit{An Autobiography} (New York: The McMillan Company, 1913), 44.
fighter are … men who hover on the border-line of criminality: and those who are not
are speedily brutalized, and are never rendered more manly. They form as ignorable a
body as do the kindred frequenters of rat-pit and cock-pit.”209

However, while he criticized professional fighting, Roosevelt often expressed
his fondness for prize fighting. He could not agree with moralists who objected to
prize fighting purely on account of its brutality. He said, “I have never been able to
sympathize with the outcry against prize-fighters. The only objection I have to the
prize ring is crookedness that has attended its commercial development. Outside of
this I regard boxing, whether professional or amateur, as a first-class sport, and I do
not regard it as brutalizing.” Roosevelt sometimes constructed an egalitarian concept
of men turning attention to manly qualities in professional fights and denouncing
hypocritical and brutalizing modern civilization. “Of course matches can be
conducted under conditions that make them brutalizing. But this is true of football
games and of most other rough and vigorous sports. Most certainly prize fighting is
not half as brutalizing or demoralizing as many forms of big business and of the legal
work carried on in connection with big business.”210

As governor of New York, Roosevelt was criticized for his generosity about
fights in the Coney Island Athletic Clubs; Roosevelt, who was disillusioned with the
crookedness of fights, joined ranks with moralists to regulate fights and supported the
passage of an anti-prize fighting law in 1900.211 Nevertheless, he still believed that

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211 “The Week,” Nation, 69, no. 1793 (November 9 1899), 345. Also see Salt Lake Tribune, February
5, 1897, p.4.
cleaning up prize fighting was better than abolishing it.\textsuperscript{212} Roosevelt remained the prizefighters’ friend throughout his life. He associated with many prizefighters, including Mike Donovan, John L. Sullivan, James J. Corbett, Bob Fitzsimmons, and Battling Nelson, and acclaimed them as model citizens.\textsuperscript{213} He also hoped that boxing became legitimized in the future.\textsuperscript{214}

In the late nineteenth century, pedagogy also valued the new masculinity based on primitive physicality revolting against the old binary between “mental” and “physical” and between human beings and animals. As Shaler pointed out, physical training was in fact an animalistic activity in nature, and he believed that male socialization and self-improvement were enhanced by this primitive and animalistic act. Physical training was supposed to advance men in the individual evolutionary process. Shaler believed that through his physical training, a man learned “a culture of the mind in a measure not demanded in the case of any other animal.”\textsuperscript{215}

New pedagogy, which stressed the importance of physical education, decreased differences between middle-class and working-class men. In “The Habit of Exercise (1893)” Austin Flint urged a man to fill his lungs to “feel the physical elasticity and animal exhilaration of absolutely perfect health.” He also argued that laborers’ and artisans’ physical work made them as likely to gain physical manhood as clerks and processionals. Flint also gave a special meaning to adolescence for


\textsuperscript{214} \textit{Chicago Tribune}, January 9, 1901, p. 1.

\textsuperscript{215} Shaler, “The Athletic Problem in Education,” 79.
which the physical education for young men was as important as mental and moral development.216

Renowned psychologist G. Stanley Hall was an educator who propagated an evolutionist view of human beings and stressed the importance of physical training for adolescent boys. In his recapitulation theory, primitivism was not the other side of civilization but a basis of a man’s development. Boys were required to learn primitive fighting spirit.217 Being a man of the savage instinct, who strayed from the excessive self-control, was a necessary step of a man’s individual evolution. A natural man was assumed to be a preparatory stage into the development of a perfect man who was civilized but still masculine. His theory, which blurred a rigid divide between a natural man and a rational man, was based on the critical view of feminizing civilization.

Hall noticed that boxing and football were methods for young men to learn primitive fighting spirit against feminizing civilization.218 His address, which argued for boxing in a national kindergarten teacher’s convention in 1899, made him recognized as an advocate of “barbarism.”219 Hall apparently criticized the immorality and brutality of prize fighting and encouraged only friendly sparring matches.220 Nevertheless, he was a big fan of prize fighting in his real life. He

confessed, “I have never missed an opportunity to attend a prizefight if I could do so unknown and away from home, so that I have seen most of the noted pugilists of my generation in action and felt the unique thrill at these encounters.” The master of new pedagogy was interested in seeing “the raw side of human life” on which a man’s evolution started.221 The ring was a mirror for him to see an original man.

3. Professionalization and Prize Fighting

While amateur sportsmen constructed boxing as a display of science against prize fighting, they not only strayed from old amateurism but also accommodated to the trend of specialization and professionalization, which emerged in all aspects of American life in the late nineteenth century. Some middle-class men more readily accepted the trend. For instance, the ethos of professionalism, which originated from working-class culture, dominated college sports in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. College sports introduced full-time players and professional coaches, and introduced specialized training to maximize performance and win competitions. Skill became a priority over character building. While full-time coaches became important for college sports, a professional’s reputation and authority did not come from his moral perfection but from his knowledge of his subjects and skill.222

College boxers saw a professional’s authority in their participation in the sport. College boxing clubs began to be organized in the 1880s and gained popularity at the turn of the century.\footnote{Leon Vandervort, “Making the College Freshmen Strong,” \textit{Outing}, 40, no. 1 (April 1902), 34; \textit{Los Angeles Times}, May 19, 1912, p. 6; \textit{Washington Post}, December 24, 1911, p. 34.} While students who learned boxing at college rarely promoted it on account of “disfavor by the public,” in their boxing clubs, students were indifferent to old morals or amateurism.\footnote{\textit{New York Times}, March 29, 1891, p. 11. Some school officials objected to the organization of boxing clubs. School authorities also occasionally suspended the sport on campus. See \textit{New York Times}, March 13, 1905, p. 1; \textit{Washington Post}, March 15, 1902, p. 8; \textit{Chicago Tribune}, September 29, 1905, p. 1.} They saw boxing as a learned skill and tried to learn the boxing game from the scientific standpoint. College boxing clubs often hired professional boxers as instructors or tutors.\footnote{J. E. McT., “College World,” \textit{The Holy Cross Purple}, 8, no. 2 (Match 1899), 128; \textit{Chicago Tribune}. January 7, 1900, p. 19; \textit{San Francisco Call}, September 1, 1908, p. 4; \textit{Washington Post}, December 24, 1911, p. 33.} Students also invited them for exhibitions. Policing class boundaries were increasingly difficult in these college boxing clubs.

The ethos of professionalization, which became conspicuous in middle-class culture, was also reflected in the changing view of newspapers about prize fighting in the 1890s. Until the 1870s, “the newspaper regarded sporting news as negligible,” and sporting events were reported without special knowledge.\footnote{J. B. McCormick, “Sporting Editor,” 205.} In the 1880s, many prizefights were held in remote places to avoid the police intervention. Only a small number of reporters could attend fights. Though most fight reports were second-hand stories and were colored by the contemporary moralism, early sportswriters gradually specialized fight reports.\footnote{Ibid., 212.} When bouts were held at clubs in cities from the late
1880s, ringside seats were open to boxing experts and professional sports reporters. These professional boxing critics and reporters were recruited regardless of their educational background to fill in independent sports sections or columns. Some of them were former fighters, and others were middle-class college graduates. While a professional’s authority came from his knowledge, not from his education or class, professionalization of fight reports already blurred class boundaries.

Newspapers boasted their professionalism in reporting the bouts. For instance, in 1897, the Chicago Tribune promised its readers quality professional boxing reports for the anticipated fight between Jim Corbett and Bob Fitzsimmons: “Trained observers told the story of the contest, ex-Senator Ingalls contributed his impression of the spectacle, both principals and the other pugilistic stars described their experiences, and all these, which were the essential features of the history of the occasion, were given to the Chicago public exclusively by The Tribune.”228 Boxing reports gradually eliminated moral judgments, which had been conventional in the 1880s reports. Subjective terms like “bloody,” “savage,” “cruel,” “vicious,” and “barbaric” disappeared from reports, which began to focus on the quality of boxers and fights, not on violence or bloody scenes.

While they focused on the evaluation of the quality of the bout and the boxer, the boxing reports were written from a technical perspective. A report of the Corbett-Fitzsimmons fight for the San Francisco Call under the headline “Water Watson’s Account: Technical Story Dictated at the Ringside” would probably shock middle-

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228 Chicago Tribune, March 19, 1897, p. 6.
class moralists. Watson, who was a boxing instructor of the Olympic Club in San Francisco, wrote a one-page account of the bout and detailed every exchange of punches and boxers’ movements round by round without mentioning blood or deformed faces. Another report of the same fight in the *St. Paul Globe* boasted its “technical description of the fourteen hard-fought rounds.” An 1898 *Call* report of the James Corbett-Tom Sharkey bout provided a detailed description of the fight in the name of “the technical story of the Corbett-Sharkey fight.” In these “technical” boxing reports, a boxer was no longer a brute. He had a highly scientific profession, which deserved professional experts’ analysis. For the *New York Times*, which still tried to find a balance between commercialism and respectability, the professionalization of boxing reports was “one of the greatest achievements of freak journalism.” Nevertheless, a conventional but amoral form of boxing reports was formulated in the 1890s and 1900s.

While commercial interests and the multiplicity of boxing critics contributed to the transformation of boxing reports, the emergence of scientific boxing also facilitated the transformation. The new style, which appreciated splendid skill, defense, footwork, and game plans, became popular with the emergence of heavyweight champion James Corbett in the 1890s. While other boxers adopted his boxing style, a bout became scientific and tamed in a great extent.

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229 *San Francisco Call*, March 18, 1897, p. 3.
231 *San Francisco Call*, November 23, 1898, p. 2; August 15, 1903, p. 2.
By the 1900s, the professionalization of the boxing reports became a popular trend. Sportswriter Willard Stuart boasted that boxing critics had been central to the transformation of fight reports and the changing status of the sport. “Our sporting writers of today have naturally adopted the idea that boxing is a profession requiring skill and brain as well as brawn and muscle. They have forsaken the old path of former writers who referred to boxing contests with the “prize” and “blood” features paramount in their description of any contests. I feel that the healthy condition of the boxing today has been brought about by the newspapers mainly.”

Stuart might exaggerate the role of boxing reports because the transformation of reports also concurred with the transformation of boxing styles. Nevertheless, in these boxing reports, whose readers included many middle-class men, boxers were elevated as the artists of mitts and athletes with the highest level of science. As a result, the artificial distinction between amateur boxing as a display of science and prize fighting as a display of brute was untenable, and class boundaries were increasingly blurred.

The popularization of the sense of profession increasingly diluted moral judgments about prize fighting among middle-class men. In 1905, the creator of a famous character the Gibson girl, Charles Dana Gibson, represented the emergent sentiment. “Any person who succeeds brilliantly in anything—even prize fighting and

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234 Andrews, Ring Battles of the Centuries, 51.
235 Corbett’s style also blurred amateur sportsmen’s division between professional and amateur boxing. Boxing instructors in clubs made him a role model for their pupils. Los Angeles Times, May 28, 1905, p. 3. Prof. Anthony Parker, “Physical Culture: Boxing for Heath and Strength,” Health, 57, no. 4 (April 1907), 264.
wrestling—is an artist.” His remark reflected the declining influence of moralism and the rising influence of pragmatism in America at the turn of the century.

Middle-class men’s public advocacy of prize fighting was rare until the 1880s. However, while prize fighting was being elevated as a profession and the distinction between amateur boxing and professional boxing began to be blurred, some middle-class prize fighting supporters started to publicly argue that professional fighting was a sport and profession which displayed manly qualities rather than violence. In so doing, these middle-class men were active advocates for the convergence of masculinities through athleticism.

In 1888, Duffield Osborne published an article in the *North American Review* defending prize fighting. In this first literary advocacy of prize fighting in America, Osborne was concerned that civilization degenerated to “womanishness” and Americans degenerated to a “race of eminently respectable female saints.” Osborne contended that middle-class respectability was confused with the unconditional objection to violence. He tried to find affirmative qualities from prize fighting to counter middle-class moralists’ claim of the “demoralizing effect” on spectators. Even before professional fight reports and scientific boxing became popular, Osborne saw prize fighting as a profession which was taken by well-trained fighters and argued that bodily damages in the ring were never fatal to these specially trained men. Rather, he maintained that a man who witnessed a fight might take pleasure in the “contemplation of skill, adroitness, and strength; of unflinching courage, of steady

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coolness, and of endurance in bearing fatigue and pain with equanimity.” Accordingly, Osborne viewed prize fighting as a sport that displayed “manly qualities” and elevated men’s “ideas of the braver capabilities of human nature.”

In the 1890s, his arguments had many middle-class supporters. Richard K. Fox of the *National Police Gazette* reversed moralists’ claim of prize fighting as an excessively emotional act for all participants. Fox argued that prize fighting taught manly qualities like self-restraint and patience. Dr. William A. Hammond of New York attributed Americans’ interest in prize fighting to the English-speaking people’s tradition in which men were expected to resolve their problem fairly only with their fists. Hammond believed that men who witnessed fights or read about them also learned the importance of courage and endurance.

The emergence of scientific boxing made middle-class supporters confident to publicly praised the (manly) qualities of professional boxing. William Greer Harrison, an officer of the Olympic Club of San Francisco, argued that scientific boxing matches had affirmative manly qualities as “much the part of an athletic education as any other branch of athletics.” He believed that prizefights, which were held in the name of scientific boxing matches, taught boxers courage. Harrison also argued that

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237 Duffield Osborne, “Defense of pugilism,” *North American Review*, 146, no. 377 (April 1888), 433. In fact, it was not Osborne who first saw prize fighting as a profession. While he did not find any respectable quality in it, George Wilbur Peck argued that prize fighting was merely a profession. Peck not only objected to the illegalization of prize fighting but also satirized the hypocritical moral austerity of the middle classes. George Wilbur Peck, “Prize fighting and Mormonism,” in *Peck’s Sunshine*, eds. Wilbur Peck (Chicago: Belford, Clark & Co., 1882), 201-204.

238 In the 1890s, boxers and boxing insiders often stressed that boxing was not violent and was a scientific profession. *San Francisco Morning Call*, February 25, 1895, p. 11; *New York Times*, March 10, 1905, p. 5; *Cincinnati Enquirer*, December 4, 1894, quoted in Pollack, *In the Ring with James J. Corbett*, p. 353.

these contests between “well-trained athletes” made spectators realize the great advantage of self-control.240 Another club official, Mark K. Frank of the California Athletic Club, stressed the positive role of prize fighting for men who followed “sedentary pursuits.” He argued that seeing “two men trained to the pink of perfection struggling for supremacy” was a “great incentive” for these sedentary men. He said, “In this city we have many medical men who are excellent boxers, and I think that I want to see every man in the city a trained athlete, and the only way to accomplish this is create the interest through the prize-ring.”241 James Hurst, a horseman, also believed that prize fighting kept an “incentive before the public to develop the physical man.” He maintained that if “some great and marked prominence” was not given to physical development, the “degeneration of the race” would ensue.242 Sheriff of New York Nicholas J. Hayes also argued that boxing was a manly profession, which was handled by the “professional exhibitors,” and taught “fairness and put a ban on trickery and cowardice.”243 In his letter to the Brooklyn Eagles, a subscriber cheered the editor who supported the fights in the Coney Island Athletic Club. “I agree with you when you say that Brooklyn is not and does not claim to be a home for saints.” He deplored the feminized “civilization,” which called lawn tennis and croquet “its manly sports.” He stressed manly qualities in prize fighting. “We

240 San Francisco Morning Call, February 27, 1895, p. 11.
241 San Francisco Morning Call, October 23, 1892, p. 8.
242 Ibid.
believed all forms of sports the tendency of which is to encourage a healthy, wholesome, and manly spirit among our young men, boxing matches included.”

Advocating prize fighting, boxing expert Robert Edgren, who was an Eastern college graduate, used the rhetoric of a natural man, which was being popularized among middle-class masculinists. Edgren saw the combative spirit as the nature of mankind. He argued that the spirit was alive with Anglo-Saxon men in amusements, which were related to fighting until modern laws dominated their lives. According to Edgren, this spirit remained in gloved fights. Stressing the role of civilized prize fighting in preserving the essence of Anglo-Saxon masculinity, he wanted boxers’ bravery to be an incentive for the revival of manly traits among middle-class fight followers.

To these middle-class prize fighting supporters, who regarded it as a manly sport and art, moralists’ agitation seemed to be based on their exaggeration of brutality and bodily danger in prize fighting and the underestimation of its art. Sam Austin, editor of the *National Police Gazette*, criticized “so called purists and social reformers” who were “illogical enough to argue that the sport of boxing was only brutal and inhuman” and deny it an “art.”

While these supporters objected to moralists’ agitation, they also constructed prize fighting not only as an art but also as a character-building sport. In this sense, they did not totally stray from the middle-class notion of sports.

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244 Athleticus to the Editor, *Brooklyn Eagles*, September 18, 1894, p. 2.
245 Robert Edgren, “Fighters by Nature,” *Outing*, 43, no. 3 (December 1903), 343. Edgren contributed to revolutionizing the boxing report for the *New York Evening World* in the 1890s and the 1900s.
246 *National Police Gazette*, December 6, 1902, p. 10.
Club fights continued to be denounced and restricted by moralists. However, throughout the 1890s and 1900s, prize fighting was becoming a part of dominant culture as an art and sport. In 1910, a Belgian writer, Maurice Maeterlinck, defined an ideal man as a “beautiful, healthy animal, fierce and ready to face all the exigencies of life.” Maeterlinck saw prizefighters as exemplars of healthy and controlled animals. He also argued that fighting was merely a profession practiced by professionals. “Three punches, three only, the result of centuries of practice … As soon as one of them lands squarely, the fight is over … Soon after, the vanquished will rise, without lasting injury, for the resistance offered by his organs and bones is strictly and naturally proportioned to the strength of the human weapon which struck him and knocked him out.”

Maeterlinck was warmly welcomed by American middle-class prize fighting supporters. In the same vein, in 1910, the editor of the Chicago Tribune openly defined prize fighting as a manly profession and sport to support it against moralists. “Why, then, all this hue and cry against prize fighting? Why this hysterical talk about its immorality? To me it is a sign of effeminacy…. A public exhibition of strength, skill, and endurance, given voluntarily by two well matched men, each showing grit and stamina, each taking his punishment unflinchingly, is an exhibition of manliness, and ought to be encouraged.”

A boxer was a perfectly trained natural man so as to endure a hardest physical
test with his knowledge of boxing. Accordingly, in his letter to the editor of the *New
York Times*, A. J. Drexel Biddle contended that professional boxing was “one of the
manliest forms of manly athletics.” In pro-prize fighting discourse, boxers were
professionals not because they were paid for their service, but because they were
highly skilled and were trained to overcome bodily destruction.

4. Beyond the Bondage of Civilization

While more and more middle-class men questioned the old idolization of
rational and disciplined manhood in the late nineteenth century, they realized that the
artificiality and bondage of Victorian and modern civilization strangled men in a rigid
binary between primitivism and rationalism. These middle-class masculinists valued a
natural man who was placed between civilization and primitivism. Discourse of a
natural man was disseminated across political and scholarly debates and pedagogical
lessons. The old dominant culture, which was based on reason, the control of
emotion, and moral shame, competed with emergent masculine middle-class culture.
Arts were also the spaces of cultural contests.

As early as the 1850s, masculine power expressed in the ring already
impressed a renowned poet. In his “Poem of Joys,” Walt Whitman strayed from
contemporary middle-class norms and celebrated the “strong-brawn’d fighter,

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towering in the arena, in perfect condition, conscious of power, thirsting to meet his opponent.”

Four decades later, energetic boxers drew a painter’s attention. Thomas Eakins’s interest in prize fighting dated back to the 1860s when he learned boxing at high school. Eakins became an ardent fan of prize fighting and attended almost three hundred fights. While his paintings were criticized for their popular taste, Eakins boldly made prizefights, as well as rowing, the subject of high art around 1898-1899.

In *Salutat* (1898), Eakins depicted a victor’s glory after a bout. The painting featured a boxer (modeled on a local featherweight boxer) who was walking to his dressing room raising his right hand for cheering spectators. The semi-naked boxer represented the beauty of the well-trained male body. The depiction of a boxer in *Salutat* was somehow unrealistic because a boxer wore more in a real bout. His painting might have been inspired by the 1897 Reno fight between Jim Corbett and Bob Fitzsimmons. In the fight, Corbett wore short pants, which displayed the considerable part of his butt toward female spectators, who were publicly admitted to the arena for the first time. While the naked male body stressed that the sport was not within civilization, Eakins did not involve moral judgments to a boxer’s masculinity. Rather, he celebrated the boxer’s primitive masculinity without reservation, featuring his father and his close friend, Clarence Cranmer, in the crowd cheering for the boxer.

Eakins drew two more paintings about prize fighting. However, making

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prize fighting a subject of high art was still a difficult task for a painter. His *Taking the Count* could not find any place for an exhibition. It made him gave up drawing paintings about prize fighting.  

In the 1900s, prize fighting still drew artists’ attention. These artists were more critical of the old definitions of man and civilization. While they saw middle-class respectability as hypocrisy and civilization as the artificial veneer of (brutal) realities, they were ready to embrace, without reservation, masculine energy and primitive power for human struggles and survival in the strangling world. The critical redefinition of man and civilization, the abdication of class norms, and the celebration of a primitive man were reflected in these artists’ view of the world and their artistic expressions. In this sense, a “natural man” in artistic discussions and expressions said farewell to the middle-class world of reason, self-discipline, and respectability. He not only strayed from old class norms but also contradicted them. The prize ring became a motif for the artistic revolt against contemporary cultural norms. The ring was a mirror through which artists saw a real man and the real world behind middle-class respectability and civilization.

In the early twentieth century, literary realists like Frank Norris, Jack London, Upton Sinclair, Stephen Crane, and Owen Wister tried to create virile literature. While heroic hunters and adventurers in the West had been motifs in subliterature (dime novels), well-known literary figures saw anti-heroic primitivism in all men.

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These literary realists denied delicacy and elegance, and made their literature full of symbolism of (Darwinian) struggles for power and money.\textsuperscript{254} To some of them, the ring was a symbol of brutal realities and human struggles. Norris believed that a novelist’s goal was to get “beneath the clothes of an epoch” and get “the heart of it” and the “spirit of it.” Norris was critical of mediocre novels in which real life wore clothes and life was artificially civilized. To him, what dominated Anglo-Saxons was not trained manners, the sense of shame, or romance. A prizefight was more real to him. He believed that the real thing behind people’s true life was more similar to primitive struggles expressed in prizefights.\textsuperscript{255}

To Jack London, a fighter was a symbol of men’s struggle to survive brutal realities. London did not praise prize fighting unconditionally. While he viewed fighters sympathetically in his novels, he did not claim prize fighting as a graceful business. In fact, prize fighting was as full of brutality, deception, and corruption as the outer world, which he debunked as a muckraker. London’s 1905 novel, \textit{Game}, which depicted the mean world of boxing as a smaller version of American society, represented his sense of reality.\textsuperscript{256}

London had antagonism against the industrialized and bureaucratized world, which strangled the old individual, primitive, and animalistic way of life. Fighters dramatically represented the old way of life. London’s sympathy to these primitive

\textsuperscript{256} \textit{The Game} was serialized in \textit{The Metropolitan Magazine} in 1905. He published another boxing story, \textit{The Abysmal Brute}, in 1913.
men was clear in his boxing reports. London classified two types of fighters, an intellectual animal and a fighting animal. The latter represented what he called the abysmal brute. According to London, the abysmal brute was the “basic life” that resided “deeper than the brain and the intellect in living things.” It was “saturated with a blind and illimitable desire to exist.” London also embraced the primitive spirit, which was “lower down on the ladder of evolution” than was intelligence, as the “will of life.”

London’s anti-intellectualism drastically redefined civilization and denied the superiority of middle-class culture. London’s disillusion with middle-class culture was clear when he saw working-class men’s aggressiveness as representing a natural way of men’s life, that is, abysmal brute force. His fondness for boxer Battling Nelson was attributable to his body, which reminded him of a “hungry proletarian.” This dashing, stubborn, and unorganized fighter contradicted his opponent Jimmy Britt, who was more intelligent. While London contrasted Nelson with Britt, in London’s boxing report, as rounds passed by, both groggy men returned to primitive and natural men. The brute dominated both men. It was not boxing anymore. It was simply a slugging match. Nelson’s final victory signified that a man needed determination, not intellect, to win the battle of life. London did not simply see class conflicts in the fight. Rather, he reconciled men of different classes in the brute, which remained deep in all men. London did not confine primitivism to fighters. In fact, he made all men primitive.

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In his report on the Jack Johnson-Jim Jeffries fight, he raised questions. “Why do men fight?” “Why do men go to witness fights?” London knew that a man was naturally a primitive one, and civilization could not totally transform him. “They want to see fights because of the old red blood of Adam in them that will not down. It is a bit of profoundly significant human phenomena. No sociologist nor ethicist who leaves this fact out can cast a true horoscope of humanity.”

The 1910 historic fight between Jack Johnson and Jim Jeffries raised the same question to other writers. Fred R. Bechdolt did not deny that prize fighting was brutal, but he did not make a moral judgment about the sport. Rather, he believed that the sport gave men opportunities to express what they were really and what they had to be. “It is nothing to be ashamed of this interest. It is as old as the old race of man. It antedates our finer things, as it antedates our evasions and subtlety. It goes back to the days when man born of woman wore no clothes. And from those days it has come down, retaining its strength, until this third day of July, 1910.” To Bechdolt, the national attention to the fight showed that civilization was never successful in concealing men’s own “natures.” The “refined” and “gentle” world would never prevent men from obeying “instincts,” which had lived with them ever since their “forefathers wore hairs instead of cloth.”

259 San Francisco Call, July 4, 1910 p. 9, 12.
Novelist Rex Beach did not also want to be hypocritical. He was enthusiastic about the Reno fight. His rhetoric emphasized the discrepancy between civilization and a natural man.

You are brought face-to-face with the great overwhelming elemental fact that mankind, underneath its veneer of civilization, is primitive and jungle-born…. You may lock yourself into a dark room or a sawdust padded icebox, or in some other manner isolate yourself from external influences, and by dint of calm, dispassionate reasoning reach the conclusion that prize fighting is unnatural, brutal, coarse, mane, and foolish beyond measure…. But man is a war-blood animal … he has not only an elemental love of life but a supergrafted love of victory and admiration of excellence.260

Though Eakins’s painting of boxing lost him favor with supporters of arts, some other painters were still interested in boxers. In the 1900s, painters like Robert Henry, John Sloan, and George Luks were becoming “rebels against conformity,” committed to confronting the genteel tradition with “real life.”261 The Ashcan school was fond of depicting urban life. While these painters saw middle-class gentility as artificial, they challenged both the aesthetic and the urban ideals which were associated with the City Beautiful movement at the turn of the twentieth century.

These painters embraced the “vulgar” aspect of the city as a reality. They located their gazing interest in the everyday life of the working classes. These painters, who valued the masculine style of painting through rough touches and unrefined lines, had a great interest in prize fighting. While they staged mob fights in their studios and studied boxers’ motions, it was George Bellow who brought them to a real artistic expression.

Bellow, who was a student of Henry, indulged in bachelor culture. In 1906, Bellow moved on Broadway opposite the Sharkey Athletic Club. He attended fights in the small local fight club. Bellow’s interest in fights finally crystallized in his famous painting, *Stagg at Sharkey’s* (1909). His painting featured a local club, which was largely patronized by working-class men. Untidy working-class spectators were thirsty for blood and violence. Two boxers’ almost naked bodies stressed the primitive aspect of the sport against the culture of respectability. In his painting, two boxers in the ring actually seemed to grasp each other. It depicted the old style of boxing, the clash between two brutes rather than the scientific boxing style. The primitive fighting spirit was ahead of intelligence in both fighters’ styles. To Bellow, boxers and the club, which were placed against rationality and Victorian gentility, were a reality. At the same time, depicting the fighters’ movements in rough lines and touches, Bellow successfully portrayed raw power and energy in the boxer’s body.

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262 Ibid., 31.
Likewise to some sculptors, a boxer was a great exemplar of physical masculinity and male power. Sullivan and Corbett became sculptors’ models. D. C. French made the eighteen-foot-high statue, which was modeled after Bob Fitzsimmons, in New York. A female writer, Inez Haynes Gillmore, saw the deconstruction of class among men in these artistic expressions. “The majority of people ignorantly believe that only the low-browed and brutalized enjoy it [prize fighting]. On the contrary, it is quite as inspiring to painters and sculptors, who deal in beauty. In fact, all kinds of men enjoy it.”

Among artists, middle-class gentility was often ignored as artificiality. A redefinition of man and civilization constructed aggressive masculinity in the ring as the human nature. The naturalization of a primitive man and aggressive male physicality made class boundaries more blurred. Some artists eliminated class markers from a natural man. A natural man was more distanced from ideal middle-class men who valued self-discipline and rationality. But he was no longer shameful. Rather, he might be an object of idolization. An old-style fighter, such as John L. Sullivan, was a primitive man. He was never disciplined anyway. He was never a scientific boxer. He relied solely on his fighting spirit, which was reflected in his motto, “I am John L. Sullivan. I can lick any son of a bitch in the world.” Sullivan’s fight with Jake Kilrain in 1889 was revived in Vachel Lindsay’s poem, “John L.

265 Inez Haynes Gillmore, “A Woman at a Prize-Fight,” Century, 89, no. 5 (March 1915), 793.
In his poem, Lindsay made Sullivan’s uncontrollable brutality a symbol of male power:

Then …
I heard a battle trumpet sound.
Nigh New Orleans
Upon an emerald plain
John L. Sullivan
The strong boy
Of Boston
Fought seventy-five red rounds with Jake Kilrain….
Yet …
“East side, west side, all around town
The tots sang: ‘Ring a rosie----’
‘London Bridge is falling down.’”
And …
John L. Sullivan
The strong boy
Of Boston
Broke every single rib of Jake Kilrain….
“East side, west side, all around town
The tots sang: ‘Ring a rosie’
‘London Bridge is falling down.’"

And …

John L. Sullivan

The strong boy

Of Boston

Finished the ring career of Jake Kilrain.266

Moralists never gave up their fight to protect “humanity” and “civilization” in the 1910s.267 However, middle-class men were a more heterogeneous group than two decades earlier. As Emil Edward Kusel pointed out, even to many middle-class men, calls for respectability were increasingly seen as a fanatical motto.268 In 1914, William H. Page, president of the New York Athletic Club, planned to have a boxing show for an old boxing instructor, Mike Donovan. The general committee for the show consisted of dignified club members. In the public announcement for the benefit to Donovan, Page introduced a former bare-knuckle fighter, Donovan, as a “courageous and most skillful boxer” in “the prime of manhood.” Theodore Roosevelt’s telegram for Donovan arrived. The benefit on November 14 featured professional boxers. John Purroy Mitchel (mayor of New York) and a number of

clergymen and priests were present.\textsuperscript{269} The meeting symbolically reflected cultural exchange between classes and the convergence of masculinities which had taken place for several decades. Cultural exchange did not transform only middle-class culture. It also transformed prize fighting in which old working-class ethos had been reproduced. In the process, middle-class culture faced further transformation.

\textsuperscript{269} Alpheus Geer, \textit{Mike Donovan}, 271.
Chapter 2

Becoming Popular Male Rituals:
Prize Fighting, Working-Class Ethos, and Cultural Negotiation

Popular culture is not synonymous with working-class culture or the culture of the subordinate classes. Rather, the most important feature of popular culture is its broad appeal across social divisions.270 Before the nineteenth century, people of different classes often participated in communal recreations. In Europe, aristocrats even used communal recreations as methods to display their status among the poor.271 However, while the middle classes had cultural hegemony in the nineteenth century, leisure became stratified. Accordingly, popular culture overlapped “to a perplexing degree with working-class culture and the culture of the subordinate groups.”272 In America, cultural hierarchies also relegated many public entertainments into lower-class entertainments. However, while middle-class people defined prize fighting as a brutal and dissipating entertainment, it was not simply a pleasure-seeking leisure activity for working-class men. It was an important medium in which they articulated a collective identity. For working-class men, prize fighting dramatically represented an alternative way of life that strayed from dominant cultural norms.

In the 1850s, American prize fighting experienced “unprecedented growth.” With exploding urban centers, the vast number of immigrants, and the commercialization of leisure, “fighters, tavern keepers, gamblers, and sparring

272 Gardiner, Sports Law, 5.
masters slowly created informal, underground promotional networks.” Improvised fistfights were held in taverns, which were scattered all around the nation. While its fans continued to be diversified in their social backgrounds, in the mid-nineteenth century, American prize fighting still “remained locally based, loosely organized, in close touch with its working-class origin.”

However, prize fighting was not an insular cultural form. From its introduction to America in the mid-nineteenth century, the law, legal enforcement, the church, and the newspapers generally tried to repress this anti-hegemonic cultural form. However, in the late nineteenth century, the relationship between prize fighting and middle-class institutions became more complicated. Athletic clubs, which were involved in professional fighting from the late 1880s, tried to appropriate, control, and transform prize fighting. Accordingly, in the late nineteenth century, prize fighting was a space of cultural interactions, contests, adaptation, and negotiation between classes. The cultural contacts also complicated the construction of class identity among working-class men and made their identity multiplied and shifted.

Focusing on the relationship between prize fighting and middle-class institutions, this chapter illuminates how social reform movements, the law, and athletic clubs all transformed prize fighting and impacted the ways that working-class people reproduced their identity in a popular cultural form. In so doing, this chapter also details the process of incorporation in which prize fighting was transformed from an underground sport to a popular entertainment, which was part of dominant culture.

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In this sense, the chapter notices the dualistic role of popular culture, which helped the construction and disintegration of the working classes. The chapter also illuminates that the transformation and incorporation of prize fighting was not an impersonal structural change. Working-class participants both facilitated and contested the process of incorporation. I contended that middle-class institutions and a popular cultural form with working-class origins mutually influenced each other. Accordingly, this chapter suggests that even in the increasing distinction and hierarchization of cultural tastes between classes in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, popular culture was a space where working-class and middle-class cultures continued to meet, contest, and negotiate. Cultural contests and negotiations in this manly sport also reflected the contests and accommodations between middle-class and working-class men’s ideals of masculinities.

1. Anti-Hegemonic Working-Class Culture and Prize Fighting

In the late nineteenth century, America experienced unprecedented social transformation. By 1900, “the loosely organized, largely agricultural rural country of a less than half century earlier was on the way to becoming a tightly organized, highly

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274 Labor historians often focused on cultural differences between working-class and middle-class cultures. However, some historians have focused on cultural interactions between classes. According to Paul Faler, some working-class people adopted middle-class Victorian values in the late nineteenth century. Paul Faler, “Cultural Aspects of the Industrial Revolution,” Labor History, 15, no. 3 (Summer 1974), 367-394. Brian Greenberg demonstrates that class-consciousness was continuously mitigated by the middle-class sense of community in a small industrial city. See Brian Greenberg, Worker and Community: Response to Industrialization in a Nineteenth-Century American City, Albany, New York 1850-1884 (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985).
industrialized, urban nation.” The factory system made individual differences based on skill useless in workshop. Workers lost their control of work processes with the introduction of machine and the development of disciplining system. While ethnic and racial divisions hampered the creation of the working classes, the increasing homogeneity of working conditions helped the construction of the working classes. Intensifying class conflicts in worship and ballot in the late nineteenth century represented that class boundaries were being sharpened.

Nevertheless, organized laborers were still a minority. Workers’ political organs, like parties and newspapers, were struggling. In fact, workers more often implicitly rejected the middle-class ways of life and articulated their collectivity in leisure rather than fighting for the ballot box or going on strike. Accordingly, while working and free times were clearly divided in the new factory system, leisure became a battlefield between labor and capital. While some workers were integrated into leisure programs controlled by capitalists or social reformers, others, who could not claim their manliness through property ownership and control of their work processes, compensated for their predicament by expressing aggressive physical masculinity in their sports and recreations. Working-class men usually relied on traditional sporting practices, which they could choose within limits of space, time,

and resource, rather than making new sports or recreations. Prize fighting was one of the traditional sports.

Prize fighting was anti-hegemonic. It accompanied Sunday entertainment, drinking, gambling, and riots, which were tabooed by hegemonic culture. That is, prize fighting was not only a bloody entertainment that pushed against religious and middle-class decorum. It was also a social activity that denied class aspirations, capitalistic individualism, and obedience to order. Accordingly, prize fighting was a threat to cultural order, which was characterized by Victorian mottos such as “Christian Gentleman” and “Self-Made Man.”

While America in the first half of the nineteenth century was characterized by the Great Awakening, and religious fever spurred numerous reform movements, religious passion among the working classes and even the middle classes gradually declined in the second half of the century. According to Lewis Saum, after the Civil War, the working-class worldview was increasingly dominated by the words like “chance,” “fortune,” and “luck.” Saum also finds that in the second half of the nineteenth century, words like “satisfaction” and “enjoyment” were used frequently and positively in Americans’ personal letters. Less religious Americans gave an important meaning to the temporal life, which was opposed to spiritual life.

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279 However, prize fighting did not unconditionally make the working classes a cultural group. Swedish and German workers, who had individualistic leisure cultures, were underrepresented in the ring. Prize fighting also facilitated “parochialism” among working-class people and divided them according to neighborhoods and ethnicities.
Secularism prevailed especially among the working classes. In the 1880s, Horace Bigelow saw the economic potential of entertainments for working-class people when he realized that most workers did not “attend church on Sunday.” Fighters and ardent working-class fight followers were probably among them. Irish Americans were not strict observers of the Sabbath. However, whether they were men of Irish descent or British descent, contemporary fighters did not leave any record about their religious passion. Fight fans were diversified in ethnic origins. However, their indifference to religion is conspicuous when it is noted that they patronized Sunday fights. While ministers and religious people objected to violence and mutilation in prizefights, the Sunday fights directly challenged religious decorum by celebrating violence and dissipation on the religious holiday.

Many fighters were former workers who had strayed away from the middle-class ways of life. Fighters contradicted not only the Victorian middle-classes’ religious values but also capitalistic individualism, which focused on work ethics and productivity. Fighters were self-employed. Apparently, fighters seemed to control the course of labor because they intermittently worked (fought) and trained. Fighters’ irregular rhythm of work represented their power on their bodies against the discipline in workshop. Fighters’ large amount of free time was often devoted to self-indulgence. In the middle-class people’s eyes, such dissipation represented laziness and lack of class aspirations. The middle classes criticized that men most physically

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281 Roy Rosenzweig, *Eight Hours for What We Will*, 178.
fit for labor not only avoided productive and regular work but also were rewarded for their idleness. An article about the 1889 fight between John L. Sullivan and Jake Kilrain reflected this middle-class view. “A prize fighter, however, is merely a muscular person who is capable of giving and taking very hard knocks. There is no productive industry in which Sullivan or Kilrain could earn two dollars a day more than a man of ordinary muscular power.”

Another report, which criticized the lack of productivity in prize fighting, made it “worse than vagrancy.” An 1893 report was also concerned that the reward from prize fighting made young men pursue brutal careers rather than “honorable and legitimate callings.”

However, fighters also contradicted capitalistic and industrial individualism by denying the cruel logic of the market in and out of the ring. In the era of the bare-knuckle fight, a purse was meager. A victor monopolized a stake, which was hanged around a post. Taking a stake meant that a victor totally conquered his opponent. But in the prize ring, winning an individual competition gave a victor a responsibility. Compassion earned a victor more respect. It was “customary at the close of a prize-fight for the victor to pass around his hat, and collect a goodly sum” for the “less fortunate one.” The custom did not disappear when fights were held in clubs and a stake was made out of gate receipts in the 1890s. The articles of agreement stipulated

284 Morning Oregonian, March 14, 1892, p. 4.
how the gate money would be divided to a winner and a loser. A victor continued to
attend a benefit for a loser.

Successful fighters contradicted social Darwinist capitalistic individualism in
another way. They played a social role as philanthropists in their neighborhoods or
ethnic enclaves. John L. Sullivan, who dominated the ring in the 1880s, boasted of his
generosity in his autobiography. 287 But it was not an exaggeration. A report recalled
his generosity. “Sullivan’s generosity has always been without limit. He would give
until his purse was as bare as old Mother Hubbard's cupboard.” 288

Reckless spending was another class marker among fighters. In the late
nineteenth century, social reformers were concerned about working-class people’s
reckless spending. Most fighters in the 1880s and 1890s were poor, and many were
heavy drinkers and gamblers. They did not have class aspirations and mostly ended
up penniless. Successful fighters often were spendthrifts who avoided accumulation.
Sullivan, who earned easy money for the first time with traveling boxing shows,
could not save money. Sullivan “had a habit of throwing away his ring earnings in a
few days after every fight.” 289 He “had his hands in his pockets, giving money away
right and left, to the worthy and unworthy alike.” 290 While his successor Jim Corbett
had a more disciplined lifestyle, his spending was also extravagant. 291 He lived at the
best hotels and bought everything. According to his manager, William Brady, an

287 Sullivan, Life and Reminiscences of a 19th Century Gladiator, 49-55, 68.
288 St. Paul Globe, August 20, 1899, p. 22.
289 San Antonio Light, December 25, 1921, p. 25; New York Times, September 19, 1883, p. 8; Mike
Donovan, Roosevelt That I know, 92.
290 Mike Donovan, Roosevelt That I know, 48.
extravagant lifestyle remained a custom for successful boxers. “Sullivan had set a so-called scale of liberality that other fellows had lived up to.”292 However, a cultural binary between working-class and middle-class cultures could not explain all things about their lifestyle. While they maintained an old working-class way of life, these fighters were also symbols of consumerism. While many middle-class people acclaimed the value of Victorian thrift, many others were adopting consumerism in the late nineteenth century.293

Fight followers not only enjoyed brutal entertainments but also contradicted individualistic capitalism. In the nineteenth century, the market revolution and industrialization made old rural communities disintegrate, and Americans placed emphasis on individual competition, class aspiration, and productivity. Victorianism culturally supported the transformation. To Victorian middle-class men, being a man meant “taking responsibility, controlling one’s impulses, and working hard in order to support a family as a good provider.” The very word “manly” was usually “conjoined with independence or self-reliance, thus linking the bourgeois concept of masculinity with autonomy and self-possession.”294 Accordingly, in the middle-class worldview, leisure was seen merely as dissipation or preparation for work. But the attraction of work-oriented culture declined among workers when the reward of labor was not the

augment of self-autonomy.295 As Daniel T. Rodgers points out, the late nineteenth
century was particular about work ethics because most men worked for others and it
needed the internalization of self-discipline to maintain productivity.296 Employers
demanded rigid self-control of laborers for the efficiency of work and tried to inspire
them with class aspirations. However, working-class people, who were mostly
victims of the market revolution and industrialization, challenged their employers
with self-indulgence in their free time and threatened the efficiency of work on return
to their workshop.

Being a fight follower also accompanied reckless spending, which
contradicted the Victorian ideal of thrift. Working-class fight followers “valued
money as a mean to conviviality more than as a reward for sober self-control” or their
work ethics.297 Betting and drinking was an act for short fun. The middle classes
viewed them as totally unfitting the youth “for the serious, unexciting, and laborious
work of the world.”298 They tried to prevent these traditional practices from
penetrating their world. Prize fighting was always related to these unproductive acts.
All spending for fighting and attendant betting and drinking contradicted any long-
term plan, work ethic, and class aspirations and displayed fight followers’ lack of
ambition. Fight followers in this mindset refused to internalize the middle-class sense

297 Gorn, The Manly Art, 139.
of self-improvement, which was supposed to be realized in hard work, thrift, and competitiveness. 299

“Prize fighting appealed to those in the working class inclined more toward self-indulgence than toward constant diligence, conviviality rather than abstemiousness, ‘the good time coming’ instead of sober self-control.”300 Naturally, while middle-class men’s leisure activities became more sedate and reflective, prize fighting kept a disorderly mode in old folk games. Under the London Prize Ring rules, which governed most fights until the middle 1880s, a fight was held in the ring, which was improvised with poles and ropes on the turf. Two fighters’ parties tried to make no person approach nearer the ring than ten feet and prevented any person from stepping inside to help his favorite.301 But keeping order in the outdoor fight venue was almost impossible. J. B. McCormick, who was one of the early fight reporters during the 1880s, depicted a prizefight as a dangerous and disorderly event, which threatened even participants’ lives.302 A group who constantly caused disorder was a mob. These “whisky-soaked and murderous looking hoodlums,” continually tried to get inside the outer ring.303 These penniless fight followers hassled with more respectable patrons to get better spots. Even fighters were disillusioned with them.304

299 Nevertheless, while betting seemed incompatible with contemporary middle-class culture, the act of betting also displayed the artificiality of a binary between modern and traditional acts and between middle-class and working-class cultures. Fight followers often made bets on matches to display their partisanship, but they were also calculating to maximize their chances.
300 Gorn, The Manly Art, 132.
301 Timony, American Fistiana, 15.
However, disorder was not only in the outer ring. Spectators with strong partisanship emotionally reacted to the referee’s calls. They tried to impact the result by hissing, rushing into the ring, and causing riots. Accordingly, “the period from 1850 to 1880 was a muddle of farces, nonfights, and intimidations, with matches being halted in mid-round, backers entering the ring with weapons, and referees being terrorized into decisions by the wagering fans.”305 Fighting between partisans often escalated to gun-fighting and knife duels in which a considerable number of fight followers died.306 While spectators avoided police raids in most cases, some of them were not obedient to law enforcement, which disrupted their free time.307 Fight followers contradicted middle-class values like self-improvement, self-government, industriousness, sobriety, and commitment to law and order.

Prize fighting was not merely a pleasure-seeking activity for working-class men. For instance, until the late nineteenth century, working-class men had attached nostalgic and affirmative values to this traditional sport. Fight followers accepted the language of the ring, which reminded them of their autonomous status in work process in the passing past. Those terms included “profession,” “schools” of fighting, “art,” “science,” and “trained.”308 However, “with the dissolution of the craftsman system and workplace autonomy, bourgeois calls for sobriety and self-discipline rang increasingly anachronistic to working-class sensibilities.” Accordingly, to working-

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305 Christian K. Messenger, Sport and the Spirit of Play in American Fiction, 94.
306 Galveston Daily News, May 14, 1884, p. 3; Bismarck Daily Tribune, March 29, 1887, p. 1; Rocky Mountain News, April 6, 1884, p.1; Milwaukee Sentinel, April 6, 1884, p. 2; Milwaukee Daily Journal, May 13, 1884, p. 1; Brady, A Fighting Man, 108.
308 Gorn, The Manly Art, 137.
class men, who were losing their power to control their bodies, prize fighting had a special meaning. “Working-class men turned to an elemental form of masculine expression that rejected austerity and the regimented control over one’s body, and instead celebrated the aggressive use of that body,” including even self-destruction.309 Prize fighting gave them opportunities to express and appreciate this ethos.

Prize fighting provided working-class fighters and fight followers with opportunities to display and valorize their assertive and aggressive masculinity. Participants in prize fighting appreciated traits such as toughness, ferocity, prowess, and (fighting for) honor, which were touchstones of working-class masculinity. To them, prizefighting “upheld their alternative definition of manliness not by becoming responsible or upright individuals, but by displaying their sensitivity to insult, their coolness in the face or danger, and their ability to give and take punishment.”310 Prize fighting empowered working-class men against “lady pets,” that is, feminized middle-class men.311 But masculine traits in prize fighting were also used to denounce class aspirants. “Gentleman” Jim Corbett, who was taunted as a challenger for Sullivan, was an untraditional man in the ring. Corbett had more education and learned boxing in a prestigious athletic club. He worked as a bank clerk before he became a professional boxer. He rarely dropped by saloons. Sullivan discounted Corbett’s

309 Carroll, American Masculinities, 63. About the relation between the aggressive use of the body and working-class ethos, see Elliott J. Gorn, “‘Gouge and Bite, Pull Hair, and Scratch’: The Social Significance of Fighting in the Southern Backcountry,” American Historical Review, 90, no. 1 (February 1985), 18-43.
fighting ability in relation to his previous white-collar occupation. To Sullivan, though he was born in a working-class family, Corbett’s former job signified his castration in the emulation of the middle-class lifestyle. Sullivan did not believe that the genteel Corbett could stand punishments in the ring. “Now how can I lose? Why, I’ll punch holes in that bank clerk. Who ever heard tell of a ‘counter jumper’ that could fight? A draw? I guess not. I’ll give handsome ‘Jimmy’ one of the best lickings he ever got in his life. I’ll finish him in short order.”

However, did prize fighting represent polarization between middle-class culture and working-class culture? Prize fighting was an individual game. However, the prize ring rules and ideal ring performance until the 1880s not only valued aggressive masculinity, which most middle-class men never affirmed. They also caused working-class hero worship, making a prizefight a testing place of incredible courage and endurance. Prize fighting gave working-class men chances to express their distinctive identity emotionally and illogically. Fighters were furious and violent in the ring. The disorderly and festive mode among fight followers signified antagonism toward the rules of self-discipline and social order. While contestants and spectators expressed violent impulses in and out of the ring, sports were rule-bounded physical contests in which a certain level of self-discipline was necessary to make the rules effective. Fighters were required to subordinate themselves to rules and contracts. Fight followers accepted the result, which was decided by rules. In this sense, a basic feature of sports is disciplining. Accordingly, the prize ring rules made

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312 New York Times, September 2, 1892, p. 3.
fighters and fight followers alternate between their excessively emotional expression of identity and self-control. In this sense, the prize ring rules were dualistic. They rationalized (institutionalized) anti-modern violence. In so doing, they constructed prize fighting as something different from middle-class sports but, at the same time, made prize fighting share some traits with middle-class sports. While the stripping of clothes was a ritual to signify a denial of civilization and a return to a primitive man, prize fighting never totally denied self-discipline or rationalization.

According to Allen Guttmann, who interprets modern sports in the framework of modernization, the existence of formal rules is the most conspicuous feature of modern sports.313 Though many local rules still existed, Broughton rules ended the oral tradition of traditional folk games in 1743. The formal rules were conventions and routines to increase impersonality and decrease arbitrariness. At the same time, they were rationalized in Max Weber’s sense of instrumental rationality. Accordingly, the rules of the game were subject to revision. The first set of prize ring rules was replaced by the London Prize Ring rules in 1838. One of the most remarkable things in these early sets of rules was to control violence and “civilize” the game. These early sets of rules were designed to regulate “angry quarrels” and “foster a kind of rude chivalry (a code of conduct).”314 In this sense, modern prize fighting was never only excessively emotional, instinctive, or animalistic as contemporary moralists contended. The London Prize Ring rules further separated prize fighting from the

314 William Chamber and Robert Chamber, Chamber’s Encyclopedia, Vol. 8, 485. For instance, both sets of rules prohibited striking an opponent while he was down and striking below the belt.
most natural way of fighting by prohibiting kicking, biting, gouging, and falling on an antagonist with the knees, which were common in a rough-and-tumble scrimmage. Eliminating excessive violence and limiting methods for victory imposed a certain level of self-control on contestants, and became a basis for the development of skills and game plans.

However, the modernization of the sport could not perfectly eliminate its working-class origin or impose civility. In fact, Broughton rules and the London Prize Ring rules were still highly traditional. The rules were dominated by the irregular rhythm of traditional society. The duration of a round was irregular. A round was finished only when a man fell down. Like traditional communal plays, there was no limit of playing time.\footnote{The longest bare-knuckle fight under the London Prize Ring rules on record lasted for six hours and fifteen minutes. The longest one in America lasted for four hours and twenty minutes. O’Reilly, Ethics of Boxing and Manly Sport, 80.}

In the bare-knuckle fight, a fast knockout rarely took place. A bare-knuckle fighter felt great pain striking a knockout blow on the jaw point. The double swing for the head (skull) was not possible without the help of gloves. For these reasons, a fighter usually attacked an opponent’s body. But these blows seldom caused a shock necessary for a knockout.\footnote{Atchison Daily Globe, October 10, 1887, p. 3. Make Donovan also pointed out that the gloves helped boxers strike a knockout blow. National Police Gazette, March 23, 1901, p. 7. In reality, the Queensberry fight lasted shorter not by its limit of round, but by frequent knockouts. National Police Gazette, October 15, 1904, p. 10.} Naturally, the importance of skill and rude chivalry disappeared as a fight dragged on. What made a fighter stay in the ring was simply
his determination to take punishment and injuries and endure pain.\textsuperscript{317} Its long
duration made a prizefight a display of pure brute and heroic endurance and
gameness, not a display of skill. Accordingly, while Broughton rules and the London
Prize Ring rules began to “civilize” the match and value skill, they also gave a great
advantage to brute and determination. In this sense, the early prize fighting rules,
which were effective until the 1880s, reflected working class men’s concept of ideal
masculinity and allowed working-class men to display irrational and reckless courage
against middle-class men’s ideal of rationalized and disciplined masculinity.

The advantage of brutes and reckless courage was also attributable to the
pattern of fighting under the early rules. Broughton rules prohibited gouging and
kicking. But hair and ear pulling and holding and hitting might be used in the ring.
The allowance of wrestling made the general pattern of a fight under Broughton rules
a simple face-to-face hammering.\textsuperscript{318} The London Prize Ring rules further prohibited
head butting and hitting behind the head but still allowed wrestling. Accordingly, in
these early sets of rules, a heavier and more powerful fighter naturally had
advantages. The allowance of wrestling also made it almost impossible for a fighter to
distance himself from his opponent. It limited the development of footwork and
defense skill.\textsuperscript{319} As long as a bout was a toe-to-toe fight with the limited methods of
footwork and defense, taking punishment was unavoidable. Accordingly, a match

\textsuperscript{317} In 1889, a sportsman pointed out that “the fight was usually won by the man who had determined
that he would not be beaten.” H. C. Merwin, “Trotting Races,” \textit{Atlantic Monthly}, 64, no. 181 (July
1889), 121.


\textsuperscript{319} In these fights, “there were few crystallized principles of attack or defense.” O’Reilly, \textit{Ethics of
Boxing and Manly Sport}, 51.
involved a great level of mutilation. Not only did an opponent’s blows inflict pain and injuries. Without gloves, fighters often broke their hands and arms striking their opponents. Because there was no point system under the London Prize Ring rules, the only way for a fighter to win the match was to fight with injured hands and arms until his opponent was knocked out or totally exhausted. In the pattern of the game, brute, courage, and endurance to take pain and punishments were the most important factors for a victory. The system of the game asked contestants for a heroic and often reckless display of determination to win, which caused worship among fight followers.

In a sport, which valued masculinity expressed in the aggressive and physical way, the lack of skill was not disgraceful. The lack of courage and determination, that is, being a quitter was the most disgraceful. Withstanding incredible punishment, injuries, and fatigue was seen as a manly performance, but it accumulated mutilation and risked dangers to life. Accordingly, courage without discretion and voluntary self-destruction in the ring contradicted the middle-class notion of sports. That is, the anti-intellectualistic and self-destructive expression of masculinity in prizefights under the London Prize Ring rules challenged not only amateur sportsmen’s notion of sports as a means to learn self-discipline but also middle-class physical educators’ claim of sports as a means for the balanced development of physique, intelligence, and morals.

While the rules supported the development of skill and “science,” what had actually impressed fight followers outside of the ring was a fighter’s heroic display of
courage patterned by the very rules. Fighters and fight followers, who still valued courage over skill, projected their notion of ideal masculinity in the word “gameness,” which meant determination and courage to take punishment and fight until he could not.\(^{320}\) A fighter, who “stopped frequently under hard punishment,” could not be characterized as “game.” Rather he was disgracefully called a “quitter.”\(^{321}\) The word represented that discretion to avoid further punishment and mutilation did not earn a fighter respect, and scars and mutilation were a fighter’s manly symbols. Accordingly, gameness contradicted rationalism, which was appreciated by middle-class men. It was more conspicuous when being game required a man to fight his losing battle until he could not. In fact, “gameness” was more often attached to a loser.\(^{322}\) A courageous loser, who took high risks without quitting, was as admirable as a victor. In this sense, “gameness” made both fighters victors. The concept of “gameness” contradicted the middle-class worldview of competition. Gameness did not divide a victor and a loser clearly as in the market. That is, “gameness” contradicted Victorian middle-class men’s moral of “Self-Made Man” in which only a victor proved his masculinity. On the contrary, gameness constructed male communities based on the celebration of working-class men’s ideals of masculinity.

When fighters followed this code of conduct in the ring, fight followers were never hesitant to admire and reward losers. In 1887, the “savagest” bare-knuckle

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\(^{320}\) Gameness meant the “plucky manner in which he stood his punishment.” St. Paul Daily Globe, May 21, 1886, p. 4.


\(^{322}\) National Police Gazette, September 17, 1892, p 10; Atchison Daily Champion, April 27, 1887, p. 1; Daily Inter-Ocean, July 22, 1887, p. 2; St. Paul Daily Globe, July 9, 1889, p. 1.
match under the London Prize Ring rules between Ned Hawkins and Billy McMahon lasted for two hours and fifty-two minutes. “Both men were terribly used up, but showed gameness and appetite for punishment.” McMahon was defeated, but spectators who were impressed by his pluck collected eighty-five dollars for him. A loser earned more money on account of his “gameness.”

Though rules tried to “civilize” matches, fighters’ and fight followers’ obsession with gameness and manly honor made bare-knuckle fights under the London Prize Ring rules exceptionally brutal, and the brutality of the bare-knuckle fight contradicted the middle-class notions of sports. In the fight between Christopher Lilly and Thomas McCoy on September 13, 1842, an older man McCoy was a loser in the early stage of the fight but never gave up fighting. McCoy fell down eighty-one times in the match, which lasted for two hours and forty-three minutes. Spectators shouted. “For God’s sake, save his life.” But it was too late. McCoy did not rise up after his last knockout. McCoy refused to be called a quitter and kept his honor rather than saving his life.

To keep their manly honor, fighters stood incredible punishments for several decades. In another 1887 fight under the London Prize Ring rules, Ed Kelly and Dan Daly stood in the ring for three hours and fifty-eight minutes. Kelly was overmatched. In round forty-three, “the fight was of a sickening character.” Kelly was “almost helpless receiving Daly’s blows.” A rich fight follower urged Kelly to give up. He promised to give Kelly three hundred dollars in return. But Kelley refused his offer,

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323 Wisconsin State Register, February 12, 1887, p. 2; Rocky Mountain News, January 25, 1888, p. 6.  
324 Timony, American Fistiana, 21.
and continued to take punishment. That amount of money was never small to a working-class man. However, to Kelly, his manly honor was worth more than three hundred dollars. In round fifty, the match was “nothing but plain brutality.” Kelly was simply a “chopping block.” Kelley received an offer of one thousand dollars from the sporting man and finally gave up the fight at the sixty-third round.

The fight was an interesting case to show what working-class men’s notion of ideal manly performance in the ring was. However, manly performance might be disrupted. Prize fighting was not an exclusive working-class entertainment. A wealthy sporting man tried to stop the excessively violent match. When the wealthy sporting man offered him a large amount of money, Kelly finally gave up the masculine performance valued by his working-class fellows. The episode presaged how clubs and commercialism would transform prize fighting in the 1890s. Nevertheless, in fight followers’ eyes, Kelly was still an honorable man. He took incredible punishment and mutilation according to unwritten rules in the ring. Most fighters, who were less fortunate than Kelly, fought until they were totally helpless for a meager amount of money. In order to keep manly honor and display gameness, they sustained mutilation and even died in matches that ended only with the knockout of either man. Class was constructed in these brutal rituals.

Prize fighting empowered working-class men not only by constructing their own masculine code of conduct and the distinctive notion of ideal masculinity but also by blurring class boundaries, which the middle classes had drawn. These

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325 Atchison Daily Champion, April 27, 1887, p. 1.
working-class men’s incredible gameness impressed not only fight followers but also reporters, who were obligated to denounce the brutality of prize fighting according to morals of the 1880s. An 1887 report of the fight between Ike Wier and Johnny Havlin, which lasted for four hours and six minutes, defined it as “one of the fiercest and bloodiest battles.” However, the fight report also expressed respect for two men in the ring, describing the fight as “one of the most terrific prize fights” and one that would “no doubt remain prominent both in the mind of those who witnessed it and the annals of the prize ring.” Havlin was heavily punished but did not avoid punishment. The report acclaimed him as “one of the gamest fighters.” According to the report, the more Havlin was punished, “the faster he fought.” He seriously injured his hand but fought for about three more hours. The report acclaimed that Havlin “proved to all these present that he was not a quitter or a coward.” Another 1887 report of the bout between Jack Hopper and Mike Cushing stressed the repulsiveness of the fight. Cushing’s face was a “mass of raw and bleeding flesh.” However, the more impressive thing to the reporter was Cushing’s determination to endure pain. He broke his arm in the eighteenth round, but “he continued gamely.” Later, Cushing’s two small bones in the wrist were also broken. Nevertheless, Cushing “swung his injured right with such force that he again broke it above the wrist.” Cushing was finally knocked down. However, Cushing’s performance earned him not only fight followers’ but also the reporter’s respect.  

327 Daily Inter Ocean, July 22, 1887, p. 2.  
328 Atchison Daily Champion, April 27, 1887, p. 1.
It is not true that prize fighting did not have any code of conduct. Prizefighters had a code of conduct which differed from that of middle-class sportsmen. While fair play and sportsmanship were a code of conduct for middle-class sportsmen, working-class men constructed gameness (courage without discretion) as a main code of conduct in prizefights. Accordingly, the prize rules and ring performance allowed working-class men to share their distinctive notion of masculinity. These cultural differences constructed class boundaries but these differences did not totally polarize working-class and middle-class men on sporting fields.

While anti-prize fighting activists constructed prize fighting in a cultural binary between disciplined and emotional (impulsive), the distinction was not absolute. Besides the formal rules, which made fighters use violence under a certain level of self-control, the ring also had the gentlemanly code. The ritual of bare-knuckle prize fighting demanded that contestants control their personal feelings. For instance, prize fighting shared the formality of handshaking before the match with gentleman’s boxing. The gentlemanly preliminary ceremony coexisted with a warlike ceremony of tying boxer’s colors to the stakes. These two conflicting preliminary ceremonies were also faithfully observed in the American ring. Even ordinary working-class men who resolved their feuds by the prize ring rules followed the gentlemanly ceremony before they began their “cruel and fatal” fights.”

When fighting men refused to shake hands, spectators hissed at them. There were also many

330 Timony, American Fistiana, 15.
331 Cleveland Herald, November 21, 1881, p. 3.
perfunctory handshakes. But these perfunctory handshakes partly contested the ritual because the contestants already submitted their antagonism to formality.\textsuperscript{332}

Many fighters kept the gentlemanly code after their matches as middle-class amateurs. The 1880 fight between Joe Goss and Paddy Ryan was entrapped in partisanship. The bouts reflected antagonism between the English champion and the American champion, and between an Anglo-Saxon fighter and an Irish American fighter. Throughout the bout, Irish American spectators were in a riotous mood. However, Ryan did not subscribe to militant ethnic and national identity. A report reconstructed the last scenes of their fight: “Joe could scarcely raise his guard, and when Ryan shot through a drive to the ribs he had reached the end. He dropped to his knees…. Thereupon Ryan was declared the winner and atoned in part for his rather questionable deportment during the battle by shaking hands with his fallen adversary in a manly and friendly way. ‘It’s nature, my boy,’ was the veteran’s simple comment. ‘It gave out.’”\textsuperscript{333} While many fights ended in riots, the ring did not totally exclude the gentlemanly code. Working-class and middle-class masculinities were not totally polarized in sporting fields. Nevertheless, the formality of pre-match and post-match rituals could not eliminate all differences between prize fighting and middle-class sports. The formality made fighters manly in the middle-class notion of men only at the moment.

\textsuperscript{333} \textit{San Francisco Call}, May 22, 1910, p. 10. This post-match ritual continued in the 1890s and the 1900s. \textit{Chicago Tribune}, May 13, 1900, p. 17.
2. The Law, the Club, and the Transformation of Prize Fighting

Throughout the nineteenth century, middle-class institutions tried to repress or mold prize fighting in their cultural norms. Among these institutions, the law was special. The law was a “body of rules enacted and imposed by society.” It was representative coercive force. In the nineteenth century, the legal system and law enforcement imposed middle-class values on all people’s recreation. The law was also a serious constraint to prize fighting. In America, “arranging matches was difficult since the sport was universally banned until the 1890s and thereafter was legalized in few locations, and usually just briefly, until 1920s.” The American legal system was based largely on the tradition of the English common law. While prize fighting was “not a distinct offense at common law,” men involved in fights were punishable for assault and battery and for a breach of peace or a riot. This legal idea was imported to America.

In America, the law repressed prize fighting more harshly. While prize fighting gained popularity in the mid-nineteenth century, some states began to write special penal codes to expressly prohibit prize fighting. In 1850, California enacted a law to make it a felony for two persons to fight each other “upon a previous

agreement, upon a wager for money, or any other reward.”337 While section 412 of the penal code did not expressively address prize fighting, it actually aimed at the repression of prize fighting in the state. Section 412 was revised to address prize fighting as a felony in 1872. It stipulated, “Every person who engages in, instigates, encourages, or promotes any ring or prize fight … is punishable by imprisonment in the State prison not exceeding two years.”338

In 1859, New York legislature introduced a bill to “prevent and punish prize fighting by imprisonment and fine.”339 Section 485 of the penal code stipulated, “Every person who engages in, instigates, encourages, or promotes any ring or prize fight, or any other premeditated fight or contention, whether as principal, aid, second, umpire, surgeon, or otherwise, although no death or personal injury ensues, is guilty of a misdemeanor.” In addition, section 486 aimed to punish anyone that made a bet. Section 488 was designed to punish anyone that left New York State to be involved in a prizefight.340 The New York Penal Code was strict enough to give the police power to repress prize fighting.341 Many other eastern states followed California and New York. When the popularity of prize fighting rose again in the late nineteenth century, some western and southern states also passed special laws to prohibit prizefights.

337 Quoted in Lyman Abbott and Hamilton W. Mabie. “The San Francisco Prize-Fight.” Outlook 95 (June 25 1910), 360
341 George Washington Walling, Recollections of a New York Chief of Police (New York: Caxton Book Concern, 1887), 373.
Minnesota (1889), Florida (1892) and Texas (1895) joined others to expressly prohibit prize fighting.342

It is often assumed that, on account of its written existence and literary interpretation, the law constrains human agency rather than human agency influencing it. Nonetheless, as Richard Gruneau argues, structural constraints also give social actors new possibilities to expand their agency.343 While the law was a main restraining force for prize fighting in the late nineteenth century, it also gave supporters of the disreputable sport opportunities to overcome moralists’ purifying movements.

In England, “sparring” was popularized with the emergence of prize fighting. Professional fighters promoted “manly art of self-defense” and taught their art to young aristocrats and gentlemen. However, as early as the 1830s, the English court was required to make a legal opinion about the danger of sparring matches. In R. v. Young (1838), the Court for Crown Cases Reserved distinguished a sparring, in which a contestant did not intend to inflict bodily harm to the other, from a prize fight. Based on the distinction, the court ruled out that a death “caused by an injury received in a sparring match” did not “amount to manslaughter.” The court decision legalized pugilistic contests in sparring schools.344

The introduction of gloves and the Queensberry rules into gentlemanly boxing contests made the court distinguish between a prizefight and a sparring contest. In *Reg. v. Orton* (1878), the Court for Crown Cases Reserved confirmed that a gloved sparring match, which was held on mutual consent, was free from legal prosecution. The court legalized a gloved sparring match as a “mere exhibition of skill” as long as two contestants did not fight until either was totally exhausted or received injuries.  

In *Reg. v. Coney* (1882), the Court for Crown Cases Reserved also confirmed the distinction and legalized a certain degree of bodily attack and violence during a sparring match. The court decision ruled, “There is no blow struck in anger nor is a blow struck which is likely or intended to do corporeal hurt, but … a blow struck in sport, not likely, nor intended to cause bodily harm, is not an assault.” American legal experts were informed by these English cases, which confirmed that, as long as it was held by consent and not dangerous in tendency, a sparring contest was a lawful athletic competition.

American fighters were ready to test the court. While some bare-knuckle fighters directly challenged the law, others began to circumvent the law by accommodating to the middle-class notion of sports. Some fighters started to stray away from the London Prize Ring rules and put on gloves as early as the 1870s. In

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the 1880s, amateur boxing gained its popularity among middle-class men. While fighters’ pupils originally consisted mainly of “employees in the public markets, firemen, and police officers,” clerks, salesmen, book-keepers, lawyers, and physicians joined them. These amateur boxers attended professional fights and read about them. Fighters and managers realized that catering to these potential spectators under legal protection might be profitable. While a championship match still meant a bare-knuckle fight, pubic exhibitions (often called “friendly exhibitions”) became popular in the early 1880s.

Promoting these tame professional fights as the “scientific boxing contests for points,” fighters and managers tried to elevate prizefights, which “were given in establishments of the lower order.”\(^{349}\) Though a professional sparring match was “frequently quite severe,” a hard-gloved sparring match under the Queensberry rules between professionals became similar to what were held in middle-class athletic clubs.\(^{350}\) Accordingly, the sparring matches often avoided the police intervention and could be held in public places. In New York, “Tammany influence and police payoffs enabled” four-round exhibition bouts to occur.\(^{351}\) As a result, the New York metropolitan area became the center of professional fighting in the early 1880s.

The sparring match became a public event in the 1880s. In 1882 sparring match between John L. Sullivan and Tug Wilson at the Madison Square Garden sold over ten thousand tickets and among spectators were several thousand whose faces

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\(^{349}\) *New York Times*, November 26, 1882, p. 5; *Daily Inter-Ocean*, December 2, 1881, p. 2.

\(^{350}\) *Daily Evening Bulletin*, May 15, 1883, p. 3; December 5, 1883, p. 1.

\(^{351}\) Riess, *City Game*, 173.
were “as familiar to the public as household names.”

The 1883 sparring match between Sullivan and Charles Mitchell at the Garden drew not only bankers, brokers, and other middle-class professionals but also high-ranking officials from New York and other cities. While controversy regarding sparring matches was growing in New York, the 1887 public exhibition between Sullivan and Patsy Cardiff, which was held at Washington Rink in Minneapolis, drew over ten thousand spectators. The boundaries between boxing as a sport and prize fighting as an illegal entertainment were increasingly blurred by this new form of professional contest, which were often accompanied by knock-outs. The commercial prospect of sparring matches made fighters less resistant to putting on gloves and having a match under gentleman’s boxing rules. The *New York Times* noticed prizefighters’ changing attitude. “The prize fighter, however, is by no means an astute man of business…. there is no reason why he should endanger his precious person, which is his only professional capital, in actual fights for stakes the large part of which is absorbed by his backers, when there is very much money for him in ‘sparring exhibitions,’ which can be thought within the spirit as well as the letter of the law.”

Sullivan also popularized gloved fights in semblance of legality in another way. He made tours all over the country and had matches with voluntary challengers in the 1880s. If they stood punishment for four rounds, Sullivan rewarded them with some money. Using the legal distinction between sparring and the prizefight slyly,

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354 *The Modern Gladiator*, 70.
Sullivan’s party made the four rounder more similar to the fight under the London Prize Ring rules than public exhibitions. A four rounder was in fact a knockout contest. It required a professional fighter to be aggressive from the start to the end so as not to lose money. The mismatched volunteers had to sustain an enormous test of endurance. Under the presence of the local police, these fights drew a number of local people who wanted to witness Sullivan or cheer for the best men of their hometowns.

The distinction between a gloved sparring match and a prizefight, which began in the English court, often protected professional fighters in America. George Washington Walling, the New York Chief of Police, planned to stop the proposed exhibition between Sullivan and Greenfield in 1884 but faced objections from the Supreme Court of New York. The court argued that, if two fighters engaged in a sparring contest for “points,” the exhibition was “perfectly legal.” The court ordered the policemen to stop the exhibition only when it became a slugging match or a fighter tried to knock out the other.\(^{356}\)

However, while professional fighters popularized exhibitions under the protection of local machines and officials, some local authorities were still ready to fight against this new form of prizefight. In 1885, Sullivan and Dominick F. McCaffrey, who engaged in an exhibition, were arrested for their violation of the Pennsylvania penal code prohibiting prize fighting. Citing English cases, the fighters and their lawyers tried to prove that their exhibition fit the legal concept of a sparring match. They argued that the exhibition was a “sparring match for scientific points”

\(^{356}\) Walling, *Recollections of a New York Chief of Police*, 374.
and fighters did not try to “do” (knock out) each other. While the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania avoided defining a sparring match or a prizefight, it ruled that their exhibition was a prizefight on the ground of a stake for the match.\(^{357}\)

Whether fighters received favorable decisions or not, other court cases began to clarify what constituted a prizefight on American soil. In 1889, Sullivan, who kept his principle to fight only under the Queensberry rules, unusually fought a bare-knuckle bout with Jake Kilrain. Sullivan was accused of violating an anti-prize fighting law of Mississippi, which was passed in 1882. The grand jurors of the Mississippi Circuit Court for the Second Judicial District of Marion County found Sullivan guilty on the ground that he bruised Kilrain and fought for a prize.\(^{358}\) Sullivan appealed to the Supreme Court of Mississippi. In *Sullivan v. State* (1890), Judge S. H. Terreal found that, though it declared a prizefight unlawful, the 1882 act lacked a specific definition as to what constituted a prizefight as a crime. Terreal himself construed a prizefight as a bruising for a “reward or wager in a public place.”\(^ {359}\)

In 1893, the Supreme Court of Michigan defined a prizefight as a premeditated contention in the ring for money, “coupled with an intent” to inflict “some degree of bodily harm” upon the other contestant regardless of the use of gloves.\(^ {360}\) In *State v. Olympic Club* (1894), the Supreme Court of Louisiana did not

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\(^{359}\) Ibid., 346.  
approve the attempt of the state to repeal the charter of the Olympic Club, which was the center of professional boxing in New Orleans. Again, the court affirmed the difference between a prizefight as an offence of assault and battery and a lawful exhibition as a display of skill in boxing. Whether contestants intended to inflict bodily harm to each other decisively divided a gloved fight into a sporting activity or a crime in these court cases.361 In People v. Fitzsimmons (1895), the court also distinguished an exhibition, which was “simply a contest of power and skill,” from a prizefight and freed Bob Fitzsimmons from the commission of assault and battery.362 In 1895, James Corbett, who was arrested at his training camp in Hot Springs, Arkansas, also got a favorable decision. Chancery judge Lentherman ruled that Corbett prepared for a scientific glove contest, not a prizefight. Lentherman admitted that the five-ounce gloves and the limited number of rounds on the articles of agreement decreased potential danger to human life. As these cases represented, the middle-class notion of sports could ironically protect gloved professional fights.363

The emergence of sparring contests between professional boxers and the lack of a detailed definition of a prize fight in anti-prize fighting laws led the courts to continually construct the meaning of a prizefight. In a series of court decisions in the 1880s and 1890s, the legal distinction became conventional. While a sparring match meant a safe display of “skill or science,” a prizefight was construed as a

“premeditated fight” allowing a contestant to bruise the other and cause “consequent danger to human life” for a reward.  

In this sense, while the law was still restraining for fighters, the clarified legal distinction between a sparring match and a prizefight and the legalization of a certain level of violence attached to a display of skill helped prize fighting survive, rather than destroy it. The conventional and legal distinction made the officials of athletic clubs sure that they could legally bring profitable matches to their clubhouses. Clubs had social connections with local politicians and police. Minor courts, which were under the influence of local machines, protected professional fights in clubs. Accordingly, even after arrests took place, fighters and other participants were rarely convicted.  

Moreover, while the legal distinction became conventional, municipal and state governments began to make gloved contests in athletic clubs free from legal prosecution and made professional fights new sources of revenue for these local governments.  

While prize fighting was used as a method for the reproduction of a working-class ethos, this commercial and popular cultural form could not exclusively serve a certain class. This became clear when clubs began to be involved in professional fights. American athletic clubs were founded in the craze of sports and physical training among middle-class men, sweeping the nation in the late nineteenth century. William B. Curtis, who was an ardent advocate of amateurism, founded the New

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365 Walling, Recollections of a New York Chief of Police, 374; Daily Evening Bulletin, June 17, 1890, p. 3; Morning Oregonian, February 26, 1893, p. 4.
York Athletic Club in 1866. The club became a model for other athletic clubs which flourished in the late nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{366} These clubs “formulated playing rules” and “arranged competition.” However, their real goal was to cultivate the character of competitors under the principle of amateurism. Clubs were also ones among the “first restricted sports societies to be formed after the Civil War.” They were upper-middle-class organizations with strict membership criteria.\textsuperscript{367} Clubs, which were involved in professional boxing, were not exceptions. For instance, the St. Paul Athletic Club, which was a center of professional boxing in the Midwest, pursued “the promotion of health, amateur sports, athletic exercise, recreation, entertainment and the cultivation of social intercourse among its members.” The club had boxing, swimming, fencing, basketball, wrestling and gymnastic game societies. Its membership was limited to two thousand.\textsuperscript{368}

To many club officials and members, the professional fight, which was increasingly similar to amateur boxing contests, did not cause repulsion. In fact, many club members were ardent fight followers. Many clubs had debt problems. The need of better clubhouses and facilities to compete with other clubs accompanied large spending.\textsuperscript{369} While clubs succeeded in expelling working-class professionals from track and field in the early 1880s, club officials were eager to capitalize on the

\textsuperscript{367} Riess, \textit{City Game}, 57.
\textsuperscript{369} \textit{New York Times}, July 21, 1893, p. 3. Also see Vincent, \textit{The Rise and Fall of American Sport}, 74-75.
popularity of professional boxing in the late 1880s.370 Clubs that attracted anticipated fights earned a large amount of profit in spite of their enormous expense.

The California Athletic Club, whose members were leading businessmen and professionals, began to hold professional fights from 1888.371 L. R. Fulda and his associates became leading matchmakers for professional bouts in California. The club made San Francisco became a center of professional fighting in the state. Other California clubs followed the exemplar and held gloved matches in their facilities.372

New Orleans also had a perfect condition to be a center of prize fighting. Louisiana did not have its penal code to prohibit the prizefight until the late 1880s. In 1889, the Young Men’s Gymnastic Club and the Southern Athletic Club already had arranged exhibitions in New Orleans.373 In 1890, the New Orleans City Council passed a city ordinance legalizing gloved boxing matches. Act no. 25 prohibited prizefights but legalized “exhibitions and glove-contests,” which took place “within the rooms of regularly chartered athletic clubs in the city of New Orleans.” The ordinance still reflected the middle-class values by prohibiting the sale of liquor for spectators and fights on Sunday. While the ordinance legalized gloved contests to promote “the development of muscular strength,” it actually made prize fighting flourish in the city. The Olympic Club, which was founded in 1883 by the middle-class ideal of amateurism and self-improvement, played an important role in making prize fighting big business. Charles Noel and the contest committee offered “fabulous

370 Ibid., 67-68
371 San Francisco Call, July 6, 1890, p. 3.
372 Naughton, Heavyweight Champions, 3-4; San Francisco Call, September 27, 1900, p. 9.
purses” and brought the best professional fighters to the city. In 1892, the club held the historic bout between John L. Sullivan and Jim Corbett for a twenty-five-thousand-dollar purse and a ten-thousand-dollar side bet. Many other clubs like the Crescent City Club and the Abudson Club also became active matchmakers in the “Sin City.”

In New York, the Coney Island Athletic Club, which was located in a town of Gravesend, King County, became a center of prize fighting. In 1892, a sporting journalist, Arthur T. Lumley, established the amateur organization with several partners. Lumley originally excluded boxing from physical programs to prevent controversy. But his partner, John Y. McKane, chief of police at Coney Island, who was a big fan of prize fighting, pressed Lumley to include boxing as a physical program and bring professional fights to the club. The club was controlled by highly respectable local figures but held the lucrative professional boxing matches, which were advertised as “sparring for scientific scores.” While McKane himself was charged in Coney Island (Gravesend District) as a boss, the club maintained a notorious connection with the Tammany Hall machine to protect bouts. Other clubs like the Varuna Boat Club of Brooklyn and the Seaside Athletic Club instantly became matchmakers in the New York metropolitan area.

Club officials, promoters, boxing critics, fighters, and managers were obsessed with the promotion of their fights as scientific boxing contests to avoid legal

374 Siler, Inside factors on pugilism, 94-95; Somers, Sports in New Orleans, 167-170, 174-176.
375 Somers, Sports in New Orleans, 167-170, 177-191.
prosecution. In England, while it was associated with criminality, prize fighting, which referred to the bare-knuckle fight, became a derogatory term. Insiders invented the term of “pugilism” to elevate the social status of professional fighting. Likewise, prize fighting became increasingly a derogatory term in America. Like their English counterparts, club officials, fighters, and pro-boxing pressmen preferred the term of “boxing.” They claimed fighters as “boxers” and “experts at glove fighting for points” and promoted a professional match as a “scientific exhibition” or a “scientific (boxing) contests for points.” In so doing, they stressed commonness between professional and amateur boxing.

For instance, Sam Austin, a boxing critic of the *National Police Gazette*, argued that the scientific boxing contest shared gloves and science with amateur boxing. He also went on to say that it was different from the prize fight, in which slugging (a display of brute) was common. Fighters also accommodated to the middle-class notion of sports through these terms. After he became the heavyweight champion in 1882, Sullivan claimed that he was a “boxer.” He argued that a boxer could not fight a bare-knuckle bout under the London Prize Ring rules. While Corbett was the first heavyweight champion free from the tradition of bare-knuckle

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379 *Chicago Tribune*, June 8, 1899, p. 4; March 27, 1894, p. 11; *New York Times*, August 31, 1893, p. 9; October 8, 1893, p. 12; October 10, 1893, p. 9; October 18, 1893, p. 1; *Washington Post*, February 1, 1894, p. 6; *National Police Gazette*, January 27, 1894, p. 3; October 26, 1895, p. 7; September 7, 1895, p. 10.
381 *New York Sun*, July 25, 1889, p. 2.
fighting, he called his fight a sparring match for “scientific points,” which was not either a “fake or a prize fight.”

However, their definition of a scientific boxing match still contested the legal definitions. They promoted a professional match as a safe display of science accommodating to the middle-class notion of sports expressed in the legal definition of a sparring match but ignored that a contest for a reward was construed as a prizefight in court. Accordingly, clubs introduced gloves and the Queensberry rules to construct a match as a safe display of science, but they still provided a purse. While clubs gave a professional fight the semblance of civility, they allowed more intense fights than exhibitions. These bouts often ended up in knockouts and therefore, became matches to a finish, which were against the law. Moralists, who literally interpreted the distinction between a prizefight and a sparring match by the court, knew these bouts still had ethos of the old bare-knuckle fight. They argued that the “mere wearing of gloves” did not “take it out of the category of barbarous exhibitions” as long as these fights accompanied brutality, the permission of violence to a level of physical damage, mutilation, knockouts, and rewards.

In fact, the relationship and interactions between a popular cultural form and a middle-class institution was not unidirectional. Club fighting accommodated both to the middle-class notion of sports and the old ethos of the bare-knuckle fight. It was a product of cultural negotiations. The contested nature of the legal definition of a

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382 *Daily Inter-Ocean*, December 28, 1891, p. 2.
prizefight helped the strange cultural negotiation survive. As long as the legal
distinction between a prize fight and a sparring match was based on the intent to
inFLICT bodily harm, discerning a prizefight was subjective. The legal distinction gave
the police and city officials the right to decide whether a contest came within the legal
definition of a prize fight or within the scope of the proviso as a “lawful” boxing
contest. This arbitrariness helped clubs, which had social connections. City officials
issued licenses to clubs. The police were present at professional matches but rarely
intervened in fights. In many cases, the police ignored that tickets were sold to non-
club members and fighters were rewarded.384 Arrests were occasionally made, but it
was hard to make them stick on account of divided opinions in the police.385

While laws failed to repress prize fighting, clubs continuously tried to mold
prize fighting from a middle-class perspective. Club fighting separated prize fighting
from the tradition of old folk culture and made it keep up with other modern sports,
which were being organized by middle-class men. In England, the existence of
prestigious status helped the emergence of nationalized governing bodies in rowing,
pugilism, horse-racing, and cricket in early nineteenth century. The National Sporting
Club in London, which was a representative upper-middle-class athletic organization,
also controlled amateur and professional boxing.386

384 New York State Legislature Assembly, *Report of the Special Committee of the Assembly Appointed
to Investigate the Public Offices and Departments of the City of New York and of the Counties Therein
included*, Vol. 2. (Albany: James B. Lyon, State Printer, 1900), 1945-1946. Also see *New York Times*,
August 29, 1894, p. 9.
385 *Morning Herald*, June 10, 1897, p. 6.
386 In England, the Pugilistic Club, which was founded by a famous fighter, John Jackson, took a role
as a governing body. Later, the Pugilistic Benevolent Association, which prominent fighters and fight
supporters formed in 1852, maintained order at the fight venue and mediated controversies between
However, American boxing lacked a central authority. In America, Richard K. Fox, an Irish American publisher, was the first figure who tried to organize prize fighting. Fox classified three categories “for heavyweights, over 158lbs.; middle, under 158lbs., and over 140 lbs.; light, under 140 lbs.” When clubs began to be involved in professional boxing, they tried to bring order to professional fighting. Clubs contributed to the sophistication of rules and contracts. Clubs classified boxers more minutely. For instance, the Olympic Club of New Orleans classified six weights to prevent mismatches. Nevertheless, the famous clubs could make their rules and regulations prevail only for certain areas. While the oral tradition of folk games had already disappeared, an old legacy of folk games was left with the localization of rules and weight classifications. While they failed to unify the rules, clubs still facilitated the modernization of the sport.

Another important feature in the modernization of club fighting was the facilitation of specialization. There was no cultural binary between a modern sport and a traditional sport. The bare-knuckle fight was a traditional sport, but it already developed some characters, which Allen Guttmann identifies as signs of modern sports. The roles of manager and trainer were already separated from fighters in the era of the bare-knuckle fight. But in the era of the bare-knuckle fight, there was no professional matchmaker. Managers dealt with matchmaking. Accordingly, “boxing matches in the 1870s and 1880s usually either were impromptu barroom brawls or

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interests. But its reign was short-lived. Adrian Harvey, *The Beginnings of a Commercial Sporting Culture in Britain, 1793-1850* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2004), 129.


were organized on personal basis by fighters or their managers.”

Clubs became professional matchmakers or hired professional matchmakers. The bidding system resulted from professional matchmaking. The role of managers was confined to the dealing of financial affairs for fighters.

Club fighting also specialized the role of referee. The Queensberry rules were the most detailed set of rules ever. But there are still many situations, which were not mentioned by these rules. Clubs developed contracts to resolve ambiguities in the rules and decrease arbitrariness in the processing of a fight. But they still needed a special arbitrator who could interpret rules and contracts correctly. Because there was no professional referee in the 1880s, old bare-knuckle fights randomly selected a referee from fight followers. However, clubs hired professional referees for a certain period of time or for a match. The emergence of professional referees increased referees’ reliability.

Clubs also helped the specialized knowledge on fighting. Guttmann identifies the circulation of information about the game as a sign of the modernization of a sport. That is, the process of modernization of a sport needed experts, who made people know the rules and history of a sport and identify performers’ skill. In the 1890s, club officials were critical of unprofessional and sensational reports about

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389 Riess, *City Game*, 172.

390 For instance, whether a boxer could hit his opponent with a free hand or not was always a controversy because the rules did not specify it. Pivot blows, elbowing, and hitting with wrist and forearm were also controversial. There were “no strait Marquis of Queensberry rules.” Siler, *Inside Facts on Pugilism*, 16-21.


392 In the Queensberry era, professional referees like Frank Stevenson, James McDonald, John Duffy, Charley White, George Siler, and Eddie Graney became nationally known.
prize fighting. Clubs invited boxing experts to guard against sensational reports and facilitated the professionalization of boxing reports.

However, under the legal limits, the most important feature of club fighting was the attempts of clubs to impose the semblance of civility on professional fights to distinguish them from bare-knuckle ones. The transformation limited the anti-hegemonic aspect of prize fighting, valorizing the middle-class ideal of rationalized and disciplined masculinity. Clubs made a prizefight a more orderly entertainment with the elevation of spectatorship. Taming spectators was an urgent task for club officials to make their fights free from social stigmatization and legal prosecution. Supported by the local police, club officials tried to secure the process of taming spectators. The Olympic Club of New Orleans became a model in the control of disorder. The club did not allow “any chance of foul play or any interruption of the peace” and forbade either side to “endeavor to stop its principal from losing or the other principal from winning.” The club also prohibited betting in the clubhouse to prevent potential disorder. The club expelled spectators who violated any regulations of the club. In so doing, the club partly succeeded in controlling unruly partisanship and disorder, which was chronicled in the era of the bare-knuckle fight, thus displaying the commitment of boxing business to social order. As a result, when fights moved to clubs, the interactive character of the old bare-knuckle fight

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393 For instance, the director of the Seaside Athletic Club, S. Stryker Williamson, attributed anti-boxing sentiment to reports exaggerating brutal and repulsive aspects. *New York Times*, June 13, 1895, p.16.
394 *New York Tribune*, March 2, 1900, p. 5.
was diluted, and fight followers’ expressive display of identity and partisanship was limited.

The legal distinction between a sparring match and a prizefight was also constructed on differences between a safe physical activity for self-improvement and “muscular development,” and a brutal commercial entertainment. In order to make a fight fit the middle-class notion of sports expressed in legal definitions, clubs also tried to “civilize” prize fighting to decrease bodily dangers. An early organizer of professional boxing, Fox, tried to introduce the National Police Gazette rules, which were based on the Queensberry rules, into the American ring. However, it was the club that finally achieved what Fox pursued. The California Athletic Club enforced the introduction of the Queensberry rules and padded gloves even to championship matches, and others followed. Clubs also tried to introduce many provisions to decrease bodily danger in boxing matches. The Olympic Club of New Orleans set an example in transforming prize fighting. The clubs provided medical checks for boxers before they entered the ring. It also required that a physician be present at the match and gave him power to stop the match to check injuries.

Clubs also gave a referee power to control brutality. For instance, the articles of agreement for the fight between Andrew Bowen and Stanton Abbott at the

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397 *Morning Oregonian*, November 9, 1886, p. 1.
398 *Chicago Tribune*, August 18, 1890, p. 2. In order to avoid legal troubles, club officials and boxing insiders tended to exaggerate the civilizing effect of the gloves. For instance, Bat Calvin of the Audubon Athletic Club believed that there was “no exhibition given in the club that the most fastidious lady could not witness.” *Daily Picayune*, June 1, 1890, p. 7. William Delaney, Corbett’s trainer, also argued that he had never seen “any serious or painful injury inflicted upon anybody in a soft glove contest.” *Galveston Daily News*, October 20, 1895, p. 2.
399 *New York Times*, September 2, 1892, p. 3.
Olympic Club in 1893 specified that the referee had the power to stop and decide the contest when so directed by the seconds and the contest committee. 401 In the articles of agreement for the fight between Corbett and Charley Mitchell in 1893, the Coney Island Athletic Club also gave the referee power to stop the match. The articles said, “Should at any time the contest become brutal or inhuman the referee shall have the power to stop the game and give decision to the man who has had the best of the game up to that point.” 402 Referees, who were hired by clubs, knew what clubs wanted them to do. George Siler argued that in the Queensberry rules, the role of referees was to make a match clean and protect both boxers in the ring. 403 With all these regulations on the safety of contestants, clubs did not allow boxers to display the incredible endurance and reckless courage, which was common in the era of the bare-knuckle fight. Gameness, that is, courage without discretion could not coexist with the provisions for the civilization of the fight in clubs.

In order to avoid trouble with courts and the police, clubs also needed to transform the style of boxing. The Queensberry rules were designed to prevent the unlimited display of brute. A famous boxing critic, W. W. Naughton, advocated club fights under the Queensberry rules, which eliminated disgraceful scrimmage and wrestling. 404 The imposition of the Queensberry rules aimed to make the professional fight fit the middle-class notion of sports by constructing it as a display of skill and

401 *The Southern Reporter*, vol. 15, 193.
402 *New York Times*, September 24, 1893, p. 3.
403 *Chicago Tribune*, March 1, 1897, p. 3.
404 W. W. Naughton, *Kings of the Queensberry Realm*, 15-17.
science. Clubs officials hoped that, with the introduction of the new rules, the focal point of the game was placed on science, not aggressiveness or gameness. But the transformations of the style of boxing reflected the dynamic relationship between middle-class institutions and boxers, who accommodated to the new system of professional boxing for their own interests. While clubs preferred a style focusing on “science,” it was boxers who could realize the transformation of the style of boxing as the producers of knowledge and ring performance. In this sense, the popularization of a new style in the ring attested to both boxers’ accommodation and agency.

3. Scientific Boxing, Clean Life, and New Hegemonic Masculinity in the Ring

In their contacts with a middle-class institution, boxers were not simply a disciplined class. Boxers’ accommodation to the new system of boxing was not passive. In fact, while slugging was popular among professional fighters, clubs had limited methods to make professional fighting a display of science. Accordingly, boxers who produced knowledge about a new style of boxing and constructed a boxing contest as a display of skill and science had more influence in the transformation of boxing style. In the 1890s and 1900s, some working-class

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405 Alf Austin, “The old and the New pugilism,” Outing, 37, no. 6 (March 1901), 682.
406 National Police Gazette, September 7, 1895, p.10.
407 Fighters accommodated to club fighting for several reasons. The introduction of gloves decreased injuries in the ring. Boxers wanted to avoid legal troubles. They also welcomed growing purses. Donovan, Roosevelt That I know, 223-224; Sullivan, Life and Reminiscences of a 19th Century Gladiator, 95; Siler, Inside Facts on Pugilism, p. 92-94; Brady, A Fighting Man, 68.
professional boxers produced a new style called “scientific boxing.” Jim Corbett, the first and most famous missionary of scientific boxing, symbolized the cultural connection between professional fighting and amateur boxing. He developed his style in a former professional’s boxing lessons and informal sparring matches with professional boxers in an athletic club. He was a professional boxer and instructor for the club. Corbett made a club a space where working-class professionalism met the middle-class notion of science.

While many contemporaries related the origin of boxing to Pancratium of Ancient Greece, by late nineteenth century Euro-American standard, Greek boxers were “almost entirely devoid of science.” In the mid-eighteenth century, James Figg termed pugilism as the “manly art.” But Figg’s style was not much different from the ancient style. He still engaged in a face-to-face hammering. Jack Broughton introduced the “art of stopping and parrying blows, then getting away.” But it could not revolutionize the style. According to Jem Mace, who was called the father of modern English pugilism, the common fighting style in the nineteenth century was that “two combatants simply hammered each other till one cried enough or fell insensibly by reason of the succession of blows rained on him by his opponent.” Without knowledge of a knockout blow, contemporary prize fighting was simply a brutal hammering.

410 Jem Mace, In Memoriam, 199, 12.
Nevertheless, while moralists saw prizefights as a revelation of barbaric emotionalism, the idea of science was always in prize fighting. More skillful fighters often earned the nickname “Professor.” The London Prize Ring rules, which gave advantages to brute, physical strength, and gameness, were not favorable to these skillful fighters. Accordingly, they cut a fine figure in boxing lessons rather than in the ring. In the 1870s, boxing novices learned skills from some guidebooks published by these boxing professors in England. In 1875, American Cyclopaedia identified scores of patterns and blows related to defense and offense requiring “great skill and judgment” for boxers.\footnote{George Ripley and Charles A. Dana, eds., American Cyclopaedia: A Popular Dictionary of General Knowledge, Vol. 14 (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1875), 76.} The patterns and blows included dodging, guarding, leading-off, counter, chopping, fibbing, a cross-counter, peak and chop, cross-buttock throw, hip throw, and upper cut. In the 1870s, amateur boxing was already a learned skill and prepared for the emergence of a scientific style in professional fighting.

In the late nineteenth century, some professional fighters tried to introduce “science” to the ring. Jem Mace, who popularized his own style among English and Australian fighters, was one of them. English and Australian imports brought their teacher’s style to America in the 1880s. However, the style made a fighter still in the ring and lack the refined skill of defense and footwork.\footnote{Richard Barry, “Kid Lavigne; Undisputed Champion of the World,” Pearson’s Magazine, 29, no. 6 (June, 1913), 666-670.} Accordingly, the style allowed only straight leads and cross counters.\footnote{James J. Corbett, “Jeff is Greatest Pug of All Time,” Chicago Tribune, April 24, 1910, p. C1.}

The influence of Jem Mace style was more limited in America. In American, the primitive style called slugging, which meant simple face-to-face fighting with
swing blows, was the most appreciated style among fighters and fight followers until
the 1880s. While some fight followers started to value “science” in the 1880s, the ring
was full of sluggers. According to a boxing expert in the 1880s, “what many an old
pugilist” had “hitherto refused to acknowledge” was “a superior degree of
science.”414 Accordingly, with the anti-intellectual tradition in American fighting, a
heavyweight champion meant “the prince of sluggers.”415

Paddy Ryan, who became the heavyweight champion of the world in 1880,
had a simple style. One fight report noted, “There was nothing to recommend him for
premier honors in the prize ring beyond his strength and his undoubted ability to take
and to inflict punishment. Science he had none, nor experience of the kind that makes
champions under recognized rules.” Ryan’s only tactic was “resorting to instant
aggression.”416 His successor, Sullivan, was called the “Napoleon of sluggers.”417 His
long reign seemed to prove that there was an advantage to strength and natural power
over “science” or the game plan. A report about his sparring with “Tug” Wilson
referred to his style. “There was seemingly no attempt upon the part of Bostonian to
display what is called ‘science.’”418 Sullivan had no defensive skill or game plan.
From a start to an end, he aggressively dashed toward his opponent and swung his
punches.419 His enormous popularity was due to his simple and aggressive style
appealing to working-class fight followers. In the era of Sullivan, slugging, brutal

415 The Modern Gladiator, 80.
416 San Francisco Call, May 22, 1910, p. 10.
417 New York Times, September 2, 1892, p. 3.
419 The Modern Gladiator, 200.
pounding, and attempt to knock out were characteristic of a genuine prizefight. But while slugging was a working-class fighting style, being a slugger did not mean a total rejection of the middle-class rationality. While sluggers were still proud of their aggressive style in the 1880s, slugging, which was related to criminality, was generally a derogatory term even among them. When Ryan classified him as a slugger, Sullivan was so upset as to issue a challenge to Ryan. He suggested that a winner would be decided by the number of clean hits. The conflicting meanings of slugging as both a proud style and a derogatory term referred to working-class men’s conflicting identity in the era of science and industrialization. But it was not only the working-class fighter who experienced conflicting identity of their masculinity. Amateur boxing instructors were concerned that Sullivan’s style was increasingly popular among their gentleman pupils in clubs. Brokers, merchants, and lawyers adopted Sullivan’s style and made amateur boxing contests slugging matches rather than displays of skill and graceful movements. An instructor, Michael Donovan, shared this concern. To him, boxing had to be “raised to almost an aesthetic level.” But a majority of students indulged in abominable “slugging.”

However, in 1892, Joseph Donovan, a veteran fight follower, noticed that a new style was emerging. Donovan argued that while slugging was still popular in “middle- and heavy-weights,” there had “been an important change in boxing style

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420 *Evening Herald*, June 10, 1897, p. 6.
421 *The Modern Gladiator*, 30-32.
423 *New York Times*, November 26, 1882, p. 5.
especially in lightweight classes.” He believed that the emergence of scientific boxers in a “newer school of pugilism” gave “pure science stronger leverage than ever over natural strength,” and science would finally supersede Sullivan’s slugging style in the heavyweight class.

When Jim Corbett challenged Sullivan, the young man was already known as one of the cleverest and most scientific boxers, who introduced “fancy footwork, fast jabs and hooks, and slippery movement of his head and body.” Corbett was never a fighter by the contemporary standard. His style lacked ferocity, aggressiveness, and readiness to take punishment. Rather, he was a boxer of the style associated with science. Accordingly, the 1892 championship fight was termed as a battle between the “gladiator” against the “boxer” and a “battle between strength and science.” Bob Fitzsimmons, who belonged to the Jem Mace School, predicted that science would “not count for so much.” However, by defeating Sullivan, Corbett contradicted an old myth that success in professional boxing relied on the size and power.

As an innovator, Corbett brought a new boxing style, which satisfied club officials and boxing critics, to the ring in the 1890s. According to Corbett, scientific boxing was a style that differentiated itself from slugging. It was a style relying more

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424 National Police Gazette, September 17, 1892, p. 10.
425 Elia Wilkinson Peattie and Susanne George-Bloomfield eds. Impertinences: Selected Writings of Elia Peattie, a Journalist in the Gilded Age (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 134.
426 While a fighter meant a man of fighting spirit, a boxer referred to a clever displayer of skill. A boxer meant a man who could land his gloves as he pleased and slip from punishment. He might be a “marvelous master of all the tricks of the boxer’s trade.” Los Angeles Times, March 18, 1897, p. 9.
428 New York Times, September 2, 1892, p. 3
on brains, not physical power. It was also a rationalization of performance in the ring rather than following conventions. In this sense, the style reflected the rise of modern attitudes in the ring. Corbett popularized several innovations, including straight hitting, defense-focused movements, footwork, and game plans.

In the slugging style, a fighter’s reliance on swing blows made him punch his opponents inaccurately and waste energy. Siler, who abhorred slugging, defined one of the most conspicuous characters of modern boxing after Sullivan as the popularization of “straight arm hitting.” Corbett was among those who knew the importance of the hitting style to increase accuracy and save energy.

While fighters and fight followers traditionally valued gameness, courage to take punishment, Corbett did not view taking punishment without fearing blows as manly. “It is quite as important for a fighter to avoid punishment as it is for him to punch the other fellow.” To him, the best boxer was one that “took least and gave most.” Efficiency became Corbett’s motto in the ring and signified the rationalization of performance. Accordingly, Corbett contradicted courage without discretion, which had been idealized in the ring. In fact, Corbett was well known for his defensive skill. An expert acclaimed his defense. “He had more than fifty men,

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430 George Siler, “M’Govern’s Great Record,” *Chicago Tribune*, December 24, 1899, p. 17. The hitting style was also a technical attempt to avoid legal troubles and hold a fight to a finish. Though boxing laws ordered policemen to stop any attempt to knock out a contestant, the policemen present at fights tended to view a knockout, which was suddenly caused by a straight blow, as unavoidable. On the contrary, the continuous exchanges of swing blows with full force and clinches were seen as a violation of boxing laws. *Report of the Special Committee of the Assembly Appointed to Investigate the Public Offices and Departments of the City of New York and of the Counties Therein Included*, Vol. 2, 1945-1946.
431 *New York Times*, September 2, 1892, p. 3.
amateurs and professionals, in finish fights, and has never had a black eye or been knocked down."\(^{433}\)

Corbett was a boxer who depended largely on his footwork. Corbett believed that footwork was headwork and the essence of his “modern boxing.”\(^{434}\) The development of footwork contributed to the decline of slugging significantly. To Corbett, it was important to “cultivate the ability to get in and out of hitting distance with all the rapidity possible.”\(^{435}\) Footwork made him avoid blows efficiently and strike his opponent at a distance.\(^{436}\) But footwork also helped diversify offensive methods. Footwork enabled him to strike an effective stomach punch, and his counterattack was even more dangerous.\(^{437}\) Relying on footwork, Corbett successfully balanced defense and offense. In the 1892 fight, Sullivan became the aggressor and led the fight. As usual, Corbett “danced all about his opponent.” one report said, “His tactics at first were purely defensive and he ducked, he sprang, he even ran out of Sullivan’s reach: but it was by no mean a walking-around match. Even at the banging he faced his adversary, countered, stopped, and swung, and was away with lightning quickness before the return could be administered.”\(^{438}\) In order to make best of footwork and agility, Corbett avoided building excessive muscles to keep up the speed of his feet.\(^{439}\) Accordingly, his physique contrasted with most contemporary boxers who built their body by lifting a great amount of weight.\(^{440}\)

\(^{433}\) Chicago Tribune, January 21, 1894, p. 25.

\(^{434}\) Corbett, Scientific Boxing, 19.

\(^{435}\) Los Angeles Times, March 9, 1894, p. 8.

\(^{436}\) Logansport Journal, February 13, 1891, p. 6.

\(^{437}\) Corbett, Scientific Boxing, 57, 69.

\(^{438}\) New York Times, September 8, 1892. p.3.

\(^{439}\) Chicago Tribune, January 21. 1894, p. 25.
Corbett’s footwork was a new wonder to fighters. Peter Jackson, an Austrian black fighter, who was the most well-known inheritor of the Jem Mace style, appreciated Corbett’s splendid footwork (and jabbing) as a “new experience.”

The rationalization of performance was best reflected in Corbett’s game plan. Corbett was always smiling during his fights. His cool pose, which many boxers would emulate, contrasted with the slugger’s ferocity and aggressiveness in the ring. The control of temper was almost impossible in slugging matches in which blows continued to be exchanged in full force. Corbett’s smile signified his control of emotion during a fight. Corbett not only rationalized his defense, offense, and movements but also subordinated all his acts in the ring to his game plan.

Unlike a slugger whose tactic was simply “to force the battle form the beginning and end it in a few minutes,” Corbett did not rely on continuous rushing or hard hitting. He started many of his punches “from a half-arm position.” The punch, Corbett learned in the Olympic Club, increased speed and accuracy.

While Sullivan was disgusted with Corbett’s “love taps,” Corbett’s performance was “calculating.” His punches were used as methods for his game plan, which had two goals. He fought to earn points to win a match under the Queensberry rules limiting the number of rounds. In so doing, Corbett brought the ethos of amateur boxing to his

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441 *Chicago Tribune*, January 21, 1894, p. 25.
442 *The Modern Gladiator*, 102.
443 *Los Angeles Times*, March 9, 1894, p. 8.
444 Corbett believed that he invented the punch. But Jem Mace began to use jabs. Nevertheless, Corbett made the best of it for his game plan. He could dictate the flow of the fight by jabbing and compensate for his lack of natural hitting power. Brady, *A Fighting Man*, 86.
game plan. Second, Corbett resorted to extreme care and gradually cut his opponent to ribbons with his “love taps” for a finish blow. As Mike Donovan pointed out, the fighter who got tired in front of Corbett would get whipped. In his fight with Sullivan, Corbett waited for twenty-one rounds to finish the champion. His manager, William Brady, remembered, “He could have done it in three. But he fought scientifically, played a safe game from start to finish, and followed the advice from his corner and took no chances.” With the emergence of Corbett’s style, being wisely coached meant that a boxer was aggressive only when necessary. It made a boxer play intelligently balancing defense and offense. Corbett’s style suited the middle-class ideal of rationalized and disciplined masculinity.

In the ring, “Gentleman Jim” Corbett contradicted the “working-class Irish persona, Sullivan.” Corbett renovated the boxing style and rationalized it by focusing on science and the game plan. His style also decreased the bloodiness and brutality of prize fighting. Corbett, who was repulsed by reckless courage and brutality, was proud of his scientific and civilized style. Contemporaries noticed the transformation, which Corbett initiated. “Corbett’s art consisted not so much in the brutal battering down of an adversary, as the parrying of attacks, the accuracy of aim, the discovery of weaknesses, and the skillful acceptance of every opportunity for

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445 In 1889, the Olympic Club published a set of rules that made a boxing match a point game. Corbett was probably accustomed to the rules and fought to score points.
446 San Francisco Call, March 18, 1897, p. 3; Chicago Tribune, January 21, 1894, p. 25.
448 Brady, A Fighting Man, 95.
449 Chicago Tribune, June 10, 1899, p. 2.
450 Gorn and Goldstein, A Short History of American Sports, 123.
advantage. He represents the idea of the refinement of the science, of thinking andacting quickly in emergence, of the perfection of self-defense." A new school ofpugilism was set up. Jim Hall, an Australian boxer who learned boxing in the Jem Mace School, realized the future of the sport belonged to "skillful and clever boxing." Corbett’s scientific style was fitting to the ethos of the era in which the word “science” had enormous appeal. Scientific management and scientific play forced Americans to discipline themselves. Even religion was influenced by new spirit so that some Americans coined a strange term, “Christian science.” The memory of the historic 1892 Sullivan-Corbett fight was still influential in the twentieth century. One decade later, the 1892 fight was remembered as a battle between “science” and “strength” and between “brain” and “brawn.” Corbett was celebrated as a man who “made fighting a science.” Corbett’s style became a model of boxing science among experts who abhorred the old style, which was characterized as “strength, capacity for punishment, hitting power, bull rushing aggressiveness, and bulldog tenacity.” Nationally known boxing experts increased their authority in the twentieth century. Newcomers consulted them about science in the ring. These experts tried to normalize the rationalization of ring performance, which was initiated

452 Quoted in Pollack, In the Ring with James J. Corbett, 267-268.
453 New York World, November 9, 1897, p. 8.
454 Van Wert Daily Bulletin, September 7, 1907, p. 3.
455 New York Times, September 8, 1892, p. 3.
456 San Francisco Call, January 10, 1909, p. 35. Experts made their judgment on the quality of the fight from the standpoint of the man who enjoyed “ring contests because of science, skill and ring generalship.” San Francisco Call, October 17, 1909, p. 47.
457 Chicago Tribune, May 13, 1900, p. 17.
458 Naughton, Kings of the Queensberry Realm, 20.
by Corbett. In so doing, they tried to make Corbett’s style a dominant one and discipline boxers’ performance to make their fighting a scientific profession.

Boxing critics like W. W. Naughton, George Siler, Eddie Smith, and Jack Skelly supported the emergence of a new hegemonic masculinity in the ring through Corbett’s style. They made inaccurate and energy-consuming swing blows obsolete.459 Skelly criticized that “freakish, swinging bing-bangers” was “burlesquing the game” by continuing “their rough-and-tumble tactic.”460

Defensive fighting also got support from experts, who no longer viewed endurance and courage to stand incredible punishments as a sign of manliness. Naughton was critical of courage without discretion in the ring. He believed that a boxer who won unmarked and unruffled proved his “resources as a fighter.”461 Boxing reports were more impressed by boxers who survived the ring without any marks.462 While experts and reporters freed the avoidance of punishment from stigmatization, boxers developed their own styles for defense based on their own experience and knowledge. Jim Jeffries, who was a sparring partner for Corbett, invented a position called crouch. Though he had advantages in size and power, Jeffries became a typical defensive boxer.463 Relying on his knowledge of anatomy, a famous black lightweight champion, Joe Gans, covered his jaw with his right hand and his solar plexus with his right elbow. Emulating Corbett’s style, Jack Johnson

459 Chicago Tribune, May 13, 1900, p. 17; Oakland Tribune, September 22, 1907, p. 6.
460 Reno Evening Gazette, October 22, 1913, p. 6.
461 Naughton, Heavyweight Champions, 186.
462 Washington Post, August 7, 1904, p. S3; Oakland Tribune, April 2, 1908, p. 11.
crystallized the science of defense, making his guard impenetrable.\(^{464}\) While black boxers emerged as first-rate title contenders in the 1900s, Joe Jeannette, Sam Langford, and Sam McVey also contributed to the development of defensive fighting.

Among experts, footwork and agility were seen as signs of a scientific and resourceful boxer. Siler was a big fan of Corbett’s footwork. He defined a scientific boxer as a man who was “strong, quick of foot.”\(^{465}\) He also believed that agility was a decisive factor for scientific boxing.\(^{466}\) Skelly, Naughton, and Billy Delaney also shared belief in speed and agility.\(^{467}\) To boxing insiders, a scientific boxer meant a “shifty” one that was good at dodging and side-stepping. Naughton was an ardent supporter of shadow fighting as a practice to learn speedy dodging and side-stepping, which Corbett popularized.\(^{468}\) Kid McCoy emulated and popularized Corbett’s irregular and unexpected movements.

At the same time, a scientific boxer meant a “strategic” boxer with diverse punches and his own game plan.\(^{469}\) Hard-hitting and the knockout style were increasingly seen as signs of the old school. Jeffries made other boxers know the effect of an uppercut. Kid McCoy was famous for his hook, which was often called the “corkscrew punch.”\(^{470}\) Monte Attell and Jack Johnson were well known for their jabs.\(^{471}\) While he was one of the most gigantic men in the ring, Johnson never relied

\(^{464}\) *San Francisco Call*, June 16, 1910, p. 12.
\(^{465}\) *Chicago Tribune*, May 13, 1900, p. 17.
\(^{467}\) *Reno Evening Gazette*, October 22, 1913, p. 6; *Oakland Tribune*, May 5, 1893, p. 8.
\(^{468}\) Naughton, *Kings of the Queensberry Realm*, 24; *Los Angeles Herald*, July 22, 1905, p. 4.
\(^{469}\) *New York Tribune*, January 2, 1900, p. 4.
\(^{471}\) *San Francisco Call*, August 12, 1909, p. 10.
on hard-hitting. 472 As these boxers represented, scientific boxing was a rationalized style that saved energy and exhausted an opponent with the accumulation of small shocks. 473 In the 1900s, boxers were asked to combine all of their “pugilistic knowledge” and work on “the scientific principles of the game.” 474 Slugging became an obsolete style among many experts and famous boxers.

“Scientific boxing” empowered boxers as producers of knowledge. Boxers were “inventive.” They never subscribed to previous “ring wisdom,” which had been “handed down for generations without change.” 475 Boxers also empowered themselves by teaching the new doctrine to novices. 476 While they felt that they were innovators of the style, boxers increasingly internalized the notion of boxing as a display of science. Their feeling of empowerment became a basis of voluntary discipline. Therefore, the new style was becoming another convention in the twentieth century. 477

Now, club fighting increasingly was transformed into a display of skill and science and suited middle-class notions of sports. In 1914, a female writer, Inez Haynes Gillmore, witnessed a most ideal type of fight of the day. She left her impression about a fight between two “gloved artists.” “Along with the absence of brutality was a complete absence of the ferocity that I dreaded, the entire lack of

472 Washington Post, July 3, 1910, p. 34.
473 Los Angeles Herald, June 28, 1907, p. 8.
474 Siler, Inside Facts on Pugilism, 56.
475 Brady, A Fighting Man, 59.
476 A welterweight fighter, Tommy West, was one of them. “I am glad to say that several to whom I have given instruction have done well subsequently in the ring. Among the number of my pupils is Matty Matthews, who recently won the welterweight championship by knocking out ‘Mysterious Billy’ Smith. When I took hold of Matthews, he knew little or nothing of the science of boxing, but he proved to be a very apt pupil.” Lincoln Evening News, May 12, 1900, p. 3.
anything like temper or fury…. It was the expression that you see in jugglers and acrobats when they approach the climax of their act, but that look raised to the nth power.\textsuperscript{478}

In spite of ongoing cultural contests between classes, boxing of the Queensberry era was losing its anti-hegemonic character. The transformation was also clearly reflected in the transformation of boxers’ training and lifestyles. Until Sullivan’s defeat in 1892, many fight followers believed that “nature intended him for a gladiator, and although he abused nature to a considerable extent, not even the best trained rival could defeat him.”\textsuperscript{479} However, a myth of natural power was finally broken. As physician J. D. Fernandez pointed out, the measurements proved that Corbett was “not a marvel” in point of inches.\textsuperscript{480} Corbett’s strength was all manufactured. In this sense, the 1892 fight was also a battle between the two boxers’ different training methods and lifestyles and signified the transformation in a boxer’s training and lifestyle in the future.

A boxer’s underperformance, which resulted from improper training or the lack of training, often caused the suspicion of crookedness. It was a significant problem for club officials and promoters. The rumor damaged their reputation and prevented bigger matches from coming off under their management. In fact, the concern of underperformance was not new in the Queensberry era. In the era of the bare-knuckle fight, a fighter and his backers usually came from the same locality and

\textsuperscript{478} Inez Haynes Gillmore, “A Woman at a Prize-Fight,” 791.
\textsuperscript{479} \textit{New York Times}, September 8, 1892, p. 3.
\textsuperscript{480} \textit{Chicago Tribune}, January 21, 1894, p. 25.
knew each other personally. Two contestants’ backers customarily put up stake money and made side bets. A fighter and his backers divided their spoil.\textsuperscript{481} However, when a fighter lost, his backers also lost all their money. Accordingly, the discipline of a fighter already emerged as an important task for backers, managers, and trainers. While a fighter was self-employed and seemed a symbol of heroic individualism, in this early commercial institution, a fighter was never free from the hierarchies of authority or the discipline of capitalistic society. Stakes money and side bets were incentives for contestants. However, the backer’s authority forced fighters to train before their bouts.\textsuperscript{482} Training was imposed. It was short but grueling. Training in the era of the bare-knuckle fight reflected the vertical relations between backers (managers) and fighters.\textsuperscript{483}

Nevertheless, trainers’ authority was based not only on coercive force but also on their successful careers and knowledge, which was largely based on hygiene.\textsuperscript{484} Comprehensive knowledge about diet, nutrition, sleeping, ventilation, bathing, daily physical exercise, and regular lifestyle, hygiene was a mid-nineteenth century social ideology, which middle-class health reformers introduced to resolve social problems like urbanization, immigration, and toppling moral authority. These reformers tried to

\textsuperscript{481} \textit{New York Sun}, July 25, 1899, p. 2.
\textsuperscript{482} Backers’ power was maintained for a while even after bouts were held in clubs and purses were based on gate receipts. Boxers still needed backers especially for championship matches which required side bets. \textit{Oakland Tribune}, November 21, 1891, p. 4; \textit{New York World}, January 1, 1892, p. 6; \textit{Evening Herald}, June 10, 1897, p. 6; Brady, \textit{A Fighting Man}, 86.
\textsuperscript{483} George Ripley and Charles A. Dana, eds., \textit{American Cyclopedia: A Popular Dictionary of General Knowledge}, Vol. 14, 75.
\textsuperscript{484} Park, “Athletes and Their Training in Britain and America, 1800-1914,” 61-66.
inspire Americans with the sense of self-improvement and self-discipline.\textsuperscript{485} Accordingly, training exposed trainers and fighters to middle-class notions of the body and lifestyles. In fact, training culture among working-class fighters shared the principals of self-denial and self-improvement with contemporary middle-class culture.

The most significant advance in English sports from 1793 to 1850 was the emergence of the notion of training.\textsuperscript{486} However, training was a class-specific term when middle- and upper-class sport fans began to write training books for sportsmen who practiced rowing, rugby and pedestrianism. While these books recommended that readers practice self-disciplined training, some of these books presupposed that “lower ranks,” who were naturally “free livers,” could not live “abstemious” lives.\textsuperscript{487} In this sense, these books contributed to marking class boundaries. However, training culture increasingly became a shared experience between middle-class amateurs and working-class professionals.\textsuperscript{488}

In England and America, fighters accepted the principles of self-denial and self-discipline in their training. In America, many early fighters were skilled or semi-skilled laborers. Their pattern of work was not regular or organized but still needed a certain level of work ethics. As early as the 1830s, fighters already trained themselves rigorously and kept dietary provisions and temperance during their training of several

\textsuperscript{485} Green, \textit{Fit for America}, 32-53.
\textsuperscript{486} Harvey, \textit{The Beginnings of a Commercial Sporting Culture in Britain, 1793-1850}, 142.
\textsuperscript{488} Ibid., 70.
weeks before a fight. For instance, in 1848, Tom Hyer and Yankee Sullivan subordinated themselves to training organized by the hour, diet, and a “perfectly chaste and abstemious life.” In 1880, Paddy Ryan, who started his training with his trainer, Steve Taylor, for the fight with Joe Goss, also repeated their ordeal. However, training culture in the era of the bare-knuckle fight still represented class differences. Though a famous trainer, William Muldoon, began to suspect the effect of short and grueling training, which was imposed until boxer was totally exhausted, he also imposed intense training to make undisciplined and overweight boxers fit. In the era of the bare-knuckle fight, prizefighters’ training reflected not only the fighters’ cultural accommodation but also cultural negotiation between fighters and backers. While backers tightly controlled boxers during their training for several weeks before their fights, fighters were free immediately after the fight. Accordingly, a fighter’s lifestyle was based on the irregular rhythm of work in traditional society. Frequent injuries with hands and arms in bare-knuckle fights also made training more irregular. Fighters’ rigorous exercise of self-denial in their occupation alternated with a large amount of undisciplined time and self-indulgency. According to Naughton, in the era of the bare-knuckle fight, the percentage of

491 Ryan’s training was grueling. He got up at seven o’clock and ate the yolk of a raw egg mixed with a wine-glassful of pure water. He took a walk before breakfast. He ate mutton chops or tenderloin steak, seasoned toast, and a bowl of tea for his breakfast. After an hour’s rest, Ryan took a twelve-mile walk or run at a lively gate. After he was rubbed down, Ryan had a dinner consisting of roast beef, a leg of boiled mutton, potatoes, and so on. After dinner, he started to exercise with clubs and light dumbbells, and fought the punching bag. About eight o’clock Ryan started off with his trainer for another long tramp. To make his wrist supple so that he could hit with his knuckles, he hit everything near him with a large stick. He was rubbed down again and received supper with either half of broiled chicken or broiled eggs, toast, or a bowl of hot gruel, mixed with port wine and currants. Ryan went to bed at ten o’clock. *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, April 15, 1880, p. 6.
pugilists who kept “themselves in good condition in and out of sessions was lamentably small.”

The training system precariously reconciled working-class antagonistic attitudes toward work with work ethics and discipline. Sullivan’s training represented the problem. Sullivan’s physical strength always suffered from his self-indulgent lifestyle. “He ate very largely of rich food and drank wine, beer, whiskey, gin, ale, indiscriminately, during the day and night; he would not retire until two or three o’clock in the morning, and would rise at about noon.” When Muldoon met Sullivan to prepare him for the 1889 fight with Kilrain, Sullivan was a “physical wreck” suffering from “the effects of a career of almost unprecedented dissipation.”

Bare-knuckle fighters easily became overweight in their free time. Accordingly, the primary goal of training was to make a fighter lose weight in a short period of time. “Reducing a man from twenty to fifty pounds was not uncommon.” Trainers naturally had to use drastic methods to achieve the goal. Hard work from 6:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. was common. It was coupled with strict diet, sweating, limitation of liquids and sexual intercourse, and the imposition of regular lifestyle. Muldoon had to use the old training methods for Sullivan. Overweight Sullivan punched the canvass bag that hung from the ceiling and skipped the jumping rope eight hundred to one thousand times every day in a training season of six weeks.

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492 Naughton, *Kings of the Queensberry Realm*, 23.
493 *The Modern Gladiator*, 226.
494 Ibid., 259.
Other programs included long walks and runs in a heavy sweater for over three hours every morning. Sullivan’s training continued until he was exhausted. After a light supper consisting of fruit, cold meat, and stale bread, he took a short walk and went to bed at nine o’clock. His diet was strictly controlled on “hygienic principles.” How to eat was also manualized. Sullivan ate only when he felt a desire for food. He was encouraged to eat slowly and masticate his food thoroughly. He had to drink as little as possible while eating and to rinse the mouth or drink only small quantities to quench the thirst. Sullivan was also restricted from using liquor and tobacco. Sullivan was asked to sleep soundly and to be keen on ventilation and temperature. The wonder of training was “accomplished in a short time by self-denial, regular habits, industry, and persistent effort.”

However, training was not a place where a fighter automatically internalized the middle-class notion of self-discipline. It was still a testing place where old working-class lifestyles clashed with middle-class lifestyles. The relationship between Muldoon and Sullivan was increasingly strained. In many other cases, hard training negatively affected fighters’ performance in the ring.

496 The Modern Gladiator, 242.
497 Ibid., 227, 244, 255. While old hygiene was still influential in a fighter’s training, professional medical experts’ knowledge also became influential. Sullivan worked with medical experts for his diet. New York Sun, April 23, 1890, p. 4.
499 Muldoon realized the cultural contest: “A man who goes into training should have perfect control over himself. The want of this power is the common and social defect, not only of weak minds, but very often of the strongest nature…. Restraint is difficult with most men, but still it is of the last importance to a man in training.” The Modern Gladiator, 254-255.
While clubs made prize fighting a big business, the problem of underperformance was more important. In the 1890s, boxing was already a high-risk business. Famous boxers demanded a large amount of money from clubs and promoters. Large spending on advertisements became common in the early 1890s. Legal protection was costly. Clubs and promoters even needed to build new arenas to reimburse all expenses and make a profit after paying boxers. However, the involvement of clubs made power relations in prize fighting more impersonal. While clubs presided over all affairs of a fight, including the collection of fight money, the selection of time and place, and the selection of referee, a boxer could arrange a big fight without backers’ financial support. Backers’ power gradually decreased. Managers, who had less authority and fewer resources, had a purely commercial relationship with fighters. Power relations in professional fighting were now largely based on impersonal hierarchies which relied on formal contracts. However, while boxers’ performances were nationally reported, club officials were as concerned with ring performance as were backers. Boxing experts criticized uneven matches and low quality matches and evaluated clubs. Legal protection and profitability largely depended on the reputation of clubs and promoters. Clubs were extremely interested in eliminating crookedness and underperformance, which might discred

501 *San Francisco Call*, April 27, 1899, p. 9.
502 *San Francisco Call*, March 23, 1898, p. 14. The *Call* urged club officials to stage “good fights” “between evenly matched, clever, scientific exponents of pugilism.” *San Francisco Call*, December 29, 1900, p.4.
them. The problem of underperformance was serious because a boxer could earn a “big loser’s purse.” However, while clubs and their promoters actually hired boxers as employees, disciplining boxers and maximizing their performance were increasingly difficult on account of their impersonal relations with boxers. Accordingly, clubs devised some methods to control fighters’ training and performance.

As third-party matchmakers, clubs tried to write some regulations into contracts to guarantee a certain level of training and performance against boxers’ will. For instance, before the Sullivan-Corbett fight in 1892, Charles Noel of the Olympic Club proclaimed that if the men intended to “make a draw in order to save their reputation,” the club would “not give them the purse or any part thereof.” In the 1890s and 1900s, the articles of agreement often prolonged the period of training and specified physical tests before the fight. Clubs also institutionalized the post-match investigation to cancel paying off to a boxer who underperformed and faked the fight.

Clubs naturally tried to be involved in the process of training to guarantee boxers’ performance. In *Discipline and Punish*, Michel Foucault illuminates the prison as a modern disciplinary institution. According to Foucault, the existence of overseers like the Panopticon and the guard made prisoners conscious of being under

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504 *San Francisco Call*, January 19, 1901, p. 4.
505 *Newark Advocate*, November 16, 1901, p. 1.
506 *New York Sun*, September 3, 1892, p. 5.
507 The articles of agreement for the famous fight between Jack Johnson and Jim Jeffries required both boxers to start their intense training ninety days before the match.
508 *Oakland Tribune*, February 23, 1891, p. 6.
surveillance. A state of permanent visibility made inmates become self-disciplinary. In fact, Foucault’s prisons were interchangeable with other institutions.\footnote{Michel Foucault, Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 195-308.}

While the relationship between clubs and boxers increasingly resembled that between capital and labor, surveillance was an important method to make boxers discipline themselves voluntarily and maximize their performance. In his training camp, a boxer had many overseers, whom they could recognize or not. Managers and trainers never lost sight of him. They checked if a boxer had followed his schedules, which were organized by the hour. Clubs officials, promoters, and their representatives randomly visited his training camp.\footnote{San Francisco Call, March 17, 1897, p. 5; Oakland Tribune, April 2, 1908, p. 11; Nelson, Life, Battles, and Career of Battling Nelson, 198; Naughton, Heavyweight Champions, 11.} They occasionally took physicians to a boxer’s camp.\footnote{Oakland Tribune, May 20, 1891, p. 8.} While a fight was legally protected, a boxer’s training camp was a popular destination for reporters and fight followers. Boxing critics and reporters swarmed to a boxer’s camp to report on his training. They evaluated a boxer’s training and scrutinized his condition.\footnote{St. Paul Globe, March 17, 1897, p. 2.} Many fight followers, especially those who placed bets, carefully watched him practicing. Some of them sold information to the other boxer’s party or reporters. Information and rumors regarding boxers’ training and conditions were circulated. Boxers were often blamed for their neglect of training or their improper methods of training.\footnote{James J. Corbett, The Roar of the Crowd: The True Tale of the Rise and Fall of a Champion (1925; reprint, New York: Arno Press, 1975), 180-181; Chicago Tribune, March 10, 1897, p. 3.} Though they did
not know who watched them or how they watched them, boxers had to be aware of these watchful eyes around them.

Surveillance might make a boxer submit himself to voluntary discipline during his training. Nevertheless, clear divisions between discipline and self-indulgence still raised the question of performance. Insiders already knew that the divide between training and non-training seasons was fatal to performance. Club officials and experts wanted boxers to exercise surveillance over themselves not only during their training but also in their everyday life. Blurring the division between training and non-training seasons was needed to make boxers goal-oriented people.

Scientific boxers, who were interested in the rationalization and maximization of performance, also actively supported the new system of discipline, which governed their training and everyday life. The transformation began with the reflection of the old method of training. Muldoon, who was a transitory figure in the transformation of training methods, argued that training had to include “plenty of long and steady exercise at a moderate pace” and had to be increased gradually to prevent overwork. He also stressed the significance of daily and regular training. However, his method of training was limited by realities such as returning overweight fighters to a fighting condition in a short period of time. Nevertheless, Muldoon’s training was not as intense as older methods. Muldoon introduced a skipping rope and light dumbbells for training to make training milder. Muldoon knew that there was a

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516 Ibid., 248.
prerequisite to make the mild methods of training effective. He asked an athlete to live a “quiet and regular life” in non-training seasons.517

The physical degeneration of Sullivan and his miserable performance in the 1892 fight embarrassed experts and fight fans. They did not attribute his failure to his age. In their eyes, Sullivan himself had “contributed to the causes of his own downfall.”518 His successor, Corbett not only brought a new style to professional fighting but also facilitated the transformation of a boxer’s training and lifestyle. He was the athlete whom Muldoon idealized. Corbett had a strict work ethic for his training.519 Corbett objected to the old way of grueling training, which was detrimental to a boxer’s heath, and supported mild but regular training. According to Parson Davies, who examined Corbett’s training, the most important thing with his method was that Corbett did not “overdo his parts.”520 Corbett also criticized the old method of training, which focused on the cultivation of physical strength. He preferred a milder method of training, which focused on the cultivation of speed and footwork.

There was another innovation in Corbett’s training. Unlike most in his profession, Corbett had a clean lifestyle and expanded self-discipline into his everyday life. Corbett did not have superfluous weight on account of his regular daily

517 Ibid., 260. Muldoon was renowned as a “professor of regularity,” a “practical preacher of all round temperance,” and a “bitter hater of whisky and cigarette.” Van Wert Daily Bulletin, September 7, 1907, p. 3.
518 A report said, “He is not relatively so good a man at 34 as hundreds of other men at that age. His face is furrowed, not alone by years, but by the methods of his own living. His ponderous body, too, bore traces not alone of time, but of easy living. His condition was not comparable with that of his victorious foe. It could not be.” San Francisco Morning Call, September 8, 1892, p. 1.
520 Chicago Tribune, April 29, 1900, p. 20.
training and disciplined lifestyle. He even gained some weight during his full-scale training for fights.\textsuperscript{521} Corbett claimed himself a physical culturist. Encouraging clean life and regular training and propagating knowledge on hygiene, he tried to make a boxer a symbol of self-discipline and self-improvement.\textsuperscript{522} Corbett not only separated his boxing style from a display of working-class men’s courage without discretion, he also dissociated himself from “rowdies,” “sycophants,” and the “low class of humanity” and their fondness for self-destruction and self-indulgence. In so doing, he embraced middle-class lifestyles and constructed himself as a goal-oriented person. His boxing style and lifestyle were compatible with the middle-class notion of body, sports, and life. His manager, William Brady, was proud that “the better class of people took a great interest in Corbett because he brought a certain spirit, a cleanness into the whole game that they had never seen before.”\textsuperscript{523}

The expansion of discipline was a process some boxers and experts facilitated. Naughton was critical of the old training method in which a fighter ended his training session exhausted. He supported the transformation of training, which was initiated by Muldoon and Corbett.\textsuperscript{524} He argued that training was to be regularized as a daily practice and boxers had to regulate themselves in their everyday lives with commitment to regular practice, careful diet, and hygiene. In his theory of training,

\textsuperscript{521} Los Angeles Times, March 9, 1894, p. 8.
\textsuperscript{522} Corbett, Scientific Boxing, p. 21.
\textsuperscript{523} Brady, A Fighting Man, 87, 96.
\textsuperscript{524} Naughton, Kings of the Queensberry Realm, 21. In the 1890s and the 1900s, boxing training was increasingly regularized but moderated. Boxing training was more scientific and controlled than sports training in middle-class institutions. For instance, college football players were given too much bruising work. Some college football coaches criticized the boxer’s mild training methods. Atlanta Constitution, July 2, 1910, p. 8.
Naughton tried to mold boxers in the middle-class sense of masculinity. He believed that the new method of training cultivated a boxer’s “sustained character” and made a boxer “his own master.”

A boxing instructor and critic, Mike Donovan, was also proud that fighting men were increasingly disciplined and abstemious. Borrowing authority from physical and hygiene experts, he supported regular training programs and clean life based on knowledge of ventilation, water, sleep, and food.

Regular training, self-abstinence, and hygiene became familiar words among boxers whose lives became increasingly dominated by the middle-class ideal of self-discipline and self-improvement. A famous referee, John Duffy, said, “Fighting is simply an adjunct to the attainment of the highest physical development. Fighters are the exponents and illustrators of the art of physical culture.” He also constructed boxers not only as symbols of the physical and mental perfection but also as savers of “modern civilization.”

An increasing number of boxers claimed themselves as physical culturists. They were disciplined by knowledge based on middle-class hygiene and internalized self-discipline. However, they also became producers of disciplining knowledge not only for other boxers but also for middle-class people.

Corbett’s successor, Bob Fitzsimmons, was more similar to Corbett than to Sullivan. According to a sports expert, Billy Edward, Fitzsimmons was a man who

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525 Naughton, *Kings of the Queensberry Realm*, 23.

526 Donovan said, “Don’t permit some poorly informed and misguided acquaintance to fasten upon your thought any silly idea that drinking and smoking are the distinguishing marks of a brave and powerful man, for they are not.” Geer, *Mike Donovan*, 197.

527 In his arguments, even drinking water was an act not only to extinguish thirst but also learn self-discipline: “Before leaving the subject of drinking water I would suggest that at least three quarts a day should be drunk. If one be awake an hour before breakfast it would be well to have a pitcher, holding about six or eight glasses, by his side, and every little while take a mouthful until the pitcher is emptied. Water should not be gulped down in large quantities.” Ibid., 194.

528 *National Police Gazette*, September 17, 1892, p. 11.
took “good care of himself” and “worked hard all his life.” He was also a “man of temperate habits” who lived “by strict rules for the moral and physical life.”

Fitzsimmons was also a man of “scientific knowledge” who did more “to revise and better the rules for training and for the care of the health than any other living man.” Fitzsimmons’ book, *Physical Culture and Self-Defense* (1900), was designed to propagate his methods of exercises and diet not only to children and young men but also to middle-class professionals, especially “the business man, the lawyer, doctor, broker, clerk, salesman” who were kept indoor during most of their working hours and therefore tended to become overweight. Fitzsimmons further blurred class boundaries. He also devoted a chapter to women, especially middle-class women. But Fitzsimmons defined physical training for women as a method to “become beautiful” and “improve their appearance.” He stressed physical differences between men and women and suggested that women play mild sports like golf and tennis.

At the turn of the century, more and more boxers claimed themselves as missionaries of physical culture. Clean living became a popular motto for successful boxers in the 1900s. Jack O’Brien was one of the exponents of “scientific boxing, athletic training and clean living.” Joe Gans attributed his success to three factors--

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529 *New York Sun*. January 16, 1891, p. 3.
531 Ibid., 44.
532 Ibid., 47.
533 Ibid., 49-50.
his fighting style, “careful living,” and correct training methods. Gans’s rival, Battling Nelson, did not drink or smoke. He was critical of promiscuous living. Nelson urged boxers to live a disciplined life under the guidance of their training and match staff. Jim Jeffries believed that the boxer became a model for a “mental and moral training for a weakening nation and for the danger of “the great White plague [tuberculosis].” In the 1900s, with the emergence of model boxers, Jack Skelly could claim that a successful boxer was a symbol of great will power who had “an active, clear brain able to control” their “physical system and heart.”

4. The Reproduction of Working-Class Ethos in Clubs and Cultural Negotiation

In prize fighting, cultural interactions were never one-directional. It was not only boxers’ fighting style and lifestyle that were transformed with the involvement of clubs. Clubs themselves were transformed in cultural interactions with the popular cultural forms in which working-class men had reproduced their collectivity.

Boxing schools already prospered in cities in the 1870s and the 1880s, and amateur boxing lovers learned skills from ex-pugilists or professional fighters. As a result, skilled fighters could easily secure employment as trainers and teachers for people in higher walks of life, and boxing increased connections between men of

537 James Jeffries “The Need of an Athletic Awakening,” Physical Culture, 21, no. 6 (May 1909), 397-400. Also see “Mental and Moral Training through Boxing,” Physical Culture, 22, no. 3 (August 1909), 153-157.
538 Reno Evening Gazette, October 22, 1913, p. 6.
different classes. These relationships moved to clubs, which were established all over the country in the 1880s. While these clubs were the badges of social status, policing amateurism and class boundaries became increasingly difficult.

An increasing number of clubs introduced boxing into their physical training programs and held boxing tournaments in the late nineteenth century. In 1872, a famous amateur sportsman, William Curtis, defined an amateur as any person who had “never competed in an open competition, for a stake, or for public money, or for admission money, or with professionals, for a prize, public money, or admission money” and had not “even, at any period of his life, taught or assisted in the pursuit of athletic exercises as a means of livelihood.” Curtis’s amateurism became a model for American athletic clubs. But most clubs not only hired ex-fighters as instructors but also defrayed participants’ expenses for boxing competitions which were open to local amateurs. These tournaments also produced potential professional fighters. Some amateur boxing contests used even four-ounce gloves. Many amateurs emulated slugging popular among professional fighters. Accordingly, some amateur contests were more intense and dangerous than professional ones. Clubs also opened their doors to class aspirants and working-class young men, who could represent them in athletic competitions and might be professionals one day.

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540 A report about a boxer who gave private lessons to lawyers, brokers, and merchants reflected the existence of male bonding among them. “At first he strongly objected to visiting his pupils at their home and offices, but he was welcomed in such a superb manner that he had not the heart to break his engagements with them.” New York Times, November 26, 1882, p. 5.

541 Quoted in Ted Vincent, The Rise and Fall of American Sport, 63.


543 Chicago Tribune, December 28, 1890, p. 4.
Many of middle-class boxing enthusiasts in the clubs were also fight followers. Accordingly, many clubs were also eager to form relationships with famous boxers. They allowed them to exercise in club facilities and accommodated them for fights.

Club members developed the emotional ties with professional boxers who had practiced in their clubs. These boxers were not the objects of shame but icons for the clubs. Club members supported and bet on them. For instance, after Corbett resigned the position of boxing instructor for the club to become a professional boxer, Greer Harrison, the founder of the Olympic Club of San Francisco, was still a patron of Corbett. Other club members also viewed Corbett as the pride of the club. The exciting scene in the Olympic club during the 1892 fight between Corbett and Sullivan showed that the distinction between amateurism and professionalism was blurred, and male bonding across classes was formed through the celebration of aggressive masculinity in the club:

The result of each round as it flashed over the wires and into the building was given to the large gathering of interested spectators by means of a stereopticon. When the rounds ended in Corbett's favor the athletic shouts of young and old members startled the audience of the Alcazar Theater, which is situated almost immediately under the gymnasium. In fact, the excitement

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544 *San Francisco Call*, March 18, 1897, p. 3. For instance, Dr. Langdon, the vice president of the New York Athletic Club, was one of Corbett’s supporters in Carson City. *San Francisco Call*, March 17, 1897, p. 5.


546 *San Francisco Morning Call*, September 8, 1892, p. 1.

grew to such a pitch that it had no bounds, and President Harrison had to request the members to remain somewhat quiet, as the operator could not catch the ticking of the machine which was bringing the glad news of the young Olympian's phenomenal success against the champion of the heavyweight contingent of pugilists. A large number of the members had wagers on the result … the feeling of excitement among the bettors on rounds grew intense as the battle progressed…. When round five appeared with the announcement that Corbett had scored first blood the chairs in the building must have suffered…. The excitement among the members when the result of the twenty-first round came can be better imagined than described. Hats, canes, coats and chairs were thrown in the air, and such hearty handshaking over the grand success of the club's old boxing instructor has not been witnessed since the club was organized.548

The artificial binary between amateurism and professionalism in clubs toppled further when clubs were involved in professional boxing as matchmakers. From the 1890s, professional boxing was “confined almost wholly to the cities” and “usually conducted under the name of an athletic club or associations.”549 Boxers’ performance in the club also contradicted the boundaries between amateurism and professionalism which athletic clubs had drawn. In the middle-class sport ideal of amateurism, fair play and sportsmanship had special meanings. The ideal of fair play

548 San Francisco Morning Call, September 8, 1892, p. 1.
549 Edwards, Popular Amusements, 96.
was “derived directly from the Renaissance ideal of the gentleman.” “For the
gentleman, who had already won in life by the very fact of his class, winning or
losing athletic contests mattered much less than the manner and style of competing.”
English aristocrats’ sporting ideals gradually spread. In national associations and
public schools, upper- and middle-class men reconstituted the seventeenth century
courtly tradition and developed amateurism. Demanding that the “manner of
competing was more important than the outcome,” amateurism associated “fair play
(goal)” and “sportsmanship (the code of conduct).”⁵⁵⁰ Sportsmanship was a code of
conduct to control the naked desire for victory. Accordingly, it valued not only
formally written rules but also unwritten rules, that is, “moral rules which were often
unwritten but were based on a proprietary sense.”⁵⁵¹ These unwritten rules included
competition between equals, the respect and protection of opponents, refusal to take
any unfair advantage, and the manly acceptance of victory and loss. All these traits
signaled the strict self-control of the desire for victory. American middle-class
sportsmen imported the sense of fair play and sportsmanship.

However, sportsmanship was mediated by nationality. In America, even many
middle-class men preferred to view the sporting ground as an amoral space against
the English tradition, which was aristocratic in origin. The attitude was reflected in
many Americans’ perception of the rules of games. While the English sportsman
accepted “both the explicit rules of the game and the unwritten code of conduct that

⁵⁵⁰ Oriard, Sporting with the Gods, 14. Also See Richard Holt, “The Historical Meaning of
Amateurism,” in Sport: Critical Concept in Sociology, eds. Eric Dunning and Dominic Malcolm (New
⁵⁵¹ Morgan, Leftist Theories of Sport: A Critique and Reconstruction, 67-68.
went with them,” many “respectable” Americans citizens in anti-aristocratic Jacksonian era acknowledged the rules but often refused “to recognize the existence of any code of conduct.” Gamesmanship allowed players to circumvent rules in his pursuit of the overriding objective of winning. In late nineteenth century America, sportsmanship was still a “contested and contradictory” term even in middle-class institutions. A college football coach’s remark reflected some Americans’ more realistic view of fairness and sportsmanship. He argued that the British played a game “for the game’s sake” but Americans played to win. “The British, in general, regard both the letter and the spirit [of the rules]. We, in general regard the letter only. Our prevailing viewpoint might be expressed something like this: Here are rules made and provided for. They affect each side alike. If we are smart enough to detect a joker or loophole first, then we are entitled not only in law but in ethics to take advantage of it.”

Though they were still contested terms even among middle-class sportmen, in the late nineteenth century, the club was a means by which the American middle-class constructed amateurism, fair play, and sportsmanship as class markers. Nevertheless, when clubs brought professional fights to their clubhouses, boxers had opportunities to express attitudes, which contradicted the clubs’ sporting ideals. Accordingly, clubs which were involved in fights became spaces for cultural contacts, contests, and negotiations.

552 John Dizikes argued that one of the earliest gamesmen was Andrew Jackson, who engaged in cock fighting. Dizikes, *Sportsmen and Gamesmen*, 38.
553 Quoted in Oriard, *Sporting with the Gods*, 15-16.
554 Ibid., 37.
Fair play was not an exclusive term for better sorts. Working-class men on sporting fields never denied fair play. Working-class fighters claimed the importance of fair play in the popular motto, “May the best man win.” However, boxers’ ring performances often contested the middle-class meaning of fair play associated with sportsmanship. In the era of the London Prize Ring rules, gamesmanship prevailed in the ring. Many fighters used loopholes in the rules. For instance, falling down without being hit to escape blows or end a round for a rest was so popular among contestants. John Boyle O’Reilly was critical of these “cowardly tricks and evasions.” When fights moved to clubs, many boxing insiders believed that it was time to eliminate “unfair tactics.” They tried to make professional fighting fit the ethos of amateur boxing contests, which displayed a player’s “abstaining for taking any mean advantage of his adversary.”

While they accepted the ritualized gentlemanly codes like handshaking and the calm acceptance of losing, boxers often displayed their naked desire for winning by refusing to shake hands with their opponents or to accept the results of fights. In so doing, they violated the middle-class code of conduct on sporting fields. These boxers’ acts already signaled the vulnerability of sportsmanship in club fighting. Sportsmanship was always challenged in club fighting. Tricks, which were abhorred by boxing insiders, never disappeared. Tantalizing was a simple but popular trick. Boxers smeared some drug like belladonna to make the opponent blind.

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555 Milwaukee Daily Sentinel, June 2, 1880, p. 3; Rocky Mountain News, June 2, 1880, p. 2.
556 O’Reilly, Ethics of Boxing and Manly Sport, 4.
557 Oakland Tribune, November 21, 1891, p. 4; Chicago Tribune, March 1, 1897, p. 3
temporarily. Another old trick was to rub gloves in resin to cut the opponents up by jabbing their gloves in the face. While the Queensberry rules were a stricter and detailed set of rules, it was never a perfect method to control the game. In fact, according to referee George Siler, there were still “holes in the rules of Marquis of Queensberry big enough to drive a hay wagon through.” Because of imperfect rules, mutual contracts were devised. Nevertheless, rules and contracts could not prevent ungentlemanly acts in the ring. Boxers’ desire for winning made them interpret the rules in their own ways and constructed differences between professional boxing and middle-class men’s ideal sporting activities.

Accordingly, many boxers contested the meaning of fair play and constructed its meaning in their own ways. Most boxers were ready to subtly use the loopholes in the rules. Corbett, who was called “Gentleman” in the ring, did not believe in sportsmanship. Bob Fitzsimmons was more pointed about the topic. According to him, boxers could be called honest and square as long as their tricks were not clearly ruled out by boxing rules. He called square boxers’ tricks the “tricks of cleverness.” He admitted that these tricks could be “practiced with impunity by those who knew and were disposed to take advantage of them.”

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560 Ibid., 133.
561 *Chicago Tribune*, March 11, 1897, p. 3.
562 Accordingly, middle-class amateur boxing lovers stressed that amateur boxing was based on sportsmanship, and it made a distinction between amateur boxing and prize fighting. Edward Hitchcock, “Athletic at Amherst College,” *Outing*, 6, no. 4 (July 1885), 449.
563 Corbett wrote, “But it would be utterly impossible these times, when boxing is simply a commercial proposition and there is no longer any sportsmanship attached to it. For there isn’t-no, not in any shape, manner or form.” Corbett, *The Roar of the Crowd*, p. 169.
Fight followers were also generous of the “tricks of cleverness.” A popular belief was that a boxer could make a “sneaking fight” as long as he was still supposed to keep “inside the rules.”\textsuperscript{565} To these boxers and fight followers, who accepted the “tricks of cleverness,” boxing was not about character building or strict morals. It was a money-making business. Winning was the most important thing in it. Accordingly, the profession of boxer could not be judged by middle-class sporting morals. A wealthy boxing enthusiast, A. J. Drexel Biddle, pointed out, “While all deceitful callings are contemptible, the vocation of the prize-fighter is at least a manly one. He is rarely matched against inferior weight or size, and constantly undergoes supreme tests for bravery and patience, and even magnanimity.”\textsuperscript{566} As his statement implied, cleverness prevailed over sportsmanship in the ring.

In bouts held in middle-class amateur sporting organizations, working-class boxers readily circumvented the rules. They took all possible advantages using loopholes in the rules. Hitting half-prostrate opponents was not unusual. In his 1894 fight, Corbett hit his half-prostrate opponent Charley Mitchell. When controversies about his act rose, Corbett argued that Mitchell was still “up” under the Queensberry rules.\textsuperscript{567} Gamesmanship accompanied not only the emotional desire for winning but also careful calculation to identify loopholes in the rules. Under the Queensberry rules, hitting in a break from a clinch was allowed. But the definition of a break was still controversial because the Queensberry rules were not clear in this regard.

\textsuperscript{565} \textit{Oakland Tribune}, November 21, 1891, p. 4.
\textsuperscript{566} Fitzsimmons, \textit{Physical Culture and Self-Defense}, 17.
\textsuperscript{567} Pollack, \textit{In the Ring with James J. Corbett}, 315.
Battling Nelson used the unclarity of the rules with his “left half scissor hook.”
Nelson threw this unexpected quick hook at the very moment his left hand was withdrawn to come out of a clinch. But it was not his invention. In fact, Nelson learned this “deadly punch” witnessing Joe Choyinski’s fights. Choyinski had another “wicked trick.” He approached the opponent and talked to him with the tips of his fingers touching the other fellow’s right nipple. At the moment his careless opponent replied, Choyinski plunged the heel of his left hand into the man’s liver. This wicked trick inspired Nelson to develop his “left half scissor hook” which he used from 1903. Nelson, who recognized only the written rules, invented a trick. Occasionally, Nelson did not retire to his corner after the referee instructed two boxers for the beginning of the match. Refusing to do what boxers customarily did before a fight, he maintained a hitting distance. As the bell rung, he shot a right-hand swing on his opponent’s jaw and ended the match. The Queensberry rules did not also have clear regulations about hitting in a clinch. While hitting in a clinch was negatively seen as unmanly, it was so common that boxers punched others in clinches.

While boxers often used the “tricks of cleverness,” contracts were devised to limit them. But contracts could not totally eliminate gamesmanship. For the fight between Corbett and Fitzsimmons in 1897, referee Siler instructed both boxers to keep twelve principles of the contract to prohibit too dangerous performance and popular tricks in the ring. The contract prohibited “pivot blows,” “whipping back with

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569 Ibid., 68-69.
570 Brady, *A Fighting Man*, 175.
the elbow,” and “meeting an opponent with or deliberately striking him with the elbows or knees.”\textsuperscript{571} The first agreement of the contract was that the match had to be a “fair, stand-up boxing.”\textsuperscript{572} But though the regulation implied the ban of clinches, the regulation did not expressively prohibit clinches. The two men continued to clinch as they pleased.

Though sometimes it was seen as less manly by boxers themselves, cleverness in the ring was an old custom in the ring.\textsuperscript{573} As Corbett and Fitzsimmons perceived, cleverness was a practical way to carry a fight. But while gamesmanship constructed cultural differences between working-class men’s realistic view of the world and middle-class men’s moralistic view of the world, gamesmanship was not the other side of sportsmanship. Gamesmanship (cleverness) and a chivalric code of conduct coexisted in the ring. In fact, a boxer’s performance alternated between the two. Boxers displayed their will for winning in ways that middle-class sportsmen could not accept. But at the same time, they displayed an honorable code of conduct in the ring.

While they were ready to use wicked tactics, boxers showed their respect to an unwritten code of conduct. The mercy rule was a long tradition in the ring, which dated back to the era of the bare-knuckle fight. In bare-knuckle fights, a fighter often stopped striking a helpless opponent and waited his friend to comfort him. The mercy

\begin{footnotes}
\item[571] Many fighters did not subscribe to sportsmanship which required a player to protect his opponent. The Pivot blow might cause a serious physical damage. George LaBlanche used it to Jack Dempsey in 1889.
\item[572] \textit{Chicago Tribune}, March 11, 1897, p. 3.
\item[573] Robert Fitzsimmons, “The Tricks of Pugilists” \textit{New York World}, March 8, 1891, p. 12; \textit{Daily Picayune}, June 26, 1890, p. 6. For instance, in the early 1880s, Sullivan was disgusted with the loopholes in the London Prize Ring rules, which could not prohibit foot-race matches.
\end{footnotes}
rule impressed even antagonistic reporters.\textsuperscript{574} In the last bare-knuckle heavyweight championship bout between Sullivan and Kilrain in 1889, which overlapped with the era of club fighting, the two boxers committed many fouls. It was natural considering both men’s bitter feelings toward each other. Several fouls committed by Sullivan especially disgusted spectators. Kilrain also used fouls, which were likely not to disqualify him. Kilrain displayed gamesmanship falling down intentionally to avoid blows. He seized Sullivan by the leg in the seventieth round. He tramped Sullivan’s foot with spiked shoes. While they displayed their naked desire for winning, the gentlemanly code was still alive. In the forty-fourth round, Kilrain stopped fighting when he noticed that Sullivan began to vomit. Kilrain told Sullivan, “I don’t want to hit you in that condition.”\textsuperscript{575} Kilrain refused to take an advantage over his helpless opponent. The tradition of the mercy rule continued in club fighting. There was no binary between sportsman and gamesman in the ring.

In fact, a boxer had two codes of conduct, pluck and generosity.\textsuperscript{576} The two codes might be conflicting. One valued die-hard determination for winning, and the other valued the control of desire for winning. But two codes coexisted in the ring. The last scene of the 1891 fight between Bob Fitzsimmons and Jack Dempsey showed how the two boxers tried to keep these codes of conduct. “A well-known Boston sporting man, who had wagered big money on Jack, at this moment threw up his hands and begged the seconds to stop the fight. But whatever may be said,

\textsuperscript{574} Rocky Mountain News, November 7, 1883, p. 2.  
\textsuperscript{575} Lynch, Knuckle and Gloves, 129.  
Dempsey was plucky throughout. In the tenth round Fitzsimmons picked him up, after having knocked him down, and said, ‘Jack, you are whipped, I can’t hit you.’ Dempsey wouldn’t be downed and insisted upon fighting. Fitzsimmons after that didn’t want to hit Dempsey, but the latter insisted, and he was finally straightened out on the floor.”577 “When the thirteenth round began, Fitzsimmons said again, ‘I don’t want to strike you.’ But Dempsey replied, ‘You will have to knock me out.’ Dempsey went down the last time. Battling Nelson remember, “Fitzsimmons walked gravely back to where Dempsey sat and leaning over whispered, ‘I hate to do it, Jack. Don’t be downhearted. We all have our turn. Jack, you’re the gamest man in the world.’”578

Subscribing to the mercy rule, boxers constructed a bout as a manly battle between equals. In 1892, Corbett, who was a wicked boxer, respected the code of conduct when he did not finish staggering Sullivan in the seventh round.579 In his 1898 fight with Peter Jackson, Jim Jeffries also behaved according to the code of conduct. In the third round, old Jackson was almost falling through ropes and leaning feebly against a post. A report described the scene: “Here was where Jeffries showed the instincts of a gentleman … He humanely stepped away and let him gradually sink against the post and ropes for support.”580

A. J. Drexel Biddle pointed out the boxer’s conflicting attitude about the unwritten rules in the ring. He did not deny that there were disrespectful tricks in professional fighting. But he noticed a general code of conduct in the ring. A boxer,

seeing victory well assured, refrained from “further beating a weakened opponent” and implored the referee to “interfere and thus save his adversary from further punishment.” According to Biddle, the idea that prize fighting was simply brutal was an “erroneous view.”

While they were involved in commercial professional fights, clubs were losing their exclusivity as a class-specific organization and became a space of cultural contacts, contest, and negotiations. Commercialism eclipsed the ideal of the club. Clubs not only brought professional fights but also allowed social acts, which were seen as immoral by respectable middle-class men. Clubs were involved in betting and sold liquor inside their buildings. Moralists blamed that clubs killed amateurism and became organizations for profit.

Spectatorship became elevated in social status in the 1890s and 1900s. A club fight was becoming an orderly and “well-dressed gathering.” However, while baseball team owners tried to expel working-class spectators by raising admission fees, holding games in daytimes, and even drawing middle-class women, clubs were less eager to prevent working-class men from witnessing fights. There were still seats at the cheap price for these old fight followers, and main bouts were held at night. The club also remained a male-segregated institution. Accordingly, while clubs

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were partly successful in taming spectators with the elevation of spectatorship, disorder took place in clubs.\textsuperscript{585}

Working-class and middle-class fight fans out of the ring were never passive. They actively participated in the fight and tried to revive the legacies of the era of the bare-knuckle fight. In a referee’s eyes, taming spectators was only partly successful. Spectators were agitated easily, and continuously challenged the authority of referees. Whether a referee’s decision was correct or not, it could not satisfy certain fans in the arena. They resisted referees’ decisions with hoots, hisses, and catcalls. They violently threatened referees unless their favorites were “beaten by a mile.”\textsuperscript{586}

Especially after a close match was finished, a referee felt threatened by spectators who yelled “like mad.”\textsuperscript{587} Spectators with strong partisanship continued to threaten referees, boxers, and matches themselves.\textsuperscript{588} The excited atmosphere of clubhouses continuously caused disorder. The 1904 fight between Joe Choynski and Kid Carter in the Criterion Club of Boston was finished in the first round. Carter’s blow landed low, but the foul was passed unnoticed by referee Jim Colville. Disorder erupted, and the police arrested pugilists and their seconds. They were charged with “mutual

\textsuperscript{585} Milwaukee Sentinel, September 8, 1892, p. 4; San Francisco Call, March 18, 1897, p. 3; March 23, 1898, p. 14.
\textsuperscript{587} George Siler, “Siler gives the ‘Why,’” Chicago Tribune, November 12, 1899, p. 17.
\textsuperscript{588} Nelson, Life, Battles and Career of Battling Nelson, 185.
assault and fighting.” The case made boxing contests prohibited for a while in Boston.589

There were no longer full-scale fistfights and gunfights among spectators in clubhouses where the policemen kept order. But there was still a “fighting mob” around and inside arenas.590 In fact, the club was a space where order and disorder alternated. Thus club fighting could not transform fight followers’ popular tastes. Fight fans still preferred to witness bouts in ways that reflected the legacies of the bare-knuckle era. They “expected a bloodthirsty contest or a knock-out.”591 The lurking tension surfaced when tamed and scientific professional fighting in clubs disappointed fight fans.

Accordingly, in the 1890s and 1900s, clubs had two conflicting missions to make prize fighting a business. While they tried to make prize fighting compatible with the middle-class notion of sports to avoid legal troubles, they also needed to satisfy fight fans for their economic interest. Clubs took the middle ground. While they enforced the introduction of gloves and the Queensberry rules, clubs negotiated with the popular sentiment among fight fans. They did not totally eliminate the legacies of the old bare-knuckle fight under the London Prize Ring rules. For instance, the articles of agreement for the fight between Corbett and Sullivan in 1892 stipulated the size of glove in its third point. “The gloves shall be the smallest the club will allow.”592 While the fight under the Queensberry rules limited the number

589 Chicago Tribune, January 24, 1904, p. 9.
590 Gillmore, “A Woman at a Prize-Fight,” 789, 792.
591 San Francisco Morning Call, October 8, 1891, p. 2.
592 Naughton, Heavyweight Champions, 10.
of rounds, the club actually allowed a fight to a finish. A common method was to limit the number of rounds but to allow scores of rounds. In fact, many fights in clubs were terminated in a knockout. Though the police was present, clubs often overlooked a boxer’s intention to knock out his opponent. As a result, a fight in the club was often a brutal and bloody slugging match. The intensity of club fights were shocking so that many reformists felt that legal regulations did not eliminate brutal slugging from fights.

Accordingly, clubs could not make a fight totally fitting in the middle-class notion of sports. The control of violence in club fighting was more difficult when some boxers tried to control their performances. In 1892, the Olympic Club of New Orleans planned to write the right of the club, to limit the number of rounds, into the contract for the fight between Sullivan and Corbett. But Sullivan believed that a draw was unmanly. He refused to sign the proposed articles of agreement. He also refused to admit the regulation of the club that a referee could stop the fight when “too much brutality” was displayed. Boxers also developed methods to end a match with a knockout. For instance, the kidney punch was controversial, but many boxers were ready to use it.

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593 Until 1910s, a fight was much longer than present one. In 1910, the fight between Jack Jackson and Jim Jeffries limited the round to forty-five. Richard K. Fox, The Life and Battles of Jack Johnson, Champion Pugilist of the World (New York: Richard K. Fox Pub. Co., 1912), 55-57.
595 New York Times, January 14, 1900, p. 11.
596 Atchison Daily Champion, April 21, 1892, p. 7.
597 New York Times, January 24, 1911, p. 11.
Nevertheless, most fight followers were irritated by the emergent style. Experts readily supported scientific boxers. But to contemporary fight followers, a “sparring for points is one thing, fighting for blood another.” Many fight followers still valued the aggressive style more than the scientific style. They did not attend a bout to see which one was the “better boxer.” They came to see “which was the best man.” The best man meant a fighter “who could hit hardest, and endure the most pain and fatigue.” Science was the next best thing. Its use was valuable only when the body was “sore” and the muscle was “tired.” Accordingly, spectators wanted a bout in which two fighters mixed aggressively and fought gamely. However, their expectations were often frustrated by club fighting, which valued “good, clever sparring and decisions based on scientific points” to avoid troubles with the law.

While Corbett became a renowned boxer, his scientific boxing was welcomed by critics but repulsed many fight fans. His scientific boxing lacked bloodiness and aggressiveness and could not show his gameness. According to a report, “Corbett showed the most science, but the display was so tame as to disgust the spectators.”

In 1891, Corbett’s defensive and point-aware style in his fight with Jackson disappointed an old fight follower. He preferred the old style, which was less scientific but masculine. “I can explain Corbett’s handling of himself upon no theory except that he went into the ring not to whip Jackson but to keep from getting

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599 Los Angeles Times, March 18, 1897, p. 9.
601 San Francisco Call, November 12, 1898, p. 2.
602 New York World, November 9, 1897, p. 8.
603 New York Clipper, January 11, 1890, quoted in Pollack, In the Ring with James J. Corbett, 123.
Corbett’s dodging, parrying, and defensive style faced the jeers of the crowds in the fight with Sullivan. After he became a champion, Corbett was not an idol of all boxing fans. He was only “the idol of admirers of scientific boxing methods.” Fight followers expressed their preference clearly in the fight between Corbett and Sharkey in 1896. Sharkey took all punishments readily and was aggressive throughout the fight. Fight fans were behind him. Though it was legitimized under the Queensberry rules, Corbett’s hitting Sharkey on breaks was hissed by the crowd. When Sharkey broke the rules, the crowd kept silent.

The coexistence of two conflicting styles in the ring facilitated further cultural contests and negotiations regarding a way to pick up a winner in a fight under the Queensberry rules. These contests and negotiations showed for whom fight fans were rooting. In the bare-knuckle fight under the London Prize Ring rules, the last man standing was an indisputable winner. As long as two men stood up and the bout could not last longer, the match was declared a draw. While club fights limited the number of rounds, it became a controversy how to decide a winner. Professional fighting in the club inevitably consulted the rules for amateur boxing contests. The point system, which was introduced in amateur boxing contests in the 1870s, began to affect professional boxing and gave advantages to scientific boxer who fought for points. Generally, boxing experts and referees favored this system.

605 Brady, A Fighting Man, 94.
606 San Francisco Call, November 22, 1898, p. 3. Corbett’s manger, Brady, also attributed Corbett’s unpopularity to his style. Brady, A Fighting Man, 102.
However, the point system was not consolidated even in amateur boxing. While the amateur rules made all offensive and defensive skills points, referees often gave a match to a contestant who damaged his opponent more, not one who scored more clean hits and displayed more graceful movements in defense. Amateur boxing lovers criticized that competitors hammered each other “like savages,” and the one who was “the luckiest, the strongest or the most enduring” got a decision in amateur contests. Accordingly, the point game failed to support amateur boxing lovers’ ideal of “purely scientific boxing” and distinguish gentlemanly and scientific amateur boxing from professional boxing.607

While professional referees felt that there had to be an objective method to prove a better man “scientifically,” they had to consider the popular sentiment among boxers and fight followers.608 As points were counted in professional fights, they had to be related only to science in offense, that is, the number of clean hits. However, referees had to solve another question. When a scientific boxer and a popular slugger met and two men stood until the last round, which one had to be picked as the winner? There was no clear answer in the ring. A famous referee, Eddie Graney, tended to give the fight to the more aggressive contestant and cater to fight fans. However, George Siler argued that a referee had to discern a victor on the basis of points. Siler counted the number of clean hits rather than the number of better rounds.609 His method valued scientific and skillful boxers, who were good at

607 Daily Picayune, October 10, 1892, p. 7.
608 San Francisco Morning Call, December 24, 1893, p. 20.
defense and counterattack rather than aggressive ones. But his attempt frustrated spectators who valued aggressiveness and gameness more than skill and science.

The controversy regarding the 1899 bout between Jeffries and Tom Sharkey, which compromised Siler’s reputation, reflected different attitudes toward ideal ring performance between a referee and a majority of fight followers. Jeffries played defensively and scientifically. He maintained a distance and relied on counterattack. He played a clean style. But Sharkey, who was five inches shorter, got in close all the rounds. He was a typical aggressor and slugger. Sharkey continuously violated rules but his aggressive style made spectators take his side. According to Siler, though Jeffries’s blows certainly left many more marks on Sharkey, it was “anybody’s fight.”610 However, Siler, who preferred a more scientific style, was certainly more aligned with Jeffries and gave the match to him. Disorder erupted. Many fight followers continued to question Siler’s decision after the fight. As Siler admitted, to a great many persons, “Sharkey was entitled to a draw because he put up such a game fight against so big a man as Jeffries.” That is, fight followers believed that endurance and gameness was at least equal to science and two men standing in the last round were entitled to equal treatment as in the bare-knuckle fights.611 The question was not solved in the early twentieth century. A referee’s decision depended largely on his taste.

In the era in which scientific boxing became dominant discourse in the late 1890s and 1900s, some fighters and fight fans still resisted the transformation of prize fighting. Tom Sharkey, who was called a “little version of Sullivan,” was one of them. While Corbett represented “science” in the 1890s, Sharkey represented “brute force.” Throughout his career, Sharkey was critical of so-called “modern prize fighters” and a “scientific way to fight.” Accordingly, there was never any fiddling and feinting in his style of fighting. His style was of the “slam-bang order from bell to bell.” Sharkey’s style represented his antagonism toward intellectualism in prize fighting. According to a famous boxing fan, Bat Masterson, modern fighters (the new school of scrappers) were skillful at defense but lacked traditional aggressiveness and gameness. “Any one who has watched the average prize fighter of to-day perform in the ring … must have discovered a woeful lack of aggressiveness on the part of one of the principals, and in many instances on the part of both.” To Masterson, ideal fighters meant men who could “stand up and exchange blows” until one went down or retreated. He also criticized “cheaters in the ring” who tried to win on points. Battling Nelson was also critical of scientific boxers who relied heavily on defense and lacked aggressiveness and “abysmal brute.” He abhorred so-called scientific matches which showed “a little touch of fighting instinct.”

While experts blamed the old style as obsolete in the late 1890s and 1900s, many middle- and working-class fight fans still loved sluggers like Tom Sharkey,

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612 *San Francisco Call*, November 22, 1898, p. 3.
614 Ibid.
Peter Maher, Aurelia Herrera, Young Corbett, Gus Ruhlin, and Battling Nelson, whose styles were often related to Sullivan. Peter Maher, Aurelia Herrera, Young Corbett, Gus Ruhlin, and Battling Nelson, whose styles were often related to Sullivan.616 Fight follower Willie Green reflected their sentiment. “Since the enforced retirement of John L. Sullivan the ring has not had a real fighter in the heavyweight division.” He desperately wanted a “champion of the prize ring” to be a “real fighter” and an “idol of the great mass of ring followers.”617 An old ex-fighter knew why fight fans resented the emergence of scientific boxing. Science decreased their fun. “There was less scientific fighting in those days…. But there was more fun for those who looked on—not quite so much, though, for the fighters.”618 Accordingly, fight fans often took sides with old style aggressive sluggers. “Hard-hitting battlers and fights in the knockout style” were still “popular with the fans.”619

For the reason, the old style fighters were still popular drawing cards for clubs. Siler resented that most fight fans’ popular taste made these old-style fighters survive in boxing. “The crowd must be catered to and that know nothing but slug pugs are choice morsels for their numerous admires to digest.”620

In the 1900s, a boxer whose style was modeled after Corbett continuously faced fight fans’ antagonism in the arena. Jack Johnson often faced hissing because of his cautious and defensive style. In his match with another black boxer, Sam McVey, spectators who

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616 The Modern Gladiator, 143, 147; New York Times, May 1, 1891, p. 5; Evening Herald, June 10, 1897, p. 6. However, not all experts acclaimed the new style. Robert Edgren was never favorable to boxers “relying on gymnastic training and skill.” He preferred a fighter with the “spirit of pugnacity.” Edgren, “Fighters by Nature,” 343.
618 Richmond Times, April 28, 1901, p. 15.
619 Los Angeles Herald, June 28, 1907, p. 8.
thought that they were “deprived of the privilege of witnessing a knockout” hissed him continuously.  

Clubs, which became a commercial organization, further facilitated cultural negotiations. They brought clumsy “preliminary fighters” before main fights between more skillful boxers and matched one with another “for the purpose of knocking his block off as speedily as possible.” These preliminary boxers, who knew “very little of scientific boxing” and were “more accustomed to the rough house style of fighting,” fanned “into each other like a pair of setting hens” until the services of a referee were “required to formally end the melee by counting out one of them.” According to boxing critics, Edgren and Naughton, clubs and promoters tended to cater to spectators by providing both slugging and scientific matches in the 1900s.

The cultural negotiation in club fighting could not satisfy the supporters of scientific boxing. While Sharkey resented that most boxers had lost aggressiveness in the ring with the popularity of scientific boxing, others were upset that sluggers were still popular throughout the 1900s. In 1908, the Los Angeles Times pointed out that scientific boxing was “threatened with becoming a lost art.” Corbett deplored that boxers ignored the importance of feinting, countering, blocking, ducking, and footwork, and “scientific matches were seldom seen.” Concerned that boxing was losing quality as an art, Corbett criticized club owners and promoters for allowing

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622 Los Angeles Herald, June 28, 1907, p. 8.
623 Oakland Tribune, April 2, 1908, p. 11; October 20, 1907, p. 9.
624 Los Angeles Times, March 15, 1908, p. 8.
slugging and gameness to prevail over science in the ring.625 Jeffries also complained
that the ring was full of “rough work artists” who wrestled with their opponents and
had no ability to move and defend.626 In 1913, boxing critic Jack Skelly criticized that
even a match between “topnotchers” was becoming simply a “go-as-you-please
slugging match without hardly any display of boxing knowledge.”627

In the 1910s, fight followers continued to be blood-thirsty.628 They were still
antagonistic toward boxers who used a lot of skill to avoid punishments.629 The boxer
who was good at footwork was derogatorily termed the “ring dancing-master” among
fight fans.630 “Scientific boxing” still appealed to “but few of the army of boxing
fans.”631 Most fight fans still loved the “Sullivan and Fitzsimmons type,” not Corbett
and other “brilliant scientific boxers.” Accordingly, it was not surprising that the
pugilists who had won “their combats decisively” were held in greater esteem than
those who triumphed “through all-round boxing skill.”632 With the support from fight
fans, the ring in the 1910s was still full of sluggers of the “John L. Sullivan school,”
who figured on “wearing an opponent down by his aggressiveness, superior strength,

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627 Reno Evening Gazette, October 22, 1913, p. 6.
628 In 1910, a witness described a fight as follows: “The blood hunger of the gallery at that fight was
merely revolting. They gloated and shouted over every spurt of blood. They wanted it in buckets. I
never again want to see humanity so degraded and so brutalized. It was the raw savage, cruel and
bloodthirsty.” San Francisco Call, May 29, 1910, p. 53.
629 Inez Haynes Gillmore, “A Woman at a Prize-Fight,” 792.
630 Johns Hollingshead, Ways of Life, 184.
and greater hitting power,” and cared “nothing about the blows he took” as long as he could “get a solid punch home.”

While club fights facilitated cultural negotiations in a middle-class institution, they also limited the reproduction of a working-class ethos in fights. However, there were still alternative ways that working-class men enjoyed the old style fighting. In the 1900s, admission fees for fights gradually increased. However, small fight clubs were scattered in cities. These small clubs, which were established by former boxers and independent promoters, charged much less or no admission fees for spectators. Many unknown boxers began their careers in these small fight clubs until they could be a drawing card for big clubs. Even in the 1900s, fights in these small fight clubs were unorganized. These clubs recruited poor and hungry young men who were ready to fight for a meager purse, which ranged from five dollars to thirty dollars. These novices had no trainer. According to a manger, Eddie Kevin, these novices were pushed into the ring without any chance of learning the art of boxing. “They are told to wade in and slam each other and never mind anything else. The effect of this has been to develop a lot of tin-eared comedians, most of whom don't know a cross-counter or a left hook.” These clumsy fighters naturally engaged in slugging matches. But small clubs capitalized on these low quality matches. Because spectators collected purses (often including admission fees) after the match, the fight

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had to cater to their popular taste.\textsuperscript{637} Accordingly, it was not unusual to find sluggers hammering each other in small fight clubs until the 1910s. In prize fighting, conflicts between concepts of ideal masculinities continued with the emergence of a new hegemonic masculinity in the ring.

In the twentieth century, it became clearer that the club could not mold prize fighting according to middle-class cultural norms. In the 1910s, some states began to further regulate boxing by establishing governing organizations. In New York, the Frawley Law, which replaced the anti-boxing Lewis Law, allowed no decision fights in the state in 1911 and made a governing body come into existence.\textsuperscript{638} In the progressive era, middle-class Americans combined their belief in rugged individualism with the ethos of industrialization and bureaucratization to control social transformation, which individuals no longer controlled.\textsuperscript{639} The New York State Athletic Commission was a product of the organizational revolution. Charles J. Harvey, who was in charge of the commission, believed that boxing was a “manly sport” and “on a plane with any other athletic pastimes or sports when placed under

\textsuperscript{638} Jeffrey T. Sammons, Beyond the Ring: The Role of Boxing in American Society. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 62-63. The New York organization was modeled after the Wisconsin State Athletic Commission, which was established in 1893. The Wisconsin organization, which consisted of middle-class sportsmen, had regulations to mold prize fighting in the middle-class notion of sports. The organization allowed no-decision matches. It also divided the scale of weight into eight classes to prevent a mismatch. No boxer was allowed to fight an opponent ten-pounds heavier than himself in the lightweight class. A commission physician formally examined contestants prior to the match and filed a report to the commission after the match. Referees, who were appointed by the commission, had a duty to stop the match when either contestant showed “marked superiority,” or was apparently “outclassed.” Unsportsmanlike conduct, like punching helpless opponent, wrestling, butting, and the use of elbow, was strictly punished. The commission also tried to make the bout a space where middle-class etiquette was practiced. The use of abusive or insulting language was prohibited. All persons attending a sparring match or exhibition were required to “behave in a gentlemanly and sportsmanlike manner.” Andrews, Ring Battles of Centuries, 75-77.
proper control.” Harvey was also generous of professionalism in boxing. Relying on clubs financially, the commission was an organization which supported clubs in the era of the transformation of prize fighting with its licensing power. The commission tried to clean boxing business and construct professional fighting as a safe sport. It also investigated and punished underperformance.

While middle-class institutions had transformed prize fighting for several decades, cultural contests and negotiations still preserved in the sport the considerable degree of the old working-class ethos, which seemed problematic to many middle-class moralists. Nevertheless, in many Americans’ eyes, the transformation seemed to lay the foundation for incorporation. It was also middle-class institutions like the law, the club, and the commission that facilitated the process of incorporation. The diversification in the perception of prize fighting prevented middle-class people from being unified to police a cultural and moral binary between classes. While moralists were still agitated against clubs and prize fighting, in the 1910s, boxing laws already focused more on the regulation of the sport rather than its repression. While prize fighting became a part of dominant culture through clubs, boxing laws, and commissions, cultural exchanges and negotiations through these institutions also transformed middle-class hegemonic culture. Amateurism was contested by commercialism. Violence attached to sporting activities was legitimized. Traditional masculine traits were valued in leisure activities. In the process, middle-class culture

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was further diversified and transformed. While concepts of ideal masculinities were still contested, the increasing convergence of masculinities, which was expressed through the cultural construction of prize fighting, also facilitated the incorporation of prize fighting and the transformation of dominant culture.
As the first two chapters illuminate, gender boundaries were important to both middle-class men and working-class men in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Class boundaries continued to be mediated by gender. Both middle and working-class men used prize fighting to construct and reinforce gender boundaries and affirm gender order.

According to Joan Wallach Scott, gender is “knowledge about sexual difference,” that is, a “socially agreed upon system of distinction rather than an objective description of inherited traits.” In this definition, gender means a discursively constructed and normalized understanding about the relationship between men and women. Another feminist scholar, Judith Butler, argues that gender is a display of social and cultural expectations of sexual differences. For these feminist scholars, the relations of the sexes are culturally constructed, embedded in and shaped by the social order.


Feminists have developed sports as a research topic to illuminate culturally and historically constructed gender boundaries. Boxing was special among these sports. It has been regarded as one of the most gender-segregated cultural institutions. According to Sarah K. Fields, “boxing is an extremely physical sport historically designed to promote warrior skill, and as such it is and has been male-dominated.”\textsuperscript{644}

While some recent studies deal with women in the ring after the 1970s, the relationship between women and prize fighting in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was rarely a research topic partly due to the oversimplification of prize fighting of the day as a male institution and partly due to the limit of primary materials. While research on working-class masculine subculture has developed with cultural studies and supports the feminist analysis of constructed gender order, those studies have often valorized (working-class) men but represented women as submissive. Likewise, when prize fighting is assumed simply as a part of male subculture without the consideration of the dynamic relationships between women and prize fighting, the sport is simplified as a male preserve to affirm gender order.\textsuperscript{645}

This perspective dismisses women as victims of masculine culture, and represents them as a homogeneous group who lacks agency.

However, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, women empowered themselves differently in relation to prize fighting. In the process, the ideal of womanhood was contested and redefined. The process also made women

\textsuperscript{644} Sarah K. Fields, \textit{Female Gladiators: Gender, Law, and Contact Sport in America} (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2005), 121.

more heterogeneous.\textsuperscript{646} Taking an approach often dismissed by studies of masculine subculture, this chapter recognizes the role of women’s agency in the construction of a predominantly male institution and discusses continually constructed, contested, and shifting gender boundaries and changing sexual relations during a period from the 1880s to the 1900s in which women’s relations with the controversial sport were diversified. Focusing on dynamic cultural interactions between men and women and the heterogeneity of women regarding the construction of prize fighting, this chapter critiques the reductionist model of gender and contradicts a structuralist and binary conceptualization of sports, culture, and power relations.

1. Prize Fighting and Male Culture

While the relationship between ideal masculinity and sports seems commonsensical to people in the present, the relationship was historically constructed. According to Patrick F. McDevitt, in seventeenth and eighteenth century England, non-elite women participated in various popular and traditional games.\textsuperscript{647}

\textsuperscript{646} The deconstruction of women as a social and cultural category took place with the new trend of feminism. Third World feminists and black feminists argue that the emphasis on sisterhood in the 1970s and on the shared global oppression of women belied the failure of a largely white and middle-class movement to recognize racism and colonialism as fundamental forms of oppression in the lives of women of color. These feminists stressed that women’s experiences were mediated by diverse social boundaries. This idea was helpful in the study of women in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Chris Weedon, \textit{Feminism, Theory and the Politics of Difference} (Oxford: Blackwell Publisher, 1999), 159-161; Bell hooks, \textit{Ain’t I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism} (Boston: South End Press, 1981), 124, 146; Patricia A. Vertinsky, Gender Relations, Women’s History and Sport History: A Decade of Changing Enquiry, 1983-1993,” \textit{Journal of Sport History}, 21, no. 1 (Spring 1994), 7.

Nancy Struna also argues that sports and recreation were opportunities for shared experiences regardless of gender in seventeenth and eighteenth century America.\textsuperscript{648} English and American women were pushed out of the world of physical activity in the nineteenth century. In fact, not only Victorian middle-class women but also middle-class men dissociated themselves from the world of physical activity in the early nineteenth century. However, middle-class men gradually came back to sporting fields after the mid-nineteenth century. While monotonous male fashion was a symbol of male bonding in the mid-nineteenth century, sports replaced it as the badge of all male commonness in the late nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{649} When physicality became one of the most important standards for men’s qualification, masculinity, a popular word of the late nineteenth century, referred to any characteristics, good or bad, that all men had. That is, typical manly traits meant toughness, fighting spirit, and courage, which men might gain through sports and physical culture across class, ethnic, and race boundaries.\textsuperscript{650} The turn in the definition of manliness was also reflected in middle-class men’s changing view of fighters. An increasing number of middle-class men saw a boxer as a “magnificent specimen of manhood.”\textsuperscript{651}

However, while sports symbolized male communalism, they were not social levelers for all men. As American sports were organized in the second half of the

\textsuperscript{648} Struna, \textit{People of Prowess}, 132.
\textsuperscript{649} In the mid-nineteenth century, middle class men’s drab and black gray suits created “an aura of staidness” and displayed proper characters. Male fashion was designed not to draw attention. Middle-class men tried “to be invisible and merge with the crowd.” The symbols of male maturity, beards and mustaches, symbolically added to gender differences. Kevin White, \textit{The First Sexual Revolution: The Emergence of Male Heterosexuality in Modern America} (New York: New York University Press, 1993), 16.
\textsuperscript{650} See Bederman, \textit{Manliness and Civilization}, p.18.
\textsuperscript{651} \textit{St. Paul Daily Globe}, January 15, 1891, p.1
nineteenth century, sports not only distinguished men from women but also made
distinctions among males according to class, ethnicity, race, and nationality. That is,
society continuously produced hegemonic, subjugated and marginalized masculinities
through sports. In fact, as long as he was in this disreputable profession, a fighter’s
manliness was continuously questioned. Nevertheless, after the beginning of modern
prize fighting, it gradually became an all-male sport. In England a “temporary
allegiance between the working classes and the aristocracy” produced “the golden age
of Regency boxing.”\textsuperscript{652} In spite of moralists’ purges, learning pugilism from
professional fighters was a ritual of passage for young noblemen in a city where they
needed to defend themselves physically. In this sense, English pugilism was seen as a
“great leveler of social distinctions.”\textsuperscript{653} Henry Fielding’s \textit{Tom Jones} shows that
public fighting, which imitated prizefights, was widely propagated to resolve personal
feuds among Englishmen, especially, lower-class men in the eighteenth century.\textsuperscript{654} In
America, while it was enjoyed largely by working-class men, the prizefight already
drew fans regardless of class, ethnicity, and race. As early as the mid-nineteenth
century, it was not difficult to see distinguished citizens at fights.\textsuperscript{655} An English
fighter, Jem Mace, who came to America to meet Tom Allen at New Orleans in 1870,
described American spectators as follows:

\textsuperscript{652} Isenberg, \textit{John L. Sullivan and His America}, 211.
Never in all my experience had I seen or imagined so picturesque and motley an assemblage. Men of all nationalities, seemingly, were there, and of all colors certainly. Creole dandies, glossy-coated and patent-leather booted, jostled bronzed backwoodsmen in homespun. Broad-hatted planters, in suits of white nankeen, were cheek by jowl with smartly-togged ‘sports’ from New York and St. Louis…. And mingling with these aristocrats of the ring-side were numbers of plantation Negroes, some jet black, some brown to pale yellow, but all attired in the most variegated and brilliant cotton clothing, similar to that which is worn, or rather which used to be worn, by the nigger minstrels on Margate Sands.656

It was not an exceptional experience. In 1882, an exhibition between John L. Sullivan and ‘Tug” Wilson also drew the unusual crowd:

Artists, actors, burglars, bankers, bunko-steerers, beer-jerker, blacksmiths, confidence men, cappers, clog-dancers, clerks, capitalists, captains, Chinese, Danes, doctors, divines, engineers, firemen, Frenchmen, Germans, governors, harlots, horse-thieves, idiots, Irish, jail-birds, keno men, lawyers, machinist, Mexicans, negroes, officers, politicians … were jammed together…. From the highest type of respectability to the lowest grade of depravity, every art, profession, vocation, trade and crime had its representatives there, and the

656 Mace, *In Memoriam*, 197-198.
capitalist jostled the pickpocket, the judge stood shoulder to shoulder with the sneak-thieves and the senator was cheek by jowl with the thug during the entire evening.\(^657\)

As these records represent, while social norms excluded most women from prize fighting, black men had a small privilege as a member of a certain sex.\(^658\) They not only fought with white men in the ring but also witnessed fights along with white men even in the South. A report about the 1882 fight between Paddy Ryan and Sullivan admitted the popularity of the sport among men across social divisions, stating “the most remarkable thing about today’s prize-fight is, not that it should have been allowed to take place on American soil, but that it should have excited very general public interest in all parts of the country and among many classes of men.”\(^659\) Fights continued to draw leading businessmen, politicians, and professionals.\(^660\) An 1892 report of a boxing exhibition at Madison Square Garden described a motley crowd. “Ten thousand men from all walks of life” attended the benefit.\(^661\)

In the late nineteenth century, prize fighting diversely constructed divisions between men and women. In America, men had their own ways to resolve personal feuds according to class. While some upper- and middle-class men dueled, working-class men often engaged in the rough-and-tumble fight. The prize ring rules became a

\(^657\) Rocky Mountain News, July 24, 1882, p. 4.

\(^658\) The Modern Gladiator, 125.

\(^659\) New York Times, February 8, 1882, p. 4.

\(^660\) Milwaukee Sentinel, December 10, 1883, p. 2; April 20, 1886, p. 3; Daily Inter-Ocean, August 17, 1887, p. 2; Rocky Mountain News, November 19, 1887, p. 2; St. Paul Daily Globe, May 21, 1886, p. 4; January 15, 1891, p. 19; Sullivan, Life and Reminiscences of a 19th Century Gladiator, 208.

\(^661\) National Police Gazette, October 8, 1892, p. 2.
method by which men resolved their personal feuds regardless of class, ethnicity, and race.\textsuperscript{662} Young gentlemen fought according to the prize ring rules to “settle the claim to superiority” and to resolve their love-triangles.\textsuperscript{663} A love fight was also popular among working-class men.\textsuperscript{664} The love triangle even matched a young gentleman to a working-class man in an improvised ring.\textsuperscript{665} These fights constructed both men’s heterosexuality and policed gender boundaries. While fights were popular among men of Irish and English descent, men of all ethnic groups were involved in these improvised fights.

The prize ring rules were also used to select the best man in a town and a neighborhood.\textsuperscript{666} These fights were exceedingly brutal. Prizes were often placed for victors. If a man proved courage in his fight, he earned respect in spite of a defeat. It was seen as shameful that men in the ring expressed their personal feelings after fights.\textsuperscript{667} Therefore, these fights were rituals to unify men in certain areas. When professional fighters visited towns and cities with their entourages, ambitious bullies responded to calls from touring pugilistic shows and participated in four-rounders. Local men supported their bullies regardless of class, ethnicity and race.\textsuperscript{668}

\textsuperscript{662} \textit{Daily Inter-Ocean}, April 11, 1888, p. 3.
\textsuperscript{665} \textit{Milwaukee Daily Journal}, August 7, 1889, p. 1.
\textsuperscript{666} A man who was better at this fight in his neighborhood was considered a “bully.” Siler, \textit{Inside Facts on Pugilism}, 130.
\textsuperscript{667} \textit{St. Louis-Democrat}, January 12, 1880, p. 2; July 16, 1881, p. 6; May 21, 1883, p. 4; \textit{Milwaukee Sentinel}, December 29, 1883, p. 3; March 28, 1888, p. 2; March 28, 1888, p. 2; \textit{Cleveland Herald}, July 15, 1881, p. 5; November 21, 1881, p. 3; Siler, \textit{Inside Facts on Pugilism}, 130-131; Nelson, \textit{Life, Battles, and Career of Battling Nelson}, 59-61, 71.
Prize fighting was near all men in America. While prize fighting still reflected class and ethnic characteristics, professional fighting heroes attracted men of different classes, ethnicities, and races in the late nineteenth century. Accordingly, while a fighter’s body was classed, ethnicized, and raced, it was continuously gendered. For instance, John L. Sullivan’s followers were mainly from Irish Americans and he symbolized aggressive working-class masculinity. However, his popularity also “had a sexual basis.” Sullivan’s popularity spread “through every stratum of the cult of masculinity.” According to Isenberg’s, Sullivan, who ruled the 1880s ring, was a typical brute in middle-class moralists’ eyes, he also attracted attention from respectable middle-class men. On September 9, 1892, William Lyon Phelps was reading a newspaper for his old father, who was a Baptist minister. When he began to read news on the fight between Sullivan and Corbett, his father suddenly said to his son, “Read it by round!” In America, prize fighting was gradually becoming an all-male culture.

In the late nineteenth century, prize fighting was a “male preserve,” a substitute of the old male warrior culture to affirm male cultural hegemony. Prize fighting increasingly linked manliness with the positively sanctioned use of aggression/force/violence. As a result, it dramatically displayed masculine identity, which incorporated images of activity, strength, and aggression, and contrasted it to feminine subjectivity associated with passivity, relative weakness, gentleness, and

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669 Isenberg, John L. Sullivan and his America, 209.
While professional fighting became a display of skill and science, prize fighting linked manliness with highly valued and visible skills. Prize fighting also developed an exclusive homosocial institution which devalued women and increased male bonding.

2. Prize Fighting, Victorian Moral Reformers, and Feminists

However, while prize fighting displayed physical differences between sexes and its supporters tried to construct affirmative male identities, many boxing insiders continued to raise moral questions regarding the sport. Bluffing, crookedness, and vicious tricks were common in the ring business. While courageous, game, and clean fighters were idealized, men often failed to adhere to these expectations in the ring. What was the ideal masculine performance was also contested between aggressive fighters and scientific boxers. That is, the definition of hegemonic masculinity in the ring was not yet clarified. In this sense, cultural boundaries, which fighters and boxing supporters constructed to divide heroic masculinity and passive feminity, were never stabilized. Even the most aggressive performance could not stabilize gender boundaries and gender order. Participating in the cultural construction of prize fighting differently, women continued to rework and destabilize gender boundaries and impact gender order.

In the Victorian era, the divisions between workshop and home led to the rigid
gender segregation, especially in the middle classes. Women lost their position in the
public sphere, including economic sectors. Instead, a new type of patriarchy, which
was based on the spatial divide of gender between the private and public spheres,
made a compensation for women. Women were considered as innately pure and
acclaimed as moral guardians. They oversaw the education of children and the morals
of family members. However, while Victorian gender roles idealized passive,
delicate, and domestic women, middle-class women assumed and enlarged their roles
as moralizing agents outside the home in the late nineteenth century. Religious
women participated in social reform movements and joined missionary and
temperance organizations. Many Victorian middle-class women fought against
gambling, prostitution, drinking, dancehalls, and brutal entertainments. While
prizefights moved to clubs in cities, some religious middle-class women participated
in anti-prize fighting agitation. These middle-class women empowered themselves
with old class and gender morals, which had bolstered a patriarchal domination
throughout the nineteenth century. While they tried to maintain gender boundaries
between women as moral guardians and men who were likely to fall to temptation,
these middle-class women normalized the moral binary and moral order between
sexes to increase women’s role in public spheres.

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In the late nineteenth century, women were not a homogeneous group. Middle-class women were also culturally divided. The antislavery movement in the antebellum era began to change a considerable number of white middle-class women’s perceptions of politics and society. Female abolitionists followed the “course of the antislavery movement from evangelicalism to politics, moving from a framework of individual sin and conversion to an understanding of institutionalized oppression and social reform.”[^674] Antislavery activists Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucretia Mott, and others organized the first women’s rights convention at Seneca Falls, New York in 1848 and began to address the oppression of women. After the Civil War, the Fourteenth Amendment (1868) and Fifteenth Amendment (1870) enfranchised freed black men but continued to exclude white women from politics. While some female activists supported the Republican Party’s effort to ratify the Amendments, the shared sense of common victimhood between white female suffragists and black male activists was no longer appealing to many other female activists who witnessed the emergence of a gender-based social hierarchy.[^675]

In fact, in the late nineteenth century, white women’s position was not clearly superior to that of black men. White women lacked political rights which were given to black men after the Civil War. Even racist discourse of the day did not value white women over black men. For instance, in his influential study about human brains, G.

Herve saw black men’s racial inferiority in “their similarity to white women.” He argued that a black man’s brain was hardly heavier than that of a white woman. In order to escape their predicament, many white feminists embraced Victorian middle-class values and defined themselves as moral guardians and cultural disseminators. In so doing, they constructed themselves as members of the white race against black men and immigrants who were culturally inferior, and addressed white women’s qualification for political rights. As a result, from the 1870s, the woman’s movement was increasingly segregated. While many white activists empowered themselves as missionaries of civilization against “lower orders” and “lower races” and justified their political rights by their superior position in class, ethnic, and racial hierarchies, black female activists were sympathetic to black men and criticized white activists’ class and racial bias.

Accordingly, while these white feminists were supporting women’s political cause and questioning the rigid division of the public/private sphere, they remained Victorian classists, ethnocentrists, and racists. Manipulating class, ethnic, and racial binaries, these feminists often supported moral reform. In this sense, Victorian moral reformers and feminists did not represent a binary division between old women and new women. Rather, they were often unified about moral issues. For instance, many suffragists were also temperance activists. Famous feminists attacked sensational journalism and “immoral” recreation. At the same time, while American Victorian


moral reformers were organized best with temperance movements, many of them believed that their moral mission would be achieved when they had political influence. In this sense, these female temperance activists “domesticated politics.” Many female temperance activists and feminists policed old middle-class norms and tried to affirm women’s role as moral guardians to rescue American manhood. In so doing, these middle-class women translated a moral binary to gender boundaries, and justified women’s social and political rights to change power relations between sexes. To them, prize fighting emerged as a common moral issue in the 1890s. These women saw prize fighting as a gender, class, ethnic and racial marker.

In America, the National Woman’s Christian Temperance Union, which was founded in 1874, became a representative organization for female moral reformers. However, under the leadership of Frances E. Willard, the W. C. T. U. was a symbolic

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678 Elaine Frantz Parsons illuminates the close relationship between temperance activists and suffragists. She also finds that temperance activists often enlarged their role of “moral guardians” to politics. Elaine Frantz Parsons, Manhood Lost: Fallen Drunkard and Redeeming Women in the Nineteenth-Century United States (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 9-11, 174-175. 679 Edward J. Blum, Reforging the White Republic: Race, Religion, and American Nationalism, 1865-1898 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005), 178. Ian R. Tyrrell argued that the WCTU was training members in the cause of suffrage and therefore, it was not always a conservative organization. Ian R. Tyrrell, Woman’s World/Woman’s Empire: The Woman’s Christian Temperance Union in International Perspective (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), chapter 10. 680 In fact, while women penetrated spaces which were traditionally reserved only for men, men also supported a Victorian moral binary between sexes to keep the disreputable cultural space as their own masculine space. An editorial about the 1892 Sullivan-Corbett fight said, “It must be admitted that this sympathy [toward prizefighters] is somehow shame-faced among modern men who are civilized and profess to be cultivated, and that it does not exist at all among modern women, who unfeignedly regard as ‘brutal’ what the male animal, however much he many have been sophisticated by culture, only affects to regard as merely brutal…. He [Sullivan] has all the vices of his class and none of its virtues. It may seem strange to speak of the virtues of pugilism, but we may quite sure that there is something human in a character that so strongly attracts the interests of men, high and low, educated and uneducated, refined and crude. The first virtue of a prize fighter is of course, physical courage.” New York Times, September 8, 1892, p. 4.
figure of the connection between Victorian moral reformers and feminists. Originally, the W. C. T. U. and its members were “unlikely commentators on prize fighting.”681

In 1897, Nevada legalized prize fighting to permit an anticipated fight between Jim Corbett and Bob Fitzsimmons. Dan Stuart, who promoted the match, also planned to admit women to the arena for the first time and film the championship fight.682 Willard, who was concerned about the brutalizing and demoralizing effects of the sport on women and the youth, turned her attention to the problem of prize fighting and the fight pictures.

Willard blamed Nevada, which allowed the “bruising ring,” and urged women in the country not to subscribe to newspapers which furnished extended accounts of prizefights.683 Willard and the national officers of the W.C.T.U appealed to President William McKinley to prevent the kinetoscope exhibitions of the “degrading spectacles.” In the letter, officers assumed their role as moral guardians and stressed the demoralizing effect of the fight picture on the youth.684 Local branches of the W.C.T.U also agitated against the fight pictures. The Central W.C.T.U. adopted a resolution to prohibit the kinetoscope exhibition of the fight and criticized that these kinetoscope representations brutalized all who witnessed them.685 In Maine, the local

681 Alison M. Parker, Purifying America: Women, Cultural Reform, and Pro-Censorship Activism, 1873-1933 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 136. Also see Ruth Bordin, Women and Temperance: the Quest for Power and Liberty, 1873-1900 (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990), 151.
683 Chicago Tribune, March 20, 1897, p. 6.
684 North American, March 23, 1897, p. 3; Chicago Tribune, March 23, 1897, p. 10.
685 Chicago Tribune, March 26, 1897, p.10. The kinetoscope exhibitions of the fight were also held in local fairs. “Debasing” sideshows accompanied the exhibitions. The W.C.T.U. members and moral
W.C.T.U succeeded in passing a law prohibiting the exhibition of the fight pictures.  

Willard not only mobilized her organization against the prizefight but also pursued a union with suffragists. In 1897, Willard sent letters to prominent female moral reformers and suffragists and urged them to participate in protests against the Corbett-Fitzsimmons fight and sensational journalism which helped promoters and fighters. Susan B. Anthony, who led the feminist and suffragist movements after Stanton, positively responded to her letter. “Your circular letter came duly, proposing that women should refuse to patronize the so-called ‘yellow’ newspapers, and also protest against prize fighting.” Anthony was a classist. She complained that, while the men of disrespectful classes enjoyed the brutal entertainments, women lacked voting

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686 Women’s Christian Temperance Union of Maine, Annual Report of the Women’s Christian Temperance Union (Rockland, Press of the Courier-Gazette, 1908), 43. The law prevented the public exhibitions of “any photograph or other reproduction of a prize fight” and fined violators. Ibid., 143.


688 Dan Streible, Fight Picture, 85.
rights which even these men had. Viewing yellow journalism and prize fighting as symbols of degrading male culture, Anthony agreed that women’s moral influence in politics could be a remedy.689

Before Anthony interpreted prize fighting as a class and gender marker and expressed her resolute objection to it, some suffragists had already expressed their antagonism toward the brutality of prize fighting. Charlotte Perkins Gilman raised questions about the admiration of physicality among men. Gilman saw men’s antagonism toward Victorian moral order between sexes in the syndrome of sports and bodybuilding. “It is good to see a man strong, healthy, well-developed—all men should be that at least; but to make beauty, much more perfection, requires more than this. The Dahomeyan is strong, healthy and well-developed; so the Esquimaux; so is the Apache; so is many a proud athlete of the ring and track. But beauty is more, far more.”690 Gilman resorted to the sense of class and racial superiority to frustrate a new patriarchal order which was based on male physicality. In so doing, she stood against middle-class men who tried to translate their physical superiority to social superiority. In 1894, Gilman, who was concerned about men’s digression from Victorian moral order, criticized a new symbol of masculine culture. She defined

prize fighting as the decay of civilization and a savage way of displaying masculinity.  

A suffragist and journalist, Elia Peatties was also conscious of prize fighting as a class and gender marker. She attributed the popularity of prize fighting to a desire and anxiety which men of all classes shared. She believed that men desired to be cavemen who strived to prove manly strength among their fellows. Peatties argued that the old desire dominated boxers, fight followers, and newspapermen, and produced barbarians in civilization. Peatties denied a claim that prize fighting was a display of courage and skill. She criticized the popularity of the sport among men of all classes, which reflected the degradation of gentlemen in the contemporary era. Valuing middle-class ideals like the control of brutality and desire and work ethic, Peatties stigmatized men of all classes and made the entire male gender an undesirable class.

One of the early suffragists, Matilda Joslyn Gage also addressed prize fighting as a symbol of male barbarism against “Christianized civilization.” She stressed that women’s presence in politics would have a moralizing effect in the society where barbarism prevailed. Likewise, criticizing the governor of Florida, Goodwin Smith, who objected to women’s suffrage, Ellen Battelle Dietrick argued that masculine politics could not stop barbarism. To Dietrick, prize fighting was a symbol

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of masculine barbarism. Suffragists maintained Victorian moral order between sexes and urged local governments to allow women’s suffrage and ban the “brutal business” which was moving its stage to respectable clubs. In her writing, “Why Women Need the Ballot,” which was read at the meeting of the Polk County Woman Suffrage Society, A. E. Thomas used prize fighting as a class, gender, and ethnic marker to advocate women’s political rights. Thomas especially appealed to anti-immigration sentiments which were shared by Anglo-Saxon middle-class men and many female suffragists. She deplored that women were deprived of suffrage while the white foreigners who could speak “a half dozen words of the English language,” elected prizefighters and salon keepers as their representatives.

Organized protests against prize fighting by women’s groups were still dispersed with the flourishing of organizations with a single goal. Nevertheless, female temperance organizations were consistent activists against prize fighting in the 1900s. The W. C. T. U. still fought against a “relic of barbarism.” The department of Peace and International Arbitration, which was established by the W. C. T. U., led anti-prize fighting agitation. As a pacifist organization, it objected to all violence and militarism. In its seventh convention, the organization defined prize fighting,

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695 *Woman’s Journal*, 22, no. 31 (August 1, 1891), 243. The *Journal* was an official organ of the National American Woman Suffrage Association.
696 Thomas referred to an Irish American fighter, John Morrissey, as a case. In 1890, another Irish American fighter, John L. Sullivan, planned to run for Congress. “Why Women Need the Ballot,” *Woman’s standard*, 5, no. 4 (December 1890), 2
697 *Bee*, October 2, 1902, p. 7.
lynching, and capital punishment as “man’s cruelty to man.”

Maintaining its humanitarian cause against violence, the organization again brought the issue of prize fighting to its next convention. In its ninth convention, the organization announced a resolution to protest against “toy weapons of warfare for children, the indiscriminate sale of fire arms, military drill in schools and higher seats of learning, lynching, prize-fighting, and capital punishment.”

Suffragists also continued to use prize fighting to justify their political causes. In 1907, a female suffragists’ organization, the Portia Club, defined prize fighting as a “relic of barbarity” and pressed female suffrage to politicians. The club members argued that prize fighting would be put down when universal suffrage allowed women to enlarge their traditional moral guardian role into politics.

In her “Equal Suffrage,” Helen Laura Sumner justified women’s political rights against the men of “notoriously immoral life,” who dominated politics and protected prize fighting and “laws of vicious tendency.” In the 1900s, suffragists tried to prove women’s moralizing effect in politics. They succeeded in stopping fights and passing anti-prize fighting laws in several states.

Anti-prize fighting female activists who were also temperance activists or suffragists blurred gender boundaries by their social participation. But at the same

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703 Helena Laura Sumner, Equal Suffrage (New York: Harper & Brothers Publisher, 1909), xxi, 212.
704 Woman’s standard, 20, no. 8 (1907), 2.
time, relying on old Victorian gender roles, these women constructed themselves as moral guardians to justify their social and political roles and impact gender order. In so doing, they constructed a gender binary. They also reproduced old class morals and shared them with male moral conservatives, and affirmed ethnic and racial hierarchies. While these women used prize fighting as a gender marker to empower them, their construction of gender boundaries in a moral binary was vulnerable. Middle-class women were not a homogeneous group. Some women were not interested in social issues. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, some other women empowered themselves in ways that moralistic female activists could not accept. They participated in prize fighting as spectators. Some working-class women even entered the ring as fighters, thus contesting class and gender boundaries which were drawn by white middle-class female activists.

3. Women at Fights and Theaters

In the late nineteenth century, contemporary cultural norms did not allow women to witness professional fights. When the heavyweight champion, John L.

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705 The criticism of prize fighting was not confined to middle-class women. For instance, a female unionist was critical of other working-class women who viewed prize fighting as a manly sport and boxers as ideal male partners. However, she also used a racist rhetoric comparing boxers to savage Indians. Elizabeth Hasanovitz, *One of Them: Chapters from a Passionate Autobiography* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1918), 74-77.

706 An antisuffragist and journalist, Molly Elliot Seawell argued that female suffragists’ moral reform failed to mobilize all women and impress the abolition of prize fighting even in Utah, in which women suffragists had a majority. Molly Elliot Seawell, “The Ladies’ Battle,” *Atlantic Monthly*, 106 (September 1910), 300. Also see Molly Elliot Seawell, *The Ladies’ Battle* (New York: McMillan Company, 1911), 101.
Sullivan, met Charley Mitchell in France in 1887, Sullivan’s mistress, Ann Livingston, had to dress as a boy to witness the bout.\(^{707}\) However, women penetrated this male institution. Fighters’ wives were occasionally present at fights.\(^{708}\) In rural areas and mining towns, the constraint of social norms was less tight. Bouts in these areas were sometimes community affairs and did not impose gender segregation.\(^{709}\) In 1884, a local match in Kansas featured scores of young girls’ ball games as a preliminary show and allowed these girls to witness the bout. They not only witnessed the fight but also “were most demonstrative, crowded up to the ropes among the men.” Some of them surely had followed these unusual community affairs. “When the men pulled off their shirts a few of the young girls blushed and turned away, but one young miss of 18 proudly announced with the air of a veteran that she had been to three fights in her time.”\(^{710}\) In the 1880s, there was a more legitimate way for middle class women to see exhibitions. Some athletic clubs had ladies’ night and provided exhibitions between amateur boxers for women.\(^{711}\)

While prize fighting became a big business throughout the 1890s, women’s interest in prize fighting was noticeable. The Sullivan-Corbett fight in 1892 attracted not only men’s attention. Women also followed news about the fight through


\(^{710}\) St. Louis Globe-Democrat, May 3, 1884, p. 5.

\(^{711}\) Daily Alta California, May 12, 1887, p. 7; December 24, 1889, p. 1; Geer, Mike Donovan, Making of a Man, 205. Ladies’ night remained a popular occasion in the 1890s and 1900s. San Francisco Chronicle, April 22, 1892, p. 5.
bulletins and newspapers. The editorial of a respectable magazine deplored women’s interest in the Sullivan-Corbett fight. “It is not to be denied that almost all the men of the country, by no means the sporting classes and the ignorant alone, and not a few women have taken a good deal of interest in the result of a prize-fight within the last month.” Women participated in public ceremonies for boxers and witnessed public exhibitions. For instance, Corbett’s exhibition with Steve O’Donnell at Madison Square Garden in 1895 was publicized as an occasion “for the benefit of ladies and gentlemen” who were “desirous of satisfying their curiosity as to the method of training adopted by the boxer in order to harden his flesh and muscles for his fast approaching battle with Bob Fitzsimmons.”

However, while club fights sanitized prize fighting into a more comfortable indoor sport and encouraged more middle-class men to attend fights in the 1890s, it became more difficult for women to attend fights. Nevertheless, some women did not give up. Women in male attire attended the Jack Dempsey-Bob Fitzsimmons fight, which was held at the Olympic Club of New Orleans in 1892. “No less than ten women were in the audience in male attire.” A police lieutenant arrested a “handsome short-haired woman” who gave her name as Emma Walters. The variety actress from Denver was arraigned for “violating the city ordinance relative to masquerading.”

The Jim Corbett-Peter Jackson bout in San Francisco in 1891 also failed to police gender boundaries in the clubs. “Two society ladies of the Pacific coast dressed

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themselves in male attire and witnessed the contest under the escort of their husbands."\textsuperscript{716}

However, commercialism was opening a new possibility for female spectatorship. At the turn of the century, promoters, who were increasingly independent from prestigious athletic clubs, began to make fights the biggest sports spectacles in the West. Under the protection of local governments, promoters built big arenas for fights to accommodate more spectators and brought the kinetoscope industry to prize fighting. Promoters needed to fill these arenas and make prize fighting gain more respectability for the legal protection of prize fighting.\textsuperscript{717} A famous promoter, Tex Rickard, recalled that he found forty or fifty baby carriers outside of the arena in a 1905 fight, which he promoted for the first time. The experience made Rickard realize the economic prospect of female spectatorship.\textsuperscript{718}

However, another promoter, Dan Stuart, had noticed women’s interest in prize fighting earlier. In 1897, Stuart began to lobby to a bankrupted state, Nevada, for a fight between Corbett and Fitzsimmons. While the State Legislature of Nevada voted against female suffrage, it legalized prize fighting to protect the heavyweight championship bout. Stuart built a new arena at Carson City which could accommodate seventeen thousand people, with an estimated gate receipt of three hundred thousand dollars. In order to fill the seats, Stuart allowed “properly escorted”

\textsuperscript{716} \textit{Weekly News and Courier}, March 17, 1897, p. 11.
\textsuperscript{717} Boddy, \textit{Boxing}, 158.
ladies to witness the fight and set aside special sections for them.\textsuperscript{719} The Carson fight was an “innovation in that women were publicly admitted as spectators.” Women no longer needed to “disguise themselves as men” to witness prizefights.\textsuperscript{720}

Stuart’s decision faced strong objections from John L. Sullivan, who was now a boxing critic. Sullivan was unhappy at Fitzsimmons’ wife, who was present near his husband’s corner and other female spectators in special sections. Sullivan supported male chauvinism and gendered nationalism to police gender boundaries. “It is natural that they [ladies] admire fighters. Naturally they think more of a man who can fight than of any other man, because if men did not fight we should all be slaves and the English or somebody else would rule us…. But ladies ought not to see fights.”\textsuperscript{721} However, Stuart ignored Sullivan’s objections.

Stuart also expected middle-class women’s presence in the arena to help control unruly elements among spectators. The master of the ceremony, Billy Madden, made a public statement for male spectators and clarified why Stuart wanted women in the arena. “Gentlemen, you will please keep order while this fight is going on for the world's championship. If you make noise or excitement you interfere with the men while they are fighting, and another thing, there are ladies present.”\textsuperscript{722} Stuart’s decision challenged old gender norms and blurred gender boundaries to

\textsuperscript{719} Leo N. Miletich, \textit{Dan Stuart’s Fistic Carnival} (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1994), 196.
\textsuperscript{720} \textit{Weekly News and Courier}, March 17, 1897, p. 11.
\textsuperscript{721} Quoted in Miletich, \textit{Dan Stuart’s Fistic Carnival}, 196.
\textsuperscript{722} \textit{San Francisco Call}, March 18, 1897, p. 3.
clarify class boundaries. Promoters were ready to blur gender boundaries to gain respect for their business rather than maintaining prize fighting as an entertainment for working-class men.

Thus, women in the stadium were expected to be moralizing agents who helped control unruly male spectators. While many newspapers eagerly reported prizefights from a technical perspective in the 1890s, they did not risk reporting women’s disorderly behaviors in the arenas and arousing moralists’ criticism. These reports contained the potential threat from female spectators by depicting them as genteel cheerers who sedately witnessed the display of masculinity from a distance. The juxtaposition reinforced a sexual divide between activism and passivity.

However, at the turn of the century, the discipline of female spectators was not an easy task. Boxing reports rarely wrote about disorderly women in the arena. But one can guess from some records that female spectatorship often gave women opportunities to violate social and cultural norms. Men’s behavior and women’s behavior could not be clearly differentiated in fight venues. In 1890, Bridget Heffernan attended her son’s fight. His opponent’s party requested Mrs. Heffernan to leave but she refused to do. In the seventh round, Mrs. Heffernan found fault with her son’s second. She started to coach her son at the top of her voice. “Now belt him.

That’s a good one, my son! Give him another in the same spot. That’s a good boy; don’t disgrace the Heffernans.”

In 1897, Fitzsimmons brought his wife, Rose Fitzsimmons, to the ringside at the Carson fight against Corbett. It was the first time that a boxer’s wife had witnessed her husband’s fight at ringside. The former vaudeville acrobat was an assertive woman. She had been a spokesman for her husband and involved in his business. Mrs. Fitzsimmons’ manner was never suitable for contemporary gender norms, and she was thus a source of annoyance for Corbett’s party. Corbett’s manager, William Brady recalled that she was “constantly loudly coaching her husband in terms of the ring.” In the ring, “Gentleman” Corbett was also facing an unexpected situation. A blonde woman, who sat with “her hair loose, hat jammed down over one ear, the blood from Fitz spattering her own face,” was continuously yelling at him at the ringside. Corbett recalled that she yelled at him “things that were not at all flattering either to my skill as a fighter or manly conduct as gentleman.”

Probably, the blonde woman was not the only lady who was excited at the fight. Nevertheless, a drawing of the fight on the Weekly News and Courier was so unrealistic that both male and female spectators seemed to be too gentle. But at the

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726 Chicago Tribune, March 11, 1890, p. 9.
727 Chicago Tribune, March 18, 1897, p. 8.
728 Oakland Tribune, April 21, 1897, p16; New York Times, June 10, 1899, p. 2.
729 Brady, A Fighting Man, 145.
same time, the drawing failed to represent noticeable differences between male and female spectators.\footnote{Weekly News and Courier, March 17, 1897, p. 1. The drawing presented cheering male and female spectators in a similar gesture.}

Because this genteel representation of female spectators could not totally eliminate a threat from women in the arena, men cast suspicious glances at women, who attended fights. According to an 1897 boxing report, “the most curious members of the spectators were a few women who had braved public opinion for the new sensation. They were mostly of the per-oxide blonde order and some of them were not particularly difficult to classify.”\footnote{Dan Streible, “Female Spectators and the Corbett-Fitzsimmons Fight Film,” 31.} The report of a disreputable sport tried to affirm old gender and class norms by implying female spectators as lower orders whose sexual behaviors were questionable.

The Carson fight was a sign of toppling gender order in the late nineteenth century. However, old gender boundaries were still influential. In the East, up to the 1910s, women hardly got an opportunity to witness a fight.\footnote{Inez Haynes Gillmore, “A Woman at a Prize-Fight,” 783-784.} Eastern clubs were still gender-segregated institutions. Club officials did not allow women to enter the building where a prizefight took place. Accordingly, club fights drew only a limited number of female spectators.\footnote{New York Times, June 10, 1899, p. 2; Riess, “In the Ring and Out,” 113.} However, even in the East, some women “braved the stares and comments of the opposite sex and the scorn of their own” and “sat out” fights. A report which described female spectators at the Jim Jeffries-Tom Sharkey fight in New York sexualized them to stress their straying from Victorian middle-
class gender norms. “A few of them were deeply velled [sic], but the other was brazen in their cosmetics and finery.”

In spite of men’s suspicious glances at women, outdoor fights in the West continuously drew a considerable number of female spectators under male escort. “A liberal sprinkling of women” attended the fight between Marvin Hart and Jack Root at Reno in 1905. Lieutenant Governor Allen also attended the fight with his wife. Tex Rickard continued to allow women to enter his arenas. He saw 1,500 women in attendance in the 1906 fight between Joe Gans and Battling Nelson at Goldfield, Nevada. Rickard was never hesitant to allow women to witness the historic fight between Jack Johnson and Jim Jeffries in 1910. While Rickard prevented toughs from entering his new arena by charging over ten dollars for each seat, he had screened boxes for the women.

While prizefights drew a considerable number of middle-class women especially in the West, men felt that women at fights were not moralizing agents. Many men did not relieve their concern about female spectatorship in the 1900s. A drama critic, Ashton Stevens, claimed that he accepted women’s presence in the arena as long as they properly acted as spectators. But he argued that there were women who were “in search of some new torment for their sagging nerves.” Stevens, who attended the Battling Nelson-Jimmie Britt fight, found that only a few of female

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spectators looked “decent.” The 1910 Johnson-Jeffries fight drew many female spectators. “There were women in the crowd, plenty of them.” However, a reporter still denied that they were the real representatives of American womanhood. “The promoters had erected a special box for their accommodation, but the occupants were, for the most part, not the women one meets in society, and. perhaps, not the women one ought to meet anywhere.”

Respectable men in the West also felt uncomfortable about women’s penetration into men’s space. After he read that several thousand women attended a fight in 1919, a progressive California politician, Hiram Johnson, wrote a letter to his son, “I prefer the womanhood of old to the non-child-bearing, smoking, drinking, and neurotic creature sitting at the ringside.” However, his moral concern seemed outmoded to Rickard, who was becoming a boxing magnate. Rickard believed that women had given boxing promoters “insurance for the future of boxing.”

The 1897 Carson fight was also the first championship bout which was reproduced as fight pictures. Stuart and Enoch Rector’s Veriscope Company distributed the fight pictures nationally and abroad. The Veriscope evidence of female spectators in the arena caused a cultural shock. When theater-going was being feminized in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, women also patronized the fight pictures. The Carson fight pictures were a hit among women. It was estimated that women constituted 60 percent of Chicago’s patronage for the fight.

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739 San Francisco Examiner, September 10, 1905, p. 42.
740 San Francisco Call, July 5, 1910, p. 18.
742 Quoted in Ashby, With Amusement for All, 182.
pictures. Female spectatorship for the fight pictures impacted gender relations in a significant way. “The result for women was a socially problematic conjunction of two cultural practices: attending the theater and becoming a spectator of the male domain of prize fighting.”743 According to a female reporter who watched the film in Manhattan, transgression still made female spectators feel shameful. In fact, the reporter also pretended not to notice her friends in the theater. As many other girls, handsome Corbett was her favorite.744 But another San Francisco society woman still saw the sport as a vulgar and savage entertainment. She simply enjoyed an act of transgression itself in the theater.745 While women watched the fight pictures for different reasons, gender order was toppling with the mass distribution of the fight film. By 1910, women already made up a considerable portion of the fight picture spectators.746 They increasingly made prize fighting a unisex institution.

Mass technologies helped women’s deconstruction of not only prize fighting but also old gender ideologies. Some men still believed that women had innate purity and that moral problems belonged mostly to men. A Yale professor, William Lyon Phelps, asserted that amid the enormous throngs at a prizefight there were “hardly any women at all.” He also said, “The seats at a prize-fight are crowded with men, while

744 “The Matinee Girl” New York Dramatic Mirror, June 12, 1897, 14, quoted in Streible, “Female Spectators and the Corbett-Fitzsimmons Fight Film,” 34.
745 Ibid., 35-39.
the pews are filled with women.” However, female spectators frustrated middle-
class male and female moralists, who still wanted to make women a morally special
sex. Accordingly, the influence of the fight pictures among women and children was
a new concern for them.

The Reverend Louis J. Sawyer, who voiced a protest against the Johnson-
Jeffries fight, defined prize fighting as a “discarded relic of barbarianism” and a
“degenerate and degenerating entertainment.” Sawyer expressed his concern about
the negative impact of mass technologies on women and children. “Women and
children, while not admitted to the ring, are, nevertheless, corrupted by the unlawful
pictorial presentations of those brutalities in our nickelodeons.” Cardinal James
Gibbons, who was one of leading anti-boxing activists in the 1900s, also criticized the
exhibitions of the Reno fight pictures and urged respectable citizens to protect young
men and women “from their immoral effects.” Female temperance activists and
suffragists still fought against prize fighting and the fight pictures to keep moral order
between sexes and increase their political influence. But mass technologies and
female spectatorship extended the influence of the disreputable sport across gender
boundaries and contradicted the gender division based on Victorian moral order
between sexes. Women, who were more actively participating in prize fighting,

751 Report of the Thirty-Sixth Annual Convention of Maine Woman’s Christian Temperance Union (N.
p: n. p., 1910), 43, 69; Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Larry Ceplair, *Charlotte Perkins Gilman: A
further contested middle-class moralists’ gender boundaries. At the same time, women were becoming more heterogeneous.

4. Boxing Women

Whether women were spectators in arenas or theaters, they were toppling old gender norms. Nevertheless, their agency was still limited. Female spectatorship often played dual roles in the construction of gender relations. It blurred gender boundaries by making women abdicate the role of moral guardian and enter the public sphere. However, female spectatorship also reinforced gender order by relegating women into supportive roles at fights. Women acted as entertainers in sideshows or cheerers for men who dramatically displayed their physical differences from the “gentler” and “weaker sex.”752 But working-class women more actively participated in prize fighting. In the late nineteenth century, women not only began to practice its gentler form (sparring) but also fought for prizes. The existence of female prizefighters made it conspicuous that old middle-class gender ideologies were contested and women were culturally divided.

Herbert Spencer accepted the old theory of limited energy. His theory was a basis of the rigid sexual control in the Victorian era. Spencer gendered Social Darwinism. He argued that women who were freed from hard physical work failed to develop physical strength. The cult of domesticity made women moral, but physical

752 Washington Post, April 1, 1897, p. 9.
development became men’s exclusive trait. Middle-class men’s concern about declining social and cultural power made sports and physical activities popular among them in the late nineteenth century. However, while Spencer justified women’s physical inferiority, the fear of racial degeneration was also significant among middle-class sportsmen and physical experts. As early as 1872, in Our Children, Dr. August Kinsley Gardner argued for athleticism for boys and young men to prevent racial decline. Therefore, the sport craze not only affirmed gender order but also opened new opportunities for women to challenge gender boundaries. “The physical training of women in this period challenged the boundaries of expected behaviors by giving them new skill and strength.”

However, a cultural turn from the cult of domesticity to the affirmation of female physicality was still unfavorable to women. Cheryl L. Cole argues that sports have been “an ensemble of knowledge and practices that disciplines, conditions, reshapes, and inscribes the body … to support patriarchy.” Her assumption was especially true in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. New sporting ideals confirmed women’s physical activities only as a mean to make them good producers and mothers. The conservative aspect of physical education was reflected in its limits of women’s sporting activities. Sporting activities were rigidly

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gendered. In fact, most influential physical educators like Luther Gulick and Dudley A. Sargent believed that there were innate physical differences between sexes.\[^{757}\] Accordingly, they discouraged physical contacts and competitive spirit in women’s sports and encouraged moderate sports for women.\[^{758}\]

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, women could participate only in gentle and moderate exercises which cultivated feminine beauty. Gymnastic exercises were idealized for women’s physical training. Tennis, croquet, golf, and bicycling were gradually allowed but contact sports were not permissible. When women played a contact sport, they were required to play it in a feminine way. For instance, basketball, which became popular among women at college in the 1890s, was criticized for its roughness. In 1899, physical educators revised the rules and prohibited female players from dribbling, snatching the ball or touching an opponent.\[^{759}\] Nevertheless, women’s sports had been gradually diversified against popular cultural norms. “The tennis maid of the 1890s was considered a wonder; the horsey girl of 1891 was a terror; the fencing beauty of 1892, the rowing girl of 1893, the basketball maid of 1894” were all controversial. Women’s participation in these sports was gradually legitimized, but a boxing girl was still controversial. She

contradicted old Victorian gender norms.\footnote{Washington Times, January 17, 1897, p. 24.} Accordingly, Sargent never approved of women’s boxing.\footnote{Allen Guttmann, \textit{A Whole New Ball Game}, 143.}

Nevertheless, professional fighters’ sparring practice for women had already begun in the 1880s.\footnote{St. Louis Globe-Democrat, December 10, 1886, p. 4.} Intense sparring matches were held among their female pupils.\footnote{National Police Gazette, March 30, 1895, p. 6.} Practicing a “manly art” was seen as unfeminine in the 1890s.\footnote{Chicago Tribune, March 3, 1895, p. 28; Washington Post, August 31, 1890, p. 14; Colleen Aycock and Mark Scott, \textit{Joe Gans: A Biography of the First Black American World Boxing Champion} (Jefferson: McFarland, 2008), 12.} However, this stigmatization did not prevent female pupils from realizing a new possibility of their physical strength. Female amateur boxing practicers were ready to use their skill to contradict what were considered as gender norms. A girl said to other girls in a boxing lesson, “If you are insulted in the street, knock your insulter down.”\footnote{Washington Post, August 31, 1890, p. 14.}

Women who needed male protection became a thing of the past among boxing girls.

Containment followed. Women were encouraged to be in full corseted dress. Male instructors also differentiated their performance according to what they thought of as women’s traits. An instructor identified women’s unique style in the ring. “I find that women display more grace than men…. They are not so good in aggressive work, and it has been quite a problem to induce them to lead. Women naturally lean to the defensive, and even when their timidity has been overcome they never hit hard enough to hurt.”\footnote{Washington Post, January 17, 1897, p. 24.} Another instructor stressed his female pupils’ lack of courage and coolness. “They go at boxing about like a boy who tries to swim dog fashion. To box...
well one must think and keep cool, and that is something women have to learn.…

Then, too, they are timid. They are afraid of black eyes, and stiff jaws, and bruised bodies.⁷⁶⁷ In fact, these boxing instructors reconstructed masculinity and feminity in the space in which gender construction was contested. Special rules for women practicing boxing also stressed physical differences between stronger and weaker sexes. For instance, in the gymnasiums of New York, every round lasted for only two minutes. Three-minute rests were given for female boxers between rounds.⁷⁶⁸

However, the existence of female professional fighters caused more problems to male cultural hegemony. Until the 1910s, female prizefighters were never acceptable.⁷⁶⁹ Women who practiced this disreputable and brutal profession obviously reversed the middle-class gender norm. According to Boxiana, in the eighteenth century, English promoters introduced some poor women to fights.⁷⁷⁰ Like their English counterparts, while their fights were only occasionally addressed in the papers, American working-class women probably fought for a small amount of money. According to an 1865 report, there were regular prizefights between women, which “emulated the brutality and ferocity of male bruisers.” A bout between two saloon girls, Maggie Shoester and Annie Wood, was a typical prizefight with a referee and seconds. The report depicted it as an extremely brutal slugging match. “Both participants were punished within an inch of their life, both their homely visages barbarously mutilated and disfigured with” “all sort of fantastic bloodstains

⁷⁶⁷ New York Times, September 25, 1904, p. 34.
⁷⁶⁸ Ibid.
⁷⁶⁹ Fort Wayne Journal-Gazette, October 26, 1902, p. 10; Evening World, February 27, 1905, p. 11.
and blotches.” The report criticized that the fight disgraced not only the two women but also their sex. As long as women’s fights were seen from men’s perspective, female fighters’ womanhood was questionable. Another article reported a prizefight between two women of “questionable repute” for a purse of fifty dollars. Female fighters’ disfigured faces and battered bodies were a symbol of brutality which violated “true womanhood.”

Another fight between Catherine Meisser and Elizabeth Stackpole for fifty dollars a side was highly deplorable in the middle class men’s eyes. The report used racialized terms to denounce the fight, which contradicted contemporary gender and class norms. These women, who were brought from working-class residential areas, were seen as “exponents of the Amazonian class” and “wild Dahomeyite females.” They were “by no means delicate.” These “muscular” women adored “prowess.” The report also indicated that there had been some more local fights between women to decide the best female fighter. In another 1878 report, female fighters appeared to contradict gender norms. These “ladies” smiling “viciously” were as aggressive and cruel as men in the ring. These reports made moral judgments about women who contested contemporary gender norms.

While knowledge about prize fighting was disseminated in the late nineteenth century, prize fighting even emerged as a way for working-class women to resolve their personal feuds. These women often fought to resolve their love triangles and

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771 Little Rock Daily Gazette, October 31, 1865, p. 4.
772 Chicago Tribune, March 13, 1869, p. 2.
773 Daily Evening Bulletin, October 19, 1866, p. 3. There were some more female fights in the 1870s. Guttmann, Women’s Sport, 101.
774 National Police Gazette, October 12, 1878, p. 7.
ironically affirmed gender boundaries by displaying their heterosexuality. 775 While women could not find their opponents easily, there were women who fought not for the resolution of their feuds but regularly for money in the late nineteenth century. According to the National Police Gazette, some female fighters had professionalism. They were more skillful with special training. The Gazette claimed that the first professional female prizefighter was Libby Kelly, a native of Jacksonville. She fought several bouts in the 1870s. According to the Gazette, several women followed her footsteps. They included Nettie Burke, Jennie Meado, Hattie Edwards, and Alice Jennings. 776

Women occasionally issued their formal challenges emulating male professional fighters. Nellie Malloy of Troy issued a challenge to Lizzie Summers in the New York Sun. Male fight followers were ready to back her to make a fight. 777 In 1887, a “hard muscled” black woman, who had fought with several men, formally issued a challenge to John L. Sullivan. In her challenge, she disclosed her intention to fight with the heavyweight champion of the world at a purse which ranged from fifty cents to five hundred dollars. 778 The report was not serious about this black woman’s challenge. Rather, it trivialized her challenge by stressing the size of a purse which she offered. While respectable middle-class men had morally criticized female fighters, the report tended to trivialize female prize fighting and to police gender boundaries. In these reports, female fighters’ threats to gender order were contained.

776 National Police Gazette, September 24, 1892, p. 11.
777 New York Sun, April 23, 1890, p. 4.
778 Sacramento Daily Record-Union, April 12, 1887, p. 1.
The 1888 fight between Marry McNamara and Julia Perry under the Queensberry rules was brutal. “Vicious blows were interchanged, and when time was called both were badly disfigured.” But in men’s eyes, while these women were as aggressive as men, it was a clumsy fight. It was also fought in a feminine way. “Time for the second round was called and the two women advanced with sleeves rolled up and with angry eyes rolling in every direction. A few passes were made and the code was thrown aside and both began a rough and tumble fight, in which scratching and hair-pulling predominated. The Perry woman was knocked down and dragged around by the hair.”

In 1888, a variety actress, Hattie Leslie, signed the articles of agreement with an Irish American amateur actress, Alice Leary, and met her for a purse of two hundred fifty dollars on Navy Island down the Niagara River. Two male professional fighters took care of them as seconds. Leslie was a more skillful fighter so that she was introduced as an “expert” in the glove fight, which violated dominant gender norms in several ways. Both women were “stripped appearing in tights and wrappers.” The match between two contestants was also “brutal” and “disgusting.” Leslie was seen as “aggressive.” The shocking scene made the reporter hope that it was the last fight of women “for the sake of decency and the female sex.” The fight report also tried to reconstruct gender differences and contain the threat which these female fighters raised. The fighters were still depicted as having feminine beauty.

780 Washington Post, September 17, 1888, p.1. Also see Daily Inter-Ocean, September 17, 1888, p. 2.
781 Chicago Tribune, September 18, 1888, p.4.
Two girls were “good-looking” and “well-dressed.” While Leslie was described as more skillful, both women emulated male fighters’ aggressive styles. They “slugged” each other in a “regular male professional style.” It might confuse gender boundaries, but the report stressed that both lacked “science.” Leary also lacked gameness, which was the most important trait in the ring. According to the report, Leary “began to suffer and manifested a disposition to quit.”\textsuperscript{782}

Both girls and male seconds were all arrested later. But in Victorian middle-class men’s eyes, there was still a supposed moral binary between the amoral sex and the gentler sex. They reconstructed gender differences through the trial. Leslie testified that Billy Baker, who was Leary’s second, abetted them to fight for a purse. District Attorney Quinby announced:

They were to share the proceeds of this most brutal, most outrageous affair. The price was $5 to be entertained upon the Sabbath by women fighting…. I don’t blame the women so much, though they are indicted. It is these men, these creatures who are at fault. It is a disgrace … to think that men so brutal, so lost to every instinct of manhood should engage in such an enterprise…. Prize-fights between men have perhaps been tolerated, but prize-fights between women never…. these men shall be severely punished at the hand of

\textsuperscript{782} \textit{Newark Daily Advocate}, July 12, 1888, p. 1.
the law, and that never again can it be said that men can get together and pollute the honor of womankind.783

Leslie was discharged. The indictment against Leary was dismissed. Only male abettors were charged.784 Victorian middle-class men’s perception of gender saved these female fighters. But middle-class men’s warning against them was clear in the case of the female bout which was most severely prosecuted. Outside the court, men were less generous about these women. Leslie symbolized the challenge to gender order. A report referred to her. “If the female Sullivan should possess the vices of her male prototype, she would cause no end of trouble.”785

The existence of female fighters embarrassed temperance activists and suffragists who justified their social and political participations with moralizing roles assigned to their sex. Accordingly, the Woman’s Tribune’s reaction about the Leslie-Leary fight was critical. “It is to be hoped that women generally will not consider it necessary to answer in this way the physical force argument which is the main reliance of the opponents to woman suffrage.”786

However, their concern could not end female prize fighting. In the late 1880s and early 1890s, Hattie Stewart grew famous as a female boxer. Stewart, who was a variety actress, learned boxing from Prof. Johnnie Clark with her German American

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783 Chicago Tribune, October 6, 1888, p. 9. Also see St. Paul Daily Globe, October 5, 1888, p. 6.
784 Saturday Herald, October 6, 1888, p. 5.
785 Washington Post, August 30, 1888, p. 4.
786 Woman’s Tribune, 5, no. 39, (August 18 1888), 1.
husband. Stewart also taught boxing to ladies in a Norfork gymnasium. On February 27, 1885, she fought Annie Lewis under the Queensberry rules for a purse of two hundred dollars. After the fight, Stewart was promoted as the “female John L. Sullivan.” In 1887, Stewart received a challenge from Alice Robinson. In the 1890s, Stewart publicly challenged Hattie Leslie to a glove contest for the female championship of the world and five hundred dollars a side.

Stewart was still gendered by men. Her bulky physique had to be contained. She was a “perfect amazon,” but still a “beautiful specimen of physical development.” A reporter projected his expectation of feminine features to Stewart. He stressed that Stewart was not “masculine in looks.” Her face was “attractive” and her voice was “pleasant.” The description implied a heterosexual identity. In her interview with the *Omaha Daily Bee*, Hattie Stewart contested contemporary gender norms and confused gender boundaries. “I like to fight,” she said. “As a girl at school in Philadelphia I was always fighting with boys…. I defeated a big bruiser named Jones in Missouri once, and have fought several ‘draws’ with men.” Stewart boasted that she made matches with men and raised questions about physical differences between sexes. While she expressed her serious interest in prize fighting, her interest was trivialized. “The vernacular of the pugilist and sport sounded strange for

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788 *Omaha Daily Bee*, December 28, 1887, p. 2.
789 *New York World*, November 27, 1887, p. 3; *Syracuse Herald*, September 28, 1890, p. 5.
790 *National Police Gazette*, September 24, 1892, p. 11.
791 *Omaha Daily Bee*, December 28, 1887, p. 2.
her lips, and her eyes evidently sincere interest in sporting matters—especially prizefighting—was a novelty.  

What made Stewart more famous than other female fighters was her touring show. Like male professional boxers, Stewart made a sparring tour and held exhibitions with another female partner and her husband. In so doing, Stewart made her touring boxing show a part of dominant culture. Stewart died in 1892. She did not perform to what were considered as norms for her sex and men saw her pugilistic career as unrespectable. An 1892 report of her death said, “What she earned in her pugilistic career was not honor but notoriety.” Gender and class boundaries, which middle-class people had constructed, made her an outsider.

Female prize fighting continued after her death. According to the Gazette, by the early 1890s, prize fighting was not “confined to the masculine race.” In 1892, two women called Mrs. Swipes and “Philadelphia Maggie” fought for gate money. Judging from her nickname, the latter seemed to have fought professionally. Accordingly, she had more science. In a report, two female fighters’ sexual identities were questioned when they appeared wearing four-ounce kid gloves. It made them appear more masculine because most male boxers used more than five-ounce padded gloves then. The report further masculinized them. “When she [Maggie] learned that

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792 Omaha Daily Bee, December 28, 1887, p. 2.
793 St. Paul Globe, October 10, 1886, p. 3; Milwaukee Journal, September 24, 1892, p. 1.
794 Milwaukee Sentinel, September 25, 1892, p. 1.
795 National Police Gazette, September 24, 1892, p.11 Also see October 28, 1893, p. 10.
she could not have another ‘go’ at Mrs. Swipes she became exceedingly indignant and called the referee hard names.” 796

However, whether men grudgingly admitted female fighting or were antagonistic toward it, women’s performance in the ring was seen as inferior and, therefore, women were reconstructed into a weaker sex not perfectly suitable for boxing. The Gazette reported some more bouts between female prizefighters during the 1890s. In these reports, women appeared to contest contemporary gender norms and gender boundaries. However, at the same time, they were the objects of trivialization. An 1894 report was such a case. “Grace returned with a swipe on the nose, and secured first blood. Then she did a little promiscuous punching about Maud’s head, while Maud played the ‘Mitchell skip’ by running all about the ring to avoid punishment.” 797

To some men, these boxing girls were a symbol of women’s increasing power in society. Their existence implied that there would be the last strike to another male-segregated space, politics. A report about a female boxer in the Wallace circus said, “The lady who enacted the new woman as a female boxer, fully realized the possibilities of the sex in this direction of feminine development. The way she laid out her adversary would have proved a lesson to the opponents of the female suffrage

796 Chicago Tribune, November 2, 1892, p. 8.
797 National Police Gazette, February 23, 1894, p. 3. However, the Gazette also policed national boundaries with female fighting. The report feminized an English fighter, Charley Mitchell, who made his fight with the American champion, John L. Sullivan, a foot-race game. American girls were also constructed as patriots. “Grace said that she was fairly whipped, but was glad that the championship stayed in America.” Ibid.
at our recent state convention.”\textsuperscript{798} However, as early as 1893, a report discounted female fighters and predicted the demise of female prize fighting. “There are probably half a dozen women pugilists in this country, but none of them is formidable from the male standpoint, and perhaps the less said about them the better…. The fighting amazon may be all right in Dahomey, but there is no room for her in America.”\textsuperscript{799} While the report finally proved wrong, it properly predicted the future of women’s prize fighting in the early twentieth century. There was no female successor comparable to Leslie or Stewart. Female prize fighting began to pass away.

But women’s boxing did not disappear. Rather, it was incorporated into other popular cultural forms. A vaudeville actress, Hessie Donahue, sparred with John L. Sullivan in a boxing show in 1892. The famous Wallace circus featured a female boxer. Female boxing exhibitions remained a program for some theaters in the early twentieth century.\textsuperscript{800} Female boxing also appeared in films. In 1898, Thomas Edison featured female boxers (Belle Gordon and Billy Curtis) as comical subjects in his film, \textit{Comedy Set-To}. Another Edison film, \textit{Gordon Sisters Boxing} (1901), featured Bessie and Mannie Gordon sparring.\textsuperscript{801} In this short film, whose duration was less than two minutes, the two variety actresses appeared to confirm the old male perception of women in the ring. While they put on extra large gloves, it stressed physical differences between sexes. Their awkward movement with heavy gloves trivialized their performance. Nevertheless, their performance was fierce and intense.

\textsuperscript{798} \textit{Salt Lake Herald}, July 20, 1895, p. 8.
\textsuperscript{799} \textit{Atchison Daily Globe}, July 17, 1893, p. 2.
\textsuperscript{800} \textit{Evening World}, March 5, 1901, p. 3; \textit{St. Paul Globe}, May 12, 1901, p. 28.
\textsuperscript{801} The \textit{Gazette} introduced Bell Gordon as the \textit{Police Gazette} Champion for lady bag punchers and featured a picture of her well-developed back muscles. \textit{National Police Gazette}, July 13, 1901, p. 7.
Edison featured a woman with gloves in his film again. In *Physical Culture Girls* (1903), he reversed gender roles making the female character a rescuer of his man.

A small number of women still insisted on fighting in the ring. According to a 1916 report, a female boxer called Helen Hildreth was even matched with a man. Legal authorities stopped the fight. Female prize fighting had a long hiatus until the 1980s. Nevertheless, women with gloves gradually became a part of dominant culture in the late twentieth century. They remained in pictures and films. It inspired women to maintain their interest in the sport.802

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Chapter 4

Sons of Erin, Sons of America:

Prize Fighting and the Construction of Ethnic and National Identity

While middle- and working-class men articulated their class identity in the cultural construction of prize fighting, the emergence of a new hegemonic masculinity in the ring decreased cultural differences between them in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Women continued to contest gender boundaries expressed through prize fighting, but the sport still drastically displayed physical differences between sexes. However, the process of the convergence of masculinities never totally eliminated social and cultural differences among men. Prize fighting was closely related to a chronic social division in America. Modern prize fighting was ethnic in origin. The first professional fighters in America were from England and Ireland.\(^{803}\) In the second half of the century, Irish and Irish American men dominated the ring.

As Fredrik Barth argues, ethnic culture and identity are not based on a fixed set of values or symbols which are passed down unchanged over generations. In fact, they are continuously reproduced to maintain ethnic boundaries.\(^{804}\) The members of

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an ethnic group even invent traditions to create distinctive identities.\footnote{About the invention of tradition, see Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger eds. *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2008).} Ethnic reproduction is thus an “evolving process.”\footnote{George A. De Vos, “Introduction: Ethnic Pluralism: Conflict and Accommodation,” in *Ethnic Identity: Creation, Conflict, and Accommodation*, eds. Lola Romanucci-Ross and George A. De Vos (Walnut Creek: Altamira Press, 1995), 17.} This conceptualization of ethnicity as a constructed process is insightful for the study of the relationship between ethnicity and prize fighting in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Ethnic boundaries were constructed in prize fighting, but they interacted with other cultural boundaries. The construction of ethnicity through prize fighting was related to anti-capitalist sentiments, classism, localism, nationalism, and racism. The members of an ethnic group combined ethnic cultural traits with their unique perception of other cultural boundaries. As a result, an ethnic group consisted of subgroups whose members had multiple identities and differently constructed ethnic identity. The process of ethnic reproduction often reflected cultural diversity rather than homogeneity in an ethnic group. Accordingly, while ethnicity was based on a culturally unified group, the reproduction of ethnicity accompanied the construction and disintegration of an ethnic group and even facilitated cultural diversification and the multiplicity of identity in an ethnic group. In this sense, ethnicity cannot be understood in any reductionist or structuralist and binary model. In this chapter, I will illuminate this dynamic process by focusing on the relation between Irish Americans and prize fighting.
1. Class, Masculinity, and the Reproduction of Irish Identity

While the United States was a nation which was constituted by an unceasing flow of immigration, Anglo-Saxon Americans always cast suspicious looks at non-English European immigrants. The fear of immigration and cultural diversity was exacerbated by the influx of Irish Catholics in the mid-nineteenth century. Irish Protestants had already immigrated to America and assimilated before the massive immigration of Irish Catholics. A small number of Catholic immigrants followed. These early Catholic immigrants did not “remain Catholic for very long; rather, they mostly became Baptists or other kinds of Protestants.”

When widespread hunger swept the country in the 1840s, Ireland became the largest source of immigration to America. Unlike other ethnic groups, the Irish continued to immigrate in large numbers throughout the last half of the nineteenth century. Between 1841 and 1850, 780,719 immigrants left Ireland for America. In the next decade, the number reached 914,111. Between 1881 and 1890, the number reached another peak amounting to 655,482. The famine and post-famine Irish immigrants were predominantly Catholic. Poor Irish immigrants chose to remain in cities near ports rather than going westward for land. Their religion and the Catholic

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Church’s separatism tended to segregate these Catholic immigrants from their Protestant countrymen.809

In New England, the Irish settled in highly structured communities, “preserves of a Yankee ruling class” that viewed them as a social plague. This contempt and their own technological and cultural poverty and insecurities, which were manifested in crime, disease, and vice, ghettoized Irish Catholics psychologically as well as physically until the turn of the century. Though they managed to achieve political influence, their economic power or social respectability did not match it.810

Joblessness, crime and pauperism, intoxication, riots, and irresponsibility were often related to the Irish. Accordingly, the Irish were described as a rude, emotional, unintelligent, lazy, violent, savage, groveling, bestial, and drunken people.811 With the popular caricatures of the simian Irish, the “striking similarity of this litany of insults to the list of traits ascribed to antebellum Blacks” represented “Black/Irish connections” in the process of racialization.812 The Irish were the “first immigrant group to arrive in extremely large numbers, to gain high visibility by clustering in cities, to retain a strong identification with the old homeland, and to appear

sufficiently ‘different’ in religion and culture so that acceptance by native-born Americans was not autonomic, and assimilation was, therefore, prolonged.”

The Irish immigrants were placed in a “distinctive new society: fluid, democratic, innovative, yet locally Catholic and competently industrial.”

Nevertheless, the Irish were still considerably cohesive. Continuous arrivals from Ireland counteracted dispersal and assimilation. The industrial concentration of unskilled Irish laborers also perpetuated Irish enclaves. While ethnic enclaves provided a physical condition to reconstruct ethnicity, the Irish used several symbolic materials from their cultural baggage to articulate and maintain their collectivity. Those included Catholicism and the memories of the Famine.

Catholic churches solely provided social networks for Irish immigrants with hospitals, orphanages, and welfare funds. They also became a strong symbol for Irish immigrants in religious conflicts with native-born Protestant Americans.

Accordingly, the parish was a “bonding unit” for the Irish immigrants and the “physical focal point of their community identity.”

The memories of the famine were also passed down through generations. Catholicism and the memory of famine helped the large segment of immigrants from Ireland to construct an exclusive ethnic identity and gave the emerging religious and nationalistic middle classes cultural

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power in ethnic enclaves. However, the Irish did not remain a community. While the American-born Irish population without powerful memories of the old country increased, class distinctions became conspicuous.\footnote{Roger Lane, “James Jeffrey Roche and the Boston Pilot,” \textit{New England Quarterly}, 33, no. 3 (September 1960), 341; Timothy J. Meagher, \textit{The Columbia Guide to Irish American History} (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 95.}

Throughout the nineteenth century, the Irish could not catch up with Anglo-Saxon social mobility. Most of the Irish immigrants were poor and unskilled peasants from Ireland’s midlands and the south. The illiteracy rate was very high: about 80 percent of all departures from 1850 to 1920 could not read and write English.\footnote{Stephen Thernstrom, Ann Orlov, and Oscar Handlin, \textit{Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups} (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1980), 529.}

Naturally, most Irish immigrants were at the bottom of the occupational ladder. Their sons, who started to work at an early age, often inherited their fathers’ positions.\footnote{Ibid., 531. According to Thernstrom, a majority of Irishmen were at the bottom of the economic ladder as unskilled workers until the 1880s.}

Irish Protestants, who had immigrated earlier and had middle-class aspirations, distanced themselves from their poorer Catholic countrymen.\footnote{For instance, Joseph Medill and his \textit{Chicago Tribune} were not sympathetic toward Irish Catholic immigrants and related them to urban problems.}

Some Irish Catholic immigrants also gradually climbed the economic ladder.\footnote{Byron, \textit{Irish America}, chapter 3. Also see Jo Ellen Vinyard, \textit{The Irish on the Urban Frontier: Detroit 1850-1880} (New York: Arno Press, 1976).}

In the 1880s, middle-class Irish people were not only physically separated from their working-class counterparts but also tried to “live down the opprobrium deriving from the brawling, hard drinking, and raffish manners of the ‘shanty’ Irish of an earlier generation.”\footnote{Rosenzweig, \textit{Eight Hours What We Will}, 184; Stephen Hardy, \textit{How Boston Played: Sport, Recreation, and Community, 1865-1915} (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2003), 170; Guttmann, \textit{Sports Spectators}, 117.}
the larger society, the Irish presented a single force, but the surface unity of the Irish community masked a growing diversity and stratification."\(^{824}\)

Class divisions became clear in cultural practices for the reconstruction of Irish identity. Religious and respectable Irish people tried to generate a “Celtic Revival” through the recovery of traditional literature and music. However, working-class Irish often constructed their own ethnic identity outside ethnic middle-class culture. Mainstream society lost its religious fervor in the second half of the nineteenth century. More and more second- and third-generation working-class Irishmen also passively followed their old religion. In the mid-nineteenth century, Catholic priests in Ireland and America had already begun to be concerned about the diminishing moral authority of the Catholic Church and the popularity of societies, intemperance, and prize fighting among young Irishmen.\(^{825}\) Contemporary Irish novels reflected middle-class Irish concerns. In these novels, the main characters, who were tainted by immoral urban recreations, were finally reborn with faith and industry. These “rags-to-riches” stories tried to inspire young Irishmen in America with traditional Catholicism and make them adopt Victorian work culture.\(^{826}\)

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\(^{826}\) Charles Fanning, *The Irish Voice in America: 250 Years of Irish-American Fiction*, 2nd ed. (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2000), 76. The type of stories was Irish Catholic immigrants’ response toward against nativist literature like “escape nun” publications. James M. Volo
In a society that valued individual self-help and self-reliance, working-class Irish Americans and immigrants gathered in ethnic enclaves to be mutually helpful. Their basic unit was not an individual, but a family and a neighborhood. Working-class Irishmen also maintained a gregarious lifestyle in their leisure. While many young Irish women left ethnic enclaves to work as maids, working-class Irishmen maintained their collective identity through sports, drinking, and gang organizations.

Customs brought from Ireland also facilitated gender-segregated collectivity. Ireland traditionally had a gender segregated culture. But gender segregation became stronger after the Great Hunger. The Irish and the Church blamed the Hunger on British exploitation. But they also criticized reckless marriages in the Irish working classes and its system of land inheritance. 827 “In the decades after the Famine, Ireland had become a society that placed little value on romance and lyrical love.” 828 “A man who shunned the “ethos of male solidarity clearly deviated from the post-Famine society.” 829 The Irishmen brought rigorous gender segregation (even misogyny) to America.

Social conditions also helped the development of working-class Irish urban subculture. The Irish enclaves were relatively young societies with a high mortality rate, extraordinary fertility, and a continuous flow of young immigrants. 830 Immigration also affected the balance of power between sexes. While more economic

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827 Diner, Erin’s Daughters in America, 10, 16-23.
828 Ibid., 23. Diner calls the cultural phenomenon “the culture of gender hostility.”
829 Ibid., 25.
options and educational opportunities were open for Irish women, especially young ones, men generally “experienced a decline in status and power within their families.” According to marriage could not compensate for Irishmen’s inferior position in America. The high rate of domestic violence and desertion and preservation of hatred against women were reactions toward the raised status of women. In Irish enclaves with a higher rate of celibacy, married working-class Irishmen rarely intermingled with women in the home. They spent most of their times with their unmarried friends. Working-class Irishmen constructed their ethnic and class identity in an urban subculture which was pleasure seeking, secular, aggressively masculine, disorderly, and violent. Unlike middle-class men in both the mainstream and ethnic enclaves, most Irish immigrant men and their sons, who suffered from a sense of emasculation, expressed their masculine identity in aggressive and physical ways. However, these leisure activities were also related to not only working-class Irishmen’s notions of regained masculinity but also class antagonism. Hard drinking, street fighting, and violent sporting activities characterized working-class Irishmen. They were ethnicized, classed, and gendered in urban bachelor subculture.

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831 Diner, *Erin’s Daughters in America*, 46, 71-72, 66, 82-84, 97-98, 140.
832 Ibid., 56-59, 119.
833 Carroll, *American Masculinities*, 224, 238. These Irishmen also displayed their masculinity in manly occupations. Many Irishmen volunteered for armies and became policemen and professional sports players.
834 In the late nineteenth century, the pleasure-seeking and self-indulgent urban bachelor subculture was an important medium for ethnic working-class men’s construction of multiple identities. See Howard P. Chudacoff, *The Age of Bachelor: Creating an American Subculture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).
Hard drinking became a popular way for many Irishmen to display their class, ethnic, and male identity. While many native-born and Irish working-class men took up the cause of temperance in the nineteenth century and the Catholic Church supported temperance, drinking was still the integral part of life for many married and single working-class Irishmen.\(^{835}\) The Irishmen learned old Irish songs and fatalism in saloons and contradicted class aspirations with the custom of treatment and reckless spending. They also drank to prove their manhood to peers.

Irish immigrants were more active in sports than any other immigrants and ardently followed their athletic heroes.\(^{836}\) Irish immigrants brought some traditional recreations (Celtic sports). Nevertheless, Irish Americans constructed their identity through “cultural accretion or substitution” rather than rejecting or retaining traditional recreation.\(^{837}\) According to Ralph C. Wilcox, “early Irish immigrants found greater favor with the popular pursuits of the New World, those that had been brought to America by Englishmen.”\(^{838}\) While nationalistic middle-class Irishmen tried to revive Gaelic sports, working-class Irishmen patronized prize fighting, animal sports, and baseball which the English brought or the host nation developed.\(^{839}\)

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\(^{835}\) James M. Volo and Dorothy Denneen Volo, *Family Life in 19th-Century America*, 18, 58.

\(^{836}\) Anti-intellectualism dominated the Irish life. The enrollment in secondary schools was low in both Ireland and America. Irish and Irish American schools had a goal of making good laborers and taught children practical programs. Irish American schools were also more interested in physical education than intellectual classes. McCaffrey, *The Irish Catholic Diaspora in America*, 87-88.


\(^{839}\) The Gaelic Athletic Association was established in 1884 to encourage traditional Irish sports and inspire the Irish to fight for independence from England. Irish intellectuals established branches in America and encouraged manly ethnic sports like hurling and Gaelic football. Ralph C. Wilcox, “The Shamrock and the Eagle: Irish Americans and Sport in the Nineteenth Century,” 68-70; P. Darby,
Among them, prize fighting was exceptionally popular. Young Irishmen learned how to fight in gangs and on the street. Poor working-class Irishmen fought for prizes in saloons and taverns and their friends and neighbors became supporters. By participating in the sports as fighters and supporters, working-class Irish American men constructed Irishness in an alternate way.

Prize fighting was not a natural ethnic tradition. While prize fighting was popular among English-speaking people in the nineteenth century, it was a constructed ethnic tradition based on male chauvinism. In the early modern era, Englishmen used “fisticuff” to settle arguments; continental Europeans relied on canes and other weapons. (The Irish also often used long canes.). Nevertheless, prize fighting was a modern invention. It came into existence when Jack Broughton wrote the first rules in 1747. While prize fighting was not popular on the continent, its founders tried to make it an undisputable part of English culture. The handbill for Broughton’s academy defined it as the “truly British Art.” Conflicts on the continent normalized the relationship between pugilism, English masculinity, and nationalism among many aristocrats and gentlemen.

840 Working-class men and Irish immigrants were the most ardent fight followers. Somers, The Rise of Sports in New Orleans, p. 53.
841 See John W. Hurley, Shillelagh: The Irish Fighting Stick (Pipersville: Cravat Press, 2007). A French Huguenot refugee, Mission de Valourg, left records on these different ways to end personal feuds. Dunning, Sport Matters, 55. Also see New York Times, October 18, 1858, p. 1.
To English supporters of pugilism, prize fighting signified the superiority of English manhood. In the first history of prize fighting, *Boxiana* (1818), Pierce Eagan tried to find excuses for this “noble art.” He constructed pugilism as a distinctively English sport. He compared Englishmen’s interest in the sport to the Italian’s and the French’s use of weapons to settle disputes.845 Vincent George Dowling’s *Fistiana* (1841) argued that the development of pugilism was based on the traditional way of resolving feuds among Englishmen and stressed the relationship between pugilism and the manly character of the Englishmen across class divisions.846 George Borrow’s *Lavengo* (1851) contrasted Englishmen and Frenchmen. “The French still live on the other side of the water, and are still casting their eyes hitherward—and that in the days of pugilism it was no vain boast to say, that one Englishman was a match for two of t’other race.”847 The construction of Britishness based on pugilism was more egalitarian considering that on the continent “aristocrats increasingly attached their social position to the sword and therefore dissociated themselves from old sporting tradition, wrestling,” which was popular among themselves and the peasantry.848

Its English supporters constructed it as an ethnic tradition “with a suitable historic past” rather than admit that it was a recent invention.849 They constructed modern prize fighting in a “Greco-English” tradition to stress its continuity. In so

848 Johnson and Fielding, “‘British Championism’: Early Pugilism and the Works of Fielding,” 335.
doing, they characterized England as a classical model of societies and promoted the Englishmen as inheritors of the Greek masculine virtues. This comparison also justified the brutality of pugilism. The classical gladiatorial combats “legitimized their reappearance in the eighteenth century,” and made “violence even seem laudable, the natural by-product of a virile, heroic society.”

While prize fighting was illegal in the nineteenth century, many English aristocrats and intellectuals were still generous to the sport. Their literature about pugilism traced the origin of English pugilism to the military sport of ancient Greece. These English intellectuals believed that the archetype of modern pugilism was an ancient Greek sport called Pancratium, which was brutal but was seen as an honorable military sport by contemporaries. In contrast, they denigrated Roman pugilism in which slave fighters used the cestus. Roman boxing was also seen as a degraded recreation because it made virtuous young male citizens simple spectators. English authors depicted pugilists like Jack Broughton, Tom Johnson, John Jackson, and Tom Gribb as heroes, with qualities inherited from Greek boxers. Even Guillaume Depping and Charles Russell colored the origin of the sport with a more

850 Johnson and Fielding, “‘British Championism’: Early Pugilism and the Works of Fielding,” 331. The erection of the amphitheater for pugilistic matches also related pugilism to the classical era.
851 Ibid.
853 Cestus was a battle glove made of metal and leather.
English tone. To fill the historical void between ancient Greece and eighteenth century England, they related modern pugilism to a military sport in the time of King Alfred and later, to English aristocrats’ physical games.\textsuperscript{854}

But the English claim of pugilism was fictitious. Some English intellectuals knew that Russians had institutionalized fights similar to Pancratium before English modern prize fighting emerged.\textsuperscript{855} In addition, medieval wrestling in Europe was not clearly distinguished from early modern prize fighting. Accordingly, English pugilism was not a cultural tradition passed along from the past. It was a cultural construction which was related to the less traceable past to articulate the ownership of a cultural form and distinctive cultural identity for Englishmen. In this sense, it was largely an invented tradition.\textsuperscript{856}

While Eric Hobsbawm argues that invented tradition had ideological functions for the socialization of a certain group and the construction of a cohesive group, pugilism had conflicting roles for social and cultural grouping.\textsuperscript{857} Despite the efforts of some intellectuals, the sport was still disreputable and illegal. Accordingly, making pugilism a truly English tradition was only partly successful. The last significant international fight in nineteenth century England represented the dynamic relationships between class and ethnicity.

\textsuperscript{854} Depping and Russell, \textit{Wonders of Bodily Strength and Skill}, 57-58.
\textsuperscript{855} “Chivalry of the Prize Ring,” \textit{People’s Magazine: An Illustrated Miscellany for All Classes}, 1, 6, (February 9 1867), 90.
\textsuperscript{856} Invented tradition means a “set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition,” and automatically implies largely factitious continuity with the past. Hobsbawn and Ranger, eds., \textit{Invention of Tradition}, 1.
\textsuperscript{857} Ibid., 9.
On April 17, 1860, Tom Sayer and John C. Heenan, champions from England and America, respectively, met at Farnborough, England. The respectable English press treated the fight as a brutal anachronism. The British government announced that the fight would be stopped.\textsuperscript{858} The prime minister also criticized the impending fight. But he was still an Englishman. “Well! If it must come off-I hope Tom will beat.”\textsuperscript{859} While it did not deny that pugilism was brutal, a report in the \textit{London Saturday Review} tacitly advocated the fight.

In a country where it is known that honor and property are only safe so long as its citizens are ready to fight in their defense, the nature which loves fighting for its own sake will always command respect. A man like Tom Sayers, who left his business as a bricklayer from mere devotion to boxing, possesses, we may say a character, which in proportion as it prevails among Englishmen, will make this country feared abroad and safe at home.\textsuperscript{860}

On match day, Parliament was full of discussion about the fight. The police allowed fight fans to gather. Aristocrats, members of Parliament, poets, legislators, clergymen, merchants, prizefighters, military officers, lawyers, and farm laborers were present.\textsuperscript{861} However, middle-class moralists opposed prize fighting. Class values mediated the process of constructing pugilism as an ethnic tradition. While cultural

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\textsuperscript{858} Boddy, \textit{Boxing}, 79.
\textsuperscript{861} John Hollingshead, \textit{Ways of Life}, 173, 177.
\end{footnotesize}
power was in the hands of the middle classes, public interest in fights was gradually declining. A symbolic figure like Sayer would never reappear in England.

The ethnicization of the sport and the construction of Britishness were also contested by the fight. Heenan was superior to Sayer in the ring. The crowd stepped in the ring to save Sayer from a humiliating defeat. Heenan further challenged a myth that pugilism was an English tradition. Heenan was an American of Irish descent. As other ethnic groups, the Irish brought cultural baggage like religion, customs, sports, and songs from their homeland to America. However, it was not clear that modern prize fighting was in their cultural baggage. The Irish knew the existence of the sport through cultural contacts with the English. They also had their own fighting hero, Dan Donnelly. However, in Ireland, prize fighting was never popular. In 1872, William Barry wrote, “Prize fighting has never flourished in Ireland. An Irishman is never mercenary where hard hitting is concerned, and the system and organization of the Ring is virtually unknown in the Ireland. The transplanted Irishman, however, occasionally distinguishes himself in the profession of slogging, and his foreign reputation is at once seized upon in his native country as a fact to be proud of from a national and patriotic rather than from a P. R. aspect.”

While prize fighting was a modern sport which originated from England, men of Irish descent entered the ring in large numbers and dominated the American ring in

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862 William Barry “The Current Street Ballads of Ireland,” *MacMillan's Magazine*, 25, no. 147 (January 1872), 198. Slogging was another word to refer to slugging.
the second half of the nineteenth century. While Germans and Swedes came to America along with the Irish in the mid-nineteenth century, they were very religious people. They also brought agrarian culture which was fitting well with Jeffersonian ideal of society in America. Their ethnic identity was formed in desire for class aspiration and rural democracy.\footnote{Carroll, \textit{American Masculinities}, 224.} While men of British descent began to climb the socio-economic ladder, fighters of British descent were only in small number in the late nineteenth century.

While the Irish became a main source of fighters in America, they did not have a literary tradition about prize fighting. Prize fighting had broad appeal among working-class Irish, but it was relegated into low-taste culture by the middle-class Irish. Nevertheless, working-class Irishmen constructed ethnic identity out of an imported cultural form. They constructed their ethnic identity through unliterary practices. These working-class Irishmen expressed their identity in fierce ethnic rivalry and partisanship, which was defined as the “horror and savagery of Irish American rowdyism” by an English boxing writer.\footnote{Miles, \textit{Pugilistica}, 136.}

In the early nineteenth century, J. P. Thomas witnessed an improvised prizefight between an English fighter and an Irish fighter in Ireland, which divided the crowd into two patriotic factions.\footnote{J. P. Thomas, \textit{My Thought Book} (London: Sherwood, Gilbert, And Piper, Paternoster, 1825), 403.} Fierce ethnic rivalry and partisanship revived in America. To the Irish in America, a prizefight between an Irish fighter and an English opponent was not simply an individual competition. The fight was related to

\footnote{863 Carroll, \textit{American Masculinities}, 224.}
\footnote{864 Miles, \textit{Pugilistica}, 136.}
\footnote{865 J. P. Thomas, \textit{My Thought Book} (London: Sherwood, Gilbert, And Piper, Paternoster, 1825), 403.}
the memory of past political relations between Ireland and England and social
discrimination in America.

In 1837, James “Deaf” Burke, the first English fighter who had immigrated to
America instantly made a rivalry with an Irish immigrant fighter, Sam O’Rourke,
who was backed by the Irish Brigade, an Irish political organization in New York.866
They met near New Orleans. The fight was in a riotous mood. Burke’s and
O’Rouke’s seconds brawled with each other. Irish draymen and hodmen (typical Irish
manual laborers) stormed the ring and beat Burke with shillelaghs and stones.867
Burke finally succeeded in running from O’Rourke’s supporters, who threatened to
cut him into sausage with their bowie-knives.868 In the same year, Tom O’Connell
challenged Burke for five hundred dollars and “the honor of ould Ireland.”

Prize fighting in the mid-nineteenth century “often pitted immigrant Irishmen
against either English or Anglo-American opponents, in contests that became focal
points for nativist-immigrant rivalry.”869 The first Irish ring hero, “Yankee” Sullivan,
born, Frank Ambrose, started his career fighting Englishmen near his village. He
fought against the Englishman Robert Caunt in 1847 and Anglo-New Yorker, Tom
Hyer in 1849. The early fights between “Yankee” Sullivan and fighters of British
descent were ethnic confrontations. Although Sullivan’s nickname was “Yankee,”
“the sons of Erin” were “extacies [sic] at the prospect of a fight between one of their
own countrymen and an Englishman and were no way slow in backing their favorite

866 National Police Gazette, June 5, 1880, p. 15.
867 Vermont Patriot and State Gazette, May 29, 1837, p. 1; Miles, Pugilistica, 135-136.
868 Miles, Tom Sayer Sometime Champion of England, 146.
Hibernia Review, 10, no. 3 (Autumn 2006), 92.
to the last copper in their possession.”870 A stake at these fights was clear when Sullivan called his fierce rival, Hyer, a “big overgrown girl.”871 Manly honor for each race was at stake. Animosity existed between both men. About four decades later, a famous Irish American heavyweight fighter, John L. Sullivan, recalled, “The spirit which carried on the early events of the American prize ring was rather of war than scientific sport. Much ill-feeling existed in those years on account of the native American movement, of which Hyer was taken as the physical representative.”872

The Irish in America were interested in the historic international fight between Tom Sayer and John C. Heenan in 1860. They never forgot the fight in which their man almost knocked out one of the most renowned champions in the history of British pugilism. John L. Sullivan recalled that “the remembrance of it was so well kept up by the pictures, songs, and controversies about it in the years following.”873

Working-class Irish Americans kept their ethnic antagonism. According to William Brady, who worked as a newspaper boy in the early 1870s, the athletic competitions between Irish American and English players heightened anti-English sentiment among Irish Americans.874 Mike Donovan remembered his fight with an English fighter in the 1870s. “Instinctively I did not like Englishmen and they did not like

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870 *Life and Battles of Yankee Sullivan, Embracing Full and Accurate Reports of the Fights with Hammer Lane, Tom Sector, Harry Bell, Bob Caunt, Tom Hyer, and John Morrissey* (Philadelphia, A. Winch, 1854), 29.
871 *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, August 23, 1880, p. 3.
873 Ibid., 37.
me." The ethnic rivalry was sharpened with interethnic fights in the era of the bare-knuckle fight.

The disorderly atmosphere of bare-knuckle fights often provided Irish Americans with opportunities to display their solidarity. When an English boxer, Harry Hicken, fought Bryan Campbell in West Virginia on March 4, 1873, ethnic turmoil erupted. After the twenty-fifth round, Campbell’s supporters attacked a fellow Irishman, Ned O’Baldwin, who was then Hicken’s second. O’Baldwin was knocked down and Hicken was forced out of the ring. O’Baldwin expressed deep depression after the match. “Since prize fighting no longer deserves the name and the question at issue is not ‘Who is the best man?’ but ‘Where is he born?’ and if his nativity does not suit, what means can be adopted, even murder if necessary, to prevent defeat, I abandon forever prize ring.”

The strong partisanship scared English fighters who moved to America in the 1870s. When Jem Mace was pitted against Tom Allen, he was concerned about ethnic hatred. “Ugly stories were afloat of the hatred borne to all Englishmen by certain sections of the American populace.” Mace was especially worried about ethnic hostility borne by Irish-Americans toward him in eastern States.

Irish American fight followers continued to display indiscreet and unconditional ethnic loyalty. The ethnic rivalry reached its peak in 1880 when an Irish American fighter, Paddy Ryan, met the English champion, Joe Goss in West

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875 Geer, Mike Donovan, Making of a Man, 48.
876 Ibid., 62-3.
877 Siler, Inside Facts on Pugilism, 14.
878 Mace, In Memoriam, 196.
Virginia. From its beginning, the Ryan-Goss fight was colored by ethnic rivalry. Joe Goss chose to fight on Tuesday because of the English belief that Tuesday was lucky. Ryan made his training camp at St. James Hotel at Far Rockaway. Ryan’s fans outnumbered Goss’s by 10 to 1. Goss was scared at the scene that members of the Ancient Order of Hibernians swarmed into the steam yacht which would tow two other sailing yachts with excursionists to the fight venue. Goss declared that Ryan came to Erie with “a gang of murderers and cutthroats.” Goss and his party refused to process the proposed fight. The crowd surrounded and threatened them. However, Ryan did not claim himself only as an Irishman. Ryan was an admirer of the English champion. He escorted Goss through the mob. Male bonding momentarily disrupted ethnic partisanship. Goss and his party eventually went to Washington to avoid the crowd. In his interview with the *New York Tribune* reporter, Goss expressed his concern of ethnic hatred again. “I'll go anywhere with three men and have it over. But I don't want a thousand along. I want a fair show and not to be eaten alive.”

While they often displayed their solidarity in fights between an Irish fighter and English fighter, Irish fight fans were not a unified group. They were involved in sectionalism. According to referee George Siler, “whenever two men of the same nationality fought, the one with the gang behind him always won…. This was the rule until John L. Sullivan defeated Paddy Ryan.” Nevertheless, fighters, managers, and fans from Irish enclaves still had collective memories and the construction of

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880 *New York Sun*, May 9, 1880, p. 5.
ethnicity might take place out of sectionalism. The 1882 fight between two Irish American fighters, Paddy Ryan and John L. Sullivan was an intriguing episode about the dynamic construction of ethnicity. Mike Gleason, who was Sullivan’s lifetime friend and main backer, helped Sullivan’s fight. However, Gleason still had a “soft spot in his heart for Ryan.” Gleason’s and Ryan’s families came from Tipperary. During the violent fight, Sullivan found that Gleason was hob-nobbing with Ryan’s friends, who also came from Tipperary. Like many Irishmen, to Gleason, the “Irish love of a fair fight” was not only to support a man who could fight but also to forget “hard feelings after a fair fight.” In fact, many working-class Irishmen believed that friendship between Irishmen was made through a fight. Even they believed that the Irish had to have a fight before they could “entirely warm up to a man.” Accordingly, they felt that it was manly to bear “no grudge after a prizefight.”

Ethnic turmoil and mob violence toward English fighters gradually disappeared in the 1880s when matches began to be held in more controlled settings like clubs and public gymnasiums. But ethnic identity was continuously constructed through the worship of ethnic heroes and developing emotional ties with them. Most Irish American men still worked as unskilled and semi-skilled laborers. The educated Irish middle classes were still a minority. Irish artists and intellectuals could impress only a small number of their countrymen. In contrast, fighters were down-to-earth heroes for poor Irishmen. Working-class Irish American men did not share the evaluation of Irish champions with the mainstream. While “Yankee” Sullivan was a

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symbol of Irish ruffianism to mainstream society, John L. Sullivan rated him as “one of the pluckiest fighters that ever stood in a ring.”

Prizefighters were always near at hand. The St. Paul Globe depicted young Sullivan in an ethnic enclave as follows: “Sullivan liked boxing, too. In common with all young men who feel that they are possessed of much strength, and like nothing better than to show it, he was ready to square off whenever there was a little quiet fun in sight. His friends were almost air athletic [sic] and greatly interested in reading about the pugilistic champions, of the time.” When an Irish American, Richard K. Fox, published the National Police Gazette in 1876 and began to report news about prize fighting, working-class Irishmen were its main readers. The Gazette published 150,000 weekly. But its record of sale was 400,000 in 1880 when Paddy Ryan met the English champion, Joe Goss. Until the 1890s, most boxers, managers, and trainers came from Irish ethnic enclaves. They made prize fighting a largely ethnic profession. Many fight fans were also men of Irish descent. William Brady recalled, “The Irish-Americans followed pugilism more closely at that time than any other race in the United States.”

While Irish fathers valued their sons’ fighting skills, many Irish American men entered the ring against their parents’ expectations that their sons would become priests. The ring was a stigmatized place not only by mainstream society but also

886 Sullivan, Life and Reminiscences of a 19th Century Gladiator, 36.
889 Riess, City Game, 72; Ashby, With Amusement for All, 93.
890 Brady, A Fighting Man, 96.
891 Corbett, The Roar of the Crowd, 63.
by middle-class people and priests in their ethnic enclaves. Working-class Irishmen had fondness for prize fighting. Nevertheless, they often had a conflicting attitude toward the sport when their sons were involved in it. However, fathers’ disappointment did not last long. These young fighters became dearest heroes for their family and ethnic neighborhoods.892 Local Irish Americans valued their fighting men and these young men were important guests for ethnic festivals and picnics.893

The Irish in ethnic neighborhoods maintained emotional ties with fighting young men. A veteran boxing instructor, Mike Donovan, recalled after a sparring with a newcomer, Sullivan, “On returning to my hotel it seemed to me that every Irishman who lived on Boston Highlands, the location of Sullivan’s home, was there waiting for me…. They plied me with all kinds of questions as to what I thought of the young fellow…. I never will forget what one old man said: ‘I have known his father and mother for many years, and decent people they are, too. Johnny was always a strong gossoon [boy], and I always thought he had the making of a good man.’”894 In 1887, Jim Corbett, who was a novice fighter, met a Jewish American man, Joe Choynski at a barn in San Francisco. It was a small and secret gathering. Corbett remembered, “Each round after the fourteenth, when it looked as if I were headed for defeat, that is, when I would clinch with Choyinski in a certain part of the ring, I could hear someone repeating The Lord’s prayer…. I recognized him as a little

892 Ibid., 108.
893 For instance, Jake Kilrain and Jack Dempsey were invited to an Ancient Order of Hibernian picnic at New York in 1887. Both fighters sparred for other participants. Washington Post, August 21, 1887, p. 2.
894 Donovan, Roosevelt That I know, 45.
Irishman by the name of Tom Riley, a friend of our folks, and no one ever knew how in the world he got there.\textsuperscript{895}

In poor Irish enclaves, some men in disreputable professions also played an important role for the construction of communities. Irish American politicians were seen as corrupt in mainstream society. However, they gave jobs and presents to poor Irish people. They were also the protectors of saloons and prize fighting for working-class countrymen.\textsuperscript{896} Irish fighters collected votes for these politicians. Some of them were philanthropists in their neighborhoods and enclaves.\textsuperscript{897} These fighters did not lose emotional ties with their people.

If an Irish American fighter was successful, his name crossed ethnic neighborhoods or enclaves. He became a hero for working-class Irishmen all over the country. As many other working-class Irish American men, Mike Sullivan (John L. Sullivan’s father) was a fight fan. He proudly compared his bulky child to famous Irish American fighters.\textsuperscript{898} When Jim Corbett was a teenager, his father was also an enthusiastic follower of a Bostonian, Sullivan. He visited Sullivan’s training camp

\textsuperscript{895} Corbett, \textit{The Roar of the Crowd}, 83-84.
\textsuperscript{896} Shannon, \textit{The American Irish: A Political and Social Portrait}, 138. Also see Alfred Henry Lewis, \textit{Richard Croker} (New York: Life Publishing Company, 1901). Irish American politicians protected their countrymen in prize fighting from legal enforcement and moralists in the mainstream. They also protected them from possible ethnic discrimination. New York State Senator Tim Sullivan was one of most conspicuous fight supporters. He blamed George Siler for deciding against Tom Sharkey and Jack O’Brien. He insisted that Siler was prejudiced against a “fighter with an Irish name.” \textit{Chicago Tribune}, January 21, 1900, p.17.
\textsuperscript{897} Irish American fighters were conscious of their ethnic communities. For instance, in 1880, George O’Rourke was pitted against Michael Donovan for the middleweight championship and a purse of two thousand dollars. The fight was canceled. But O’Rourke promised to contribute his purse for the next fight with Donovan to the Irish relief fund. \textit{New York Times}, May 25, 1880, p. 3.
\textsuperscript{898} Isenberg, \textit{John L. Sullivan and His America}, 21.
held in San Francisco where Corbett’s family was living.\footnote{Corbett, \textit{The Roar of the Crowd}, 116. While Sullivan was very popular among the working-class Irish in Boston, many working-class Irishmen in other cities were also “crazy about Sullivan.” He was an ethnic hero among working-class Irishmen in America. J. Corbett, \textit{Jabs} (Cleveland: The Buckeye Publishing Co., 1907), 39-40.} Irish fighters also used common symbols to express their ethnic identity and appeal to the Irish all over the country. Green tights and colors were popular among them.\footnote{\textit{Rocky Mountain News}, January 1890, p. 3.}

In both England and America, “Hibernian blood” was often related to violence.\footnote{Miles, \textit{Tom Sayer Sometime Champion of England}, 160, \textit{New York Times}, October 18, 1858, p. 1. Irishmen’s resort to physical violence was continuously exaggerated by anti-Catholic figures. Using \textit{Safeguard}, which was an anti-Catholic weekly, Horace Hastings continued to stigmatize Catholic masculinity in the 1880s. Bendroth, \textit{Fundamentalists in the City}, 75.} While Englishmen were also involved in fights, stigmatization was placed largely on the Irishman. “Yankee” Sullivan felt the stigma of his race and Irish manhood. In his 1848 challenge toward Tom Hyer, Sullivan said, “I am no ‘Irish braggart’ or ‘bully,’ although I am an Irishman, and I can show myself worthy of my country whenever I am required.”\footnote{Life and Battles of Yankee Sullivan, 34.} But in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Irish Americans proudly constructed themselves as members of a “fighting race.” While middle-class Irishmen constructed themselves as fighters for the liberation of their suffering mother country, boxing insiders differently constructed themselves as members of a fighting race.

In fact, on the street and in school, working-class Irish American men were accustomed to fighting from their youth. Sullivan’s autography explained that an Irish American boy could not expect a “mollycoddled” life. A weak boy was belittled.\footnote{Sullivan, \textit{Life and Reminiscences of a 19th Century Gladiator}, 24.} The heavyweight champion from 1892 to 1897, Jim Corbett also constructed his
ethnic identity in strife, which was common in working-class young men’s lives. Corbett’s autobiography began with his first fight at the age of twelve in St. Ignatius College of San Francisco.\textsuperscript{904} Corbett was an Irish young man who refused to be called a coward. For Corbett, having “Irish blood” meant that he had to fight like a man.\textsuperscript{905} Corbett’s father was delighted that his twelve-year-old son could confront a man six years older to protect his honor. Corbett remembered that his father had “all the typical Irishman’s pride in a son that was a good fighter.”\textsuperscript{906} An Irish American boxing manager, William A. Brady shared similar memories. He was proud that he had the courage to fight bigger boys to protect his rights. He knew “the importance of being known as a fighter.”\textsuperscript{907} He believed that courage made “the Irish” in him. To Brady, fighting spirit was a main reason for his success of life.\textsuperscript{908} A famous Irish American veteran fighter, Mike Donovan, said to his biographer, “Why, the more I think over my life, the more I can see it was nothing but fight, fight all the way through.”\textsuperscript{909} His fights were about ethnic pride. “If anyone called me ‘Mickie,’ in a teasing way, I’d fight. When I was mad a good fist fight was the only thing that would satisfy me. I gloried in it. Poking any fun at my Irish descent meant [a] fight.”\textsuperscript{910}

Irish American boxing insiders viewed their profession as closely related to their life experiences. By relating their profession to their memories in youth, Irish

\textsuperscript{904} Corbett, \textit{The Roar of the Crowd}, 1-5.
\textsuperscript{905} Ibid., 16, 122.
\textsuperscript{906} Ibid., 108.
\textsuperscript{907} Brady, \textit{A Fighting Man}, 8.
\textsuperscript{908} Ibid., 4.
\textsuperscript{909} Geer, \textit{Mike Donovan, Making of a Man}, 27.
\textsuperscript{910} Ibid., 31.
American boxing insiders personalized prize fighting. The Britishness of the sport was further diluted. Prize fighting was not English or foreign. It was in the Irish blood. Accordingly, they tried to naturalize the excellence of the Irish in prize fighting and their physical superiority. Prize fighting became a source of ethnic pride. It empowered Irishmen in the brutal business with an affirmative ethnic identity. As a young amateur boxer, Corbett took boxing lessons from Walter Watson, who had been a professional fighter. In their first sparring, Watson noticed Corbett’s unusual ability. Corbett remembered the conversation that followed. “Is there any Irish blood in you, by any chance?” “Yes, sir, my father and mother are Irish.” He grinned. “In three months you will lick any man in this club.”911 As a champion boxer, Corbett used the same joke when he taught his countrymen. Corbett never questioned his ability as an Irish American professional fighter. He believed that there was no “Protestant” he couldn’t lick.912

While working-class Irishmen were diversely constructing their ethnic identity through prize fighting, prize fighting lacked Irish American intellectuals’ support. However, unlike other Irish American intellectuals, the renowned Irish American journalist, John Boyle O’Reilly, had an ambivalent attitude toward prize fighting. O’Reilly viewed bare-knuckle prize fighting as a dishonest business, characterized by “brutality and ruffianism.” He was also critical of bare-knuckle fights between Irish Americans. O’Reilly was ashamed that “respectable and intelligent people” took an interest in “so unworthy a struggle” as the 1882 New Orleans fight between Paddy

911 Corbett, The Roar of the Crowd, 16.
912 Ibid., 162.
Ryan and John L. Sullivan. However, while he equated English fighting with brutal bare-knuckle fights, O’Reilly separated the gloved fight from the English prizefight. O’Reilly hailed Sullivan’s decision to don gloves to control brutality and his introduction of ‘incomparable skill’ to fighting. He was even proud of Irish American fighters’ success in the Queensberry ring. “In boxing, there is no need to say that the Irish race has the best men in the world.” To O’Reilly, the Irish American champion, Sullivan, signified discontinuity between American boxing and English prize fighting.

In fact, O’Reilly exaggerated Sullivan’s role in the American ring. The Queensberry rules and gloves originated in England. The glove contest was introduced as early as the 1860s in England. Sullivan was not a scientific boxer. Nevertheless, in order to protect prize fighting from moralists, O’Reilly tried to distinguish American boxing from English prize fighting and construct it as a representation of courage, skill, and endurance. O’Reilly narrowly defined English prize fighting as brutal bare-knuckle fighting and, therefore, blurred the origin of American prize fighting. Furthermore, O’Reilly boldly related the profession to ancient Celt martial arts. In so doing, O’Reilly tried to reconcile his Irish ethnic identity with working-class masculine traits. However, most of his middle-class countrymen shared the view of the sport with middle-class moralists in mainstream society.

914 O’Reilly, Ethics of Boxing and Manly Art, 75.
915 Ibid., 173.
O’Reilly’s *The Ethics of Boxing and Manly Art* (1888) was problematic because of his generosity to prize fighting and professional fighters. The *New York Times* criticized O’Reilly for ignoring the problem of professionalism in prize fighting. However, it was a middle-class Irish American organ that most severely criticized O’Reilly and his book.\(^9\)\(^16\) Peter McCorry reviewed his controversial book for the Irish American journal, *Donahoe’s Monthly*. While O’Reilly tried to weaken classism among Irishmen and empower them with traditional masculine values, McCorry never admitted that a “savage contest” was or could be part of Irish culture. McCorry differently policed ethnic boundaries. “Boxing, or pugilism, is *par excellence* an English practice, and whatever we have of it in this country is copied from England.” According to him, professional fighting represented “the brutal nature of the common Englishman.”\(^9\)\(^17\) By defining prize fighting as foreign, McCorry traced the cultural origin of brutal English imperialism and policed ethnic and national boundaries between Ireland and England. In contrast, McCorry’s criticism of O’Reilly and prize fighting, based largely on middle-class moralism, weakened ethnic boundaries between middle-class Irish and native-born Americans. To McCorry, professional fighters’ hearts were “gored with the blood of passion.” Accordingly, there is no manly quality in it. It was an animalistic “savagery” which outraged “humanity.”\(^9\)\(^18\) It was a brutal entertainment for “loafers and drunkards, the gamblers,

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\(^9\)\(^17\) Peter McCorry, “The Ethics of Boxing and Manly Art,” *Donahoe’s Monthly Magazine*, 20, no. 1 (July 1888), 27.

\(^9\)\(^18\) Peter McCorry, “The Ethics of Boxing and Manly Art,” *Donahoe’s Monthly Magazine*, 20, no. 2 (August 1888), 149.
sports, outlaws, thieves, and pimps of every description.” McCorry’s criticism reflected most Irish middle-class men’s sentiments. According to O’Reilly’s close friend, James Jeffrey Roche, the publication of *The Ethics of Boxing and Manly Art* and his fondness of boxing isolated O’Reilly from the society of Irish American intellectuals.

Because of stigma placed on them, the Irish had to succeed as a people to gain acceptance in American mainstream. McCorry and other middle-class Irishmen believed that acceptance would result from accommodation to dominant cultural norms, not from the construction of masculine Irish Americans. Accordingly, middle-class Irish Americans frowned on the lower-class recreations. The existence of the Irish immigrant fighters embarrassed respectable Irish Americans as early as the mid-nineteenth century. The editor of the *American Celt* lamented. “Ireland … has here and on the Pacific coast the discredit of swarming the great cities with a horde of hardy and vulgar ruffians, unmatched in any former state of society. Most of these young wretches are young men, born here or in the English manufacturing towns, of Irish parents. Such was the notorious Sullivan [Yankee Sullivan], such was the Kelly in the last tragedy. Surely, surely, some one has a terrible account to give of our neglected first and second generation in the English and American cities.”

However, ethnicity still mediated class. In 1863, the *Irish World* expressed ambivalence toward the disreputable sport in which their poorer countrymen engaged.

919 Ibid., 152.
The *World* asserted that Celtic fighters competed for fame and honor, not for money, and contrasted Irish masculinity to that of the English. Nonetheless, it did not fully approve of the sport as an object of ethnic pride or a part of Irish culture. “The Irish, from their connection with the English, have unfortunately acquired some of the barbarous habits and customs of the Saxons, as they did their language.”922

In the late nineteenth century, the emergent Irish middle classes were infatuated with old middle-class morals. Middle-class Irish newspapers and magazines were full of literature, travelogues, and analysis of politics and diplomacy but had little to say about sports and prize fighting. *Donahoe’s Monthly Magazine* supported the love of the high arts, temperance, and “true womanhood.”923 However, it did not have an interest in their poorer countrymen’s sports idols. The *Irish World*, which supported temperance, did not report on prize fighting. The omission conversely produced discourse about the sport.924 While O’Reilly was its editor, the *Boston Pilot* was a little more generous about the sport. However, while O’Reilly occasionally addressed Sullivan’s fights in editorials with both ethnic pride and repulsion, the *Pilot* reported only “legitimate” sports like boating, baseball, and

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924 Eliminating the reports of fights became Irish American journalists’ old principle. William M. Higgins, editor of the *Kentucky Irish American*, argued that the Catholic press had to avoid “sensationalism” and report news mainly about science, art, and politics. He also maintained the Catholic press had to report only “legitimate athletics” which encouraged temperance and good character building. He excluded prize fighting from these athletics. *Kentucky Irish American*, September 20, 1902, p. 3. Later, while the Anglo-Jewish press occasionally reported boxing events, the Jewish mainstream press, especially, Yiddish newspapers, never reported boxing. This intentional exclusion was actually a disapproval of the sport. Allen Bodner, *When Boxing Was a Jewish Sport* (Westport: Praeger, 1997), 17-18.
pedestrianism. It occasionally criticized Sullivan and his fighting. In Irish middle-
class eyes, “winning boxing championships confirmed a ‘racist’ opinion of many
Anglo Protestants that the ferocious Irish had strong backs but weak minds.”

However, in the late 1880s and early 1890s, prizefights were increasingly
brought to cities with Irish American fighters dominating the ring. While prize
fighting became a national phenomenon, John L. Sullivan became the nation’s first
sports idol. However, “the better class of Irish people” was “shocked by many of the
escapades of John L.” Unlike other Irish American fighters, Sullivan was not
notoriously involved in politics. However, he always brawled with other men in
saloons. An anti-Catholic agitator, Horace Hastings, called him a “drunkard and wife-
beater.” To many middle-class people in the mainstream, as previous champions,
Sullivan was of questionable character, simply a ‘bully’ who possessed the greatest
power in the world but “in the very useless one of beating another man brutally with
the fists.” A magazine defined Sullivan as a “vulgar false hero of that numerous part
of population that lived still in barbarian times.” His glory was “every way
demoralizing.” He taught people that his “coarse preeminence” was “not to be
maintained without paying the price in self-control and industry.”

The long stigmatization of Irish masculinity and the emergence of nationally
known bruisers made Irish American intellectuals more hesitant to embrace the sport

925 John Boyle O’Reilly, “Prize Fight,” Boston Pilot, February 18, 1882, p. 4; “Sullivan Still
Champion,” Boston Pilot, July 13, 1889, p. 5.
926 McCaffrey, The Irish Catholic Diaspora in America, 86.
927 Brady, A Fighting Man, 96.
928 Quoted in Bendroth, Fundamentalists in the City, 75.
into their culture. In 1889, a Catholic newspaper tried to contradict the undisputable relation between the Irish and prize fighting. The Catholic Review attributed the popularity of Sullivan not to the Irish race or Irish masculine culture but to the immoral culture of New England where “the brute instinct of human nature” was “fast coming to the surface and being stimulated to an unnatural degree.” In so doing, the Review constructed Sullivan as symbol of moral degradation of the most English-style region in America, not an ethnic figure. However, it was undisputable that Sullivan was a man of Irish descent. The Irish World and American Industrial Liberator, which spoke for the organized Irish working classes and rarely featured this popular hero, cited Sullivan to give readers a moral lesson after he lost the title. “They all know what a mistake I made… I have lived too fast and my legs have been very bad for five years.” The article made Sullivan’s defeat a living example of the result of the undisciplined lifestyle.

The Catholic Church noticed that its cultural and moral authority among the Irish was declining in the late nineteenth century. Not only liberal ideologies and competing religions and denominations but also urban subculture diminished the influence of the Catholic Church. Priests in Ireland did not welcome “so brutal and disgusting an exhibition.” The Catholic Church in America also reacted to the rising popularity of prize fighting with the emergence of Sullivan. The Catholic Church was both the traditional preserver of Irish culture and the most important

930 While black intellectuals more readily embraced the fighters of their race, Irish counterparts were critical of their poorer countrymen in the profession.
932 Irish World and American Industrial Liberator, October 8, 1892, p. 7.
933 Jem Mace, In Memoriam, 157-158.
Americanizer. While many priests supported the Irish working-class cause, they also tried to instill their compatriots with middle-class values and norms. Catholic priests were ready to take sides with respectable middle-class Protestant figures in mainstream to ban prize fighting.

In the early 1890s, Archbishop John Ireland led the anti-prize fighting movement in the Catholic Church. Under his leadership, St. Paul, Minnesota became a center of anti-boxing agitation.\(^9\) In 1891, Ireland tried to prevent the impending fight between Bob Fitzsimmons and Jim Hall at the Minnesota Athletic Club in the city. Ireland characterized prize fighting as “savagery” and “animalism.”\(^9\) He protested the bout, which he defined as a “brutal thing” for the “ riffraff of the country.”\(^9\) Ireland and other Irish middle-class figures like J. R. McMillan and Thomas Cochran collaborated with respectable Protestant citizens in the city. Old foes, Catholics and Protestants were unified across ethnic boundaries to police class values and prevent the municipal government from issuing a license for the fight. Other Catholic institutions joined Ireland’s agitation against a “degrading and demoralizing” event.\(^9\)

Notorious John L. Sullivan finally lost his title in 1892. But the new heavyweight champion of the world was still another Irish American man. While the emergence of “Gentleman” Jim Corbett might relieve some Irish American middle-

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class people’s concerns, the Catholic Church did not approve of him or of prize fighting. Rather, the Catholic Church became Corbett’s nemesis. In 1893, the fight between Corbett and the English champion, Charley Mitchell at the Coney Island Athletic Club in Brooklyn drew the agitation of the Catholic Church. The Most Rev. Mgr. Farley, one of the Vicars General of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of New York, expressed his antagonism toward prize fighting. Because Farley was second only to Archbishop Michael A. Corrigan in power and authority, his denunciation of prize fighting was seen as the formal opinion of the Archdiocese. He said, “Prize fighting is a crime against morality, humanity, and the law of the State. The Catholic Church frowns on it as sinful and brutal, and no words are too strong for me to say in denunciation of it.” Mgr. Ducey also stressed that prizefights were “exhibitions of brutality, vulgarity, and bestiality.” “They [knock-out matches] appeal to the degradation of manhood and womanhood.” Ducey believed that Irish American boxers could not be ethnic heroes or role models. “Each one of these people appeals to the lowest and most vulgar education--drink, display, and dress.” To him, contemporary fighters were simply the different versions of old fighters like Yankee Sullivan, Tom Hyer, and John C. Heenan, who were known as thugs.\(^\text{938}\) Agitation against the fight also unified Catholics in New York with Protestants.\(^\text{939}\)

While in the late nineteenth century, working-class Irishmen constructed their ethnic identity through displays of aggressive masculinity and reckless partisanship and the construction of fighting heroes and a fighting race, the middle-

class Irish tried to articulate ethnic identity through the revival of old Celtic culture in high arts and respectable cultural forms or the maintenance of religious decorum. Prize fighting represented cultural divisions within ethnic reproduction. However, ethnic reproduction was an evolving process in which ethnic boundaries were continuously mediated and contested by diverse social and cultural boundaries.

2. Prize Fighting and Local Heroes

Prize fighting was a popular cultural form which developed mostly in urban subculture. Accordingly, a class or an ethnic group did not exclusively own it. Social contacts between classes, ethnic groups, and racial groups were inevitable in urban subculture. Irishmen also experienced increasing contacts with mainstream society through their participation in prize fighting as fighters, spectators, and fans. While Irish Americans who were living mainly in ethnic enclaves built their ethnic identity in relation to a special residential space, the construction of ethnic identity in popular culture became increasingly mediated by cultural boundaries related to other local spaces.

In the late nineteenth century, people of the Northeast pushed national identity. But their political and cultural project faced two obstacles. Many American elites still saw the traditions of the Old World as superior. They eagerly imitated European aristocratic life styles. At the same time, localism and local chauvinism prevailed.
among ordinary Americans. Localism also prevailed in prize fighting. As a boxing critic George Siler pointed out, the bare knuckle fight played the double role. When the fighters of two different ethnic groups entered the ring, it divided spectators along ethnic divisions. However, a bout between fighters from the same ethnic group divided spectators into two groups largely based on a neighborhood and city.

In fact, Irish immigrants were accustomed to sectionalism. Primitive transportation and a number of mountain ranges divided Ireland into isolated provinces, counties, parishes, and townlands. In America, Irish people were divided by the place of their origin and competed with other Irish immigrants for jobs. Accordingly, Irish identity in America was an evolving process. In America, middle-class Irish literature and newspapers served “cultural nationalism” and Irish freedom movements. However, while middle-class Irishmen were involved in cultural and political nationalism, working-class Irishmen were more involved in “bread-and-butter issues of American politics” and local partisanship. Irish American fighters started their career as competing bullies in neighborhoods, not as heroes of their race. For instance, the 1858 fight between two Irish American fighters, John Morrissey and John C. Heenan drew local partisans. While both parties’ partisans came from the same neighborhood, Heenan’s supporters were mainly the No. 40 Bowery crowd and Morrissey’s supporters entirely came from the Third Congressional Distinct of New

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942 McCaffrey, *The Irish Catholic Diaspora in America*, 138-139.
943 Ibid., 142.
York. The sectionalism of Irish American fight followers both facilitated and counteracted ethnic reproduction. Sectionalism among the Irish continued in prize fighting of the 1890s but took a different shape. For instance, the 1892 historic fight between John L. Sullivan and Jim Corbett was a competition between Boston and San Francisco, two cities which had large Irish populations. The fights represented the transformation of prize fighting. Prize fighting was already a national business with the development of transportation, print, and mass communication. A famous boxer’s local base was not an ethnic neighborhood, but a city.

While Irish American men dominated the ring, many boxing fans were Irish Americans. However, its fan base was increasingly diversified in ethnicity and class. Throughout the 1880s, the sizes of purses, side bets, and forfeits were gradually increasing. While the middle-class Irish still frowned on prize fighting, ethnically diversified fight fans tried to prove that their local talents, most of whom were Irish Americans, were “world beaters” by “backing their opinion with all kinds of money.” Among these local fight fans, wealthier ones prepared for forfeits, purses, or side bets as backers. The size of purse depended on a fighter’s reputation which could gain him a city-wide fan base over ethnic divisions.

Between the late 1880s and early 1890s, big fights increasingly moved out of ethnic neighborhoods. While best matches were held in clubs and boxing business

946 In the 1890s, matchmaking system gradually changed. Athletic clubs and promoters prepared for purses. But fighters’ backers still raised side bets and forfeits to make big matches.
947 *Chicago Tribune*, April 1, 1900, p. 17.
was nationalized, successful fighters drew citywide partisans across his ethnicity. These fight fans followed their heroes to fight venues in other cities and made bets. Accordingly, betting for a boxer depended on fight followers from the city where he was a favorite among fight fans. Increasingly heterogeneous fight followers constructed a bout as a trans-local, not an ethnic event. The diversification of fight fans and the increasing influence of local sectionalism were best reflected in betting for an international match. For instance, betting for the 1891 fight between an Irish American boxer, Jack Dempsey, and a San Francisco-based Australian boxer, Bob Fitzsimmons divided fight followers into two groups based on cities. “It was the North and the East against the South and the West. A flood of money poured into New Orleans from around New York. But so much gold was shipped on from California.”

Fight fans were never a homogeneous group in class and ethnicity. However, their betting often expressed a local affiliation with a certain boxer across class and ethnic boundaries. Even betting was a local event to display loyalty to a city for all residents. Elia Peattie described Sullivan’s popularity across social divisions in his hometown, Boston. “The multitude of people of all classes” was “willing to back their pugilistic townsman to any amount-from $1 to the Bunker Hill monument.” The betting pattern was a sign of the emotional tie between fighters and local people. An 1889 report of the fight between John L. Sullivan and Jake Kilrain contained a

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sketch of the two cities which viewed these fighters as their local heroes. The report, whose headline was “Kilrain’s Defeat Cast a Gloom Over Baltimore, But Boston Rejoices and Is Glad Along With Other Cities,” contrasted the atmosphere of two cities during and after the fight. Such a juxtaposition became popular in fight reports in the late 1880s and 1890s.

The external ascription of the Irish American fighter was changed when prize fighting became closely related to a locality, especially, a city. In the 1880s and 1890s, there were several ways for a fighter to acquire a nickname among fight fans and reporters. But the lack of the Irish-style nicknames in prize fighting contrasted to the multiplicity of ethnic names for Irish American teams in baseball and rowing in the previous decade. It was rare that an Irish American fighter had an Irish-style nickname in the Irish American dominated profession.

Some nicknames were made after renowned fighters. Nicknames like ‘Young” Corbett and “Young” Gorff attracted attention from these famous fighters’ fans. Nicknames were also made to refer to fighters’ special boxing styles, previous occupations, and personal character. Many fighters had nicknames like “Professor,” “Battling,” and “Cyclone.” One of the most common ways was to make a nickname in relation to a city. Many fighters proudly embraced these nicknames. For instance, 

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950 Weekly Courier Journal, July 15, 1889, p. 5.
951 By the 1870s, Irish names were popularly attached to Irish American baseball teams. But after the 1870s Irish Americans gradually played in multiethnic teams with American-style names. Wilcox, “The Shamrock and the Eagle: Irish American and Sport in the Nineteenth Century,” 61-2. However, Irish team names were still popular among Irish American sportsmen. Ralph Wilcox, “Irish American in Sports: The Nineteenth Century” in Making the Irish American: History and Heritage of the Irish in the United States, eds. J. J. Lee and Marion R. Casey (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 447. In the 1880s and the 1890s, Jack Burke was called “Irish Lad,” but it was a rare ethnic nickname.
John L. Sullivan was popularly called the “Boston Strong Boy.” In fact, Sullivan was a cultural icon of the city. When he defeated Paddy Ryan and won the heavyweight title in 1882, an admirer wrote a verse:

Just fancy what mingled emotions
Would fill the Puritan heart
To learn what renown was won for his town
By means of the manly art!
Imagine a Winthrop or Adams
In front of a bulletin board,
Each flinging his hat at the statement that
The first blood was by Sullivan scored.
Thy bards, henceforth, O Boston!
Of this triumph of triumphs will sing,
For a muscular stroke has added a spoke
To the Hub, which will strengthen the ring!...953

While middle-class people still stigmatized these fighters, localized nicknames implied their broad appeal within cities. The localization of his fame changed the image of a most notorious Irish American fighter. Sullivan was no longer

952 Sullivan’s other nicknames were also related to the city. A less popular nickname included “Boston’s pride.” New York Sun, November 15, 1886, p. 1. In his autobiography, Sullivan introduced his numerous nicknames. Many of them were related to Boston. But there was no nickname related to his Irish heritage. Sullivan, Life and Reminiscences of a 19th Century Gladiator, 29-30.
953 Ibid., 92-93.
merely a thug. Many Bostonians called Sullivan “Our John.”954 Making him an icon of the city reached its peak in 1887. In spite of some respectable citizens’ objections, Boston mayor Hugh O’Brien, who was convinced of Sullivan’s popularity in the city, awarded him a huge belt pronouncing Sullivan as the champion of the world. A female writer, Inez Haynes Gillmore, recollected that she and other Bostonians had an “enormous civic pride” in Sullivan.”955 Many other fighters’ nicknames were also related to cities or state. “The Trojan” (Paddy Ryan), “Omaha Kid” (Terry McGovern), and “Arkansas Kid” (Joe Finnik) were household nicknames. The nickname of “Philadelphian Jack” diluted Jack O’Brien’s Irishness by linking him to the Quaker city. These nicknames diluted their ethnic origin and eventually stressed their American nationality.

Accordingly, fighters often claimed to be a representative of the city in which they were born or made their career. The contracts for a fight often attested to these fighters’ identities. In 1899, the articles of agreement signed between two Irish American fighters introduced both men as follows: “Articles of agreement entered into this 7th day of January, 1889, between Jake Kilrain, of Baltimore, Md., and John L. Sullivan, of Boston, Mass.”956 The articles of agreement also tended to make an Irish American boxer a representative of a city even in an international fight and matched a city to a foreign country, as in the following case of the articles of agreements signed in 1891: “We, the undermentioned, John E. Dempsey of Portland,

954 Walling, Recollections of a New York Chief of Police, 379.
955 Inez Haynes Gillmore, “A Woman at a Prize-Fight,” 783.
956 The Modern Gladiators, 114. The articles of agreement tended to feature fighters’ name with the name of city or state in the first part or last part.
Ore. and Robert Fitzsimmons of New Zealand herby agree to engage in a glove contest to a finish.957 The proofs represented that American prizefighters promoted themselves in relation to strong regionalism. But at the same time, viewing a fighter as a representative of a city already presupposed national competitions. In this sense, prize fighting became localized and nationalized at the same time.

While some moral conservatives still pointed out the relationship between the Irish race and prize fighting, the press conventionally identified boxers with the names of cities and promoted them in relation to localism in the late 1880s and 1890s.958 The normalization of the relationship between a boxer and a locality in typical boxing reports combined the legacies of the past with a new trend. Prize fighting was being nationalized. However, the press still made local heroes. While boxing business was still dominated by an ethnic group, the selling point of fights became local loyalty.

Nevertheless, localism and local partisanship never totally eliminated class and ethnic markers in prize fighting. A report in the Boston Globe displayed an ambivalent attitude toward the impending fight between Paddy Ryan and Sullivan in 1882. The report did not view prize fighting as a sport but did not trivialize their local man’s prowess in the ring. “As long as the mill came off at all, we are glad the Boston

958 An 1886 report showed a format of the typical boxing report. “Tom Burke, of New York, and Ed Kelley, of this city, had a rattling three round set-to, and then the announcement was made that Denny Costigan, of Rhode Island, ex-champion light weight of the world, and Tom Cleary, champion middle weight of the Pacific coast would have a friendly set-to of four rounds.” St. Paul Daily Globe, May 21, 1886, p. 4.
boy won.”\textsuperscript{959} Seven years later, Sullivan, who was confident of his popularity in Boston, disclosed his intention to run for Congress through a letter to the \textit{New York Evening Sun}. It appalled middle-class citizens in Boston. The \textit{Boston Investigator} reminded Bostonians of Sullivan’s profession. “Boston has been represented at Washington heretofore by more or less brains…. The funniest thing in his letter is that he speaks of himself as a man. Every individual of the human race, every grown-up male person, is not a man…. Let this fellow stick to prize-fighting and whiskey drinking. He is an ornament to the ring and the bar-room, but a disgrace to any other place.” In this critical comment, the \textit{Investigator} stressed Sullivan’s ethnicity, describing him as the “most famous Catholic in America.”\textsuperscript{960} However, two Irish American heavyweight champions of the 1880s and 1890s never gave up constructing themselves as figures that were above ethnic and class divisions.

\section*{3. National Boundaries and Prize Fighting}

The fight between Tom Sayer and John C. Heenan in 1860 was not simply an athletic competition to many English fight followers. While Heenan refused to see the fight as an issue of “national importance,” many Englishmen were eager to prove national superiority through the athletic event.\textsuperscript{961} Sayer, who was saved from a

\textsuperscript{959} \textit{Boston Globe}, February 8, 1882, quoted in Hardy, \textit{How Boston Played}, 172.
\textsuperscript{960} \textit{Boston Investigator}, September 18, 1889, p. 4
humiliating loss by the riot of the English crowd, became a national hero. In fact, the fight presaged fierce competitions in athletics between two nations in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. While many English gentlemen tried to confirm national superiority on sporting fields in the mid-nineteenth century, two decades later American counterparts were eager to construct affirmative national identity in an age of class conflict and immigration. Many of them embraced progressivism, Americanization, and expansion. They also used sports not only to seek national identity but also to prove national superiority. American middle-class men believed that American athleticism made their nation superior to England, where many modern sports began. O’Reilly expressed this sentiment. “The best of the English field-sports are confined to the aristocracy. There never was a race with so many and so various athletes as the American.” He believed that in America, sports contributed to making young people “fair-minded, confident, courageous, peaceful, and patriotic citizens.”

Like O’Reilly, many middle-class nationalists realized the social role of sports. The creation of American team sports “coincided with an intense wave of political and cultural nationalism” in the late nineteenth and early twentieth

964 O’Reilly, Ethics of Boxing and Manly Sport, 86-87.
centuries. Thanksgiving football games became national spectacles to display American middle-class men’s aggressive masculinity. Baseball and the American Olympic teams were other examples to prove America’s physical and cultural superiority. Baseball was elevated as a national pastime which symbolized American meritocracy and counteracted class and ethnic divisions. The Olympic field became a place where Americans competed with English athletes to prove America’s cultural superiority. Middle-class sportsmen constructed American Olympians as composed of men from every stratum of society across class and ethnicity and justified their success as reflecting the superiority of American way of life.

The social transformation in the late nineteenth century already laid the foundations of the nationalization of prize fighting. Mass technologies like transportation, print, and later, films helped make a fighter a national figure across ethnic divisions and local boundaries. There were also dramatic changes in prize fighting in the 1880s and 1890s which facilitated the Americanization of the brutal sport.

In the late nineteenth century, the second- and third-generation Irish were being Americanized. Accordingly, Irish enclaves “functioned as half-way houses

966 S. W. Pope, Patriotic Games: Sporting Traditions in the American Imagination, 1876-1926 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 37-100, Dyreson, Making the American Team, 96, 100-101, 125-126. The national rivalry between England and America reached its peak when American athletes refused to dip the national flag to the Queen in the opening ceremony of the 1908 London Olympics.
between two cultures.” Politics and sports facilitated the blurring of the boundaries of ethnic enclaves. Prize fighting was a space where Irish American fighters and fight fans raised in traditional Irish families and ethnic enclaves met other people. Sullivan was the first nationally known pugilistic idol who reflected the shifting identity of the second-generation Irish. While many middle-class people saw him as un-American on account of the foreignness of his profession, Sullivan proudly claimed himself as an American. He was a well-known patriot boasting the contribution of the “great Sullivan family” to America.

The changing ethnic geography of prize fighting also helped Sullivan’s claim as a patriot. While Americans were bound for England to seek pugilistic glory and bigger purses in the mid-nineteenth century, the American ring was being “invaded” by English fighters in the late nineteenth century. Some fighters from England and Australia became instant celebrities. Jem Mace, “Tug” Wilson, Charley Mitchell, Peter Jackson, Bob Fitzsimmons, Frank P. Slavin, and Joe Goddard became familiar to American fight followers. American fight fans tried to dismiss them as inferior to native born fighters. But some of them emerged as formidable rivals to native-born fighters and even favorites among fight fans.

This changing aspect of prize fighting intensified nationalism among fight followers, who were increasing in both numbers and in ethnic origins. When English

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969 Sullivan, Life and Reminiscences of a 19th Century Gladiator, 22.
970 National Police Gazette, January 7, 1893, p. 11.
and Australian fighters came to America, their nationality was a disadvantage. In the 1870s, Mace, who endured hostility from Americans and Irish Americans during his fights, wondered if he could get fair ground with “Yanks,” their backers, and spectators.\(^{972}\) In 1882, American fight followers heartily embraced the new champion. Sullivan was not simply another champion. American fight fans finally seemed to have a pugilistic icon comparable to old English fighters. When Australian fighter Frank P. Slavin came to America, he was often promoted as a guy who could “whip any man in the world” or “the heavyweight champion of the world.” Americans, who believed that the only champion was Sullivan, despised Slavin. Spectators hissed him when Slavin first appeared at Madison Square Garden.\(^{973}\) Slavin felt that he was denied “fair treatment” on account of his nationality.\(^{974}\)

Americans displayed their national loyalty in different ways. Fight fans, who placed bets, favored native fighters. The press stressed their nicknames attached to special cities and states.\(^{975}\) On the other hand, an imported fighter was seen as an “invader” against a “Native son.”\(^{976}\) Siler remembered the spite directed against “English pugs.”\(^{977}\) The growing sense of competition between nations in prize fighting led to the stigmatization of fighters from other nations and the questioning of their manliness.

\(^{972}\) Mace, *In Memoriam*, 156.
\(^{973}\) *New York Times*, May 1, 1891, p. 5.
\(^{974}\) Ibid. Also see *New York World*, January 6, 1892, p. 6.
\(^{976}\) *San Francisco Morning Call*, December 24, 1893, p. 20.
Many American fight followers tried to assert their nation’s superiority through Sullivan, a representative of American physical masculinity. Sullivan faithfully responded to the demand. In an 1889 public speech, Sullivan cast himself as a symbol of American athleticism, thus avoiding moral controversies regarding the sport. “There isn't a self respecting American, no matter what tomfool ideas he may have about boxing in general, who does not feel patriotic pride at the thought that a native born American, a countryman of his, can lick any man on the face of the earth.”

His earliest fight with a foreign fighter dated back to 1880, against George Rooke of Manchester, England. His second international fight was held one year later, and the ancient Irish-English rivalry was behind the match. The English fighter, Fred Crossley saw Sullivan as an Irishman, not an American. After he became champion, Sullivan met another English fighter, James Collins, who was better known as “Tug” Wilson. The 1882 bout, which turned out to be a hugging and dodging match, remained the most repugnant fight to Sullivan. In 1884, Sullivan met another English fighter, Alf Greenfield. His next English opponent was his nemesis, Charley Mitchell, who in 1887 and 1888 would give him the hardest matches. Sullivan’s struggles with Englishmen in the ring continued until 1889 when he was matched to Jake Kilrain who had been trained by Mitchell.

As many other middle-class sportsmen of the day, Sullivan also tried to translate his athletic superiority to national and cultural superiority of America. His

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public challenge to title contenders, Frank P. Slavin of Australia and Charles Mitchell of England, on March 5, 1892 ended as follows:

I prefer this challenge should be accepted by smoke of the foreigners who have been sprinting so hard after the American dollars of late, as I would rather whip them than any of my own countrymen…. I intend to keep the championship of the world where it belongs in the land of the free and the home of the brave.\textsuperscript{979}

Sullivan’s foreignness, which his profession signified, drastically decreased during his career. Sullivan’s following was increasingly “above an ethnic group.” “He was the first to take individual sporting celebrity from the neighborhood to the nation.”\textsuperscript{980} Sullivan’s success was not simply an individual achievement. It was seen as a sign of national superiority and the young empire. Richard K. Fox, who could not personally reconcile with him, also saw the emergence of a national hero in Sullivan. He recalled. “His fist seemed like a clapper of some great bell that … boomed the brazen message of America’s glory as a fighting nation from one end of the earth to the other.”\textsuperscript{981} Recollecting Sullivan’s career, sportswriter Willie Green celebrated Sullivan as a symbol of American athletic success and as a loyal American. “Many persons have believed that John L. Sullivan was foreign born. On the contrary, he was

\textsuperscript{979} Corbett, \textit{The Roar of the Crowd}, 166.
\textsuperscript{980} Isenberg, \textit{John L. Sullivan and his America}, 209. His performance as an American was rewarded. Sullivan was often billed as “Yankee Sullivan.”
\textsuperscript{981} Quoted in Isenberg, \textit{John L. Sullivan and his America}, 379.
born at the Highlands, near Boston, on October 15, 1858. During all his public career, if he has been nothing else, he has certainly been a “consistent American.”

However, Sullivan was not only a “consistent American.” He was always ready to shift his identity and to construct himself as a heroic Irishman as well as an American.

As long as Americanization was not a linear process in which an ethnic identity was replaced by an American one, the process experienced continuous disruption. In this sense, the Irish American’s identity was often conflicting. While he proudly claimed his American nationality, Sullivan was also proud of his Irishness. In his 1887 visit to England, Sullivan used symbols to refer to his Irish identity in an exhibition held for the Prince of Wales. Sullivan and his sparring partner, Jack Ashton, wore “emerald-green tights-green as that of the grass fields of Galway-and dotted all over with harps and medallions of famous Irishmen.”

Lawrence J. McCaffrey, one of the most prominent scholars of the Irish diaspora, defines Roman Catholicism as a symbol of connection among involuntarily dispersed Irish people. However, prize fighting, which was often criticized by the Catholic Church and was foreign in its origin, also connected people of Irish descent around the world. In the late nineteenth century, Irish American fighters ritually visited their motherland. Sullivan was one of them. On December 1, 1887, Sullivan

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visited Ireland as a returning hero. More than fifteen thousand people welcomed him at the steamboat landing with two full brass bands playing “patriotic tunes” like “See, the Conquering Hero Comes!” and “The Wearing of the Green.” Sullivan recalled, “I was in the midst of the warm-hearted people from whom I am proud to claim descent.” Sullivan said to the crowd, “As a descendent of Erin’s Isle, I will endeavor always to prove myself worthy of your attention and to uphold the honor of my father’s native home.”

Sullivan also participated in the nationalistic ritual of visiting the Curragh of Kildare, a natural amphitheater where Dan Donnelly had defeated a series of English fighters in the early 1800s.

Sullivan was both an Americanizing agent and a proud Irishman. However, Sullivan more often took the middle ground as an Irish American man. He was loyal to both his suffering motherland and America. In his 1887 visit to England, Sullivan refused to cheer for Queen Victoria. Sullivan explained the situation in his interview with the San Francisco Call. “I hadn’t been brought up to seeing Irishmen drinking to the heath of English monarchs … Gilliespie was polite enough to get on his feet, but I reached for his collar and jerked him back into his seat. ‘You must stick to Uncle Sam, Mike,’ I said to him.”

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986 Sullivan, Life and Reminiscences of a 19th Century Gladiator, 193. Also see Chicago Tribune, December 12, 1887, p. 1.

987 In 1815, Dan Donnelly had a famous eleven-round battle with a renowned English champion, George Cooper and defeated him. After the fight, Donnelly went to England and conquered all famous English fighters. Patrick Myler, Regency Rogue: Dan Donnelly: His Life and Legends (Dublin: O’Brien, 1976), 50-55. Donnelly was a symbol of Irish nationalism. O’Reilly saw Donnelly as a “man of extraordinary strength, good temper, generosity, and pluck” and Sullivan as his reincarnation.

Sullivan’s dual identity was a choice. In 1884, Sullivan met an English fighter, Alf Greenfield in Boston. From its start, Sullivan was in the middle of a hot ethnic rivalry between English sportsmen and Irish Americans supporters, who made up a majority of the crowd. When two men shook their hands, an Englishman shouted, “Remember hold H'ingland and knock is bloody ’ed hoff.” An Irish American man in the crowd shouted back, “Remember Limerick and put your mark on him. John L.” Sullivan both accommodated to and contradicted the ethnic rivalry by displaying his dual identities and translating the fight into an ethnic and national rivalry. “A number of times while I was convincing Alf that the twined American and Irish flags about my body was a hoodoo on him, he asked me not to hit him so hard.” While the fight progressed, a veteran Irish American boxer, Mike Donovan, was brawling with a group of Englishmen who called on their boy to “knock the blooming Yankee’s ’ead h’off.” Irish American men continued to shift their identity situationally.

In the late nineteenth century, Irish Americans often used symbols to express their dual identities. The cultural phenomenon was also reflected in Irish Catholic events. For instance, Chicago’s Confirmation Day parades featured brass bands and American flags. Sullivan also actively displayed his twin identities by symbols.

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989 In 1649, Oliver Cromwell recaptured most portions of Ireland from Catholic rebels. Anti-Catholic legislation followed. Limerick was a city in middlelands which was a stronghold of the Irish Catholic resistance to England. McCaffrey, *The Irish Catholic Diaspora in America*, 23-24.
990 *San Francisco Call*, June 25, 1905, p. 4; Donovan, *Roosevelt That I know*, 105.
Sullivan’s color for the heavyweight championship fight with Ryan in 1882 was a “white handkerchief with a green border; in the left-hand upper corner was an American flag, in the right-hand upper corner an Irish flag, in the lower left-hand corner an American flag, and in the lower right-hand corner an Irish flag. In the center was an American eagle.”993 In 1889, Sullivan carried his color of green for the fight with Jake Kilrain and expressed his antagonism toward an English fighter, Charley Mitchell, who was the manager of his opponent. But at the same time, he wore an American flag belt. Sullivan also fastened an American flag to the stake of his corner.994 Sullivan’s use of both Irish and American symbols became his trademark.995 It also became a motif of a popular vaudeville song.

His colors are the Stars and Stripes,

He also wears the green,

And he’s the grandest slugger that

The ring has ever seen,

No fighter in the world can beat

Our true American,

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992 He was not the first Irishman who displayed his identity by symbols. For instance, in the mid-nineteenth century, “Yankee Sullivan,” waived an American flag to display his loyalty to the host nation against anti-Irish sentiments among native-born Americans.

993 Sullivan, Life and Reminiscences of a 19th Century Gladiator, 78.

994 The Modern Gladiator, 130; Weekly Courier Journal, July 15, 1889, p. 5.

995 The Modern Gladiator, 60, 62.
The champion of all champions

Is John L. Sullivan! 996

In 1887, a championship belt, awarded to him by Boston mayor Hugh O’Brien, reflected the public display of dual identities. It was a huge diamond and gold belt four feet long and four feet wide with “a great center medallion [that] spelled his name in diamonds, and four panels on either side [that] depicted the emblems of America and Ireland.”997 On account of Sullivan’s famous display of twin identity, some people related his athleticism to the ideal of America as an ethnic amalgam. Many anonymous poems praised Sullivan. One of them made Sullivan himself a symbol of new America.

You valiant Sons of Erin’s Isle

And sweet Columbia too,

Come, gather ’round, and listen while

I chant a stave for you.

Oh! Fill your glass up, every man,

With Irish Whiskey, stout;

And drink to John L. Sullivan,

The famous “Koncker-out.”998

998 National Police Gazette, June 6, 1885, p. 10.
After their fierce fight, Sullivan and Greenfield did not forget that they were participating in a manly ritual. Greenfield calmly admitted that he lost to the “strongest man in the world.” An ethnic and national rivalry between Sullivan and Greenfield was diminished in this masculine ritual. They symbolized it with a warm hug. While gender boundaries relieved ethnic and national rivalry, masculinity also played an important role in the construction of ethnic and national identity. The Irish in Ireland constructed their self-image through cultural nationalism from the 1880s. Anti-English sentiment combined with political movements would be revived in the Easter Rebellion of 1916. However, in the 1880s and 1890s, Irish Americans still held strong anti-English sentiments. Sullivan’s anti-English sentiments often made him deny the manhood of English fighters.

Sullivan called his English rivals, “Tug” Wilson and Charley Mitchell, “two artful dodgers from England.” Sullivan denied Wilson’s courage and gameness, the most important traits for a fighter. Sullivan was disgusted at Wilson’s floor crawling and hugging to avoid punishments and prolong the match. Before and after the match with Wilson, Sullivan questioned Wilson’s courage. “Wilson won’t stand up before a man, and resorts to tricks in the prize ring to down his antagonist.” “Tug Wilson was a coward … He acted cowardly with me.”

999 *San Francisco Call*, June 25, 1905, p. 4.
1002 Ibid., 239.
Sullivan also stressed Wilson’s lack of courage citing his backer’s disappointing remark. “He made a masterly but inglorious retreat, ungratefully leaving in the lurch those who had been his best friends.”

American fight fans also sided with Sullivan. While Wilson survived Sullivan’s blows in a four-rounder at Madison Square Garden with his dodging tactic in 1882, American fight fans saw Wilson as a greedy man who did not recognize manly honor. Ex-Senator Tim McCarthy believed that Wilson had fought merely for the money. Wilson’s style was disgusting to American fight fans. An American supporter of Sullivan said, “The power of Victoria’s court will not protect the expert dodger when John meets him the second time.” In 1889, a famous sportswriter, John B. McCormick, also ridiculed Wilson, who “by dint of falling at the slightest touch, succeeded in lasting out four rounds,” and “went back to England with more money for the performance than he had made in the whole course of his life before.” To McCormick, Wilson exchanged money for his manly honor.

Sullivan saw the English prize ring as a foot race for sprinters who fell down without being hit to escape punishments. For this reason, he did not respect another English nemesis, Charley Mitchell, as a boxer. While some American fight fans expressed antagonism toward Mitchell, Sullivan fought with him under the London Prize Ring rules in 1887 and 1888. Before the fight, Sullivan continued to

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1005 Sullivan, Life and Reminiscences of a 19th Century Gladiator, 103.
1006 Ibid., 101.
1007 Ibid., 103.
1009 Sullivan, Life and Reminiscences of a 19th Century Gladiator, 246.
question Mitchell’s’ courage calling him a “sprinter.” “You are not signing for a foot-
race.” “You’ll find even that (a twenty-four-foot ring) too small to skulk in when the
day comes.” The fight ended in a draw. While he never subscribed to the middle-
class sporting ideal, Sullivan did not hesitate to use sportsmanship to impugn
Mitchell’s gamesmanship. “Had I desired to practice the trick of the London prize
ring rules I had good opportunities to do so by giving my weight to Mitchell; but I
tried my best to avoid falling on him.” According to Sullivan, Mitchell’s unmanly
tactic was to “make the fight last as long as possible, depending upon police
interference and hoping to make a draw.” Sullivan argued that Mitchell was foxy
but did not know what honor meant.

In contrast, Sullivan respected his Irish American rivals like Paddy Ryan and
Jake Kilrain as plucky fighters, who were faithful to the old working-class ethos in
prize fighting. Sullivan also toppled racial hierarchies to affirm the ethnic and
national superiority. He classified a Maori fighter, Hebert A. Slade, into the “gamest
group” whose members fought him “like a man” without resorting to any “trickery or
petty dirtiness.”

The relational construction of Irish American masculinity in the ring clarified
national boundaries and referred to American cultural superiority. While hierarchies
between managers and players were being consolidated in professional sports,

1010 Donovan, Roosevelt That I Know, 132; Sullivan, Life and Reminiscences of a 19th Century
Gladiator, 155, 246.
1011 Ibid., 200-201.
1012 Ibid., 240.
1014 Sullivan, Life and Reminiscences of a 19th Century Gladiator, 234.
Americans still believed that their way of playing sports was unique. For instance, baseball fans constructed the sport as a symbol of American democracy. As a patriot who believed that America was a free land, Sullivan saw the dark shadow of a hierarchized society and a colonist in his English opponents’ parties. In so doing, Sullivan constructed fighters as symbols of American equality and democracy. He also constructed the national uniqueness and superiority as many middle-class sportsmen of the day did.

Sullivan belittled Wilson for being under the watchful eyes of his manager. To Sullivan, their relationship reminded him of that between a master and a servant. Sullivan was not the only fighter who thought that English style human relations denied a fighter’s manliness. A veteran Irish American fighter, Mike Donovan, who was a member of Sullivan’s party in the 1889 fight with Jake Kilrain, felt the same way. When he saw an Irish American fighter, Kilrain, obey his English manager, Charley Mitchell “like a boy,” he became angry. “Jake, what do you let Mitchell order you around for? You are the man who’s going to do the fighting—not he.” In fact, the Sullivan-Kilrain fight was not only a fight between America and England, which Mitchell represented. Americans saw it as a fight between two different lifestyles. While an English sport, Pony Moore, saw the fight simply as a symbolic battle between two nations, a Sullivan supporter, John Gullen, interpreted it in the frame of Americanism and therefore, placed Kilrain outside national boundaries. “I

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1015 A fighter’s party usually included a manager, trainers, and sparring partners. Famous boxers’ parties often included chefs and massagists.

1016 Donovan, Roosevelt That I Know, 114.
am glad Sullivan won, heartily glad. I want none of my countrymen who say, ‘God save the Queen’ to be prominent in this free and enlightened country…. What did Kilrain do? He spoke of the United States with the voice of Charley Mitchell and Pony Moore.”

As many nationalistic middle-class sportsmen, Sullivan and other fight fans constructed America as a culturally distinctive nation. When the supposed cultural affinity between America and England was severed, Sullivan’s inclusive ethnic identity became congruent with national boundaries and supported the multiethnic America. Sullivan further contested the culture of English-style hierarchies when he ignored English etiquette that reflected differences in social status. In his 1887 visit to England, he greeted the Prince of Wales in a casual American way. “How are you, Prince!” It dumbfounded all those present. Sullivan believed that he had “the manly consciousness” of all true Americans. Sullivan also positioned himself as a missionary of American meritocracy and democracy. His biography, written in 1889, described the scene. The “big bodied and level headed young American whose father laid bricks for a dollar and a half a day” was honored. “The son of a poor Irishman felt quite up to the work of shaking hands with the son of a great sovereign, and

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1017 The Modern Gladiator, 187. However, John O’Reilly did not totally deny an Irish American fighter’s masculinity. But he stigmatized English manhood. O’Reilly’s editorial about the fight reminded readers of Charley Mitchell’s nationality and the unfair tactics he used in the match with Sullivan two years ago. O’Reilly criticized Kilrain for trotting round the ring and dropping to the ground without being touched. Nevertheless, O’Reilly constructed the fight as a manly battle. While he was forced to follow the Englishman’s instructions, Kilrain still “stood up manfully.” O’Reilly also stressed that Kilrain did not strike a vomiting Sullivan, and Sullivan refused to give up the battle. O’Reilly’s final verdict of Kilrain expressed his sympathy toward him. “That he endured the attack of Sullivan for so long shows him to be a man of wonderful physique and fortitude.” John Boyle O’Reilly, “Sullivan Still Champion,” Boston Pilot, July 13, 1889, p. 5.

1018 The Modern Gladiator, 81.
meeting him hand to hand and face to face on the great platform of humanity, equal
eights.”

While he policed national boundaries with the sense of American cultural
superiority, to Sullivan, American citizenship was never egalitarian. His own ethnic
and national identity was mediated by race. Many native-born Americans still
harbored anti-Irish and anti-immigration sentiments. But Sullivan tried to build a
social category of “Caucasian” or “white” by drawing the color line. Sullivan
began to draw the color line formally after he became the champion. He also urged
other white fighters not to have a match with a “nigger.” Other famous Irish
American fighters like Jack McAuliffe and Jim Corbett followed his step. The boxers
of French, Polish, and Danish descent would draw the color line in the 1900s.
However, many white boxers were still fighting with black men. Whiteness was not
only a pervasive concept in prize fighting.

In 1892, Jas Daley complained that the ring in England was dominated by
hoodlum rules and asserted that foreign boxers had tainted the American ring. Daley
argued that foreign boxers were essentially criminals, brawlers, and woman

1019 Ibid., 80.
1020 See Letter from Theodore Roosevelt to Joshua David Hawley, Joshua David Hawley, Theodore
1021 Blacks and early Irish immigrants blurred social and cultural boundaries in the mid-nineteenth
century. These Irish immigrants and freed blacks lived together in cities. Sexual contacts were not
uncommon. The Irish and freed blacks, who shared the memory of oppression, were sympathetic to
each other. However, beginning in the 1840s, Irish immigrants started to treasure their whiteness.
Roediger, The Wages of Whiteness, 133-137. Competition between Irish and blacks in labor market
intensified racial tensions. These conflicts led to race riots. A representative case was the Memphis
Riot of 1866. Irish policemen and firemen together with white laborers and small businessmen
attacked former black soldiers and black residents. About racial tension between the working-class
Irish and blacks, see Joseph K. Griffis, Tahan, Out of Savagery into Civilization: An Autobiography
(New York: George H. Doran Company, 1915), 211-212.
1022 Pollack, In the Ring with James J. Corbett, 169.
beaters. In fact, his comments represented American fight fans’ concerns about an unbearable threat from foreign boxers who competed for the title of the “king of physical manhood in the world.” Sullivan, who was then thirty-five years old, had been out of condition for several years. English and Australian boxers made up a large portion of potential contenders. American fight fans were waiting for a new symbol of American masculinity to ensure that the title remained on American soil.

In 1892, the Olympic Club of New Orleans held three title matches. In the first, Jack Skelly, who challenged the black featherweight champion, George Dixon, carried a color which was decorated with an Irish and an American flag. The color had an inscription, “Our Brooklyn Boy, New Orleans, Sept. 6, 1892” in the center. Thus, as other Irish American boxers had done, Skelly displayed his affection for old homeland and identification with his adopted nation, and also made himself a local icon. However, Americans’ attention was placed on the heavyweight championship match between Sullivan and a young challenger from San Francisco. As usual, Sullivan entered the ring wearing green trunks and carrying an American flag. However, the result of the bout was unexpected. A young Irish American boxer, James J. Corbett, ended Sullivan’s ten-year reign. After the match, the two men made the fight a nationalistic event rather than a manly ritual. Sullivan made a speech in the center of the ring. “If I had to get licked I’m glad I was licked by an American.” Sullivan also proclaimed that he was glad that the title remained on American soil.

1024 New York Sun, October 3, 1892, p. 5.
1025 New York Times, September 8, 1892, p. 3.
1026 Donovan, Roosevelt That I know, 186; National Police Gazette, September 24, 1892, p. 2.
Corbett held a benefit for the defeated champion in New York. Despite his resentment of Corbett, Sullivan praised him and reiterated his patriotism. Sullivan proclaimed that Corbett would keep the title in American against Charley Mitchell.\(^{1027}\)

While Corbett was the champion, the national rivalry in the ring intensified. The rivalry placed the national pride on a boxer’s shoulder. Sportwriter Sandy Griswold described the scenes of the Joe Goddard-Ed Smith fight held at the Olympic Club of New Orleans in 1893. The “Denver man” was mismatched with the Australian. However, the “courageous American” was ready to mix with Goddard. “Each was striving for a knockout blow, and when it came, and from the little American at that, the scene in the big arena was even wilder than those that followed the downfall of the mighty John L. Men climbed on their seats and with waving hats yelled until they could yell no more.” Griswold knew that the stake of the fight was the “pride of the nation.”\(^{1028}\)

As an American, Corbett already felt his rivalry with foreign boxers even before he defeated Sullivan. Corbett had issued a formal challenge to an Australian boxer, Frank P. Slavin, on November 3, 1890. In spite of his strained relationship with Sullivan, Corbett was upset at Slavin who spoke disparagingly of Sullivan. Corbett said, “And, after expressing yourself quite freely regarding him, your insinuations are directed toward American fighters in general. Now, my dear sir, there’s one American who has not accomplished one-half as much as Mr. Sullivan,

\(^{1027}\) *National Police Gazette*, October 1, 1892, p. 3; *New York Times*, September 8, 1892, p. 3; *Irish World*, October 8, 1892, p. 7.

\(^{1028}\) *Omaha Daily Bee*, March 4, 1893, p. 2.
but who deems it pleasure to accord you a meeting.”\textsuperscript{1029} After he became the heavyweight champion of the world, Corbett Americanized his body and accepted his patriotic duty. On September 23, 1892, Corbett made a speech at Holmes’ Star Theater in Brooklyn. “In a short time I shall be prepared to protect the heavy weight championship, and I hope to keep it in America.” Corbett accepted the challenge of the English champion, Charley Mitchell, in 1893. Moralists did not acknowledge Corbett’s nationalistic claim and agitated against two “notorious fighters.” However, Corbett responded with a speech in the Grand Opera House in Wilmington, Delaware. “I am now training for my contest with Mr. Mitchell and promise you to do my level best to keep championship this side of the water.”\textsuperscript{1030}

Mitchell was still one of the most threatening foreign boxers. In fact, he also inspired some Anglo-Saxon Americans to police ethnic boundaries and counteracted the Irish American champion’s claim to be a symbol of national identity and superiority. For instance, before the 1894 fight with Corbett, Mitchell’s party received a bottle of brandy from a Kentucky liquor dealer with a message. “The brandy is 100 years old. TAKE WITH YOU TO Mitchell’s corner, use it, and victory will perch upon the banner of the Briton.”\textsuperscript{1031}

Corbett’s manager, William Brady viewed Mitchell as a “fighter in the full sense of the word.”\textsuperscript{1032} Nevertheless, Brady did not depict him as a fair dealer. In fact,

\textsuperscript{1029} San Francisco Chronicle, November 3, 1890, p. 3.
\textsuperscript{1030} New York Times, October 6, 1893, p. 9.
\textsuperscript{1031} New York Times, January 27, 1894, p. 6.
\textsuperscript{1032} Brady, A Fighting Man, 127.
Brady doubted if this “little Englishman” was really ready to fight. Like Sullivan, Brady believed that the English boxer was “a little game cock” who did anything to win. Brady recalled the Corbett-Mitchell fight in 1894, “The second round Corbett went at Mitchell viciously and knocked him down. But no sooner was the Englishman on the ground than he began uttering disgusting awful things about Corbett, with the idea of making ‘Pompadour Jim’ lose his head. Corbett grew white with rage.”

While Corbett claimed himself as a symbol of American masculinity, he was still an Irishman. A pompadour was a hairstyle which was seen as a symbol of Americanization. Corbett, who was famous for his cool head during a fight, totally lost control. Corbett’s fight with Mitchell was the most vicious of his career. In the second round, Corbett, who was maddened by “his opponent’s virile epithet,” finished the match. Brady remembered, “It was evident to all that unless something was done he would strike or kick the prostrate man and lose by a foul.”

Corbett did not participate in the manly ritual with Mitchell by refusing to shake hands with him and console him after the match. He never blurred national boundaries in his relationship with Mitchell. Rather, Corbett used the foreign fighter’s villainous image and growing anti-English sentiments among Americans to make himself an American hero. Corbett’s famous play, Gentleman Jim, depicted Corbett’s life as a young bank clerk in California. The play featured a villain who tried to steal his girlfriend. The villain robbed Corbett’s bank and placed the blame on Corbett. He

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1033 Ibid., 105-108.  
1034 Ibid., 109.  
1036 Brady, A Fighting Man, 108.
also sent for an English boxer, Charlie Twitchell, who was probably a caricature of Mitchell. As expected, the play ended with Corbett’s victory over Twitchell.\textsuperscript{1037}

As with other amateurs, Theodore Roosevelt was critical of professionalism in sports. Nevertheless, he still believed that American professionals were different from those in England. According to Roosevelt, an American professional was “apt to be a gentleman of more or less elegant leisure, aside from his special pursuit.”\textsuperscript{1038} In fact, he was waiting for gentleman professionals who could fight for the honor of their nation. By making himself a gentleman boxer, Corbett constructed America as the nation with a unique and superior culture. In so doing, Corbett helped blur ethnic boundaries in America and police national boundaries.

Corbett was raised in a working-class Irish immigrant family in San Francisco. His parents held the diasporic memory of Ireland and their relatives. Corbett was proud of his Irish blood.\textsuperscript{1039} However, he was also a class aspirant. As a teenager, he joined one of the most prestigious amateur athletic clubs in San Francisco. Corbett became a boxing instructor for the club and enjoyed associations with distinguished members. Unlike most other fighters, he had never worked as a manual laborer. Corbett had more education than most Irish American fighters and became a bank clerk. Corbett learned the need of a disciplined lifestyle when he was still young.\textsuperscript{1040} Corbett projected an image of a “proto-Ivy Leaguer” with handsome

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[1037]{Patrick Myler, \textit{Gentleman Jim Corbett: A True behind a Boxing Legend} (London: Robson Books, 1998), 70.}
\footnotetext[1038]{Roosevelt, “Professionalism in Sports,” 190.}
\footnotetext[1039]{Corbett, \textit{The Roar of the Crowd}, 18-19, 16.}
\footnotetext[1040]{Ibid., 36-37.}
\end{footnotes}
and intelligent face and genteel manners, which contrasted to Sullivan’s image as a hard drinker and brawler.\textsuperscript{1041}

Corbett’s lifestyle and tidy look gave him an unusual nickname, “Gentleman.” But Sullivan viewed Corbett as a “damned dude.”\textsuperscript{1042} In fact, Sullivan’s remark reflected the popular sentiment of working-class Irish American fight followers. Corbett resented his unpopularity among his countrymen:

My unpopularity with the Irish struck me as rather peculiar, for everybody that ever belonged to me, as far back as we could trace, was Irish through and through, and Sullivan, like myself, was born in this country, of Irish parents. Of course this attitude was due to Sullivan’s disposition, which was just the right mixture of good nature, aggressiveness and temper for a fighter, so people thought; while I was always more controlled and a little too businesslike, perhaps, to vie with him in popularity. Then, though I entered saloon occasionally, I did not care to waste a lot of time standing up against the bars of any city I happened to be in.\textsuperscript{1043}

The two Irish American champions thus represented the contest of ideal masculinities among Irish American men. While Sullivan embodied working-class masculinity, Corbett symbolized a disciplined, rational, and goal-oriented middle-

\textsuperscript{1041} John V. Kelleher, “Irishness in America,” \textit{Atlantic}, 208 (July 1961), 38, quoted in Fanning, \textit{The Irish Voice in America}, 156.
\textsuperscript{1042} Boddy, \textit{Boxing}, 113.
\textsuperscript{1043} Corbett, \textit{The Roar of the Crowd}, 171-172.
class man. Corbett was “hailed as a thinking man's fighter, pleasing those who saw Sullivan as a working-class bully but also modeling Irish America's upward mobility.” Accordingly, the two men represented cultural divisions in an ethnic group. At the same time, they also appealed to Americans across ethnic boundaries and became national icons. However, while Sullivan appealed to working-class men, Corbett appealed to “the better class of people.” In this sense, Corbett’s constructed himself as a symbol of social mobility rather than an ethnic working-class hero.

Like Sullivan, Corbett asserted American physical superiority. But Corbett also tried to represent American cultural uniqueness and superiority. He contrasted the working-class Irish American man’s healthy image to foreign boxers’ suspicious character. Corbett’s tour in England in 1893 was not financially successful. While he knew that the boxing tour was unsuccessful on account of anti-American sentiment, Brady attributed the failure of the tour to English people’s sense of inferiority against the “exceeding wholesomeness of the American champion.” While Mitchell symbolized the “Old world’s scum,” Corbett symbolized the uplift of the Irish and the working classes in America. The American champion constructed himself as a polarization of Mitchell in England and acted to suite middle-class tastes in England.

1044 Cannon, “The Heavyweight Champion of Irishness: Ethnic Fighting Identity Today,” 94. Also see Brady, A Fighting Man, 96.
1045 Ibid., 87, 172. Also see National Police Gazette, September 2, 1905, p. 4.
1046 Brady, A Fighting Man, 16. For instance, Corbett refused to be entertained by English animal sports.
While he acted as a symbol of social mobility in America, Corbett was also a missionary of American equality and democracy. A report identified the differences between Corbett’s and Mitchell’s training camps for their 1894 fight. The report depicted Corbett’s training camp as a cordial and non-hierarchical organization. Corbett’s trainers and manager maintained their authority because Corbett deferred to their opinions. The reporter contrasted the small version of America to Mitchell’s camp at Anastasia Island where the Englishman was a “ruler.” The reporter failed to find the “spirit of cordiality” that he noted at Corbett’s.  

On his visit to England, Corbett revolted against the old status society by refusing to follow an old custom of the National Sporting Club, which required boxers to use the back door so that gentlemen could use the front. According to Brady, Corbett “arranged to give the English public a view of an American athletic club” which became more egalitarian with the popularity of professional fights.

Corbett and boxing insiders also constructed American cultural superiority in another way. Except for rich social elites who emulated European refinement, many Americans searched for something distinctively American in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Corbett’s style was American. However, it was seen as not only unique but also superior. In his 1892 fight against Sullivan, Corbett displayed a different style from slugging which had grown with American fighters for several decades. Corbett’s style also contrasted to an English style which was brought to the U.S. by imported boxers. Corbett was a boxer with a “style peculiarly his own” which

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1047 *Chicago Tribune*, January 21, 1894, p. 25.
1048 Brady, *A Fighting Man*, 111.
had evolved in athletic clubs.\textsuperscript{1049} Corbett articulated the style called “scientific boxing.” He was known “as a skilled ring scientist rather than a physical “phenom.”\textsuperscript{1050} Corbett’s new boxing style and disciplined lifestyle made him embrace the middle-class concept of sports which stressed the balanced development of moral, intelligence, and physicality. Corbett gave his style a nationality. According to Edward Russell, an English journalist who visited Corbett’s training camp, Corbett was proud to call his American style of fighting “boxing.”\textsuperscript{1051}

A boxing critic, Robert Edgren saw the emergence of the superior American style of fighting in Corbett’s civilized and scientific boxing. According to Edgren, Sullivan was the last American fighter who fought an English style, and Corbett and American boxers were innovators. Edgren attributed the innovation of style to American society’s culture in which social status did not define one’s position and social mobility allowed creative people to be promoted. According to Edgren, the new American style of boxing referred not only to American exceptionalism but also to its cultural superiority.\textsuperscript{1052} The emergence of a new style of boxing and the distinction between the American and English styles empowered American boxers and experts and helped them construct an affirmative national identity and police national boundaries. Battling Nelson, who was a renowned Danish American boxer, proudly believed that while England began modern boxing, it was Americans who

\textsuperscript{1049} Forth Worth Gazette, August 25, 1895, p. 7.
\textsuperscript{1050} Cannon, “The Heavyweight Champion of Irishness: Ethnic Fighting Identity Today,” 95.
\textsuperscript{1051} Russell, That Remind Me, 189.
\textsuperscript{1052} Robert Edgren, “The Modern Gladiator: Why the American Succeeds-Brute Strength superseded by Scientific Cleverness,” Outing, 41, no. 6 (March 1903), 738.
had brought the sport “a scientific basis.”\textsuperscript{1053} A boxing critic, R. A. Smyth, also claimed the superiority of the American style. The direction of cultural dissemination was reversed. He was proud that English fighters were absorbing the “American style of fighting” and the American style of training.\textsuperscript{1054} Sullivan and Corbett diversely constructed themselves as the symbols of American physical and cultural superiority. In the age of nationalism, these Irish American fighters were also diversely constructed in relation to Americanism.

4. The Ring after Corbett

In 1895, Corbett, who was busy with his touring shows, planned to retire. But he still wanted the title in the hands of a special ethnic group whom he believed pugilistic glory to belong to. He said, “I bestowed the championship upon [Peter] Maher because he is an Irishman,” he said, “and because I prefer that he should bear and defend that title, rather than place it in the custody of either an Australian or an Englishman.”\textsuperscript{1055} In fact, Maher was a foreigner from Ireland. He had no “science.” All he had in common with Corbett was an Irish heritage. While Corbett’s remark showed that he was still loyal to his homeland, it also represented that there was no appropriate American title contender in his class.

\textsuperscript{1053} Washington Herald, May 15, 1910, p. 36.
\textsuperscript{1054} San Francisco Call, November 17, 1907, p. 34. However, not all Americans welcomed the new style. Some saw American boxing as too skillful and scientific. They were critical of the style which lost brutality and fighting spirit. Public Opinion, 56, 5 (May 1914), 360.
\textsuperscript{1055} National Police Gazette, December 14, 1895, p. 11.
However, the end of Corbett’s career could not come in that way. Like every other champion boxer, he had to be defeated to leave the ring. In 1897, while Irish American boxers usually avoided having bouts on St. Patrick’s Day, Corbett decided to meet his formidable Australian contender on that day. To some native-born American moralists, Corbett’s decision symbolized the inseparable relationship between his race and the brutal sport. His decision also infuriated Catholic priests and many middle-class Irish Americans who had fought against the commercialization and working-class leadership of the ceremonies for St. Patrick’s Day. Jerome Deasy, who was one of delegates in the St. Patrick’s Day convention of San Francisco, defined prize fighting as an immoral recreation and criticized his hometown boy. While not all delegates viewed the fight as desecrating St. Patrick’s Day, the St. Patrick's Day convention of San Francisco passed a resolution censuring the fight managers for “desecrating the festival day of Ireland's patron saint.”

Archbishop John Ireland, who had led anti-prize fight agitation, characterized prize fighting as “barbarism,” and “animalism,” and declared it as a “disgrace to Christian civilization.” He also urged all citizens to fight against the kinetoscopic reproduction of the fight.

While many middle-class Irishmen had constructed it as a solemn religious and political occasion, Corbett contested the meaning of St. Patrick’s Day. He wanted

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1056 A San Francisco pastor pointed out that the “disgusting exhibition” would be held on St. Patrick’s Day. He related the sport to the Irish race. “Well, the Emerald Island supplies a large portion of the world’s professional sluggers, and the sons of the Emerald Island chose the day of all the year they love the best.” *San Francisco Call*, March 15, 1897, p.4, March 18, 1897, p. 1.

1057 *San Francisco Call*, February 22, 1897, p. 5.

1058 *North American*, March 23, 1897, p. 3.
to celebrate the day with a masculine Irish working-class ethos which was expressed in a pleasure-seeking commercial entertainment. Many Irish Americans were behind Corbett. According to a report, in Chicago, which had a large Irish American population, the fight attracted huge attention. The “people of Irish birth and parentage” were “out in full force and augmented the crowds at various points.”

“‘Pompadour Jim’ was the favorite at all these places and among the thousands who blocked the streets opposite newspaper offices and saloon resorts.” However, while many Irish Americans reconstructed their ethnic identity through the fight on St. Patrick’s Day, the report contested the meaning of the fight. It was well known that Corbett did not like being called “Pompadour Jim,” but the report used the nickname to make him a symbol of American masculinity.

Before the match, Corbett was encouraged to win for America by the ex-Senator from Kansas, John J. Ingalls. Corbett’s party carried two colors--an American flag and a green flag. Brady “tied two colors to the post in his corner of the ring.” In order to stress national boundaries between them, Corbett wore red trunks “with the stars and stripes draped around him.” Corbett also refused to shake hands and disclosed his intention not to participate in a manly ritual with a man whom he considered as a rude foreigner. The crowd hissed a little at this violation of ring etiquette. As many expected, Corbett won every round until the fourteenth. But in the fourteenth round, Fitzsimmons’ terrific left landed in Corbett’s stomach and ended

1059 San Francisco Call, March 18, 1897, p. 3.
1060 San Francisco Call, March 18, 1897, p. 3. Also see Chicago Tribune, March 18, 1897, p. 8.
the bout. Furious, Corbett could not admit his loss and rushed to Fitzsimmons. They wrestled until deputy marshals separated them.

The new symbol of masculinity was a New Zealander of English parentage. Many Irish Americans felt loss. Frank G. Walker, who marched in the St. Patrick’s Day parade as the smallest of St. Patrick Parochial cadets at Anaconda, Montana, heard the news from Carson City on the way back to his home in Butte. “I am heartbroken to learn that my idol, James J. Corbett, had been defeated. My loyalties were decidedly with Corbett.”

The era of great Irish American champions had ended. But a symbol, which they used to display their identity, was left to other boxers. After Corbett was counted out, Fitzsimmons “grabbed an American flag from his belt and waved it high.” The national flag became a popular item for American boxers. The ring increasingly became a space for patriotic rituals. The patriotic music was played in arenas and clubhouses. Patriotism prevailed across ethnic boundaries. Bob Fitzsimmons and Jim Jeffries, who was of Scotch-Dutch descent, wore American flags in their championship fight in 1899. Green colors also remained. But at the turn of the century, black and white colors became more fashionable.

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1062 *St. Paul Globe*, July 26, 1902, p.1; *San Francisco Call*, November 2, 1899, p. 4; August 27, 1904, p. 4; Edgren, “Fighters by Nature,” 343.
1063 *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 7, 1898, p. 9.
1064 *San Francisco Call*, August 27, 1904 p. 4.
Beginning in the 1880s, new immigrants from southern and eastern Europe became a main source of unskilled labor, replacing the Irish Americans and penetrating Irish ethnic enclaves. They also gradually challenged Irish American boxers’ superiority in the ring. In 1908, the featherweight champion was a Jewish American, Abe Atell. The lightweight champion, Joe Gans was black. The welterweight champ, Stanley Ketchel, was a Polish American. Hugo Kelly, the middleweight champion was Italian. The ring was ethnically diversified by champions of nationalities which had only “in the past year broken into the game.”1066 With prevailing patriotism, white was becoming a popular social category among ethnically diverse boxers and fight fans. The rivalry between Irish Americans and the English and Australian in the ring shifted to racial tensions. Like Corbett, Fitzsimmons, and Jeffries, many white boxers drew the color line. Nevertheless, the reproduction of ethnicity through the ring never disappeared.

Though the era of glorious Irish American fighters was the past, the Catholic Church remained hostile to the sport. Cardinal James Gibbon and Bishop James E. Quigley led anti-prize fighting movements.1067 However, many Irish American middle-class men held a nostalgic memory of Irish American fighting.1068 While the relationship between the Irish Americans and prize fighting was weakened,

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1067 *Kentucky Irish American*, September 12, 1908, p. 2.
organizations like the Irish American Athletic Club and the Hibernian Society brought fights to more “respectable” elements of the Irish.\(^{1069}\)

Irish Americans, who still made up a large portion of fight followers, did not seem to be impressed by non-Irish American boxers.\(^{1070}\) However, not only Irishmen in America were nostalgic of old Irish-blooded fighting heroes. Unlike other sports, an Irish-style name had capital in the business of boxing.\(^{1071}\) Boxing critics still viewed an Irish American boxer as having “all of the fighting qualities of his race.”\(^{1072}\) Many fight fans still believed “the gameness of the race and their natural love of combat” gave them a “monopoly on the game.”\(^{1073}\) “The ring hero, who was “Irish in extraction,” had “the inside rail in the race for popularity.”\(^{1074}\) But ethnic boundaries became more artificial in this commercial sport. The grafting of the Irish boxing identity onto a fighter was often “transparent.” “In the first half of the twentieth century, this could be as simple as adopting a ring name that spoke to a dominant local ethnic group. Fighters identified as Irish had varied ancestries, and their Irishness was mediated, even wholly fictionalized, by the desires of promoters, press, and consumers.”\(^{1075}\)


\(^{1070}\) Charles E. Van Loan, Taking the Count: Prize Ring Stories (New York George H. Doran Company, 1915), 149.

\(^{1071}\) Steven A. Riess, Sport in Industrial America 1850-1920 (Wheeling, Harlan Davidson, 1995), 104. For instance, a baseball star, Jim O’Rourke, was encouraged to give up O from his name. Richard F. Peterson, “Slide, Kelly, Slide”: The Irish in American Baseball” in New Perspectives on the Irish Diaspora, ed. Charles Fanning (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000), 182.

\(^{1072}\) San Francisco Call, February 14, 1908, p. 12.

\(^{1073}\) Salt Lake Herald, January 27, 1908, p. 8.

\(^{1074}\) Washington Post, September 2, 1907, p. 8.

In fact, Irish names were often floating signifiers. Many boxers took Irish
cognomens to be drawing cards. Edward Blazwick, who was born in Austria to
Croatian parents, began his career as “Young Olsen, the Gangling Swede,” and
finally became “Kid” Carter. Noah Brusso became a heavyweight champion fighting
as Tommy Burns. The son of Italian immigrant, Andrew Chiariglione became Jim
Flynn. Many Italians fought under Irish cognomens. Even Jack Dempsey was
of scandalously uncertain origins, but took his ring name from an Irish-born
middleweight champion. A search for authenticity was of no use. In 1916, an
Irish American boxing promoter, James Buckley, appeared before the New York
State Athletic Commission as the “champion of the Irish race.” He asked the
commission to pass a rule prohibiting boxers with unpronounceable names from
taking Irish names. While Irish Americans attempted to police ethnic boundaries
in prize fighting, commercialism reproduced Irish identity of which authenticity was
questionable.

However, at the same time, non-Irish ethnicity was also a selling point.
Commercialism often attached ethnic signs to boxers from underrepresented ethnic
groups. Battling Nelson was nicknamed the “Battling Dane” by a San Francisco
journalist, Waldmar Young and promoters popularized the nickname.

1076 “In the Interpreter’s House: In the Defense of Pugilism,” American Magazine, 63, no. 5 (August
1909), 414. Also see Salt Lake Herald, January 27, 1908, p. 8.
1077 Ward, Unforgettable Blackness, 100.
nicknames like “Little Hebrew” Abe Attell, George “Boer” Rodel and “Welshman” Freddie Welsh were also expected to draw more spectators.

Battling Nelson’s career and family history represented the role of the sport in the construction of ethnic groups whose members had only recently entered the ring. His personal history was very similar to that of an Irish American boxer. Nelson, who was born to a working-class family of Danish immigrants, began as a street fighter. Nelson’s fighting ability brought him to small fight clubs. His father tried to persuade him away from his boxing career, but after Nelson won several matches, he came to support his son. Nelson became a hero among Danes in Hegewisch, Illinois.\(^{1082}\)

Jewish and Italian American boxers had similar stories. Many of them were raised in inner-city rivalries, which often led to street fights between the combative elements of each group, and their bout with boxers from other ethnic groups sharpened ethnic identity and cultivated ethnic pride. While some Jewish fighters entered the ring in the 1890s, Joe Choynski was the only Jewish American with a national reputation. Choynski was born to a middle-class family in San Francisco in 1868. His family background was untraditional for a boxer, but Choynski’s father, Isadore, took a pride in his muscular son, who dropped out of high school to practice boxing. He saw ethnic pride in his son’s victory over an Irish American opponent in 1887:

\(^{1082}\) Ibid., 72, 100-101.
We are coming father Abraham! The boys of the Jewish persuasion are getting heavy on their muscle. Many of them are training to knock out J. L., and it may come to pass. It is almost an every occurrence to read in our paper that a disciple of Mendosa … has knock out the best of sluggers, who point with pride to their ancestors…. This week a youngster, who call himself J. B. Choynski, nineteen years old, native of this city, weighing a hundred and sixty pounds, fought for the championship and gold medal with one named [Joe] Connelly, and the lad with the Polish name knocked the well-knitted Irish lad of much experience, out in three rounds, and carried off the medal and the applause triumphantly.\textsuperscript{1083}

Choynski was involved in the rivalries and neighborhood conflicts of San Francisco. He was Corbett’s early rival.\textsuperscript{1084} In his last fight with Corbett in 1889, Choynski who had become a professional boxer a year before was defeated by the promising young Irish American. Choynski fought almost all renowned boxers, including Jack Johnson and Jim Jeffries. However, while Choynski was one of the first class title contenders in the heavyweight class, he did not win the championship.

In the 1900s, Italian American and Jewish American lightweights began to dominate the ring. Harry Harris became the first Jewish American champion by

\textsuperscript{1084} At the turn of the century, “the most popular contests pitted fighters of different ethnic groups against each other, usually Jew against Irish, and each group would come out to support its hero.” Steven A. Riess, “Tough Jews: The Jewish American Boxing Experience, 1890-1950,” in Sports and the American Jew, ed. Steven A. Riess (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1998), 68.
winning the bantamweight championship in 1901. In the same year, Abe Attell, the California featherweight, began his boxing career. Young Attell learned to fight to protect himself from Irishmen in the neighborhood in which his father owned a jewelry shop. He was a typical scientific boxer. In 1903, Attell defeated the famous black boxer, George Dixon, and won the championship, which he would hold for nine years.

Jewish American boxers often wore a Star of David on their trunks. While Yiddish newspapers ignored these Jewish boxers, they were popular heroes among the second generation, especially working-class Jewish men. These ghetto boxers rejected first-generation culture, which devalued physicality and valued intellectual achievement. They also contested “stereotypes about Jewish weakness” in the mainstream. Even some of the first generation elders saw Jewish American boxers’ achievements affirmatively.

Pugilistic heroes, who already gained new meanings in Israel Zangwill’s *Children of Ghetto* (1892), appeared big to many American Jewish men. By the

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1086 Choynski and Attell were differently represented. While big and heavy Choynski was not related to his ethnicity, small and intelligent Attell was often called “the Little Hebrew.” In 1910, both Jewish American boxers supported Jim Jeffries in the Reno fight and displayed antagonism toward the first black heavyweight champion, Jack Johnson.
1087 Many Jewish boxers wore Star of David on their bathrobes and trunks until religious symbols were banned in the 1940s. Bodner, *When Boxing Was a Jewish Sport*, 4.
1089 Levine, *Ellis Island to Ebbets Field: Sport and the American Jewish Experience*, 143.
1091 In his novel, Zangwill featured an old bare-knuckle fighting hero, Dutch Sam (Samuel Elias), as protector of his people.
early 1920s, boxing was familiar to Jewish Americans. According to a Jewish American screenwriter, Budd Schulberg, Jewish American boxers enhanced ethnic pride by proving “their mettle against the toughest and most skillful of the Italians, Irish, and blacks who produced so many stars in those star-studded times.”1092 But Jewish fight followers also cultivated twin identities in contacts with other ethnic groups. Schulberg, who had witnessed Benny Leonard’s match with his father, recalled Jewish Americans’ reaction after his victory. “When Leonard’s hand was raised in victory, he would run his hand over his sleek back hair, and my father, and Al Kaufman, and Al Lichtman, and the rest of the Jewish rooting section would roar in delight.”1093 Thousands of Jewish people were on the Harlem street where Leonard lived and they were waving American flags.

The American ring became a space to police national boundaries and construct national identity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. However, it was never a linear process. The process often accompanied the reproduction of ethnicity. Ethnic identity constructed in prize fighting could disrupt and prolong Americanization. Nevertheless, the reconstruction of ethnic identity often coexisted with and facilitated the emergence of national identity.

1093 Quoted in Levine, “‘Oy Such a Fighter!’: Boxing and the American Jewish Experience,” 264.
Chapter 5

An America Contested within the Ring:

Prize Fighting, Masculinities, and Shifting Racial Boundaries

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, American excellence in sports was often interpreted as reflecting the cultural superiority of America, which was then commonly characterized as a classless democracy and a melting pot. However, this self-congratulatory sporting ideology was a myth. This mythical sporting ideology not only hid class, ethnic, racial, and gender hierarchies in American sports and the nation but also constructed the image of Americans as a virile master race and, therefore, advocated its expansion and imperialism.

Race had always been an important social division in America. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, racial exclusion or segregation prevailed in all social spheres. While the commercialization of leisure made it profitable for proprietors to use all the resources and methods available, the same commercialization never guaranteed black athletes’ positions in commercial sports. In fact, at the turn of the century, some commercial sports that had previously employed black athletes actually expelled them. By the 1900s, black athletes had disappeared from cycling and horseracing in which they had earlier cut a fine figure. However, the most disrespectful sport never totally closed its door to men of color. While

1094 Race is “a category popularly constructed along assumptions of biological dissections indexed by color and then naturalized through cultural practice and ideological work.” Susan Birrell, “Racial Relations Theories and Sport: Suggestions for a More Critical Analysis,” Sociology of Sport Journal, 6, no. 3 (September 1989), 218.
individual white boxers drew this color line by refusing to meet black boxers in the ring, the *New York Sun* asserted that the color line was a “matter of convenience,” not a “result of racial prejudice.” In reality, white boxers tended to draw the color line only after they became champions. Many white boxers readily met blacks when those bouts helped them “advance in point of fame and fortune.” As long as prize fighting claimed to be a manly sport in which the “best man” could win, black boxers continued to be “involved in interracial competitions.” From the 1880s to the 1910s, therefore, the American ring produced such renowned black boxers as Dominick Godfrey, Peter Jackson, George Dixon, Joe Gans, Jack Johnson, and Sam Langford.

While the existence of these black boxers made prize fighting an open space to men of color, prize fighting itself was never a place of racial equality. Blacks in the ring were the objects of racial caricatures and jokes. They fought more often than whites. They were exploited. They often faced unfavorable refereeing. Black men hardly ever entered managerial positions in the sport. Above all, there were always many more whites in the ring. The reason was simple. While fight fans would support mediocre white fighters “eking out a living in the business,” they would not “stand for a dub colored fighter [sic].” In the professional sporting institution, which valued individual merit, blacks had to be better than whites even to survive. The

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1095 White fighters often refused to meet strong black fighters, but most of them fought against black men some time in their careers.  
1096 *New York Sun*, January 10, 1909, p. 10.  
1097 While segregation prevailed, black men could enter the ring to fight white men, even in the South. Nelson, *Life, Battles, and Career of Battling Nelson*, 85.  
1098 *Salt Lake Herald*, January 27, 1908, p. 8.
convergence of masculinities in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was not totally inclusive, nor was it color-blind. Accordingly, prize fighting became an excellent place to examine how racial relations were constructed, mediated, and changed.

Racial relations in sports have drawn many scholars’ attention. However, as Martin Polley points out, studies that illuminate black athletes are often entrapped in reductionism.¹⁰⁹⁹ Studies about black boxers tend to recognize race as the most important social category. Accordingly, these studies often overlook divisions within a racial group, the mediation of racial boundaries, and the continual remaking of those racial boundaries. These studies also often ignore the special characteristics of a sporting institution. Prize fighting was not a racist institution originally. It was a “manly sport” in which playing on fair grounds was idealized and individual merits were appreciated. The characteristics of prize fighting complicated the racial relations that lay within the sport.

Recognizing the complexity of racial relations in a sporting institution helps us see the meaningful cultural phenomena related to prize fighting in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. That is, blacks’ and whites’ experiences often contradicted the binary view of white and black. Whites and blacks situationally and diversely constructed black fighters’ images. Blacks did not embrace their fighting heroes to the same degree. Whites’ recognition of fair play and individual merits also impacted racial boundaries. While the ring with boxers of different colors

competing was often a racial battleground, male bonding between men of different colors also took place in the ring. Black boxers’ agency continued to complicate the process of racialization. The dynamic was especially well represented in a prizefight. The ritualized event was full of tensions, cultural interactions, and the fluidity of identity.\(^{1100}\) As I will show, the 1910 Reno fight was such a contested ritual.

Accordingly, it is an oversimplification to define late nineteenth and early twentieth century prize fighting only as a metaphor for the racialized battle between black and white men or a racist institution in which racist ideology and racial domination were simply reproduced and affirmed. Focusing on the cultural construction of black prizefighters and prize fighting in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, this chapter illuminates how racial boundaries were continuously constructed, mediated, and blurred by agents. Counteracting the reductionist, structuralist, and binary view of race, this chapter illuminates the dynamic of racial relations in prize fighting, more specifically, in the era of Jack Johnson (1908-1913).

1. Black Boxers before Jack Johnson

According to Alexander Johnston, Southern slaveholders introduced prize fighting to America, and black slaves were the first pugilists in America.\(^{1101}\) But the


first black American fighter on record was not a slave. Bill Richmond, who was born in New York, started his pugilistic career in England. In *Boxiana* (1814), Pierce Eagan rated him as a first class fighter.

The second black American fighter, Tom Molineaux, entered the English ring under the patronage of Richmond. As the remaining caricatures of the black giant illustrate, Molineaux was considered a novelty within English sports, but even so, his skills were duly recognized. According to Eagan, “his milling requisites were inferior to none.” The sporting world, which “preferred a white to a black pugilistic champion,” did not ignore the “courageous qualities of Molineaux.” English sporting men were excited about this black man whom they believed to be a match for the English champion, Tom Gribb. Molineaux fought Gribb two times. In the first match on December 18, 1810, Molineaux gave the champion a fearful beating until a broken ring saved Gribb. Molineaux’s performance amazed the English fancy, so he was given another chance. The second fight was an unexpectedly short one. Molineaux’s performance disappointed English fight fans. Nevertheless, English fight fans did not question Molineaux’s courage, intelligence and science. Rather, they believed that Gribb was a more disciplined man. American fight fans shared this dualistic attitude toward Molineaux a century later. Richard K. Fox highly evaluated Molineaux’s courage. However, Fox agreed that Gribb’s temper was “more under

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1104 Ibid., p. 339.
Many black fighters entered the ring and retired unremembered. Even while fight reporters faithfully documented white fighters’ names, they did not bother to record the obscure black fighters’ names. Not all black fighters were obscure. In the 1880s, some black fighters like George Godfrey and McHenry “Black Star” Johnson became well known among fight fans. However, it was in the 1890s that a large number of black fighters began to earn the spotlight. In 1895, Charles A. Dana, editor of the *New York Sun*, felt that the immense presence of black boxers would lead to the deterioration of the “Caucasian race.” “The black man is rapidly forging to the front in athletics, especially in the field of fisticuffs. We are in the midst of a black rise against white supremacy.”1107 According to a George Siler, while the 1890s was remembered for white heavyweight champions like John L. Sullivan, Jim Corbett, and Bob Fitzsimmons, “the dark-skin glove wallopers practically ruled the pugilistic roost.”1108

Peter Jackson was the most famous of these black boxers. Jackson born in Saint Croix in 1861 earned his pugilistic fame by defeating the Heavyweight Champion of Australia, Tom Lees, in 1886. Jackson came to America in 1888 to fight the heavyweight champion, John L. Sullivan, and instantly became a favorite among

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fight followers in California.1109 In that state, Peter Jackson was called a “modern Samson of their race” and seen as a “vindication of their [blacks’] claim as equal in muscular prowess as the whites.”1110 Fight followers and boxing critics bombarded Joe McAuliffe, who drew the color line to avoid a fight with Peter Jackson. They saw his decision as an “indication of fear” rather than a symbol of racial pride. McAuliffe finally reversed his decision in spite of some fight fans’ complaints.1111 The fight between the two men was one-sided, just as most fight followers expected. Jackson easily defeated his opponent.

While Jackson prepared for the famous fight with a youngster, Jim Corbett, veteran white fight followers generally predicted Jackson’s victory. One day before the fight, a California fight fan interviewed by the *Oakland Tribune* made his judgment based on individual merits, not on race. “There is no doubt whatever that Corbett will make a game tight. In his few ring performances thus far he has shown himself so much better than expectation that it is evident his townsmen underrate him…. This, however, does not prove that he can win in the coming fight, we do not know how good a man must be to defeat Jackson.” Still, the odds were 100 to 80 in favor of Corbett, which was unusual considering that Corbett was a novice. As the fight fan pointed out, however, the pool, which had been selling at that rate, represented “the popular estimation of the two men.”1112 The sense of white racial superiority still prevailed among fight fans. Nevertheless, prominent gambling betters

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1110 *San Francisco Call*, July 22, 1888, p. 1.
1112 *Oakland Tribune*, May 20, 1891, p. 8.
were behind Jackson, who they thought was the better man. The fight ended in a
draw. Corbett objected to the referee’s call for a draw. He believed he was cheated by
San Francisco’s prominent fight fans, who had bet on Jackson.

In spite of the controversy over the match, Corbett did have respect for this
clean, gentle, excellent black fighter. In his autobiography, Corbett detailed the
important moments of the fight. What most impressed Corbett was not Jackson’s
gigantic physique, but his intelligence. Corbett was not hesitant in admitting that
Jackson was better than the white hero in that respect. “In science the Australian
[Jackson], in my opinion, is superior to Sullivan.” The two men enjoyed a
personal friendship in a Turkish bath after the heated contest. Corbett’s attitude
toward Jackson contrasted with his consistent antagonism toward Sullivan, which
continued even after both men retired from the ring.

Jackson constructed his own image as a polite and compliant black man. In
the eyes of whites, Jackson was masculine but did not pose a racial threat. While
white fight fans and the white press called this gracefully mannered man a “Black
Prince” or the “First Black Gentleman,” whites still misused Jackson’s gentility. The
popular touring show, Uncle Tom’s Cabin (1893-4) featured Jackson as Uncle Tom
and constructed him as a compliant black man. Jackson’s role in Uncle Tom’s

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1113 Corbett, The Roar of the Crowd, 132, 140.
1114 Referee, June 25, 1890, quoted in Pollack, In the Ring with James J. Corbett, 166. Many Irish
Americans were obsessed with the color line. Corbett’s father also objected to his son’s fight with a
“nigger.” Corbett, The Roar of the Crowd, 118. Corbett had respect for Jackson and, therefore, saw
him as a foreign boxer or an intelligent boxer, not a “nigger.”
1115 While the play had become a classic in American theaters by the 1890s, it had lost its antislavery
message and was reduced to a “melodramatic tale of good versus evil with heavy racist overtones.”
Susan F. Clark, “Up against the Ropes: Peter Jackson as ‘Uncle Tom’ in America,” TDR, 44, no. 1
Cabin contrasted with that of Jack Johnson in the same play one decade later. The assertive first black heavyweight champion made himself a masculine man in the play. Johnson even introduced a little sparring into the play so that the press complained that he had “degraded the character.”\(^{1116}\) However, while Jackson was victimized, he knew how to use the white press. Jackson was sarcastic about his first renowned white opponent, Jack McAuliffe, and challenged the racial stereotype. “I can’t see anything clever in him. He has great staying power, and could hit you ‘real hard’ if you’d let him! But as far as cleverness is concerned, I think Dooley could outfight him at every point.”\(^{1117}\)

Jackson tried to fight Sullivan, but his attempts were not rewarded. Being called a “Black Prince” did not mean that Jackson always submitted to racial etiquette. He openly questioned the courage of the white masculine symbol. Nevertheless, the heavyweight champion, Sullivan, still did not give Jackson a chance. Many boxing fans and critics were, however, behind Jackson. They demanded that Sullivan “meet all comers.” A report said, “The rules bearing upon fistic encounters, whether of the bare knuckles or of gloves, do not in the remotest way recognize color.”\(^{1118}\) William Brady, who managed the rising star, Corbett, accused Sullivan of bluffing. He thought that Sullivan’s color line was simply his way

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\(^{1116}\) Boddy, *Boxing*, 180.


\(^{1118}\) *Daily Alta California*, January 14, 1889, p. 8. Also see *New York Sun*, April 23, 1890, p. 4.
to avoid Jackson. Nevertheless, many other critics and fans hesitated to question the idea of racial superiority. A white expert admitted that Jackson was a great boxer but he still believed that the best one was white. For him, Jackson was the “greatest fighter in the world … with the exception of Sullivan.” While some fans and experts policed racial boundaries, Sullivan knew that many others questioned his courage. He occasionally lifted the color line and claimed he would meet Jackson, but, he never kept his word.

While white champions avoided meeting him, Jackson continued to question the pluck of white men publicly. Jackson depicted the new champion, Corbett, as a “bluffer,” who tried to squirm out of a meeting with a strong opponent, and in so doing, appealed to fight fans’ sense of manly honor. Many boxing fans and experts were sympathetic to Jackson. Questioning Corbett’s courage, the National Police Gazette urged the new champion to meet Jackson according to the old rules of the boxing world. Parson Davies, who was Bob Fitzsimmons’s manager, also criticized Corbett for avoiding Jackson, arguing that Corbett had to either accept the offer of Jackson or Fitzsimmons or retire from pugilism. A medical expert also supported Jackson as a qualified title contender. After his physical examination of Jackson, Dr. John Wilson Gibbs argued that the two boxers’ measurements did not

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1121 *San Francisco Call*, July 8, 1890, p. 2.
1124 *National Police Gazette*, February 11, 1893, p. 11.
show any signs of physical superiority between black and white. His measurements of the two boxers made both men the symbols of ideal physical manhood, who were ready for their fight.\textsuperscript{1126}

Corbett continued to avoid meeting Jackson. Frustrated at the use of color line, Jackson went back to Australia. After a hiatus, Jackson returned to America again in 1898. He still had huge fame among San Francisco fight fans and reporters who remembered him as the “clever and decidedly unassuming pugilist.” He was still called “the Great and Scientific Pugilist of Modern Times.”\textsuperscript{1127} However, when he came back to America, Jackson was a physical “wreck.” He was suffering not only from aging, but also from “dissipation.”\textsuperscript{1128} Some boxing experts criticized him, saying that the “ring master” had been ruined by his life “full of ease, comfort and excesses.” Accordingly, Jackson’s last fight bolstered the old racial stereotype of the dissipation and undisciplined black man. Nevertheless, even then, many white fight fans still appreciated his “physical grace and symmetrical beauty.” They still believed that Jackson had been handicapped against his last opponent, Jim Jeffries, but not in science. Above all, in the eyes of his white fans, the last fight had proved that Jackson was a game fighter. Therefore, for them, the defeat never “dishonored” him.\textsuperscript{1129}

However, the whites’ nostalgic elevation of Jackson did not mean any reevaluation of his race. The caricature in the \textit{San Francisco Call} affirmed racial order with Jackson’s defeat. The caricature satirized the defeat of a black hope by

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{1126} \textit{North American}, March 22, 1894, p. 6.
\item \textsuperscript{1127} \textit{San Francisco Call}, March 17, 1898, p. 5.
\item \textsuperscript{1128} \textit{San Francisco Call}, March 23, 1898, p. 14.
\item \textsuperscript{1129} \textit{San Francisco Call}, March 7, 1898, p. 12.
\end{itemize}
featuring dispirited black faces at the ringside. In so doing, the caricature made the fight a small racial battle that simply affirmed racial relations in the larger society. However, Jackson was not as humorously caricatured as other black men at the ringside. Jackson was still a special man to many whites.\footnote{San Francisco Call, March 23, 1898, p. 14. An English writer, J. G. Bohun Lynch highly evaluated Jackson. “His [Corbett’s] encounter with Sullivan took place at New Orleans on September 7th, 1892. It was supposed to be for the Championship of the World, but the title should be qualified by the word ‘white.’ John Lawrence Sullivan had not earned the full title of Champion, because he had, one imagines for his own convenience, refused to fight Peter Jackson.” Lynch, Knuckle and Gloves, 128.}

But Jackson was not the only black boxer who was seen ambivalently by whites. Fight fans now saw excellent black boxers growing on American soil. While Irish American boxers’ nicknames were increasingly attached to locality, many black boxers’ nicknames still related to their skin color. A featherweight champion of the world, George Dixon, had the nickname of “Little Chocolate.” Dixon won the featherweight championship in 1888. But he was a less respected champion on account of his color. As a successful black boxer, he was an object of white jealousy. In the 1890 fight with Johnny Murphy, Dixon had to fight in the middle of the ring to avoid a crowd aiming blackjacks at his legs.\footnote{Kaye, The Pussycat of Prizefighting, 29.} In his 1892 fight with Jack Skelly, Dixon had to face an antagonistic crowd in the South. A “colored boy” pummeling a “white lad” grated on Southerners.\footnote{Chicago Tribune, September 7, 1892, p. 1.}

Like other black athletes of his day, Dixon was subjected to dualistic images. He was described as a compliant black man who kept to the expected racial etiquette. According to the National Police Gazette, “he realized that he was a negro.” Dixon
had “natural reserve”\textsuperscript{1133} Nevertheless, as a black man, once in the ring, he was still seen as a threat to social and racial order. The South was concerned about this black champion. That resentment was evident in a Southern newspaper story that stated,

\begin{quote}
It was a mistake to match a negro and a white man, a mistake to bring the races together on any terms of equality, even in the prize ring … for, among the ignorant Negroes that idea has naturally been created that it was a test of the strength and fighting powers of Caucasian and African…. [T]he colored population of this city … because of [Dixon’s] victory are far more confident than they ever were before of the equality of the races, and disposed to claim more for themselves than we intend to concede.\textsuperscript{1134}
\end{quote}

Dixon’s image also continuously shifted among whites. His courage in the ring was not a question. “He never personally shirked a contest with any living man”\textsuperscript{1135} His gentleness, courage, and successful career in the ring were also sometimes rewarded. A report in the \textit{New York World} about the 1891 fight between George Dixon and Cal McCarthy offered no hint of Dixon’s color. The article introduced Dixon as a symbol of Boston and stressed his clever and scientific boxing style.\textsuperscript{1136} The 1892 report about his fight with the English featherweight champion,

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{1133} \textit{National Police Gazette}, September 2, 1905, p. 3.
\textsuperscript{1134} \textit{Time-Democrat}, September 8, 1892, quoted in Pollack, \textit{In the Ring with James J. Corbett}, 283.
\textsuperscript{1135} \textit{St. Paul Globe}, January 3, 1899 p. 5.
\textsuperscript{1136} \textit{New York World}, February 4, 1891, p. 7.
\end{flushleft}
Fred Johnson, at the Coney Island Athletic Club presented Dixon, as a masculine symbol of America contrasting with the white foreigner.1137

It was shortly before 10 o’clock when Dixon and his seconds appeared in the ring, and the colored lad received a splendid ovation. The boy never showed in a better form…. The Englishman received some indifferent reception when he made his appearance after keeping Dixon waiting some fifteen minutes…. He [Johnson] is taller and bigger-framed than Dixon, but is put together awkwardly, and the comparison between him and his symmetrically-built antagonist was for all the world like a draught horse and a thoroughbred racer.1138

When masculinity became visible in late nineteenth century, Dixon’s well-developed black body decreased the differences between white and black men, but increased the difference between the old empire and the young republic. The report continued on to make Dixon into an American symbol of masculinity. “In the first two rounds Dixon was at him like a whirlwind, and it looked as if the fight would be ended in a jiffy. Boston’s pride banged England’s hope all over the stage, and when Johnson tottered to his corner at the close of the second round he was all at sea.”

1137 In fact, Dixon was a Canadian, but he was often related to Boston. Localism situationally transformed into nationalism. In the East, Dixon’s foreignness might drastically decrease when he fought against English boxers in an era of anti-English sentiments and nationalism. Later, some white fans saw Jack Johnson as a representative of America against English boxers, who still “invaded” the American ring.
Nevertheless, Dixon’s potential threat to racial order had to be contained. Whites denied his mature masculinity. He was still called a “colored boy.”

Dixon’s position in white society was precarious on account of his skin color. One year later, Dixon faced a totally different situation in his next international fight with another Englishman, promoted as “Briton’s Pride.” A report under the title “George Dixon’s Waterloo” described the fight at the Coney Island Athletic Club as follows: “It was plainly evident that the race prejudice was very strong. Plimmer is a foreigner, but nine-tenths of those present wanted to see him win…. It was some minutes before Master of Ceremonies Burns could give his decision. Cries of “Plimmer!” “Plimmer!” was [were] all that could be heard.”

Throughout his career, Dixon, who had great merit as a boxer, was acclaimed as the best man in his class. To George Siler, Dixon was a better man than Terry McGovern, the best white boxer in his class. Siler also saw Dixon as a scientific boxer and an innovator. Boxing experts appreciated Dixon’s boxing style, which contradicted the old stereotypes of his race as being less intelligent than white boxers. The New York Sun contrasted him with his white rival, McGovern, by saying that “Dixon is a scientific boxer with two well-educated, clean cut hands. McGovern is a miniature Sharkey, a boring, determined, rough youngster.” Even when his

1142 Evening World, January 9, 1900, p.1.
fighting ability drastically diminished with age in the early 1900s, white experts and fans still believed that Dixon was the “legitimate featherweight champion.”

Accordingly, he was also a model to many white boxers. Among them was a famous bantamweight, Johnny Griffin, who witnessed all of Dixon’s fights and studied his style. Dixon was acclaimed not only for his boxing, but for being “manly enough” to acknowledge a defeat. In fact, Dixon was popular among many boxers, who appreciated his fighting style and character. On January 14, 1900, a benefit for Dixon held in the Broadway Athletic Club drew “the biggest array of pugilistic celebrities ever brought together.” The guests included Jim Corbett, Tom Sharkey, Joe Choynski, “Kid” McCoy, and Terry McGovern. The *Evening World* also noticed a special guest who was present. “Even John L. Sullivan, whose antipathy to colored fighters is traditional in pugilistic history because of his refusal to box or fight one, waived his prejudice and was one of the first to offer to box for Dixon’s benefit.”

The *World* reported Dixon’s final match in Philadelphia with a typical racist caricature of a black fighter. Nevertheless, one boxing critic for the *World*, Robert Edgren, was nostalgic toward this penniless old boxer. His report described the male bonding in the arena. “Poor old Dixon, hero of more than a thousand battles in the Queensberry ring, faced his final defeat gamely, as he has faced more than one since Terry McGovern removed him from the championship class. Little fighting men from

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1143 *New York Sun*, January 3, 1904, p. 34.
1144 *New York Times*, August 28, 1892, p. 3.
1145 *Chicago Tribune*, December 24, 1899, p. 17; *San Francisco Examiner*, January 10, 1900, p. 1.
1146 *Evening World*, February 17, 1900, p. 6.
all over the country came to the wake…. It was a veteran union…. There was not a sound in the house. It was like a funeral. No cheering, no yelling, no catcall. The gong ran again. It was a muffled sound.” As everyone attending the fight predicted, the fight did not last long. While his young white “executor” walked back to his dressing room, five thousand spectators remained silent.¹¹⁴⁷

At the turn of the century, another black boxer, Joe Gans, was spotlighted by both boxing critics and fans. His experience and images were also dualistic. Gans was an exploited boxer. While he fought more often than whites, he was always financially indebted to his white managers. At the same time, in a meritocratic world, Gans was occasionally given privileges. He was a renowned boxer whom ambitious white boxers were desperate to fight at any cost. As a champion, Gans had a privilege to choose his opponents and even took unfair advantages.¹¹⁴⁸ For instance, Gans tried to avoid Jimmy Britt, who had eliminated all potential contenders, so the National Police Gazette questioned Gans’s claim of the title.¹¹⁴⁹

This lightweight boxer was a controversial figure. In fact, many blacks were indeed paid to lose their matches.¹¹⁵⁰ Gans was also connected to many rumors of crooked matches. However, these rumors did not decrease his popularity among boxing critics and fight followers and even drew sympathy from them.¹¹⁵¹ Gans

¹¹⁴⁷ Evening World, September 21, 1905, p. 5.
¹¹⁴⁸ Evening World, December 25, 1908, p. 4.
¹¹⁴⁹ National Police Gazette, August 5, 1905, p. 10.
¹¹⁵⁰ Siler, Inside Facts on Pugilism, 118.
¹¹⁵¹ Ernest Hemingway was also sympathetic to Gans, who was used for crooked matches. Hemingway wrote a short story, A Matter of Color for his school magazine, Tabula in 1916. In it, Hemingway featured a black boxer who was entrapped in whites’ conspiracy. The black boxer was modeled after
remained a favorite among Baltimore fight fans. White boxing critics and fight fans did not question Gans’s courage and fighting skill in spite of all the rumors. T. P. Magilligan argued that “in point of grace, action, intelligence, contour, speed and punching power,” Gans was in a class by himself. He saw Gans as a “ring artist.” According to Eddie Smith, Gans was “recognized as the superior of any man living in the boxing game.”

His ability as a boxer was not underestimated by any mythical belief in racial traits. Before his battle with Battling Nelson in 1906, boxing experts picked the aging Gans “for his cleverness and his known ability as a hard hitter.” Gans’s success was not attributed to the theories held by many Americans of primitive character and natural physical advantages to explain black athletic success at the turn of the century. A report in the New York Sun, which described his fight with the Italian boxer, Joe Grim, said, “Gans’s showing was a revelation. He floored Grim more times than Lanky Bob did…. Gans was in fine condition and his appearance indicated that he had trained faithfully for the fray…. Gans carefully and skillfully fought


1152 San Francisco Call, February 19, 1906, p. 7.
1154 Oakland Tribune, October 20, 1907, p. 9.
1155 San Francisco Call, September 3, 1906, p. 10.
against his ‘plucky foreigner.’”\footnote{\textit{New York Sun}, October 20, 1903, p. 10.} A medical report on Gans before the fight with Nelson in 1906 alluded to his work ethic attributing Gans’s “marvelous network of muscles” to his “rigorous training.”\footnote{\textit{San Francisco Call}, September 3, 1906, p. 10.}

However, Gans’s masculine power was also seen as a potential threat to the racial order. His first victory over a tough white contender, Battling Nelson, in 1906 was taken as a warning to some whites. The \textit{Atlanta Journal} asserted that Gans’s victory “had a demoralizing effect on the rough elements of Negroes.”\footnote{\textit{Atlanta Journal}, September 5, 1906, p. 2, quoted in Kaye, \textit{The Pussycat of Prizefighting}, 30} The threat of a black man fighting was always lurking. Part of the reason that Gans was popular among whites was that he was seen as a smiling black man. However, he could not always perform to whites’ expectations. In 1906, Gans, who underperformed in his match with Frank Erne, came back for a return match with him at Fort Erie. After the first match, the fight was rumored to have been a fake and Gans was denounced as a quitter. Gans badly wanted to regain his manly honor against his detractors. In spite of the many rumors about him, one reporter was sympathetic, writing that Gans was one of those boxers who prided himself “on the immaculate purity of their reputation.” However, Gans’s performance in the return match made this reporter feel uncomfortable.

But what lover of the game who witnessed Gans’s battle with Erne at Fort, will never forget the terrible execution done by the ‘coon from Maryland’ in
less than two minutes on that occasion? He wore an ominous, cold expression on his usually good-natured countenance as he entered the ring. As he sat in his corner he eyed Erne in a vicious way. His bead-like eyes glistened with murderous light, but he was as cool as the proverbial cucumber. His soul was filled with hatred for Erne. His coolness portended evil for the then “Pride of Buffalo.”

Gans’s rival, Nelson, finally dethroned Gans in 1907. Nelson was a famous racist who claimed to be a “Negro hunter.” Before their first battle in 1906, Nelson said, “You may think I am vicious when I am in the ring with a white man, but you should see me when I am fighting a negro.” However, after his second battle with Gans, Nelson acknowledged that Gans was “without a doubt the greatest boxer in the world.” Recollecting Gans’s fighting career, Eddie Smith noticed two conflicting images of Gans in the white world. “The color has made some difference with Gans, but even with this handicap, the best judges agree that he is the greatest boxer that the game has developed.” Gans’s career ended in 1907. Then Tommy Burns, who idealized Gans, resurrected his hitting style. Ironically, in 1908, Burns, who then the heavyweight champion of the world, would meet a black boxer who idolized Corbett’s style. Peter Jackson, George Dixon, and Joe Gans were all “acknowledged

1160 National Police Gazette, July 8, 1905, p. 10.
1161 San Francisco Call, September 3, 1906, p. 10. After the 1906 fight, a report in a black newspaper stressed Gans’s “fine chivalry” against Nelson’s “dirty work” and “unsportsmanlike spirit,” and stigmatized the white man’s masculinity. New York Age, September 6, 1906, p. 1, 5.
1162 San Francisco Call, September 9, 1907, p. 9.
1163 Oakland Tribune, October 20, 1907, p. 9.
kings in the prize ring” among blacks. But one man had yet to join the hall of fame. A black boxer from Texas with a golden smile would change the history of boxing.

2. The Road to the First Black Heavyweight Championship

In 1877, Republican control of the South formally ended with the withdrawal of Federal troops. Terrorism brought the southern states under white control again. The Supreme Court began to withdraw legal support for freed blacks by reinterpreting the Fourteenth Amendment. In 1896, the Supreme Court legitimized Jim Crow segregation laws using the “separate but equal” formula. The process of relegating freed blacks to second-rate citizenship was supported by a racist discourse which made white racial supremacy appear to be natural. Racist discourse aimed to gain creditability in the name of scholarship and science at the turn of the century. Racist discourses in academic fields soon reproduced conventional racial stereotypes and consolidated them with seemingly effective cultural authority.

In Race Traits and Tendencies of the American Negro (1896), Frederick L. Hoffman stressed the physical differences between whites and blacks and

1164 Colored American, October 10, 1903, p. 1.
characterized the black as lazy and sexually loose.\textsuperscript{1167} In his \textit{Reconstruction and the Constitution, 1866-1876} (1905), John William Burgess reinforced the old racial stereotype that blacks lacked industriousness, intelligence, and self-control. He argued that “black skin” meant “membership in a race of men” which had “never of itself succeeded in subjecting passion to reason.”\textsuperscript{1168} The prominent historian, William A. Dunning, also supported Burgess. In \textit{Reconstruction, Political and Economic 1865-1877} (1907), Dunning stereotyped blacks as dependent, lazy, and sexually promiscuous people and questioned their ability for self-help and self-government. Dunning also totally denied black men any masculinity. He believed that “the Negro had no pride of race and no aspiration or ideals.”\textsuperscript{1169} Other scholars like Walter L. Fleming, Ulrich Bonnell Phillips, Charles W. Ramsdell, and Howard Odum also subscribed to a similar view of blacks.

Pseudo-scientific discourse also policed racial boundaries and normalized racial superiority. In fact, in the nineteenth century, racist scientists were obsessed with physical differences and the size of the brain to construct racial differences. In the late nineteenth century, a prominent Southern physician, Samuel Cartwright, maintained that blacks’ inferior nervous system was a “cause of their indolence and apathy.” Another physician, W. J. Burt, also denied black men’s physical courage and

\textsuperscript{1168} John William Burgess, \textit{Reconstruction and the Constitution, 1866-1876} (New York: Scribner’s Sons, 1905), 133.  
their qualifications to be soldiers. In his 1906 article for the *American Journal of Anatomy*, Robert Bennett Bean supported the theories of black inferiority with the measurement of brain. Bean did not classify human beings according to race. However, he argued that even the “low class Caucasian” had a larger brain than a “better class Negro.” His study drew the conclusion that blacks were immensely emotional and sensual, and lacked self-control. R. S. Woodworth supported the same conclusion three years later.

Still, at the turn of the century, white supremacy was now increasingly challenged in prize fighting. While many racists thought that whites were the fittest mentally and physically, this “white” social Darwinism was not realized in prize fighting. A white reporter had already deplored black superiority in the ring in 1894. By the early 1900s, the ring was full of mediocre white heavyweight boxers. They were seeking the heavyweight championship, which had been a symbol of white masculinity, after the first unbeaten champion, Jim Jeffries, retired in 1905. White supremacists knew that there was a looming possibility that a black man could win the heavyweight title.

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1173 The report said, “Up to date very few of the colored stars of the fistic world have gone wrong or finished second best in meetings with white men. Nearly all their matches have been with white men. The colored champions, Peter Jackson, Frank Craig, Joe Walcott, Bobby Dobbs, Jerry Marshall, and George Dixon, have seldom, if ever, given battle to men of their own race … It is humiliating, perhaps, but the bald pate fact seems to be that in the roped arena Africa has walked away with the top knot in nearly every encounter with the boasted ‘superior race.’” *Buffalo Courier*, July 18, 1894, quoted in Pollack, *In the Ring with James J. Corbett*, 325.
It was not only white physical superiority that was being questioned. The successful black boxers of the 1890s and 1900s already contradicted all the racial stereotypes which had been constructed in the larger society. They were courageous and clever. They were disciplined and industrious. They were fully trained men. They had cool heads in the ring. They were also men of honor. Accordingly, their success depended on cultural traits that were supposedly held only by whites. Prize fighting of the day was not a space where dominant racist ideologies in the larger society could be imposed and consolidated. They were instead continuously contested.

However, in this sporting institution, boxing critics and fight followers had produced their own racial stereotypes. In both Atlantic worlds, one prevailing racial stereotype was the belief that blacks were weaker in the stomach. A “yellow streak” (cowardice) was another enduring stereotype for black boxers. Based on this belief, Sullivan denied Peter Jackson’s courage. “Jackson was pretty good. But he never had the courage to go into the ring until he got Dutch courage out of a bottle.” The old image was still prevailing. Thomas Edison, who recorded Corbett’s sparring with his kinetograph, told others about a Negro boxer who was paralyzed by his fear of Corbett. Another enduring racist stereotype about black

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1174 Lynch, *Knuckles and Gloves*, 123.
1175 It was a mythical stereotype that “blacks were too fragile of will and spirit.” Entine, *Taboo*, 152.
1176 *San Francisco Call*, July 23, 1905, p. 7. Dutch courage meant courage gained from intoxication.
deficiency was that black fighters could not take punishment and, therefore, they lacked endurance and gameness.\textsuperscript{1178}

However, by the turn of the century, these racial stereotypes were also toppling. Many boxing experts and fight followers, who had actually witnessed black boxers in the ring, did not subscribe to the oversimplified racist ideas. While Sullivan’s own weak point was his stomach (supposedly a malady of black boxers), fight followers found that Peter Jackson contradicted this racial stereotype through his performance as a “stomach fighter.”\textsuperscript{1179} Accordingly, some fight followers started to question the old stereotype, which was often contradicted by actual black boxers’ performance.\textsuperscript{1180} A “yellow streak” also seemed an ungrounded argument to some white experts. One report said, “The colored boxers … [are] impressing the sporting men of the world with their equality by winning glove fights, just as forcibly as battalions of Negroes proved their strength and courage to their former owners on the battlefields of the South nearly thirty years ago.”\textsuperscript{1181} Richard K. Fox, who had witnessed many black boxers in the ring, dismissed the “yellow streak” theory.\textsuperscript{1182} Likewise, George Siler, who had witnessed Dixon’s and Gans’s performances, knew that the racial stereotype about gameness was simply an ungrounded belief.\textsuperscript{1183}

A black boxer from Galveston Texas, John Arthur Johnson, who would become better known as Jack Johnson, arrived on the scene at the very time when

\textsuperscript{1178} \textit{San Francisco Call}, October 29, 1897, p. 12.
\textsuperscript{1179} \textit{New York Sun}, April 23, 1890, p. 4.
\textsuperscript{1180} \textit{Oakland Tribune}, May 20, 1891, p. 8.
\textsuperscript{1182} Fox. \textit{The Life and Battles of Jack Johnson}, 21-23.
\textsuperscript{1183} Siler, \textit{Inside Facts on pugilism}, 118.
these beliefs in white physical and cultural superiority and other racial stereotypes were being questioned in prize fighting. Naturally, Johnson’s body and performance became objects of scrutiny. Through that scrutiny, white boxing critics and fans reconstructed these racial stereotypes and racism in diverse and even conflicting ways and also blurred racial boundaries. Accordingly, in prize fighting, racism was not an impersonal structure. It was a cultural construction that continued to be reconstructed and contested even by whites. Class and gender boundaries mediated racism. Moreover, the black boxers’ agency disrupted the process of racializing black boxers. As a result, racial boundaries never became stable in prize fighting. They shifted continually. Johnson’s career and life is representative of this particular cultural dynamic.

Johnson was born in 1878. As an adult, he stood a “quarter inch over six feet in height,” and in condition weighed 200 pounds. According to Fox, Johnson began his boxing career in 1897. In the early 1900s, Jack Johnson was already seen as a potential title contender by boxing experts and fans, who were disillusioned with the mediocre white boxers then in the heavyweight class. Before a championship match began, as a rule of the ring, the master of the ceremonies would read challenges sent by title contenders. Two challenges were read to the crowd before the last fight between Jeffries and Corbett in 1903. “Jack Monroe’s challenge was received with jeers, but Johnson’s received applause.” The same year, the Los

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1184 Naughton, *Heavyweight Champions*, 184.
1185 Fox, *The Life and Battles of Jack Johnson*, 10.
1186 *San Francisco Call*, August 15, 1903. p. 2.
Angeles Times also claimed that Johnson was entitled to challenge Jeffries. “The color line gag does not go now…. Johnson has met all comers in his class: has defeated each and every one. Now he stands ready to box for the world’s championship. He is a man who would wear that honor with decent grace if it fell on his shoulder.”

When Jeffries retired in 1905, Johnson, defeated by Marvin Hart a year before, could not make himself a title contender. The championship was given to Hart who won over Jack Monroe. However, Sam Austin, editor of the National Police Gazette, was skeptical of Hart’s qualifications as the heavyweight champion of the world. To Austin, whiteness did not justify his championship. Hart was “not of championship caliber.” In fact, Austin thought that Johnson was a better candidate. Hart’s controversial victory over Johnson did not impress Austin. Like many other critics, Austin believed that his fight with Johnson had been a fake. “If Hart could not lick Johnson ‘on the level’ and draws the color line to evade another meeting, I think his championship claim has no virtue.” George Siler who never believed in naturally any given white supremacy was also critical of Hart’s abilities. Siler considered Hart to be the “poorest champion since the days of John L. Sullivan.” Instead, he claimed that the “best big man in the business” was “Jack Johnson, the colored heavyweight champion.” For this reason, Siler ridiculed Hart’s policy not to fight a black man.

To many boxing critics, a heavyweight champion did not mean a fairly good man. That champion had to be the best man in the ring regardless of color. One

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1187 Los Angeles Times, October 29, 1903, p. 12.
boxing writer, Sandy Griswold, also bombarded Hart. Griswold criticized the new champion for drawing the color line. “What right has Hart to throw Jack Johnson in the discard on account of his ebony complexion, and for that matter what right had Mr. Jeffries to bar this very estimable gentleman? A black man, in my esteem, is entitled to just the same right and prerogatives, as long as he is clean and decent, upright, capable, and honest…. I’ll bet my boots, that Mr. Johnson can lick him every day in the weeks, not even barring Sunday.”

Still, there was some remaining belief in white physical supremacy. John L. Sullivan, who had become a boxing critic, discounted emerging black boxers including Johnson. “As I have said before, the negro boxer, while some of him may be pretty good, none of him is as good as the white boxer of the first class.”

However, his remark already had implied that not all whites could prove their superiority.

Hart was a short-lived champion. He lost to Tommy Burns in 1906. In his post-fight interview, Burns lifted the color line. Burns seemed resolute to prove that he was the best man and deserved the title. “I will defend my title as heavyweight champion of the world against all comers, none barred. By this I mean white, black, Mexican, Indian or any other nationality without regard to color, size, or nativity…. If I am not the best man in the heavyweight division, I don’t want to hold the title.”

Boxing critics and fans welcomed Burns’s decision. Apparently, that decision signaled the return of prize fighting to a manly and meritocratic world. Nevertheless,

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1189 National Police Gazette, August 12, 1905, p. 10.
1190 San Francisco Call, July 23, 1905, p. 7.
like Hart, Burns was never a popular champion among boxing critics and fight followers. Burns’s regime was also disastrous for promoters. Burns’s shady reputation could not produce a big fight and big betting. The *New York Sun* still refused to admit Johnson as an appropriate champion but agreed that the heavyweight championship match was no longer a lucrative endeavor.\(^{1192}\)

In 1907, no expert could deny that contemporary heavyweight boxers were “far below the standard fixed by the former stars of the ring.” Hart was an old type of boxer. He “possessed a limited amount of cleverness.” In addition, Burns was too small a man for the heavyweight championship. Challengers also lacked skill. Burns’s one-round fight with an Australian import, Bill Squire, in 1907 was one such case. While some experts acclaimed the fight as a sign of the superiority of the American boxing style, most fight fans were disillusioned with the declining quality of prize fighting.\(^{1193}\) Eastern prize fighting was losing its popularity because a series of regulations had made it too tame.\(^{1194}\) Emerging Western promoters needed quality matches to make the West a new center for prize fighting. Burns had to meet the best candidate. The uncertainty of the white boxing critics about Burns increased the reputation of Johnson. The old image of inferior black boxers had disappeared. The first black boxer who came close to the heavyweight title was seen as superhuman. His body was also racialized to stress his extraordinary ability. Johnson was a

\(^{1192}\) *New York Sun*, January 20, 1907, p. 42.

\(^{1193}\) *San Francisco Call*, July 5, 1907, p. 8.

“demon” in the ring.\textsuperscript{1195} This myth of a “demonish giant” continued to be reproduced by boxing critics and fight fans.

Although he claimed a willingness to meet any man, Burns still dodged two black boxers, Johnson and Sam Langford. The former champion, Jim Jeffries, also urged Burns to hold the color line.\textsuperscript{1196} In 1907, Burns finally left America to avoid Johnson’s challenge. Many experts and fight followers saw cowardice in Burns’s action, but not all experts and fight fans agreed that prize fighting had to be the perfect model of a manly meritocracy.\textsuperscript{1197} In fact, while he did criticize Burns’s bluffing, Eddie Smith still had an ambivalent attitude toward racial equality in the ring. In his report, Smith confessed that he was not ready to see the first black heavyweight champion. “Johnson is entitled to some sort of a fair deal. When a white man and a colored fighter meet in the ring there should be no difference in the two because of their color. If a fighter does not want to meet a colored man, that is his business and although people will try to force a match sometimes, no one really blames a man for taking that stand.”\textsuperscript{1198} In truth, he was fluctuating between his identity as a man and a sense of whiteness. While he believed in the old motto, “May the best man win,” Smith still wanted to maintain white physical superiority.

By 1910, there were not as many black boxers in the ring as in the 1890s. But many were excellent boxers.\textsuperscript{1199} Because boxing fans and experts generally viewed a white boxer’s drawing the color line as an unmanly way to avoid black challengers,

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item[1195] \textit{Oakland Tribune}, October 20, 1907, p. 9.
\item[1196] McCaffery, \textit{Tommy Burns}, 147.
\item[1197] \textit{Oakland Tribune}, October 20, 1907, p. 9.
\item[1198] \textit{Oakland Tribune}, April 24, 1908, p. 15.
\item[1199] \textit{Salt Lake Herald}, January 27, 1908, p. 8.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
Johnson felt that the press and the boxing authorities were friendly toward him and recognized his claim to have the privilege of meeting Burns. In 1908, Burns realized that there was nowhere he could go to avoid Johnson. Finally, Burns and Johnson signed the articles of agreement for the fight in Sydney, Australia for a purse of thirty-five thousand dollars.

Johnson’s style was an intriguing one. In *Papa Jack Johnson and the Era of White Hopes* (1975), Randy Roberts interpreted Johnson’s style as rooted in black rhythms and defensive social positions. Roberts’ view of Johnson’s performance as the expression of racial differences was colored by racial essentialism. In fact, many black boxers did not have “rhythmic” styles. Some black boxers were offensive. Peter Jackson had inherited the style of the Jem Mace School, which originated in England. Accordingly, his style was not defensive. Rather, he relied on hitting power. Many other black boxers were defensive, but their defensive style was learned. Whether black boxers had offensive or defensive styles, many of them emulated the styles of famous boxers. For instance, Black Griffò earned his nickname on account of his style, which was similar to that of the white boxer, Young Griffò.

Johnson had no traits thought to be racial in his boxing style, but rather combined two different styles. Johnson’s position was somehow English. He fought high. For this reason, the referee, Charley White, viewed Johnson’s style as

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1201 Ibid., 58.
English. This position contrasted with James Jeffries’s extremely defensive position of crouching. But Johnson also absorbed the new American style, as represented by Jim Corbett. When Corbett fought Sullivan in New Orleans in 1892, Johnson was an ardent supporter of Corbett. Corbett was Johnson’s ideal model since Johnson had an interest in prize fighting. According to one referee, Eddie Graney, Johnson was “the greatest defensive fighter.” But, like Corbett, Johnson was a defensive boxer who depended largely on footwork. At the same time, Johnson was a wonderful blocker. His defensive stance was extremely hard to penetrate. His admirer, Sig. Hart, believed that Johnson had inherited Corbett’s style, but then developed a creative approach for blocking.

Like Corbett, he feinted the opponent into leading and delivered effective counters. Johnson had untiring, tantalizing, wicked jabs, hooks, and uppercuts. He was not an “aggressive rusher” or a “mixer.” As did Corbett, he enjoyed a prolonged fight, using his own game plans and diverse kinds of punches. Accordingly, Siler classified him as a scientific boxer, who was similar to Corbett. Johnson’s style did not fit the racial stereotypes for black athletes. His style was not emotional, but disciplined and intelligent, so it did not align with the commonly held view of racial identity. Rather, his style represented prize fighting as a shared and learned skill. In his style, racial boundaries were blurred.

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1204 *Washington Post*, July 3, 1910, p. 34.
1205 *San Francisco Call*, June 26, 1910, p. 51; *New York Sun*, October 10, 1909, p. 10; *San Francisco Call*, July 4, 1910, p. 9.
1206 *Richmond Planet*, July 30, 1910, p. 7.
Nevertheless, some contemporary boxing insiders still saw Johnson’s style in relation to defined racial traits. Before his fight with Johnson in 1905, Marvin Hart, who believed the old racial stereotypes, criticized Johnson’s defensive style as a sign of his lack of gameness. The fight also reinforced W. W. Naughton’s belief in racial traits. According to Naughton, Hart, who was “indifferent to punishment” and “steadfastly game,” displayed the “great pluck [of a] white man.” But defensive Johnson lacked “grit.” Naughton concluded that Johnson, who was not “stout-hearted,” lacked courage and endurance. While Johnson’s friends thought that Johnson won by a large margin, the referee gave the bout to Hart. The referee justified his decision. “I always give the gamest and most aggressive man the decision.” But his decision reinforced other whites’ beliefs in racial traits. The comparison between a white man’s mental simplicity and aggressiveness and Johnson’s rationality and discipline reversed the racial images but then produced other racial stereotypes among critics and fight fans.

While Johnson was emerging as a legitimate challenger, Naughton revived the old theory of a “yellow streak.” Naughton contrasted Johnson’s “demonish” body and his splendid demonstration of modern pugilism to his lack of fighting spirit and courage. “Johnson is surely a master workman at the Queensberry game, but he is supposed to be cursed with a timid streak.” Naughton thought that Johnson could not defeat “white men of a determined stamp.” In fact, black boxers who emulated

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1210 Richmond Planet, February 20, 1909, p. 7.
1211 Oakland Tribune, October 20, 1907, p. 9.
Corbett’s scientific style were often seen as having a “yellow streak.” When a reporter witnessed Jeffries’s sparring with his black partner, Bob Armstrong, he saw the black boxer’s Corbett-type boxing and cleverness as a sign of cowardice. “Armstrong, who had a pronounced yellow streak, did not take a chance with the bulky Californian, but simply danced around from one side of the ring to the other, jabbing, blocking, sidestepping, and clinching with his usual cleverness, while Jeffries, always aggressive, but as slow as cold molasses, could not land an effective blow.”

Before he entered the ring to fight with Johnson, Burns also argued that Johnson had not gotten a real test on account of his refined defense. Burns believed that Johnson had a “yellow streak” and “would quit under fire.” It was not Burns alone who revived an old racial stereotype before the historic fight. Robert Edgren also believed that, if Hart could spot Johnson’s stomach, he could win. Edgren reminded readers of the theory of a yellow streak and predicted Burns’s victory.

A ritual was aimed at producing common values for participants. But a prizefight as a ritual was full of contradictions. Burns’s identity was fluctuating and even conflicting. He decided to define the impending battle as a racial battle, not an individual competition. However, Burns also admitted that the fight was a manly ritual. Mutual respect existed between the two boxers who both had overcome ring fear. In his letter to Edgren several days before the fight, Burns no longer subscribed

1213 New York Sun, October 10, 1909, p. 10.
1214 Evening World, December 23, 1908, p. 10.
1215 Evening World, May 20, 1908, p. 20.
to an old racial stereotype that a black boxer lacked gameness. Burns predicted that Johnson would be “game.” However, a day before the fight, Burns redefined the fight as a racial battle and decided to enter the ring as a white man. He sent a cablegram to Edgren as follows:

Edgren, Evening World, New York

Am feeling great. Johnson insisted on McIntosh as referee. Advance sale is over ten thousand pounds. Tell the American public I will uphold the white supremacy. Am 2 to 1 favorite.

Tommy Burns.

On match day, Burns tried to make the fight a racial event. He refused to shake hands with Johnson and denied Johnson’s courage, calling him a “yellow dog” and a “yellow cur.” He also shouted to Johnson, “Come on and fight, nigger!” “Fight like a white man.” To the contrary, the ring provided Johnson with opportunities to express his masculine identity without any fear of retaliation, a contradiction of racial norms. Johnson feminized Burns verbally. He also violated racial etiquette, making a joke about Burns’s wife. In so doing, Johnson was blurring racial boundaries in the ring.

Johnson continued to disrupt the racist ritual of white supremacy. Johnson openly ridiculed an old stereotype in the ring by exposing the right side of his

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1216 Evening World, December 23, 1908, p. 10.
1218 Ibid., 46.
1219 Ward, Unforgivable Blackness, 122-123.
stomach to his opponent and letting him hit that part.\textsuperscript{1220} According to the
sportswriter, James C. Isaminger, Burns believed that if he belted Johnson’ stomach,
Johnson would lose courage, but that belief proved to be groundless during the
fight.\textsuperscript{1221} Johnson continued to shout to Burns during the fight, “Find that yellow
streak.”\textsuperscript{1222} “Walk right into them. Tommy, that's the boy, takes your medicine
nicely.”\textsuperscript{1223}

While Johnson was displaying his masculine identity, he also disrupted a
manly ritual by ignoring the mercy rule in the one-sided bout. His performance was
cruel. “He seemed bent on punishing the white man as much as lay within his
power.”\textsuperscript{1224} Several months later, Johnson recalled, “I would have won easily in the
first two or three rounds, but I wanted to show I was not a yellow dog with the yellow
streak that Burns called me.”\textsuperscript{1225}

While Johnson’s performance was unusually aggressive in the bout, Jack
London, who was at ringside, saw his aggressiveness as a masquerade and tried to
contain the threat of the black boxer. London racialized Johnson with an old image of
the coon. “At times, too, when both men were set, Johnson would deliberately assume
the fierce, vicious, intent expression, only apparently for the purpose of suddenly
relaxing and letting his teeth flash forth like the rise of a harvest moon, while his face
beamed with all the happy and care-free innocence of a little child. Johnson play-

\textsuperscript{1220} Ibid., 125-126. Also see Lynch, \textit{Knuckles and Gloves}, 123.
\textsuperscript{1221} \textit{Richmond Planet}, January 9, 1909, p. 1.
\textsuperscript{1222} Johnson, \textit{Jack Johnson-in the Ring-and Out}, 166.
\textsuperscript{1223} \textit{San Francisco Call}, December 26, 1908, p. 8.
\textsuperscript{1224} \textit{San Francisco Call}, December 26, 1908, p. 13.
\textsuperscript{1225} \textit{Richmond Planet}, February 20, 1909, p. 7. Johnson had also publicly ridiculed the racial stereotype
after he won over Jim Flynn. \textit{San Francisco Call}, November 3, 1907, p. 37.
acted all the time. His part was the clown, and he played with Burns from the gong of the opening round to the finish of the fight.”

Johnson and Burns finally consented to return their fight to a manly ritual at the end. Burns calmly accepted his defeat. Stressing that he “put up a game and honest fight,” Burns acclaimed Johnson as the “greatest fighter” he ever met. “I do not wish to take any credit from him…. I think he will have little trouble in beating any of the heavyweights. I think he is the greatest fighter in the world.” In spite of his rude attitude toward Burns during the match, Johnson also performed to expectations. He spoke about his opponent in the traditional manner of his profession. “Burns was very game and at no time did he show any inclination to quit. He is the gamest man I ever fought.”

Burns entered the ring as a white man but left the ring as a man.

White fight fans who believed in white physical superiority felt humiliated at seeing the first black heavyweight champion. Sullivan hated the “idea of letting a negro hold the championship.” But he had to admit that Johnson was a man whom no white could compete with in physicality--except for only one man, Jeffries. More boxing experts and fans accepted Johnson as a deserving champion who had ended the era of mediocre boxers. Gus Ruhlin claimed that Johnson was a “wonder.” “He is a faster man with his head and hands than Corbett ever was.” Johnson’s victory over Burns was not so surprising because most experts and fight fans had predicted that result. Nevertheless, some still needed to find a reason for how a black boxer

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1227 San Francisco Call, December 26, 1908, p. 13.
1228 Washington Times, December 26, 1908, p. 8
1229 Evening World, December 30, 1908, p. 10.
could have claimed the heavyweight championship, which until then had been preserved only for whites.\textsuperscript{1230} The old racial traits attached to black men in the ring were no longer tenable. White boxing critics needed new theories of black physical superiority to explain the emergence of Jack Johnson. However, unlike the foreign-born black boxers, Jackson and Dixon, a southern black, Johnson, was racialized in an American context or related to Africa.

Edgren saw Johnson as a “marvelously clever” boxer with physical advantages. “Johnson deserves credit for the cool and scientific way in which he took the first opening and put all his power into the first damaging blow.”\textsuperscript{1231} However, he also still tried to find racial traits in Johnson’s success. Edgren attributed Johnson’s physical superiority to power which had been “instilled into the negro race by centuries of labor.” That is, Edgren related Johnson’s physicality to the traits of slavery and the black man’s body to one constructed for manual labor.\textsuperscript{1232} As a racial supremacist, Edgren still believed that Jeffries could prove his view of white physical superiority.\textsuperscript{1233}

Jack London did not deny Johnson’s mastery in the fight, but he still called Johnson an “Ethiopian.”\textsuperscript{1234} London’s analogy would reoccur to characterize

Johnson racially. Johnson’s success was continuously related to Africa. The jungle

\textsuperscript{1230} Some whites accepted Johnson’s victory by Americanizing his body. Bat Masterson said, “Jack Johnson, like most of the Negroes in this country, is genuinely American, and if we have no white natives capable of holding and defending the championship title it is far more in line with American patriotism to have it defended by a black native than an imported American whose skin happens to be white.” \textit{New York Age}, December 31, 1908, p. 6.

\textsuperscript{1231} \textit{Evening World}, December 25, 1908, p. 4.

\textsuperscript{1232} \textit{Evening World}, December 26, 1908, p. 4.

\textsuperscript{1233} \textit{Evening World}, December 26, 1908, p. 8.

was an important setting to stress a black man’s primitivism in evolutionary steps and
his exceptional physicality.¹²³⁵ When attributing Johnson’s success to his “primitive”
African traits, the stereotype rejected the role of cultural traits like hard training or
scientific strategy. On the contrary, it was implied that his biological advantages were
the “compensation of the supposed intellectual disabilities and cultural shortcomings
of African Americans or the result of blacks’ lower position in the process of
evolution and civilization.”¹²³⁶

Among African Americans, fighting men were racial heroes. Even respectable
black newspapers did not exclude their fighting heroes. In these reports, all racial
stereotypes were contested. A black fighter was described as brave, cool, and fair.¹²³⁷
Championships had a special meaning for blacks. It was a metaphor for the
unfulfilled dreams of blacks. Joe Gans received his mother’s telegram before his bout
with Nelson in 1906. In the telegram, Gans’s mother related his son’s championship
to Jackson, who had never fulfilled his dream. “Joe, the eyes of the world are on you.
Everybody says you ought to win. Peter Jackson will tell me the news, and you bring
back the bacon.”¹²³⁸

Racial exclusion and segregation accompanied white violence toward African
Americans. In the 1900s, white violence persisted through lynching and a series of

¹²³⁵ San Francisco Call, October 17, 1909, p. 47.
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¹²³⁷ Richmond Planet, January 30, 1897, p. 2; September 8, 1906, p. 8, 14; September 21, 1906, p. 1;
September 14, 1907, p. 1.
¹²³⁸ Richmond Planet, September 8, 1906, p. 1.
riots. Some African Americans fought back. In 1906, Theodore Roosevelt hastily discharged 167 black soldiers, who were reported as having exchanged shots with white racists in Brownsville, Texas. Blacks were frustrated at this racial injustice. However, blacks now had another symbol of black masculinity, and it was Jack Johnson. When he was invited to Philadelphia to umpire a baseball match between the Cuban Giants and the Philadelphia Giants in Philadelphia on August 24, 1907, Johnson’s popularity was enormous. “Men and women vied with each other to show ‘Mistah’ Johnson how much they thought of him…. He [Johnson] finally eluded his well-wishers and reached the street, his clothes somewhat ruffled and pulled out of shape. Even there he was not safe from the crowd which followed him cheering all the way to the subway station, which saved him from further molestation.”

Johnson’s victory in 1908 made him even a bigger hero among blacks.

Some middle-class black men still regarded Johnson with reservations. The Baltimore Afro-American argued that prize fighting was “not necessarily a profession to rave over.” But the Afro-American admitted that Johnson’s championship was a “credit to the race” and every Negro had to “be proud of his achievements.” More middle-class black men were ready to be delighted at the first black heavyweight championship. The Colored American Magazine saw Johnson’s victory over Burns as “the Zenith of Negro sport.” The Richmond Planet said, “No event in forty years

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1241 Baltimore Afro-American, December 4, 1909, p. 3.
1242 Al-Tony Gilmore, Bad Nigger!, 32.
has given more genuine satisfaction to the colored people of this country than has the
signal victory of Jack Johnson."\textsuperscript{1243}

Lester Walton of the \textit{New York Age} believed that Johnson’s victory would
make the “unwilling civilized world” admit the physical prowess of the black
race.\textsuperscript{1244} Johnson’s victory was seen as a signal of racial equality. In “The Black
Gladiator: Veni, Vidi, Vici-Jack Johnson,” a black artist, J. “Berni” Barborn
celebrated the victory as “proof that all men” were “the same in muscle, sinew, and in
brain.”\textsuperscript{1245} Black intellectuals tried to translate Johnson’s victory into a symbol of
black progress. The Reverend Reverdy Ransom argued that Johnson’s victory
presaged black progress “in every domain of human endeavor.”\textsuperscript{1246} When Johnson
attended a gathering for Booker T. Washington at Quinn Chapel, an African
Methodist Episcopal church in Chicago, which represented the gradualism of middle-
class blacks, Washington and well-dressed, middle-class black participants welcomed
Johnson. The \textit{Baltimore Afro-American} termed Washington and Johnson the
“intellectual and physical giants of the race.”\textsuperscript{1247}

A boxer’s victory in the ring apparently meant one man’s total domination of
the other man. Accordingly, when a bout was held between a white man and a black
man, that bout could be translated into a symbolic battle between the two races for
social power. Whites still held the controlling power in prize fighting. The ring was

\begin{footnotes}
\item[1243] \textit{Richmond Planet}, February 9, 1909, p. 4.
\item[1244] \textit{New York Age}, December 31, 1908, p. 4. But while he contradicted a racial stereotype of a “yellow
streak,” Walton also internalized another racial stereotype. He attributed Johnson’s success to the
“Negro’s closeness to nature.” Ibid.
\item[1246] \textit{New York Age}, December 30, 1909, p. 6.
\item[1247] \textit{Baltimore Afro-American}, August 21, 1909, p. 1.
\end{footnotes}
“safely in white hands.” Managers, referees, trainers, and club officials were almost all white. Nevertheless, the controlling power never totally eliminated the possibility of a symbolic reversal in the power relations in the prize ring. Whites accepted the insecurity of such symbolic power relations because prize fighting was a rule-bound sport that valued fair play and individual merit. In this case, the popular motto, “May the best man win,” also supported the black boxer’s cause. A white man was supposed to face a black man on fair ground, and white spectators had to endure whatever the result of the bout might be. In order to avoid strong black opponents, white boxers could rely on the principle of racial segregation which was popular in the general society. Yet many fight followers viewed these white fighters simply as bluffers. Accordingly, prize fighting did not literally reflect the actual racial relations found in the larger society. It was a relatively insecure institution for whites. Johnson was problematic because whites had limited the methods to use to dethrone him. Whites’ concerns were thus aggravated further by Johnson’s resistant attitude.

After the 1908 fight, Johnson’s image among whites changed. In fact, Johnson was a polite man in real life as were most other famous black boxers. He had a tidy look and controlled manners. Many whites appreciated his “dignified

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1248 Ashby, With Amusement for All, 105.
1249 White spectators did not support unfair advantages for white boxers. They even attacked a referee, who was unfair to a black fighter. Siler, Inside Facts on Pugilism, 29-30, 121. Also see George Siler, “Siler on Fight Rules,” Chicago Tribune, November 26, 1899, p. 17.
1250 Among prize fighting supporters, the most unsportsmanlike quality was to avoid challenges. National Police Gazette, July 8, 1905, p. 10.
1251 San Francisco Call, July 4, 1910, p. 10.
1252 Roberts, Papa Jack, 22.
manner” and “his perfect control of temper.” However, Johnson refused to be what whites wanted him to be. Johnson contested racial etiquette that limited black citizenship. Johnson was an assertive and daring black man. Unlike other black boxers, Johnson sought “admiration and courted publicity.” Johnson also tried to have authority over his white managers. Against the custom in the fight business, Johnson did his own negotiations and refused to leave business matters to white men. After he won the championship title, he forced his white opponents to sign the articles of agreement in Pittsburgh’s colored district. Johnson also displayed his wealth in his spendthrift lifestyle. He also accompanied his white wife to public places and associated with white women. While supposedly “hyperpotent” black men were perceived as a threat to white male hegemony in the early twentieth century, Johnson violated the sexual boundaries between the two races that whites had rigidly policed using anti-miscegenation laws and the threat of lynching. Johnson contrasted himself with his rival, Sam Langford, who acted as a compliant black man.

Whites became increasingly impatient with Johnson. Even the National Police Gazette, which was less careful of class decorum and racial etiquette, criticized Johnson for forgetting that he was “colored” and refusing to do a “little catering to a

1254 *San Francisco Call*, July 6, 1910, p. 9.
1255 Ward, *Unforgivable Blackness*, 150, 156.
1257 For instance, Langford’s challenge was issued by his manager, Joe Woodman, not by him. Woodman announced that Langford would meet any man in the world except Jim Jeffries. Naughton, *Heavyweight Champions*, 199.
tolerant white public.”1258 Johnson, who “chose a different attitude and station from the ones prescribed by white society,” was thus called a “Bad Nigger.”1259

While many experts backed Johnson’s intent to earn a fight with Burns, some soon began to question Johnson’s superiority. They started to make their voices heard after Johnson made a poor showing against Jack O’Brien in Philadelphia in 1909. Thomas S, Rice ridiculed some boxing experts for creating an “ebony idol.” Rice attached the old image of black men to Johnson. To Rice, Johnson was a lazy boxer and the skill sportswriters had attributed to him was simply overestimated. The 1909 match also seemed to confirm an old stereotype about blacks’ actions in the ring. A report in the Washington Times related Johnson’s defensive fighting style to a lack of gameness once again. “Johnson acted as though he was afraid of punishment and held back and awaited his opponent.”1260 The New York Sun also questioned Johnson’s gameness and asserted that Johnson was an “overrated heavyweight champion.”1261 But a search for a white hope was still painful and unsuccessful. Johnson answered his detractors by knocking out the white hope Stanley Ketchel at Colma, California, in October of 1909.1262

Though Johnson successfully eliminated Ketchel, an increasing number of boxing experts and fight fans refused to accept him as the champion. To them, Johnson was now merely a threat to white supremacy. Whites needed someone that could “erase the ‘Golden Smile’ from the countenance of Black Jack Johnson.” Even

1261 New York Sun, October 10, 1909, p. 10.
1262 Roberts, Papa Jack, 82-84.
old Corbett claimed that he would take the “white man's burden” and “restore the pugilistic prestige of the Caucasian” against the “Ethiopian.” Edgren cried for Jeffries’s comeback to “settle the question of the white supremacy in the fighting game.” When the Burns-Johnson fight picture was exhibited on March 1909, more and more whites demanded a racial battle. In New York, the theater impresario, Felix Isman, gave up his economic profit by opposing an exhibition of the moving pictures of the Burns-Jeffries fight.

However, in spite of the increasing racial hatred expressed toward him, Johnson was still a popular champion across racial boundaries. Being a champion already had made Johnson an ambivalent text. In 1910, the journalist, Edward F. Cahill, encountered 500 people who had gathered on the sidewalk in San Francisco. He asked the policeman on the corner what they were doing. The policeman replied with “evident disgust.” “The negro prize fighter is inside with his white wife.” Cahill described the crowd. “These idle people staring at a blank wall represented the primitive man engaged in patient hero worship.” While he was an object of increasing racist anger, Johnson was still a public idol, not only to blacks but also for some whites.

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1263 San Francisco Call, January 10, 1909, p. 35.
1266 The San Francisco Call, May 29, 1910, p. 53.
3. Reno, 1910

Jeffries finally responded to the call from his home in California. In 1910, two Western promoters, Tex Rickard and Jack Gleason, were arguing over the location of the fight between Johnson and Jeffries. The match day was special and a prime one for a racial battle. Battling Nelson had defeated the unconquerable black lightweight champion, Joe Gans, on the same day three years earlier. While this fight on the Fourth of July would be a battle to decide which boxer was the better man, the battle was also about the question of white supremacy outside of the ring. Jeffries’s victory would signify the reconstruction of America based on a regained white supremacy and racialized citizenship. A Johnson victory would totally confuse the plan.

Despite the unpredictability of the result, however, the 1910 fight was a contested event. In *Manliness & Civilization* (1995), Gail Bederman oversimplified the 1910 fight as a racist event or a racial battle. The ritual never fixed on the participants’ identity or supported a reductionist view of the fight. Two boxers, middle-class moralists, racists, boxing experts, white boxing fans, the black middle classes, and the black masses all participated in the construction of the meaning of the fight. Class ideals, a sense of belonging to a certain racial group, masculinism and male bonding, and the belief in meritocracy interacted and competed to define the meaning of the historic fight.

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1268 Bederman, 1-5.
After a long negotiation, two promoters agreed to hold the fight in the Rickard & Gleason Arena within the racetrack at the California Jockey Club at Emeryville, Alameda County, near San Francisco. The Jeffries-Johnson fight almost landed in San Francisco with the help of city officials. However, two boxers’ recent death in the ring had sensitized religious and civic organizations in California. The fight was also seen as one that challenged the middle-class demand of a “safe and sane” celebration for the Fourth of July. The process of making Jeffries the white men’s symbol of regained racial superiority was continually disrupted by class values. Religious people and pastors in California were unified in trying to prevent the match. While public discourse on the fight saw it predominantly as a racial conflict, religious groups reproduced the traditional middle-class discourse about violence and civilization. For these moralists, the binary of skin color was useless, and white was too broad a term. Jeffries was never a White Hope. He was simply a brute just like Johnson. These moralists thus objected to the racist plan, instead defining the fight as a “disgrace to present-day Christianity” and a “desecration of the Fourth of July.”

One of the anti-prize fighting activists in California, the Reverend Dr. John Wesley Hill, defined the proposed fight as a “moral calamity to the nation.” Hill said, “Physical development is the foundation for physical and national greatness. But there should be no encouraging for turning the human body into a battering ram. To

mutilate the image of God in humanity is a sickening and loathsome caricature of our so-called Christian civilization.”\(^{1273}\) The Reverend Charles R. Brown of Oakland also denounced the Jeffries-Johnson fight as a disgrace to “all true citizens of the community” who upheld “principles of honor, morality and patriotism.” Brown did not subscribe to the sense of racial unity, but he did to that of classism. “The prize fight would result in the gathering here of a great mass of undesirable representatives of both races. The lowest kind of riffraff would be stranded here.” Brown also defined the fight as un-American and racialized the fight. “The fight should be relegated to Mexico or some other place, for Americans are working with higher ideals in mind.”\(^{1274}\) In a meeting of ministers and religious people in Emeryville, the original fight venue, the Reverend William E. Parker also refused to identify himself within the racial binary which racists imposed. Categorizing the fight as a “brutalizing spectacle,” Parker argued that the “undesirables of both races” supported the fight. He also criticized the fact that the ideals of the national holiday were to be “subverted for public indecency and public brutality.”\(^{1275}\)

Likewise, the Reverend M. A. Matthews of Seattle classified Johnson and Jeffries into “brutes,” thus blurring racial boundaries. He defined the fight as a “national outrage” because it desecrated the Fourth of July.\(^{1276}\) While he did not accept the claim of the fight as the battle to decide racial superiority, the Reverend Homer J. Vosburgh of Oakland also tried to police class boundaries. He urged

\(^{1274}\) *San Francisco Call*, May 2, 1910, p. 14.
\(^{1275}\) *San Francisco Call*, May 9, 1910, p. 14.
Americans not to class themselves “with peoples whose public amusements” were “bullfights and gladiatorial shows.”\textsuperscript{1277}

This moral crusade in California gathered support from moral reformers nationally. The editors of the Outlook, Lyman Abbott and Hamilton Mabie attacked the immoral aspect of the fight and its fight pictures and demanded a ban of brutal prize fighting.\textsuperscript{1278} In Washington, the ex-President of the Board of Commissioners for the District of Columbia, Henry F. B. MacFarland, was indignant at a “desecration” of the “patriotic anniversary” which was intended to “mark the ascent” of the nation “from barbarism to civilization.”\textsuperscript{1279} In the eyes of middle-class moralists, primitive and violent fighting transformed both white and black participants into barbarians. This ritual of brutality was also un-American. One should be entitled to citizenship not by skin color, but by his accommodation to dominant class norms.

Nevertheless, San Francisco Mayor P. H. McCarthy and local businessmen still worked to bring the fight to the city. However, Governor James Gillette, who expressed his anger at fights held on Washington’s Birthday, Decoration Day, and Independence Day, backed the moralists’ cause.\textsuperscript{1280} Leading citizens and businessmen in Reno and Carson City were also competing to bring the fight to their cities. Tex Rickard and Jack Gleason finally chose Reno as the fight venue. Reno was

\textsuperscript{1277} San Francisco Call, May 9, 1910, p. 14; May 23, 1910, p. 12.
\textsuperscript{1278} Lyman Abbott and Hamilton Mabie, “The San Francisco Prize-Fight,” The Outlook, 95 (June 25 1910), 360.
\textsuperscript{1279} New York Times, July 5, 1910, p. 18.
\textsuperscript{1280} San Francisco Call, June 17, 1910, p. 3; June 16, 1910, p. 3, 12; June 17, 1910, p. 1, 3.
a small city that still observed the Sabbath. There were voices raised against the fight, but the city officials ignored them.  

Tex Rickard expected Jeffries’s victory, but nominally he was neutral as a promoter. He urged a fair ground for both boxers. Many others tried to make it a sporting event. Governor Denver S. Dickerson of Nevada was one of them. Satisfied with the economic impact of the fight on his state, he vowed to protect Johnson from any possible physical attack. In his message to Rickard, Dickerson stressed that the match had to be fair. “I believe that as long as the battle has come to Nevada, it is the duty of each of the citizens of the State to do what he can to encourage it. May the best man win.” The officials of Nevada also tried to make the fight a sporting event. Captain W. L. Cox of the Nevada State Police promised reporters that there would be no disorder after the fight. “This is a sporting proposition, and Johnson stands on exactly the same footing with us that Jeff does. He'll have the same square deal.”

Though it was not his sole goal, Johnson also aimed to make the fight a manly contest without any personal feeling. “Every fighter on the eve of his fight declares that he hopes the best man wins. I am quite sincere when I say that I do. If Mr. Jeffries knocks me out or gains a decision over me, I will go into his corner and congratulate him as soon as I am able. My congratulations will be no fake. I mean it. If Mr. Jeffries has it in him to defeat me, I think I can modestly say he is entitled to all

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1282 Nevada Sate Journal, July 1, 1910, p. 1.
1284 San Francisco Call, June 28, 1910, p. 12.
the congratulations he may receive.”  

1285 Johnson also tried to construct the fight as a sporting event to display individual merits. He said to reporters, “As soon as I had shown what I could, the fight public--most of the fans, anyway--took sides with me.”  

1286 John L. Sullivan arrived at Reno as a special reporter. Sullivan had been well known for his racism. But Sullivan was not what he had been twenty years previously. He visited Johnson a day before the fight. “I want to shake hands with you once again, and all I have got to say is just think of your old mammy back there in Chicago, who is hoping and praying for you, and you will do your best, I haven't a doubt…. it is my old motto, ‘May the best man win.’”  

1287 A special reporter for the *Atlanta Constitution*, Rex Beach, hoped for Jeffries’s victory but he also believed that the fight had to be a clean and honorable competition for the two men. “Should it prove to be a clean, manly struggle for supremacy, we will rejoice in acclaiming the victor, be he white or black, be he Jim or Jack…. May the best one win, for physical prowess is too clean a thing to soil; pugilism is too great a sport to die”  

1288 While moralists and sports advocates did not care about the result of the fight, to others, what was at stake in this fight was clear. They ardently constructed racial boundaries and tried to contest the meaning of the fight. Corbett hoped that the fight would restore white masculine superiority. In his column in the *Chicago Tribune,*

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1285 *Los Angeles Times*, July 4, 1910, p. 18. Also see *Washington Post*, July 4, 1910, p. 2. In fact, Johnson was concerned that the fight could turn into a racial battle. Johnson said to reporters a day before the fight, “If I whip that white man, he never will forget it: if that white man whips me, I will forget it in about fifteen minutes.” *Chicago Defender*, July 30, 1910, p. 1.  
1288 *Atlanta Constitution*, July 3, 1910, p. 2.
Corbett made Jeffries a representative of white masculinity and the embodiment of all that was “powerful and brutish in the white man.”\footnote{James J. Corbett, “Tradition Factor in the Big Fight,” \textit{Chicago Tribune}, July 1, 1910, p. 13.} Max Balthazar of the \textit{Omaha Daily News} also expected Jeffries to “restore to the Caucasians the crown of elemental greatness as measured by strength of brow, power of heart and lung, and withal [\textit{sic}], that cunning or keenness that denotes mental as well as physical superiority.”\footnote{\textit{Omaha Daily News}, July 3, 1910, p. 1, quoted in Roberts, \textit{Papa Jack}, 96-97.}

The \textit{New York Times} apparently took a moralist’s position, proclaiming Gillett’s attempt to stop the fight in California. But the editorial reminded readers of the symbolic meaning of the fight. “If the Black man wins, thousands and thousands of his ignorant brothers will misinterpret his victory as justifying claims to much more than mere physical equality with their white neighbors.”\footnote{\textit{New York Times}, May 12, 1910, p. 10.} Likewise, the editorial of the \textit{Brooklyn Eagle} did not see the fight simply as a sporting event. The \textit{Eagle} used the middle-class moralist rhetoric of civilization to support the racists’ cause. “This sustained supremacy of the white race is to govern the civilization…. For that reason … we hope Jeffries will win and Johnson lose.”\footnote{Reprinted in \textit{Atlanta Constitution}, July 3, 1910, p. 3.} Likewise, Jeffries also tried to fix the meaning of the match in terms of race. He said to reporters, “That portion of the white race that has been looking to me to defend its athletic superiority may feel assured that I am fit to do my best,”\footnote{\textit{Los Angeles Times}, July 4, 1910, p. 18. Also see \textit{Atlanta Constitution}, July 4, 1910, p. 1.} Most white fight followers were also “with the white race.”\footnote{\textit{San Francisco Call}, June 26, 1910, p. 51.}
However, it was not only white racists who constructed the fight in terms of race. Black intellectuals also knew that Johnson’s victory would impact the racial order outside the ring.\(^{1295}\) Even Jackson J. Stovall of the *Chicago Defender*, who tried to define the match as an individual competition, finally admitted that the fight would decide racial supremacy. He expected Johnson to teach whites that Jeffries could not return “the pugilistic scepter to the Caucasian race.”\(^{1296}\)

While a racial battle was impending, the discourse of “racial traits” reemerged. The “coon” image was revived to police racial boundaries and relieve white concerns. The image combined an old belief in black emotionalism with the denial of a black man’s mature masculinity. Reports from Reno were full of Johnson’s carefree acts in his training camp. Ashleigh B. Simpson reported. “All during the day, the ‘big smoke’ acted with even more than his usual liveliness. He frisked and played and slapped everyone on their back, and his good nature didn't seem a bit forced.”\(^{1297}\) The *Baltimore American* reported. “The black man is as happy and carefree as a plantation darky in watermelon time.”\(^{1298}\) To Alfred Henry Lewis, Johnson seemed to lack seriousness. His “cheerful indifference to coming events marked others of the race.”\(^{1299}\)

Jack London, who had already attached the “coon” image to Johnson in his report of the 1908 fight, contrasted Johnson’s indifference with Jeffries’s


\(^{1297}\) *San Francisco Call*, July 4, 1910, p. 10; July 1, 1910, p. 11; *New York Tribune*, June 30, 1910, p. 8; *Los Angeles Times*, July 2, 1910, p. 16.


seriousness. In so doing, London tried to contain Johnson’s racial threat by stressing the stereotype of blacks as childish. London described Johnson’s arrival at Reno as follows: “He appeared unperturbed and happy, despite the fact that his train was three hours late and that it was a Friday…. Like Jeffries, he, too, is every inch a big man. But they are vastly different type of men. Under all his large garniture of fighting strength, Johnson is happy-go-lucky in temperament, as light and carefree as a child. He is easily amused. He lives more in the moment, and joy and sorrow are swift passing moods with him…. If Johnson loses the fight, he won’t be worried much. If Jeff loses, it will almost break his heart.”

But at the same time, London also brought anti-modernism forth to stress the racial differences between Johnson and Jeffries. While black men were traditionally constructed in relation to primitivism, he reversed that relationship. London projected middle-class men’s anti-modernism and their ideals of athletic masculinity onto Jeffries to bolster both the racial differences and white superiority. “Jeff is a fighter, Johnson is a [skillful] boxer. Jeff has the temperament of the fighter. Old mother nature in him is still red of fang and claw. He is more a Germanic tribesman and warrior of two thousand years ago than a civilized man of the twentieth century…. Another thing, despite Jeff’s primitiveness, he is more disciplined than the other man,

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1300 In his interview, London also reconstructed an old racial binary. He believed that science made whites dominant in the ring. The white man, who was “instinctually superior,” was supposed to have self-control while the black man was just “emotional.” Jack London, “Psychology of the Prize Fight,” Current Literature, 49, no. 1 (July 1910), 57-58. Also see “Intellectualism of New Pugilism,” Current Opinion, 54, no. 2. (February 1913).

vastly more disciplined … Johnson, mastered by the moment, could make no such an adjustment.”

Accordingly, London’s racialization of Johnson was conflicting. He was a coon. Yet at the same time, Johnson was a symbol of modern civilization, which London abhorred. Johnson was artistic in style and sly in performance. His slyness and scientific performance concerned white experts. Rex Beach contrasted the white man, Jeffries, who was “somber, sullen, dogged, and tremendous in his strength,” to Johnson who was “brilliant in execution.” Hugh E. Keogh’s report stressed Johnson’s tricky style with the headline, “The White Man’s Real Hope Is that the Better Man is Not Cheated.” But, in London’s eyes, Johnson still had racial deficiencies. He was emotional and indifferent; he lacked discipline; he was a lazy man. London believed that these racial traits increased Jeffries’s chances.

Edgren also tried to contain “the marvelous form of Johnson” by stressing the differences in “mental attitudes” between both men. Edgren did not suspect that Jeffries’s seriousness and self-control would give him an edge over the smiling black man. Rex Beach also believed that a white man’s seriousness and carefulness would make Jeffries a winner in the evenly matched bout.

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1302 Hendricks and Shepard, eds., Jack London Reports, 267.
1303 Atlanta Constitution, July 2, 1910, p. 3.
1305 Atlanta Constitution, July 2, 1910, p. 3.
(movie), which was recorded with twelve cameras, also juxtaposed the idea of a merry champion to that of a serious challenger.\(^\text{1308}\)

While Johnson’s superior skill was clear, white discourse on the fight also revived the racial stereotype of the “yellow streak.” Many whites still argued that any black man lost all his advantages on account of a lack of courage. Arthur Ruhl argued that Johnson lacked “dogged courage and intellectual initiative” which was the “white man’s inheritance.”\(^\text{1309}\) Corbett also believed that a “yellow streak,” which was the black man’s innate fear of white men, would appear during the fight.\(^\text{1310}\) Even though he admitted he had lost the 1908 fight with Johnson, former champion Tommy Burns argued that Johnson had a yellow streak.\(^\text{1311}\) The sporting editor of the *San Francisco Call*, William J. Slattery, also implied that Johnson lacked courage. “Three days more and we will all know whether Jim Jeffries can come back or whether Jack Johnson has a yellow streak.”\(^\text{1312}\) Accordingly, many white experts were sure that Johnson lacked the courage to sustain punishment, that is, gameness. Corbett also upheld the old racial stereotype. "I don't believe Johnson is game. I never saw a colored fighter who could stand up under real punishment."\(^\text{1313}\) Tom Jones, a fight promoter and manager, also believed that that the difference between the two boxers laid in


\(^{1313}\) *Washington Post*, July 3, 1910, p. 34.
gameness. “I think Jeffries will win because of his gameness, hitting ability and bulldog determination.”

However, while many racists tried to police these racial boundaries and constructed a binary based on skin color, the meaning of the fight was also contested in racist discourse. By 1910, in spite of the lack of boxers of English stock, some people still continued to view prize fighting as an Anglo-Saxon tradition. A binary based on skin color alone toppled and became fortified once again through discourses on the national and ethnic lineage of the sport. In 1910, a fight follower argued. “That is an art supremely Teutonic, or rather Saxon, though the Celt are even with them.” Before the Reno fight, a sportswriter colored Jeffries, largely of Scotch-Dutch stock, with Britishness. “Runnymede and Agincourt behind him, while Johnson had nothing but the jungle.” While most racists tried to construct a social category of whiteness through the Reno fight, Rex Beach made Jeffries into a representative of the Anglo-Saxon race which valued the old farmers’ simple lifestyle. In so doing, he gave the “boiler maker’s pugilism” both ethnic and racial traits. A special reporter for the *San Francisco Call*, Fred Bechdolt, also constructed Jeffries as a symbol of Anglo-Saxon masculinity:

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1314 *San Francisco Call*, July 4, 1910, p. 12.
1317 Rex Beach, “Instincts Primeval,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 2, 1910, p. 11, 12. Jeffries was a boilermaker before he became a professional boxer.
A Saxon farmer [Jeffries] came to gather in the hay…. He is a strong, stubborn workman…. He is a man without a sign of subtlety, without finesse or tricks or policy; one who goes along a straight line, and that line of his own marking; a fighter who is not skilled in self-defense, nor skilled in deceit by which to gain openings for blows, but endowed with a maddening, stubborn advance and owning a face which stays impassive under punishment; a man who does not lose his temper, but maintains a sullen, smoldering, grim determination. Every trait he has shown is along these stubborn Saxon lines. The man sticks out in him, strong, often unreasoning, often impolite, taciturn always, and always lion hearted.\textsuperscript{1318}

Racist discourse about the fight also reflected cultural conflicts among middle-class men. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Victorian civility was no longer attractive to many middle-class men who valued traditional male qualities. Modern civilization was also problematic because it strangled individuality. While some racists claimed Jeffries’s victory would protect civilization, Beach constructed the unrefined fighter, Jeffries, as a role model against Victorian and modern civilization. While Bechdolt also related Jeffries to old Anglo-Saxon simplicity, he related Johnson to modern civilization characterized as machinery and the masses. Johnson’s perfect male body amazed Bechdolt.\textsuperscript{1319} But for Bechdolt,

\textsuperscript{1318} Fred Bechdolt, “‘I’ll Get Him,’ Vows Jeffries,” \textit{San Francisco Call}, July 2, 1910, p. 9.
\textsuperscript{1319} He said, “I never saw a more beautiful array of muscles rippling underneath a skin. I never saw hands and arms and feet and torso flashing back and forth, twisting in and out, bending, straightening, shooting into blows, as Johnson's did in this bit of play for the moving picture machines.” Fred
Johnson was simply a “fighting machine.” It meant that Johnson was still but half a man. He lacked personality. Bechdolt wrote, “In the ring Johnson's personality did nothing. It was not there. He was too fine to suggest the animal, too strong and quick and perfect to make one think of a boy. He was a wonderful and a beautifully constructed black Frankenstein.” The analogy supported racial hierarchies. Machines symbolized a man with no character, will, and autonomy. This argument disconnected athletic success from the intellectual ability of men of color. Bechdolt had the impression from Johnson’s training that “the brain did not seem to me to be running that machine.” This reversed construction of racial differences projected middle-class anti-modern sentiment to the construction of race. It displayed the dynamic role of prize fighting in the construction of whiteness.

While the discourse of racial traits re-emerged before the fight, the experts were still divided. Many experts tried to construct the Reno fight as a racist ritual. A majority of experts picked Jeffries as a winner. While they wanted Jeffries to regain the white physical superiority, they did not question whether Jeffries could regain his youth after an idle life of about five years. They argued, “Class will always tell.” “The coon will never score.” “He doesn't need to be half as good as he was to lick the

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1320 Fred Bechdolt, “Black a New Frankenstein Is More Machine than Man,” San Francisco Call, July 1, 1910, p. 11. The analogy was also used in other sports. For instance, when a Chinese Hawaiian baseball team toured the West Coast in 1912, the Chinese players’ daring performance and sweeping victories shocked whites. One report said, “Like all foreigners who adopt the game, they play mechanically and display little knowledge of the game.” Quoted in Joel S. Franks, Crossing Sidelines, Crossing Cultures, 59.
negro.” Among these experts were Tommy Burns, Joe Choynski, and Jack O’Brien.\textsuperscript{1321} However, other experts still regarded a boxer’s individual merit as a main factor to decide a winner in a sporting contest. They picked Johnson as the victor before the fight.\textsuperscript{1322} For them, there was no racial trait that would give an advantage to the older Jeffries against a champion in his prime. The former heavyweight champion, Marvin Hart, was unsure of Jeffries’s chances after his five-year retirement. He thought Jeffries could not keep up with Johnson’s speed.\textsuperscript{1323} Jim Coffroth, a famous Californian promoter who took a close look at Johnson’s training, also predicted Johnson’s victory. He predicted that Jeffries could not even lay a glove on Johnson during the first part of the fight.\textsuperscript{1324} Ruben L. Goldberg knew that Jeffries’s training was misdirected. He lacked real sparring partners in his camp. To Goldberg, who had witnessed black boxers in the ring for a long time, the racial stereotype of a yellow streak was simply nonsense. Goldberg asked, “Again they say Johnson must be a dog because he's colored. Did George Dixon or Joe Gans ever dog it?” Goldberg argued that a yellow streak was a symbol of boxers of a “lower order,” not black boxers.\textsuperscript{1325} A famous trainer, Billy Delaney, also considered only individual merit to pick Johnson as the winner. To Delaney, Johnson was a “keen, clever, and

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\textsuperscript{1321} San Francisco Call, June 26 1910 p. 3, 51; Washington Post, July 3, 1910, p. 34.
\textsuperscript{1322} Atlanta Constitution, July 3, 1910, p. 8.
\textsuperscript{1323} Atlanta Constitution, July 2, p. 8; San Francisco Call, July 2, 1910, p. 10.
\textsuperscript{1324} San Francisco Call, June 28, 1910, p. 12.
\textsuperscript{1325} San Francisco Call, July 4, 1910, p. 10. Also see San Francisco Call, June 26, 1910, p. 51; Atlanta Constitution, July 3, 1910, p. 8.
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brainy fighter” and had great advantages.\footnote{Atlanta Constitution, July 2, 1910, p. 2.} In fact, many white fight fans were not sure of Jeffries’s ability. “There was a great deal of Johnson sentiment among the small betters.”\footnote{Washington Post, July 4, 1910, p. 2; Lincoln Evening News, July 2, 1910, p. 9.} But the betting odds still reflected the popular sentiment among a majority of whites. William J. Slattery did not deny that the odds reflected “the prejudice against Johnson on account of his color.”\footnote{William J. Slattery, “Fighters, Ready, Resting on Eve of Ring Battle,” San Francisco Call, July 3, 1910, p. 47.}

The Reno fight, dubbed the ‘battle of the century,” began with Johnson’s appearance. Johnson entered the ring at 2:30 p.m. with his party and waived his hands to his white wife sitting near his corner. Jeffries entered the ring three minutes later with Sam Berger. Two Jewish American boxers (Joe Choyinski, and Abe Attell) and his compliant black sparring partner, Bob Armstrong, followed him. Jeffries’ multiethnic and multiracial party symbolically blurred the racial boundaries, but also identified Johnson as the “bad nigger.” Jeffries also added to the atmosphere by wearing an American flag as a belt.\footnote{Atlanta Constitution, June 17, 1910, p. 11; San Francisco Call, July 5, 1910, p. 19; New York Tribune, July 5, 1910, p. 8.} Jeffries displayed his intention to make the fight a racial battle by refusing to shake hands, thus disrupting the conventional ceremony for male bonding before a fight. The brass band among the spectators also disrupted the manly ritual by playing racist songs.\footnote{Some people testified that the brass band set up the tune, “All Coons Look Alike to Me.’ But others denied it. This song was often played when white and black boxers met in the ring. Nelson, Life, Battles, and Career of Battling Nelson, 161.} At ringside, Rex Beach noticed the racialized nationalism in the racist songs and waving flags.\footnote{Rex Beach, “The Spark Had Died,” Los Angeles Times, July 5, 1910, p. 11.} Outside Reno, the nation seemed to be divided along color lines at the moment that the fight began. All
over the country, people gathered to see newspaper bulletins reserved for their own color and cheered for their favorite.1332

However, the manly sporting ritual was not totally disrupted. Johnson was stripped to his waist in the ring. “There was a sigh of involuntary admiration as his naked body stood in the white sunlight.”1333 No one could deny that Johnson’s athletic body personified a great specimen of physical manhood. When the ring announcer, Billy Jordan, introduced both men, “the colored fighter was given a fair reception.”1334 A Jeffries’s admirer shouted out. “Now, you'll get it. You black coward!” But a majority of the men at ringside made him be silent. They shouted back. “Don't talk to them. Give them a square deal.”1335 Later, Edward F. Cahill, editor of the Berkeley Gazette, acclaimed that the event had remained a manly sporting event until the last minutes. “The negro got fair play and his full share of applause. There was not a word but one of any race feeling in the affair, and that was at once suppressed by a strong outcry of disapproval from the crowd. ‘Cut that out!’ they shouted, and it was. It was a fair play crowd, sure enough.”1336 In fact, Johnson was fighting a white man who partly gave up his racial privilege according to the formal rules.

During the fight, Johnson also made it a racial battle. In the first round, Johnson said to Jeffries, “All right, Jim. I will love you if you want me to do.”

1332 Atlanta Constitution, July 5, 1910, p. 13.
1333 New York Times, July 5, 1910, p. 3.
1334 San Francisco Call, July 5, 1910, p. 19.
1335 Atlanta Constitution, July 5, 1910, p. 3; New York Tribune, July 5, 1910, p. 8
1336 Edward F. Cahill, “Child of Sun in His Elements in Torrid Ring,” San Francisco Call, July 5, 1910, p. 18.
According to W. J. Slattery, Johnson shouted to Jeffries in the second round. “Don’t love me so much, Jim.” Johnson feminized and symbolically castrated Jeffries with witty but cutting remarks. In so doing, he ridiculed Jeffries’s qualifications as a participant in the manly ritual.\(^{1337}\)

Johnson’s performance was marvelous, according to the reports. In the eleventh round, one of Jeffries’s friends left ringside crying. In the twelfth round, Johnson’s boxing drew cheers even from the white crowd. Jeffries was already bleeding freely.\(^{1338}\) A reporter found that “there was no evidence or hint of the famous "yellow streak" on the part of Johnson.”\(^{1339}\) In the fifteenth round, Johnson refused to participate in a manly sporting ritual again when he ignored the mercy rule. He simply looked at Corbett, who was begging for mercy for Jeffries. But Johnson had no mercy for the “Great White Hope.”\(^{1340}\) After Johnson’s final blow, Jeffries’s manager, Sam Berger, stepped into the ring and tossed in the towel. It stopped Johnson from making another finishing blow.\(^{1341}\) Johnson was proud that he had destroyed an old racial stereotype. Later, Johnson told the press that his “stomach punches did it.”\(^{1342}\) The historic fight had finally ended.

The fight was reconstructed as a sporting event right after it ended. Though he had never previously been defeated, Jeffries accepted his loss calmly according to the code of conduct in the ring. After regaining his senses, Jeffries sent one of his men to

\(^{1337}\) *Atlanta Constitution*, July 5, 1910, p. 3; *San Francisco Call*, July 5, 1910, p. 19.

\(^{1338}\) *Atlanta Constitution*, July 5, 1910, p.13.

\(^{1339}\) *Atlanta Constitution*, July 5, 1910, p. 1.

\(^{1340}\) *Los Angeles Times*, July 5, 1910, p. 16.

\(^{1341}\) *San Francisco Call*, July 5, 1910, p. 13.

\(^{1342}\) *Richmond Planet*, July 9, 1910, p. 8.
Johnson and asked Johnson to give his gloves to him. Johnson gladly gave up his gloves to Jeffries. Jeffries’s party also accepted the loss in a conventional way in the ring. To them, it was clear who was the best man in the ring. They claimed that Jeffries had done his best.

At first, Johnson refused to dilute the meaning of the fight as a racial battle. When one of his friends asked him to shake hands with Jeffries, Johnson refused. But in his post-match interview, he acclaimed Jeffries’s gameness. The fight was a symbolic competition, which eventually reconciled both parties in the manly ritual. Spectators did not blame Jeffries, but he had lost respect from spectators of his race who expected manlier fighting. A report said, “There were a great many who wouldn’t deliberately accuse him of quitting, but on the contrary there is no one who will ever attempt to call him game after witnessing his downfall to Jack Johnson.”

Jeffries’s performance, which was seen as not manly enough, had disintegrated the racial boundaries.

After the fight, while all racial stereotypes toppled, boxing insiders restored the ring to a meritocratic world. Many boxing insiders confessed their blind loyalty to the white race and elevated Johnson as a real man with great merits as a boxer. The Reno fight was apparently reconstructed as just a sporting event among them. Rex Beach had to admit that Johnson had no yellow streak and demonstrated that his race had “acquired full stature as men.” He wrote, “His heart, his yellow streak of which

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1344 Atlanta Constitution, July 5, 1910, p. 3.
1346 Los Angeles Times, July 5, 1910, p. 16.
1347 San Francisco Call, July 6, 1910, p. 9.
so much had been said, it was not there. He fought carefully, fearlessly, intelligently. He outpointed, outfought, he outlasted his opponent."¹³⁴⁸ H. E. Keough admitted that a “yellow streak” was not in the black man, but instead in Jeffries. He bombarded Jeffries as a “coward.”¹³⁴⁹

Bob Fitzsimmons, who had expressed hostility toward Johnson, also confessed that a belief in white supremacy had confused his judgment. He stated that Johnson was a “big, strong, clean fighter” and “one of the cleverest fighters.” Fitzsimmons also said, “I don't think there is a man in the ring today who would have a chance against Johnson.”¹³⁵⁰ Johnson’s great performance impressed Tommy Burns, who had supported Jeffries. He also expressed an intention to fight Johnson again. “If Johnson again succeeds, then I will shake hands with him and compliment him. If I get through, he will be always gratefully remembered, and I hope we may remain good friends.”¹³⁵¹ Some white spectators, however, continued to grieve. Still, Johnson’s merit as a boxer was overwhelming. A report described their sentiments. “They could not help but admire him, and there was little animosity shown.”¹³⁵² Johnson’s “coolness” and “boxing skill” were “the talk of the town men.”¹³⁵³

The fight made a great impact on white ideas of race. After the fight, some whites appreciated not only Johnson’s manhood, but also his race. Edward F. Cahill was critical of Jeffries’s gamesmanship, but he acclaimed the fact that the two men

¹³⁴⁹ *Richmond Planet*, July 16, 1910, p. 5.
¹³⁵⁰ *San Francisco Call*, July 5, 1910, p. 15.
¹³⁵¹ *San Francisco Call*, July 5, 1910, p. 18.
¹³⁵² *New York Tribune*, July 5, 1910, p. 8
¹³⁵³ *Atlanta Constitution*, July 6, 1910, p.12.
had controlled themselves and made the bout a manly “contest,” not a “fight.”

A famous referee, Charley White, also admitted that Johnson was more disciplined in the ring than Jeffries was. The echo of the fight went beyond the small city of Reno. Impressed by Johnson’s performance, some scientists addressed the black soldiers’ records during the Civil War and admitted to the black man’s courage. Professor W. L. Hamilton of the University of California claimed that the fight proved that the negro was no longer an inferior race. He argued that Johnson’s achievement was part of the “wonderful progress” which blacks had made in art, music, literature, welfare, business, and physical development.

However, in most places in America, the symbolic contest and reconciliation between the races through this fight was not realized. Southerners warned against blacks who became less respectful of white power. The Los Angeles Times also warned blacks that Johnson’s victory was a “personal achievement rather than a racial one.” Warnings accompanied physical attacks. White mobs attacked blacks all over the country. Racial turbulence erupted in New York, St. Louis, Los Angeles, Pittsburgh, Atlanta, Washington, Newport, and other cities. In the two days after the fight, 42 died and 2,484 were injured in the race riots.

1355 Richmond Planet, July 30, 1910, p. 7.
1356 Chicago Tribune, July 4, 1910, p. 4.
1357 Salt Lake Herald-Republican, July 7, 1910, p. 2.
1358 Chicago Tribune, July 4, 1910, p. 4.
1359 Los Angeles Times, July 5, 1910, p. 4.
Discourse on racial traits never disappeared. Edward F. Cahill was still obsessed with racial differences. He attributed Johnson’s perfection as a boxer to the position of his race in human evolution. “He is the savage raised to the highest power by a thousand—a natural, grinning savage…. He might have come out of the jungle and been fed on the meat of crocodiles…. Don’t get away with the idea that his high sense of his own importance is offensive. Not at all; he is just the simple minded, elemental savage, basking in the sunlight of popular admiration.”

Some other whites never accepted the result of this sporting event. While they could not reverse the result, they saw racial deficiencies in Johnson’s’ victory. Even some white moralists racialized the champion. A prominent Protestant minister, Lloyd C. Douglas, attributed Johnson’s victory to the Negro’s anti-intellectualism which laid “special stress upon his brawn” rather than cultivating his brains. The atmosphere disillusioned the former boxer, Jack Earl. He criticized the fact that racial bias prevented people from accepting a superior man as the winner. In his letter to the New York Times, Earl disapproved of the Times’ editorial on Oct 25, 1910, which conveyed a “snee of the colored man’s admiration for brutal physical prowess.” Calling Johnson “their champion and our champion,” Earl argued that Johnson proved that he was a physically and mentally superior man. Earl tried to protect the old meritocratic tradition of the manly sport of boxing.

Class boundaries surged again after the match. Many middle-class people still criticized the fact that “Independence Day was dishonored and made a disgrace” by the fight.\(^{1364}\) David Starr Jordan, President of Leland Stanford University, argued that the popularity of prize fighting signified a “love of the sordid.”\(^{1365}\) Theodore Roosevelt, who was originally a fight fan, also demanded a termination of professional fighting in America.\(^{1366}\)

Middle-class moralists were unified in trying to prevent the exhibition of fight pictures all around the country. John S. Allen, a New York pastor, blamed the fight pictures for stimulating “vulgar and beastly” instincts and degrading public morals.\(^{1367}\) Many politicians who were moralistic or concerned about racial turmoil blamed this brutal sport for corrupting “public morals” and took sides with the moralists to prevent any circulation of moving pictures of the fight.\(^{1368}\) Class boundaries blurred the ethnic boundaries. Catholics also participated in the moral crusade. Cardinal Gibbons of Baltimore urged the municipal government there to prohibit the exhibition of the fight film in the city.\(^{1369}\)

Class boundaries also blurred the racial boundaries. Governor Edward Everett Warner of Michigan did not hide his class-consciousness, blaming the “brutal contest at Reno between the black stevedore and the white boilermaker.” In his letter to the *New York Tribune*, Warner was proud that the “best element in both races” protested

\(^{1364}\) *New York Tribune*, July 6, 1910, p. 4.
\(^{1365}\) *New York Times*, July 6, 1910, p. 7.
\(^{1366}\) Theodore Roosevelt, “Recent Prize-Fight,” *The Outlook*, 95 (July 16 1910), 551.
\(^{1368}\) *New York Tribune*, July 6, 1910, p. 4; July 6, 1910, p. 4.
\(^{1369}\) *Salt Lake Herald-Republican*, July 7, 1910, p. 1-2,
against the “perpetuation of the brutality of Reno.” Mayor Brand Whitlock of Toledo, who also fought against the circulation of the pictures, approached the fight with attitudes of class-consciousness. “Some persons talk as if this prizefight had decided the question of supremacy between the black and white races,” said the Mayor. “Why, I would not be surprised if Mr. Johnson could whip Tolstoy. In fact, I haven't the slightest doubt that he could. Perhaps he could whip Mr. Roosevelt. And I have no doubt that Mr. Jeffries, in his present battered condition, could defeat Booker T. Washington.” In his remarks, racial boundaries were drastically blurred by his criticism of both Johnson and Jeffries. The fight pictures were barred in many states and cities. While these middle-class moralists sometimes blurred racial boundaries, they also helped regain racial order by leading the ban on the circulation of the fight pictures.

4. Blacks and the First Black Heavyweight Champion

Black men, who had been so vulnerable to white physical attacks and deprived of their ability as protectors of their families, regardless of their class and status, attached significant meaning to virile black athletes. Their victory symbolically redeemed masculinity for the men of their race. Black champions especially “provided vicarious thrills in their socially sanctioned punishment and

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defeat of white hopes.”1373 While they had all died by 1910, Peter Jackson, George Dixon, and Joe Gans still held special positions among African Americans.1374 Many newcomers in the ring coming from the black ghettoes named themselves after these racial heroes. For instance, American fight fans saw many incarnations of Gans. “Baby” Joe Gans, ‘Cyclone” Joe Gans, and “Young” Joe Gans were some of those fighting in the ring.

Although the records were rare, there were black fight followers. Black boxers were especially popular among black fight followers. Clubs were ready to utilize these black men’s interest in fights. Interracial matches drew these black fight followers to local clubs.1375 There was a special bonding between black boxers and black fight followers. George Siler noticed that these colored fight fans were always loyal to their heroes unlike their white counterparts.1376 On the wall of black clubs, which were patronized by working-class blacks, hung pictures of their heroes. Pictures of Frederick Douglass were hung alongside those of black athletes and actors. Black boxers’ pictures on the walls inspired black men to have racial pride.1377

At the turn of the century, black middle-class intellectuals who desired racial uplift, like their white counterparts, were generally critical of the popular culture and not so sympathetic to the popular figures in it. Yet working-class blacks, who saw

1376 Chicago Tribune, November 26, 1899, p. 17.
racial uplifting as an unrealistic motto and felt that they were excluded from social mobility, readily embraced popular culture. Black middle-class men discouraged dissipating, sensational, and brutal entertainments which they believed did not bring public esteem to blacks. In so doing, they drew class boundaries within their racial group. Nevertheless, black fight followers did include intellectuals. William Henry Dorsey was among them. According to Roger Lane, who studied Dorsey’s life-long collection of newspaper reports and books, the first black historian of Philadelphia found racial pride in sports, especially prize fighting. Dorsey kept excerpts and copies about Tom Molineaux and collected materials about Peter Jackson.

The Reno fight helped unify blacks across class and gender. Blacks had an enormous interest in the fight. One report said, “The excitement among the blacks is intense. For the first time Independence Day will be enjoyed as a real holiday by the negroes tomorrow. For months they have talked about the big fight. Of late it has been the one important topic of conversation. Almost to a man the negroes believe Jack Johnson will win.” While blacks considered Johnson to be a representative of their race, Sam Langford, who had worked in Jeffries’s party, was seen as a traitor. On match day, there was a “scarcity of colored people” in the arena. But

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1378 White middle-class people were not accepting of black entertainments. For instance, Victorian moralists criticized ragtime as “nigger whorehouse music.” Ragtime also sounded too sexual to middle-class blacks. Ashby, *With Amusement for All*, 165-166. Some black ministers prohibited recreation on Sunday and therefore, limited working-class blacks’ participation in sporting activities by, Jebsen Jr., “The Public Acceptance of Sports in Dallas, 1880-1930,” 11.


1380 *Washington Post*, July 4, 1910, p. 3.

blacks swarmed to Reno and remained hidden.\textsuperscript{1382} Blacks used all sorts of ways to display their support for Johnson. Black fight fans fully backed Johnson in poolrooms.\textsuperscript{1383} Black porters jumped their jobs on the Southern Pacific to wager their last five-cent piece on Johnson. Many other black men put their small savings on Johnson to win.\textsuperscript{1384}

However, for these black men, a stake in the fight was not a monetary reward. They expected a redemption of their masculinity through Johnson’s courage and his victory. A black female writer, Ruby Berkley Goodwin, recalled the day. “The fate of an entire race hung in the balance. Today one lone black man had the power to make us a race of champions.”\textsuperscript{1385} Goodwin’s father and other black men waited for news of the fight. To them, Johnson, who was surrounded by hostile white spectators, was a metaphor for white cowardice and black courage. One of black men predicted Johnson’s victory if a fair contest was guaranteed. He said, “A white man is the biggest coward on the face of the earth.” Another black man satirized the whites’ hypocritical concept of courage. “In the South it takes two or three hundred of ‘em to lynch one unarmed nigger.”\textsuperscript{1386} Courageous Johnson was thus a visible symbol of the black man’s regained masculinity.

Not only working-class black men were waiting for news from Reno. The Reverend W. A. Gibbons at Mount Carmel Baptist Church prayed for Johnson. “We pray no bodily harm will befall him … that he may be returned to his aged mother

\textsuperscript{1382} San Francisco Call, July 5, 1910, p. 18.  
\textsuperscript{1383} Baltimore Afro-American, July 23, 1910, p. 5. 
\textsuperscript{1384} Washington Post, July 3, 1910, p. 32; July 4, 1910, p. 3.  
\textsuperscript{1385} Ruby Berkley Goodwin, It’s Good to Be Black (1953; reprint, Garden City: Doubleday, 1971), 76.  
\textsuperscript{1386} Ibid., 77.
and spared to do much for the cause and uplift of our race.”1387 Black churches in the South became places where black men and women prayed for Johnson and heard wired details about the fight.1388 While the bout was going on, many blacks swarmed to the bulletin boards reserved for them. The New York Tribune’s report on July 5 described the scene as follows: “When the result of the fight was displayed on the bulletin boards there was a mad rush for the first editions that told the story of the fight round by round. The negro population, in its jubilation, paid all sorts of premiums for their papers…. As the blacks read the story of their man's triumph, their pride mounted higher and higher.”1389

After the fight was over, a sense of regained masculinity instantly transformed blacks. To black men, the Fourth of July in 1910 was a day of freedom from submissiveness. They became assertive. In Evansville, Indiana, a young black man “sauntered into a local grill and told the owner he wanted a cup of coffee as strong as Jack Johnson, and a steak beat up like Jim Jeffries.” He was shot five times.1390 In New York, “an unpleasant remark about Johnson by a white man” instantly brought a crowd of blacks who were “ready to fight for the name of their champion.” A general battle between white and black men then erupted.1391 In Southern cities like St. Louis and Chattanooga, blacks blocked streets for celebrations and resisted the police and the militiamen.1392

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1387 Washington Post, July 4, 1910, p. 3.
1388 Atlanta Constitution, July 2, 1910, p. 1; Washington Post, July 4, 1910, p. 3.
1390 Hietala, The Fight of the Century, 42.
1392 Atlanta Constitution, Jul 5, 1910, p. 1; July 5, 1910, p. 2.
Not only did black men celebrate Johnson’s’ victory aggressively. Black men and women came together to hear the news over the wire. Racial pride temporarily blurred the gender boundaries when black women acted along with men and contested the contemporary gender norms. Confronting “long-standing racial restrictions on public space and behavior,” “black males and females revelers all over the country ‘shouted’ at whites in their cars, jostled them on sidewalks, made ‘threats’ and blocked traffic.” In New York, “five women of Johnson's race were arraigned in the West Side court for overcelebrating [sic] the victory.” There were also women among the black crowds who went to Reno to cheer for their hero. A black woman, who took off her hat before she boarded a train for home, was asked why she had. She replied to the reporter. “Cause ah wants everybody to know that ah's a niggah, das why, an' ah'm prahd of it.”

A black boxer was a perfect representative for those black men who had been denied their masculinity. But middle-class black women also made racial boundaries a priority in constructing their identity in an era of discrimination. Unlike many white feminists of the day, Ida B. Wells viewed a black man in the ring as a fellow fighter against racism and did not interpret his virility as an anachronism against civilization. She supported Johnson. After the match, the Women’s Alliance, whose President was Wells, held a reception to honor Johnson’s mother, Mrs. Tina Johnson.

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1393 Chicago Defender, May 28, 1910, p. 1; July 8, 1910, p. 3; Atlanta Constitution, July 5, 1910, p. 2.
1394 Atlanta Constitution, July 5, 1910, p. 1. Also see July 5, 1910, p. 2.
1396 San Francisco Call, July 5, 1910, p. 18.
1397 Chicago Defender, September 24, 1910, p. 1.
Johnson’s fight also impressed many middle-class black men. As Kevin Gaines points out, ever since Emancipation, black intellectuals had been engrossed in the idea of racial uplift to achieve integration. In the late nineteenth century, black intellectuals accepted white middle-class values and tried to transfer them to other blacks. They shared the same beliefs in work ethics, education and disciplined lifestyles, and gender segregation. But a sense of castration also made middle-class black men obsessed with proving their manliness. To some black intellectuals, the Christian stoicism of the *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* was too tepid a method to use to deal with all situations.

One of the great advocates of racial uplift, Frederick Douglass, promoted self-help and self-discipline to blacks. However, he also had an eager desire for physical masculinity. Young Douglass had to defend himself with his fists. From that experience, Douglass learned that black men had to fight against racial discrimination in every place rather than acquiesce to it. To Douglass, who did not subscribe to passive intellectualism, the distinction between mental and physical progress had no meaning. Black progress would take place “all the way from the prize ring to the pulpit; from the plow to the professor’s chair.”

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Jackson. He used to say, “Peter is doing a great deal with his fists to solve the Negro question.”

Unlike Douglass, most black middle-class intellectuals did not approve of prize fighting. While some white middle-class men enjoyed straying away from contemporary middle-class cultural norms and became fight followers, their black counterparts, who craved both public esteem and integration, were more conscious of such dominant social and cultural norms. In 1894, a Professor at Wiberforce University, William Saunders Scarborough, criticized prize fighting as not only “brutal” and “demoralizing” but also a “curse to civilization.” Nevertheless, while they shared many class ideals with their white counterparts and, therefore, were antagonistic toward this disreputable sport, race still held significant meanings for many black middle-class intellectuals. Accordingly, these middle-class blacks could not totally identify with their white counterparts.

William Pikens, a Professor of Talladega College and a member of the NAACP, did not totally approve of black boxers; he criticized the fact that pugilism was the “end of civilization” and “adjacent to barbarism.” Nevertheless, he went to Reno to witness Johnson’s fight. He viewed Johnson’s smile as a symbol of the “sunshine and good-nature” of his race and a method to endure insults. Pikens saw a physical and temperamental superiority of the black man in Johnson. Pikens also

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satirized white moralists’ claim of a prize fight as a “pure contest of brutality” and Johnson simply as the “best brute.” The white moralists’ motto was too remote. The stake in the Reno fight was too big for blacks. He wrote, “It was a good deal better for Johnson to win and a few Negroes be killed in body for it, than for Johnson to have lost and all Negroes to have been killed in spirit by the preaching of inferiority from the combined white press. It is better for us to succeed, though some die, than for us to fail, through all live. The fact of the fight will outdo a mountain peak of theory about the Negro as a physical man—and as a man of self-control and courage.”

Accordingly, to Pikens, Johnson had completed his missionary work “against whites’ claim of Black inferiority as undeniable fact.”

While he agreed that prize fighting was “brutal and bloody,” James Weldon Johnson was also cynical of white middle-class moralism. Johnson viewed civilization as a raced term. He argued that “civilization,” which the mainstream white society had insisted that Jeffries protect against a black savage, was synonymous with “white supremacy.” Johnson did not place the first black heavyweight champion in the white moralists’ cultural binary and liberated him from white classism. Johnson was proud that the stout-hearted black boxer had made racial antagonism to serve as a “spur to victory.”

A black journalist, William Monroe Trotter, also pointed out the hypocrisy in the white middle-class moralists’ view of the fight. In his letter to William Shaw, the General Secretary of the Christian

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1406 Quoted in Entine, Taboo, 157.
1407 Johnson, Black Manhattan, 66.
Endeavor Society, Trotter expressed his critical view of the crusade against the Johnson-Jeffries fight pictures. “There are many who feel that all this unprecedented hullabaloo against these pictures is due to the fact that a colored man was [a] victor over a white man. This belief is due to the alleged fact that you attempted no such country-wide movement against any former prizefight.” He asked, “Would you have made the same far-reaching attempt if Jeffries had won over Johnson?”

In fact, since Johnson’s victory over Burns in 1908, black intellectuals had become more generous toward Johnson. Though many of them were still antagonistic toward prize fighting, middle-class blacks generally had a positive attitude toward their representative of black physical prowess and tried to translate Johnson’s pugilistic achievements into racial pride and an inspiration for black progress in other fields. Lester Walton of the New York Age, a strong champion of Johnson in his fight with Burns, still abhorred prize fighting. However, while he was concerned that the 1910 fight continued to be dubbed as a racial battle, Walton did believe that Johnson’s victory was an undisputable sign of the black man’s physical prowess. Walton also defined the movement against any exhibition of the fight pictures as the “most childish and idiotic crusade.”

Jackson J. Stovall of the Chicago Defender warned against the popularity of the disrespectful sport among blacks. But Stovall saw the ideology of white supremacy toppling and credited Johnson’s feat and his character for this success.

“Pugilism does not compare favorably with the intellectual forces of mankind, yet the same pluck, patience, perseverance, and stick-to-itiveness characterized by the colored champion is essential to success in all vocations of life.” A black journalist, Calvin Chase, also saw the possibility of racial progress in Johnson’s victory. Criticizing Rex Beach’s comment on the fight, which admitted to a black man’s qualification as a man but was still suspicious of the black man’s intelligence, Chase argued that the “colored man” was “equal to the white man in every particular” and would “demonstrate his equality on education and [in] other lines.” A black journalist, N. Barnette Dodson, also saw Johnson as a symbol of black progress in physical prowess which was as important as progress in business, literature, and education.

Sylvester Russell, the most influential writer at the Chicago Defender, was delighted that the sport had done “its holy work” for his race. After the fight, the Defender became a Johnson defender. The Defender criticized his rival, Langford, for being involved in a whites’ conspiracy against Johnson. It also followed all of Johnson’s activities like a worshiper and catered to popular sentiments among blacks. In so doing, the Defender constructed Johnson as a race man who perceived himself as a representative of his race. The Defender defended Johnson’s interracial

1411 Washington Bee, July 9, 1910, ed.1, p. 4.
1415 For instance, Jackson’s investment of the ring money in real estate was acclaimed as his consideration to provide blacks with places of associations. Chicago Defender, December 3, 1910, p. 1, June 17, 1911, p.1.
marriage, which would divide black public opinion. However, it was not only the 
_Defender_ that had made Johnson a race man. In his letter to the _Richmond Planet_, E. 
H. Sutherland, a white subscriber, expressed his concern about the best black 
newspaper devoting too much attention to Johnson’s affairs.

However, while Johnson’s victory seemed to unify blacks across social 
divisions, potential tensions still lurked. Even before the Reno match, many black 
intellectuals’ accommodating attitude toward white society and their desire to emulate 
white middle-class respectability problematized the first black heavyweight 
champion. While whites and blacks saw Johnson as an undisputable representative of 
his race in different ways, black intellectuals expected Johnson to act as a race man. 
The black middle-class people’s concept of a race man was based on class norms and 
black gradualism. However, while Johnson was also a class aspirant, his public 
identity had been constructed not in hard work or education, but in consumption and 
materialism. Johnson’s lifestyle increasingly irritated middle-class blacks who had 
internalized Booker T. Washington’s teachings. Washington abhorred the snobbish 
black middle classes who ignored traditional white middle-class values like 
industriousness and thrift and emulated only the trend of conscious consumption in 
the mainstream. Washington also wanted blacks to comply with racial etiquette. But 
Johnson did not want to be submissive and sought more manly solutions against

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1417 _Richmond Planet_, August 20, 1910, p. 1. The _Richmond Planet_, a religious and respectable black 
weekly, featured a big picture of Johnson on the front page after the Reno fight. The _Planet_ reported 
the news about Johnson in detail.
racism. Accordingly, Johnson challenged racism by embracing consumerism and violating racial etiquette. In the eyes of the black middle classes, Johnson was failing to inspire his fellow blacks with a middle-class sense of racial progress and thus earn respect and sympathy from white mainstream society.

Black middle-class intellectuals had begun to complain about Johnson’s assertive and undisciplined lifestyle even before his historic fight against Jeffries. Concerned with his continuous trouble with the police, the *Baltimore Afro-African* advised Johnson to be a respectable representative of his race “for the sake of the thousands of Negroes” who “nailed” his name “to their masthead.” A columnist for the *Indianapolis Freeman* who supported Washington’s cause criticized Johnson for his interracial marriages, which reproduced racist images of black promiscuity and rapaciousness. He claimed that “Johnson has shown no particular liking for the colored race…. The lives, liberty and happiness of over nine million Negroes are being antagonized and jeopardized by his folly.”

Johnson’s spendthrift, assertive, and undisciplined lifestyle was also a concern for Booker T. Washington’s friends. Washington’s secretary, Emmett Jay Scott, and Washington’s nephew, John H. Washington, had great interest in Johnson’s fights. However, Scott’s delight at his victory in Reno did not last long. In his letter to J. Frank Wheaton, a black lawyer and activist in Harlem, Scott admitted that Johnson had given pride to his race. But he also urged Wheaton to exert his influence to

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1419 *Baltimore Afro-American*, March 12, 1910, p. 4.
“discuss correct mien and conduct with Johnson.” Scott wanted Johnson to be compliant. He did not want Johnson to boast of his achievements and have numerous interviews. Scott was especially disturbed by Johnson’s former manager, Sam Fitzpatrick’s statement that “Johnson was hard to manage after winning a fight.” Scott was also concerned about Johnson’s spendthrift lifestyle. He wrote, “I do not like white men to feel that Negroes cannot stand a large prosperity.” Scott doubted that Johnson could be an ideal model for racial uplift and wanted his white manager to remain in control of the black champion.1422

Class always divided African Americans. Johnson’s victory over Jeffries could not change that circumstance. While blacks across class differences celebrated Johnson’s victory, some black intellectuals saw the danger of the black working classes being involved in a series of race riots after the Reno fight. N. Barnett Dodson of the *Baltimore Afro-American* did not deny due credit to Johnson. However, Dodson argued that prize fighting was not a “race issue,” but rather a class issue because the “inhuman” sport was enjoyed by rough elements from both races. He went on to say that these rough elements had brought disgrace to all respectable citizens after the fight.1423 Dodson was concerned that the assertiveness of the lower class blacks would bring brutal retaliation. Shocked at the working-class blacks’ assertiveness expressed in racial riots after the fight, a reporter for the *Baltimore Afro-American* wrote, “Prize fighting is becoming a menace to the peace and happiness of

the race and ought to be abolished.”1424 Another black newspaper, the Southern Reporter, tried to appease working-class blacks and channel their energy toward the black middle-class intellectual and social mission. The Reporter argued that if Johnson’s championship had had any racial significance, it had to impress on all blacks the “importance of resisting dissipation” and “avoiding dirt and disease,” and “had to teach the Negro the lesson of temperance and cleanliness and hygiene.”1425 A Southern minister, the Reverend G. D. Carnes, was even critical of Johnson’s victory. For Carnes, blacks needed education, not a display of brute force.1426

After the Reno fight, black middle-class intellectuals continued to keep Johnson under surveillance. Only a week after the fight, Lester Walton warned Johnson to “save money” and conduct himself in a “modest manner.” Walton also asked Johnson to practice “self-control.”1427 However, after the Reno fight, Johnson experienced more trouble in his life. Johnson’s hobby, fast driving, created trouble for him with the police. He continued to be a spendthrift. His white wife, Etta, committed suicide in 1912. Several weeks later, Johnson began to associate with another white girl from Minnesota, Lucille Cameron, and whites became increasingly intolerant toward this “bad nigger.” At the same time, the relations between Johnson and middle-class black intellectuals remained strained. In fact, the tension had already reappeared when Johnson viewed his historic victory not as a racial triumph, but as an

1424 Baltimore Afro-American, July 16, 1910, p. 4.
1426 Baltimore Afro-American, August 6, 1910, p. 1.
individual achievement.\footnote{1428} The \textit{Pittsburgh Courier} was critical of Johnson’s assertive manner on his visit to England in 1911. “Johnson’s manners, which gained so much animosity in America, a feeling that was never held toward such men as Peter Jackson, George Dixon, Joe Gans and other colored boxers, have evidently caused a similar feeling in England.”\footnote{1429} Another episode illustrated Johnson’s strained relationship with black intellectuals. In 1911, Ida B. Wells urged Johnson to invest in a gymnasium for black boys on Chicago’s South Side. However, Johnson ignored her advice. Instead, he opened a splendid bar, the Café de Champion. Wells complained that Johnson was catering to the “worst passions of both races.”\footnote{1430}

While Johnson’s association with a nineteen-year white girl still divided blacks, whites were resolute to police racial and sexual boundaries. In 1912, Johnson was arrested for his abduction of Lucille Cameron and the violation of the Mann Act.\footnote{1431} Division among blacks became clearer in 1912 with the trial of the “Cameron Girl Scandal” and the disclosure of Johnson’s extramarital relationship with another white girl, Belle Schreiber. The \textit{Chicago Defender} still fought with Johnson’s detractors. While many white newspapers had sexualized Johnson as a threat to white women, the \textit{Defender} had represented him as a loving husband. While he was

\footnote{1428} Johnson sometimes acted as a race man. But he did not view his success as a racial achievement. In his interview with Kate Crew, Johnson objected to the “popular theory” that his victory demolished the supremacy of the white race. \textit{Richmond Planet}, July 30, 1910, p. 7. Also see Jack Johnson, \textit{Jack Johnson-in the Ring-and Out}, 58.

\footnote{1429} \textit{Pittsburgh Courier}, November 11, 1911, p. 8.


\footnote{1431} The Mann Act (1910) was a law meant to supervise Americans’ sexual behaviors. It forbade the transportation of women in interstate or foreign commerce for prostitution or debauchery. However, the law could also punish any sexual intercourse outside the bonds of marriage. Roberts, \textit{Papa Jack}, 144-145. While the case designated Cameron as a white victim, it made Johnson into a sexually promiscuous black man and a rapist.
continually troubling with the police, the *Defender* still depicted Johnson as a gentleman.\footnote{1432 Chicago Defender, September 21, 1912, p. 1, 3; September 28, 1912, p. 1; October 25, 1912, p. 1} However, the *Pittsburgh Courier*, which was disillusioned with Johnson’s “high life” and the “Cameroon girl scandal,” resented Johnson’s success. “When Johnson brought to his race the championship of the pugilistic world, he was appreciated for his prowess and skill; but his recent conduct as reported by the public press has more than made us regret the day he was allowed to compete for the honors he has since disgraced. Ever since he has been champion, he has flouted white outcasts in the face of his people. All of his energies have evidently been directed toward the evil and licentious side of life.” The *Courier* criticized the “evil agency of a single member, suffering from too much prosperity and notoriety” and endangering black progress. The *Courier* finally made its judgment on Johnson. “We think Jack Johnson a failure as a representative of his race.”\footnote{1433}

One of the most prominent black intellectuals also became increasingly impatient with Johnson. Booker T. Washington never fully embraced Johnson. His reluctant acceptance of Johnson was shown when he did not allow a party at Tuskegee to celebrate Johnson’s victory. For Washington, the Negro problem was not a racial problem; rather it was a class problem. It was a problem related to the lack of education and an unorganized and undisciplined lifestyle. In his letter to Louis Bronislawovich Skarzynski, a Polish social reformer, Washington criticized the lifestyle of Southern black people. “The masses of the Negro people in the South are, as you perhaps know, a class corresponding in a way to the peasant classes of
Europe.”\textsuperscript{1434} He stressed that middle-class black intellectuals had become the “more thoughtful classes of Negroes” who were responsible for their poorer and less educated fellows and their uplifting.\textsuperscript{1435}

For Washington, Johnson was just one of the large “masses of the Negro people in the South.” Johnson came from Texas. He lacked education. He had an undisciplined lifestyle. To Washington, Johnson was a threat to racial uplift. Washington knew that, if a black man who succeeded in the white world failed to live up to the expected social and cultural norms, that choice was significantly problematic to his whole race. While he could not totally deny Johnson’s feat, Washington deplored that Johnson was in a position where he had “been able to bring humiliation upon the whole race.”\textsuperscript{1436}

The strained relationship between two men finally ended in 1912 when Johnson faced a charge of white slavery. While Johnson’s trial was going on, some black activists blamed Washington for his indifference to Johnson’s dismal situation. However, Washington answered their criticism in his statement to the United Press Association. Although he did not want to either defend or condemn Johnson until the final decision of the court was made, Washington defined Johnson’s case as “another illustration of the almost irreparable injury that a wrong action on the part of a single


\textsuperscript{1435} Ibid., 72.

individual may do to a whole race.” He declared that “no one can do so much injury to the Negro race as the Negro himself.”

Another influential black intellectual still had an ambivalent and conflicting attitude toward Johnson. W. E. B. Du Bois had learned that race was an artificial social grouping in his experience with the First Universal Races Congress. While he did not encourage it, Du Bois knew that the prohibition of intermarriage was simply a social taboo. In fact, Du Bois viewed interracial marriage as an important sign of racial equality. However, Du Bois did not advocate Johnson’s interracial marriage. Du Bois was another middle-class black man. He knew that white ascription exaggerated the homogeneity of blacks and prevented black middle-class people from earning public esteem. Avoiding white retaliation and earning public esteem for blacks was his main priority. He distanced himself from Johnson. Du Bois did not contest the white view of racial and sexual boundaries.

While many black intellectuals expressed concerns about white bias in Johnson’s trial, most were already not in sympathy with Johnson. In 1913, Johnson finally left America to escape prosecution under the Mann Act. While Washington and many black intellectuals tried to forget his name, Du Bois did not. Du Bois did not approve of Johnson’s profession; like many other black intellectuals, he was critical of prize fighting. While he admitted that prize fighting had been

1437 Ibid.
1440 Sammons, Beyond the Ring, 43; Roberts, Papa Jack, 160.
1441 W. E. B Du Bois, “Logic,” Crisis, 6, no. 2 (June 1913), 80-81.
1442 Gilmore, Bad Niggers!, 122-123.
civilized under the Queensberry rules, he still regarded it as an “immoral” sport.1443 However, Du Bois did not dismiss Johnson. To Du Bois, Johnson was the “antithesis of an Uncle Tom.”1444 While Johnson’s profession was still a symbol of anachronism, Du Bois admitted that Johnson might be a hero in that sport by making it “with little brutality, the utmost fairness, and great good nature.” Du Bois was also critical of white moralists and sympathetic to Johnson’s agony. Du Bois wrote, “Neither he nor his race invented prize fighting or particularly like it. Why then this thrill of national disgust? Because Johnson is black. Of course, some pretend to object to Mr. Johnson’s character. But we have yet to hear, in the case of white America, that marital troubles have disqualified prize fighters or ball players or even statesmen. It comes down, then, after all to this unforgivable blackness.”1445

While manliness was increasingly decided by physicality, not by character, sports became the spaces where racial order was always contested. Jack Johnson raised an unimaginable racial threat to white male hegemony. The crisis of white masculinity, which Johnson’s championship and assertiveness created, never unified whites. White moralists and feminist still dismissed white physical supremacy in the ring. While many Americans were excited about the impending racial battle in 1909, Charlotte Perkins Gilman did not agree with the promoters’ claim that the Johnson-Jeffries fight was a patriotic event that unified Americans.1446 In 1914, another feminist, Ida M. Metcalf, ridiculed white men’s “fussy pussy” about white masculine

1444 Quoted in Entine, Taboo, 154.
superiority after the Johnson-Jeffries fight. She criticized white men’s obsession with racial domination and their male chauvinism.1447

However, many white men still ardently searched for a great white hope to regain white male physical superiority and symbolic racial order. But they knew that in prize fighting, a white hope could not be qualified only by skin color. When Luther McCarty emerged as a candidate for “restoring the championship to the white race” against the exiled black champion, boxing circles saw his claim negatively. Boxing fans believed that he was not rugged enough to mix with Johnson. They believed that McCarthy did not “possess the same amount of cleverness.”1448 Racism could not totally deny Johnson’s qualifications as a man or persuade fight followers to ignore individual merit.

Clamor for a white hope continued to sharpen racism in prize fighting in the years that followed. After Johnson eliminated a series of white hopes, some whites were desperate to construct imaginary white boxers who would regain white supremacy.1449 In 1914, Frank Moran challenged Johnson in Paris. But boxing experts and fan did not expect his victory. They had an ambivalent attitude toward Johnson. He was not simply a black man. He was also an undeniable champion. His exile in France could not change it. Sportswriter Frank G. Menke admitted that

1448 New York Times, January 3, 1913, p. 10
1449 Jack London’s Abysmal Brute (1913) and W. R. H. Trowbridge’s The White Hope (1913) featured ideal boxers who were called white hopes.
Moran was not as manly as Johnson. According to Menke, Moran lacked “a lot in [his] manhood to get a ‘white hope.’”\textsuperscript{1450}

In 1915, Jess Willard, an unknown boxer from Kansas, finally ended Johnson’s reign in a match in Cuba. Nevertheless, throughout Johnson’s career, whites did learn that skin color could not guarantee the best man in the ring. Racial stereotyping could not survive in the world of boxing where superiority was decided by individual merit. However, ironically, the demolition of old racist ideas increased white concerns and prevented black boxers from challenging for the heavyweight title. This racial taboo would remain in place until Joe Louis emerged as a national hero, reconfigured as representing American nationalism against Germany’s Nazism in the 1930s.

Johnson’s achievements in the ring made Johnson a privileged black man. He was forced to leave America and pay for his violation of racial etiquette. However, when he came back to America to serve his prison term, he was still specially treated as a former heavyweight champion in prison. Black communities were still divided about the former heavyweight champion. While some intellectuals expressed sympathy toward Johnson, others were less charitable.\textsuperscript{1451} About eighty years later, an Afro-American scholar, Gerald Early, appreciated this confrontational and assertive first black heavyweight champion. Early argued that black intellectuals’ class-consciousness had valued the “cultured” Peter Jackson and thus refused to accept

\textsuperscript{1450} \textit{Evening Independent}, May 9, 1914, p. 7.
\textsuperscript{1451} Ward, \textit{Unforgivable Blackness}, 381. For instance, the \textit{Defender} continued to support Johnson after he was “crucified for his race” under the Mann Act. \textit{Chicago Defender}, July 1, 1913, p. 1.
Jack Johnson until the 1950s. According to Early, in the 1960s, some black middle-class intellectuals finally reaccepted Johnson, but they accepted Johnson “in the guise of Muhammad Ali.”

Conclusion

Throughout the nineteenth century, Victorian middle-class Americans obsessed over gender differences. While rural communities disintegrated and a market revolution transformed American life, gender boundaries were more rigidly constructed among middle-class men and women, delivering the Victorian ideal of the spatial separation of sexes. However, throughout the nineteenth century, middle-class men also articulated their class identity in a construction of cultural hierarchies of lifestyles. Leisure became a cultural space in which they could articulate class identity.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Americans witnessed unprecedented social transformations. Middle-class culture also increasingly diversified. Prize fighting was diversely constructed by middle-class people. Victorian moralists continued to construct it as a threat to middle-class cultural norms and civilization. Many other middle-class men were disillusioned with what they saw as the feminizing effects of civilization. They valued cultural traits that they believed were traditional and primitive manly qualities. The sports boom reflected these middle-class men’s changing views on civilization and masculinity. While many amateur boxing supporters accepted a martial spirit in a cultural form that they had appropriated from a working-class sport, they still tried to distinguish amateur boxing from prize fighting and to police class boundaries. Other amateur boxing supporters were ambivalent toward prize fighting, through which working-class men had
reproduced class ethos. With the advance of science and bureaucratization, some middle-class men began to view prize fighting as a scientific profession. Even some middle-class men saw prize fighting as a mirror of real life which was full of brutality and passion. These anti-modern intellectuals eliminated class markers in prize fighting by embracing aggressive masculinity in the ring without reservations. Accordingly, the attitude of middle-class men toward prize fighting was not unified. This diversification and transformation of middle-class culture made cultural interactions between classes bidirectional. The process of cultural exchange facilitated the convergence of masculinities and the transformation of the dominant culture through middle-class institutions, which had mutual relationships with prize fighting. It also helped the “disrespectable” entertainment survive.

While prize fighting was a medium in which many working-class men could construct their collective identities, prize fighting was also transformed from an anti-hegemonic male ritual to public entertainment. Prize fighting was never an insular cultural form. It complicatedly interacted with middle-class institutions from the late 1880s to the 1900s. The law enforced this transformation of prize fighting, but legal distinctions between sparring and prize fighting also helped the underground sport survive an age of middle-class moralism. In the late 1880s, athletic clubs began to bring professional fights to their clubhouses. These cultural interactions between prize fighting and middle-class institutions initiated a process of incorporation that gradually made prize fighting more fitting and acceptable within the middle-class definition of sports. Nevertheless, the process did not extinguish the reproduction of a
working-class ethos in that sport. The process of incorporation only limited the ways in which the working-class ideals of masculinity were reproduced within the sport. Cultural contests, exchanges, and negotiations continued in athletic clubs. It was here that class boundaries blurred and were reconstructed continuously in the gradual emergence of a new hegemonic masculinity. The process transformed not only working-class culture but also middle-class culture. Both middle-class and working-class cultures were not cohesive sets of certain cultural traits, but were characterized by fluidity. That is, middle-class dominant culture and working-class culture were continuously diversified, patched, and changed through cultural interactions.

While prize fighting gave men of different classes the chance to display and celebrate their aggressive masculinity in common cultural activities, hegemonic masculinity was gradually constructed through class reconciliation. However, the cultural phenomenon in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century did not clarify gender boundaries and stabilize gender order. Women continued to affect the process of the convergence of masculinities through the cultural construction of prize fighting. Some women supported old middle-class morals and tried to keep gender boundaries in a moral binary in order to advance their own political and social rights and reverse the gender order. Others tried to penetrate male space and blur class and gender boundaries. Women’s diverse construction of prize fighting showed that women, like men, were not homogeneous, and that their identities were both varied and multiple. As the dynamic relationship between women and prize fighting illustrated, in the late
nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, cultural power was circulated in cultural spaces and gender relations were contested and reconstructed in cultural spaces.

While prize fighting facilitated the convergence of masculinities, social divisions among men continued to be reproduced and blurred in prize fighting. Modern prize fighting, originally constructed as an ethnic sport, did not allow any ethnic group to claim its exclusive ownership. People of different ethnicities constructed identities in relation to prize fighting. The process of constructing ethnicity was also mediated by other cultural boundaries, such as class, race, gender, and nationality. As a result, subgroups constructed ethnic identity differently. Members of an ethnic group developed multiple and shifting identities through their relationship with the sport. Accordingly, the construction of ethnic identity through prize fighting accompanied a process of dilution, disintegration, and increasing commonness with other social and cultural groups in the mainstream at the same time. The dynamic relationships between ethnicity and prize fighting show that any reductionist, essentialist, structuralist, and binary conceptualization of ethnicity cannot explain the process of ethnic reproduction in late nineteenth and early twentieth century prize fighting.

While ethnic reproduction in prize fighting was finally mediated by national identity, racial divisions among men remained chronic. Nevertheless, racial relations were complicated processes. As a special cultural institution, prize fighting was a space where the adoration of aggressive manliness and individual merit and the persistence of racism continuously interacted. Accordingly, white boxing experts,
reporters, and fight fans constructed black boxers in diverse ways. Racial boundaries were continually reconstructed, mediated, and blurred in fight events over time. Black boxers as cultural agents also complicated the construction of racial boundaries and relations. The dynamic of race did not allow any essentialist notions of black and white. Johnson’s championship unified and divided blacks and whites. To end my dissertation with Jack Johnson’s era is to close this analysis of prize fighting from 1882 to 1913 with just one of many moments that illuminate how the dynamics of racial relations within the sport disrupted the reductionist, essentialist, structuralist, and binary notions of race and culture.

After Geertz’s anthropological concept of culture was critically accepted by historians, a new cultural history slowly emerged in the late 1980s. Some scholars constructed conventional boundaries between the new approach and social history. In making these distinctions, social history is presented as an approach that views social structures as an impersonal driving forces and people as part of a social group (especially class) and values objectivity, causality, and analysis. To the contrary, cultural history is seen as an approach to let us see history as a cultural construction and value cultural autonomy, agency, and understanding. However, as Lawrence B. Glickman and Paula S. Fass argue, these two trends are gradually merging. Present social historians are reevaluating the importance of culture and cultural historians now recognize the importance of social structure. As a result, while some

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social historians still criticize cultural historians’ underestimation of social hierarchies and social contests, cultural historians have successfully illuminated the social meanings of culture and cultural spaces.

Influenced by the cultural and linguistic turn of recent historiography, my dissertation attempts to blur the boundaries that have often been artificially drawn between social history and cultural history. Prize fighting was not merely a pleasure-seeking activity. It was a cultural text that was mutually related to the construction of social relations. Recognizing the textuality of prize fighting, my intersectional study also notes the instability, subdividing, and changeability of social boundaries. Therefore, my study illuminates that prize fighting could have two conflicting social roles in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As a cultural text, prize fighting helped shape social relations. However, it also deconstructed diverse social boundaries and social hierarchies, and denormalized the knowledge that supported them.
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Note: Digital Materials

My study about the textuality of prize fighting necessarily draws from diverse primary materials published in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Prize fighting was constructed in diverse cultural spaces. Accordingly, my primary sources include sermons, newspaper articles, autobiographies, legal documents, publications about the sport and boxers, and scholarly works.

When I started to gather these materials, I was still suspicious of the feasibility of my study. I knew that my plan might be too ambitious. I had a huge file of copies, but I was still thirsty for more materials. Fortunately, around the time I began to write my dissertation, many non-commercial and commercial organizations began to digitalize old materials. Google’s fast growing digital archive was extremely helpful to a student who studied American culture and history in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Other digital projects for publications and newspapers were also helpful.

While I accessed these diverse digital materials, I could read important books and newspapers related to my topic in a shorter time. In addition, I became more confident to make general arguments. For instance, while I painstakingly read newspaper reels, I was always concerned about counterevidence. Digital materials let me access a range of materials with similar and recurring themes. In order to make the best of these treasures, I made my own database about important organizations, dates, and names related to prize fighting. I also developed my own keywords.
Becoming familiar with contemporary boxing terms was extremely helpful to a researcher.

However, I realize that there are more challenges for researchers with this new Treasure Island. A wide range of digitalized primary sources will facilitate studies about the textuality of culture. While these materials made researchers confident to make some generalizations, their organizing concepts would be more vulnerable. What I found with these materials was that all terms were contested in history. For instance, civilization, men, and even prize fighting itself were such contested terms. But it was a challenge researchers should welcome, if they are familiar with the cultural and linguistic turn of recent scholarship.

I also realize that digital archives can be useful only when researchers properly rely on secondary materials. Reading helps us develop our framework and identify what materials we should use. Above all, a wide range of primary materials do not tell us anything themselves. For instance, without enough background knowledge about a topic and social contexts, researchers’ keywords will be drastically limited and they will miss such precious information which they can access. Accordingly, my dissertation did not start with primary materials including digitalized ones. It started from what I had learned in my academic life. Of course, because of the limit of my knowledge, my dissertation is open-ended. My study has some conclusions but they were still unfinished ones. Alternating between the text and the context with more preparation, I believe someone can make better scholarly
works about late nineteenth and early twentieth prize fighting with a growing number of accessible materials. I will be delighted to read them.
Appendix
The London Prize Ring Rules (1838)

Rule 1
That the ring shall be made on turf, and shall be four-and-twenty feet square, formed
of eight stakes and ropes, the latter extending in double lines, the uppermost line
being four feet from the ground, the lower two feet from the ground. That in the
centre of the ring a mark be formed, to be termed a scratch; and that at two opposite
corners, as may be selected, spaces be inclosed by other marks sufficiently large for
the reception of the seconds and bottle holders, to be entitled "the corners."
Rule 2
That each man shall be attended to the ring by a second and a bottle-holder, the
former provided with a sponge, and the latter with a bottle of water. That the
combatants, on shaking hands, shall retire until the seconds of each have tossed for
choice of position; which adjusted, the winner shall choose his corner according to
the state of the wind or sun, and conduct his man thereto, the loser taking the opposite
corner.
Rule 3
That each man shall be provided with a handkerchief of a colour suitable to his own
fancy, and that the seconds proceed to entwine these handkerchiefs at the upper end
of one of the centre stakes. That these handkerchiefs shall be called "the colours;" and
that the winner of the battle at its conclusion shall be entitled to their possession, as
the trophy of victory.
Rule 4
That two umpires shall then be chosen by the seconds to watch the progress of the
battle, and take exception to any breach of the rules hereafter stated. That a referee
shall be chosen by the umpires, to whom all disputes shall be referred; and that the
decision of this referee, whatever it may be, shall be final and strictly binding on all
parties, whether as to the matter in dispute or the issue of the battle. That the umpires
shall be provided with a watch, for the purpose of calling time; and that they mutually
agree upon which this duty shall devolve, the call of that umpire only to be attended
to, and no other person whatever to interfere in calling time. That the referee shall
withhold all opinion till appealed to by the umpires, and that the umpires strictly
abide by his decision without dispute.
Rule 5
That on the men being stripped, it shall be the duty of the seconds to examine their
shoes and drawers, and if any objection arises either as to insertion of improper spikes
in the former, or substances in the latter, they shall appeal to their umpires, who, with
the concurrence of the referee, shall direct if any and what alteration shall be made.
Rule 6
That both men being ready, each man shall be conducted to that side of the scratch next his corner previously chosen; and the seconds on the one side, and the men on the other, having shaken hands, the former shall immediately return to their corners, and there remain within the prescribed marks till the round be finished, on no pretense whatever approaching their principals during the round, on penalty of losing the battle.

Rule 7
That at the conclusion of the round, when one or both of the men are down, the seconds and bottle-holders shall step forward and carry or conduct their principal to his corner, there affording him the necessary assistance, and that no person whatever be permitted to interfere in this duty.

Rule 8
That at the expiration of thirty seconds (unless otherwise agreed upon) the umpire appointed shall cry "time," upon which each man shall rise from the knee of his bottle-holder and walk to his own side of the scratch unaided, the seconds and bottle-holders remaining at their corners; and that either man failing so to be at the scratch within eight seconds, shall be deemed to have lost the battle.

Rule 9
That on no consideration whatever shall any person be permitted to enter the ring during the battle, or till it shall have been concluded; and that in the event of such unfair practice, or the ropes and stakes being disturbed or removed, it shall be in the power of the umpires and referee to award the victory to that man who in their honest opinion shall have the best of the contest.

Rule 10
That the seconds and bottle-holders shall not interfere, advise, or direct the adversary of their principal, and shall refrain from all offensive or irritating expressions, in all respects conducting themselves with order and decorum, and confine themselves to the diligent and careful discharge of their duties to their principals.

Rule 11
That in picking up their men, should the seconds or bottle-holders wilfully injure the antagonist of their principals, he shall be deemed to have forfeited the battle, on the decision of the umpires or referee.

Rule 12
That it shall be "a fair stand-up fight," and if either man shall wilfully thrown himself down without receiving a blow, he shall be deemed to have lost the battle; but that this rule shall not apply to a man who in a close slips down from the grasp of his opponent to avoid punishment.

Rule 13
That butting with the head shall be deemed foul, and the party resorting to this practice shall be deemed to have lost the battle.

Rule 14
That a blow struck when a man is thrown or down, shall be deemed foul. That a man with one knee and one hand on the ground, or with both knees on the ground, shall be deemed down; and a blow given in either of those positions shall be considered foul,
providing always, that when in such position, the man so down shall not himself
strike or attempt to strike.

Rule 15
That a blow struck below the waistband shall be deemed foul, and that, in a close,
seizing an antagonist below the waist, by the thigh or otherwise, shall be deemed foul.

Rule 16
That all attempts to inflict injury by gouging, or tearing the flesh with the fingers or
nails, and biting shall be deemed foul.

Rule 17
That kicking, or deliberately falling on an antagonist with the knees or otherwise
when down, shall be deemed foul.

Rule 18
That all bets shall be paid as the battle-money after a fight is awarded.

Rule 19
That no person on any pretence whatever shall be permitted to approach nearer the
ring than ten feet, with the exception of the umpires and referee, and the persons
appointed to take charge of the water or other refreshment for the combatants, who
shall take their seats close to the corners selected by the seconds.

Rule 20
That due notice shall be given by the stake-holder of the day and place where the
battle-money is to be given up, and that he be exonerated from all responsibility upon
obeying the direction of the umpires and referee; and that all parties be strictly bound
by these rules; and that in future all articles of agreement for a contest be entered into
with a strict and willing adherence to the letter and spirit of these rules, and without
reserve or equivocation.

Rule 21
That in the event of magisterial interference, it shall be the duty of the umpires and
referee to name the time and place for the next meeting, if possible on the same day.

Rule 22
That should the event not be decided on the day named, all bets shall be deemed void,
unless again declared on by mutual agreement: but that the battle-money shall remain
in the hands of the stake-holder till fairly won or lost by a fight, unless each party
shall agree to withdraw his stake.

Rule 23
That all stage fights be as nearly as possible in conformity with the foregoing rules.
The Marquis of Queensberry Rule (1867)

Rule 1
To be a fair stand-up boxing match in a twenty-four foot ring or as near that size as practicable.
Rule 2
No wrestling or hugging allowed.
Rule 3
The rounds to be of three minutes duration and one minute time between rounds.
Rule 4
If either man fall through weakness or otherwise, he must get up unassisted, ten seconds be allowed to do so, the other man meanwhile to return to his corner; and when the fallen man is on his legs the round is to be resumed and continued until the three minutes have expired. If one man fails to come to the scratch in the ten seconds allowed, it shall be in the power of the referee to give his award in favor of the other man
Rule 5
A man hanging on the ropes in a helpless state, with his toes off the ground, shall be considered down.
Rule 6
No seconds or any other person to be allowed in the ring during the rounds.
Rule 7
Should the contest be stopped by any unavoidable interference, the referee (is) to name the time and place as soon as possible for finishing the contest, to that the match can be won and lost, unless the backers of the men agree to draw the stakes.
Rule 8
The gloves to be fair-sized boxing gloves of the best quality and new.
Rule 9
Should a glove burst, or come off, it must be replaced to the referee's satisfaction.
Rule 10
A man on one knee is considered down, and if struck is entitled to the stakes.
Rule 11
No shoes or boots with springs allowed.
Rule 12
The contest in all other respects to be governed by the revised rules of the London Prize Ring