

SPORT AND VIOLENCE

Glue, Seed, State, or Psyche?

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Sport is one of the few bits of glue that holds society together.

—Spiro Agnew, media critic and veep

Upon the fields of friendly strife are sown the seeds which, on other days, on other fields, will bear the seeds of victory.

—Douglas MacArthur, football theorist and general

Spiro is right. Since the first Middletown study in the 1920s (Lynd & Lynd, 1956, pp. 212-213, 485) found high school loyalties developed and class differences slackened in Muncie with the arrival of basketball, sport has been heralded by many functionalists for its integrative capacities. Durkheimians, for instance, have correlated suicide rates with the Super Bowl and the World Series and found lower levels than at other times of the year (Jarvie & Maguire, 1994, p. 19).

But Spiro is also wrong. When the Lynds went back to Indiana 10 years later, debts incurred because of the school stadium had made it an unpopular Depression liability (Lynd & Lynd, 1965, pp. 291-292). And during Agnew's term as vice president, pitched battles were fought on U.S. campuses between footballers and anti-War demonstrators over perceived structural homologies between Vietnam and college sport. Self-mutilation may diminish while watching sport on TV, but reports of domestic violence by men against women are said to increase dramatically during the Super Bowl (Cobb, 1993), and the work of Benedict and Klein (1997; also see "Out of bounds," 1996) suggests that, by contrast with the overall national rate, collegiate and professional sportsmen are very likely to be charged with sexual assault against women (and very likely to be exonerated). In the United Kingdom, the case of footballer Paul Gascoigne is notorious. Gascoigne's brutal domestic violence last year was rewarded with selection by the national team's evangelical-Christian manager (Higgins, 1996; see also Hamilton, 1994). Then, of course, there are sports intrinsically dedicated to violence, such as boxing, hunting, shooting, most codes of football, and car racing.

Clearly, the key aspects to this are masculinity, the media, and government. We are generally offered an analysis that views violent men as

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psychologically disturbed and suggests that the state should treat and restrain them while researching their reactions to, *inter alia*, television. Let's consider some alternative ways of pondering the question.

Given the U.S. data on causes of men's death as opposed to women's (six times more likely to die from lung cancer, five times from other bronchopulmonic disorders, three times in car crashes, twice as likely from cirrhosis of the liver and heart disease, nine times from AIDS-related problems, and three times more suicides), men's bodily self-management is a pressing topic. Such practices cannot be separated from the violence men do to one another and to women, often in ways related to sport (Kimmel, 1995, p. vii). As we know, far from rejecting sport, second-wave feminisms of the early 1970s claimed it as a key site for changing gender relations. Rather than arguing that it demonstrated men's separation of mind and body in a lack of holism, the Cartesian divide was said to disarticulate women from personal and worldly power (Cahn, 1994, p. 253). This struggle resonates with an earlier history of the Left. In both its national and pan-European manifestations, Popular-Front politics was vitally concerned with sport as a terrain of contest with the Right for popular consciousness, workers' dignity, and pleasure (Cross, 1989). So there is much to be said for seeing sport as an arena where questions of violence, men, and the state can be thought through and not just psychologized, sanctioned, or produced.

There is a utilitarian side to nations, sport, and physical power/skill, as endorsed by MacArthur and Agnew and described in this issue (somewhat ambivalently) by K. L. Siegenthaler and Leticia Gonzales. A healthier, fitter population reduces the cost of public health, guarantees a functioning workforce, and helps tourism. A recent Aotearoa/New Zealand minister of recreation and sport referred to his portfolio as a route to "social and economic prosperity" through the promotion of "active, physical lifestyles." He identified an additional benefit: "being into sport" ensured being "out of court" (quoted in Volkerling, 1994, p. 8). This longstanding criminological obsession deems familially based and formal sporting activities to be worthy, integrative norms, whereas informal leisure is demonized. Even the late Jamaican Socialist Prime Minister Michael Manley (also a distinguished historian of cricket) pushed this line. Here, male violence is seen as a sociobiological danger that can be pacified and redirected into an appropriate sphere: literally, national fitness. Just as schools have often used the gymnasium for discipline, so too has the nation (Agnew & Petersen, 1989; McMurtry, 1993, p. 422). Come on down, Matthew Arnold. But more than that, sport becomes inflected with an ethnocentric notion of correct behavior that associates delinquency with racial minorities and youthful muscularity (hence the NCAA's panic about so-called showboating in college football, a thinly disguised attempt to legislate away African American styles of celebration on the grounds that they are individualistic and crowd oriented). With diminished employment prospects in the latter half of this century, such moral panics are as much to do with governments preparing people for

a well-behaved, leisure-defined poverty as training them to work (Griffin, 1993, p. 119; Scraton, 1987, pp. 169-171, 174). What will model this behavior?

Andrew Young said of preparations for the Atlanta Games:

"We hope we have taken commercialism out of sport by taking commercialism for granted. With no financial problems, we can concentrate on Olympic ideals. If you are struggling for money, then you will probably struggle for ideals." (quoted in McKay & Kirk, 1992, p. 10)

Good to know Andrew has a materialist analysis that sees ideals flowing from monetary position. But Melina Mercouri was on hand to suggest the decision to award the event to the United States in place of Athens (where the centenary of the modern Olympics would logically have been) showed the "Parthenon does not run the Olympics, Coca-Cola does" (quoted in McKay & Kirk, 1992, p. 10). The notion that sporting commerce offers a security from which ethics can then flow is problematic. It also denies the intrication of sport, business, and subjectivity by turning them into separate spheres: It is precisely because the lifeworld of Olympic sport is said to transcend commerce that sponsors want to articulate its aura of decency with their businesses in a directly commodified way, as well as through an association with "good" citizenship. The commercial use of sport has latterly picked up on a civil-rights discourse and tamed it by imbuing commodities with inner-city attitude (for poor African American child targets) or picket fence antiattitude (for middle-class White child targets). Consider the new sneaker success, Fila, which signed Grant Hill to make shoes "safe" for White suburban youth, with astonishing success (Pereira, 1996). If your children wear Filas, they will not encounter violence or homeless people, but they will encounter healthy SATs.

There are, of course, counters to violence and sport that problematize either psychologistic or commercial answers, as per the feminist and Popular-Front examples cited earlier. Think of the Global Anti-Golf Movement, which began at a 1993 Malaysian Conference on Golf Course and Resort Development. Throughout the Asia-Pacific region, local communities have protested the expansion of golf business, the most environmentally rapacious service industry on record. As companies lobby for its inclusion in the Olympics, and First-World wealth seeks new places to play, the pressure on governments to turn over land for link development is intensifying from multinational airlines, construction firms, real-estate concerns, equipment manufacturers, and so on. Citizen opposition in Indonesia has led to imprisonment, as farmers and others rally behind questions of siltation, erosion, pollution, and the loss of heritage caused by new resorts (Serrano, 1994, pp. 273-274).

Each time we are encouraged to think of violence as the demesne of the mad, the immoral, or the audience—the mentally disturbed, the uncivilized, and the TV habitué—we should equally turn our attention to systematic violence done by states, business, and men, and violence done to destroy

environmental heritage or prevent the safe passage and free talk of women and minorities. Then we might reverse Spiro Agnew's interest in glue and Douglas MacArthur's fascination for seed.

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